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THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA) PRIVATE LTD.
40 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020, India
email: bomult@vsnl.com

सत्यत् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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ARE WE BOUND BY FATE?

FATE is looked upon as an absolutely inscrutable power to which all are subject. We use the word "fate" or "destiny" when we are unable to see the rationality. Among the Greeks, Fate and Fortune are two ways of looking at life. From the point of view of Fortune, everything is indeterminate, from the point of view of Fate, all is determined. Interestingly, it is shown that Zeus himself is subject to fate while Prometheus (the Greek counterpart of *Manasaputras*, who endowed man with the light of mind) alone has the key to deliverance from Fate. Likewise, Islam has the concept of *Kismet* or the *will of Allah* (God). Christianity has the doctrine of Predestination, which states that God alone determines or predestines, a few elect to salvation and others to damnation.

Hindu religion has various names for fate: *Kala* (Time or appointed time); *Vidhi* (ordinance); *Daiva* (divine will). It is also called *adrasta* or that which is not *seen*, but *felt*. Fate thus is taken to be the result of acts done by the soul in former bodies, which exert irresistible power on the Soul. In a story, when a boy died of snakebite, Death or Yama said that he was guided by *Kala* (Time). Thus, the boy was killed neither by snake, nor by Yama, but because the time was ripe. But *Kala* (time) said that even he had not killed the boy, but that he was killed by his Karma (Fate). What exactly is fate? Can fate and free will co-exist? If everything is predetermined and pre-destined, where is the need for right action? The

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above story very correctly links fate with Karma. There^ are three classes of Karma: *Sanchita*, *Agami* and *Prarabdha*. *Sanchita* Karma is that which is stored up and not in operation now, because there is not the appropriate environment or condition for bringing it into action. It is like the vapour held in suspension in the atmosphere, which will fall as rain upon earth, when conditions are ripe. *Agami* is Karma we are making in the present life and will be felt by us in future births. It is being generated by our thoughts, feelings, words and deeds, day by day. Every Ego is born bringing with it a portion of the stored Karma. Thus, *Prarabdha* Karma is the portion or aspect of Karma with which one is born, and for whose precipitation the field is ready. It is operating in the present life and body, bringing about all the circumstances and changes. Destiny or Fate is the Karma that has ripened, so that its expression cannot be averted or postponed. For instance, we cannot change the sex, family, nation or race into which we are born. The Karma that is irreversible may be called fate or destiny. Mr. Judge defines Destiny thus:

Destiny is the English word applied to a Karma so strong and overpowering that its action cannot be counteracted by other Karma; but in the sense that all happenings are under Karma, all things are destined as they occur.

In the absence of the knowledge of the law of karma we describe certain inevitable events by saying, "These things were destined." But destiny is only the working of certain powerful causes, so that no action of ours or any other karma can avert or modify the result. We are being fatalistic if we imagine that our life today is only the result of past Karma from a previous incarnation, because, we experience the effects of Karma from this life as well as from many previous ones. Thus, what we experience is result of the *balancing* of Karmic causes.

Who weaves the web of destiny? Some believe that God orders our life, putting some of his creatures in a favourable situation, while others are in misery. Some others believe that destiny is determined by the stars, so that each individual is born under the influence of certain stars, and no one and

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nothing can change the course of what is predestined and pre-ordained. The fact is that we are creating our destiny from moment to moment. How do we build fate or destiny? "Sow a thought, reap and act; sow an act reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." The manner in which a man turns into a chain smoker illustrates this process. An occasional smoker with confidence in his will power may finally become a habitual smoker. When we form these habits deliberately and consciously, it becomes *avoidable* fate, because by avoiding certain thoughts, feelings and actions we can avert the fate. Just as a spider weaves the web, thread by thread, so every man from birth to death weaves his destiny. When the last strand is woven, we are *seemingly* enwrapped in the network of our own doing, and are under the empire of *self-made* destiny.

Destiny and free-will co-exist. A person may think ten times before he makes the choice, but having made it, that choice becomes his destiny, by which he is bound. Today's destiny is made by our choice in the past. Today's choice weaves our destiny in the future. Destiny is woven in the minds of men with good and evil thoughts. Each one is born with the Divine Destiny. Each one can weave his freedom. One needs to transform one's thinking and feeling and thus weave a better destiny.

When Karma has ripened and begun to precipitate, all we can do is to experience the effects with right attitude. *The Voice of the Silence* says: "Teach to eschew all causes; the ripple of effect, as the great tidal wave, thou shalt let run its course." Since the Law of Karma is just and merciful, there cannot be a misshapen day. So, instead of complaining or grumbling there must be acceptance or resignation. We might even go a step further and say, "This is not only what I deserved, but what in fact I desired." This is an attitude of supreme surrender, of unswerving faith in the Law of Karma— an inward stance necessary to cultivate by every true spiritual aspirant. With such attitude, we will not resort to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, to cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge the karmic consequences. It is total acceptance that "my own comes back to me.

" However, "acceptance" should not be equated with passivity and

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helplessness. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power. We are not expected to remain poor, handicapped, ignorant, weak, oppressed, or whatever be our plight. We can use the situation as raw material and extract the necessary lessons. It might consist in learning the lessons of fortitude and sympathy, or detachment and patience, and so on. One of the aphorisms on Karma points out that in the given life we can take measures to repress wrong tendencies and eliminate defects. When intense efforts are made, the influence of the Karmic tendency is shortened. Karma has placed us where we are, but it does not hold us there. Sri Chandrashekhara Bharati Mahaswami of Sringeri points out that we do not know the intensity of efforts needed to completely overcome the fate created by our previous Karma. For instance, we cannot see the length of the nail inside the wood. Hence, we do not know how much effort will be required to pull it out. But with sufficient effort we can take the nail out of the wood. In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma's advice to Yudhishthira is:

These two, *viz.*, Exertion and Destiny are equal (in their operation), and all men are subjected to and governed by these two forces. Success springs from the union of the two. Of them, I regard Exertion superior, for destiny is ascertained from the results of what is begun with exertion. Do not indulge in grief if what is commenced ends disastrously, for, thou should then exert thyself in the same act with redoubled attention.

You can be a slave in chains like Epictetus and yet, like him, retain the quiet soul of a philosopher. All the kings, who were his Masters, could not touch his soul. Viktor Frankl puts it thus:

Man is not fully conditioned and determined but rather determines himself, whether he gives in to conditions or stands up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self-determining. Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become the next moment.... Every human being has the freedom to change at any instant....How can we dare to predict the behaviour of man? We may dare to predict the movements of a machine;

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of an automaton; more than this, we may even try to predict the mechanisms or "dynamisms" of the human *psyche* as well. But man is more than *psyche*.

Karma and predetermination are not contradictory. Ravi Panwar illustrates it through a hypothetical situation. Consider Person A, who is told that if he takes Action 1, he shall be rewarded; but if he takes the comparatively easy alternative, Action 2, then punishment awaits him. Clearly, these conditions should motivate Person A to take Action 1. Consider Person B, who knows the *psyche* of Person A so well that he can precisely predict his choice in the given scenario. Person B writes down on a piece of paper what action Person A is expected to take and folds it up. Sure enough, Person A takes just that action and is consequently rewarded/punished accordingly. At this juncture, Person A opens the paper and comes to know his pre-ordained future. The author argues that just because Person B could predict the future, was the motivation for "A" to choose the right action in any way reduced? In a similar manner, it is possible for Yogis and advanced Beings, or even pure and intuitive astrologers to predict a future event. A yogi knows the ultimate divisions of time and the intricate working of Karma and does not see time in compartments of past, present and future. The fact is that we are conditioned, to an extent, by our previous right or wrong actions so that our present choices are, as it were, determined or influenced by the past. Hence, H.P.B. points out that man is a free agent during his stay on earth, but "there are *external and internal conditions* which affect the determination of our will upon our actions." In other words, the exercise of free will is conditioned or limited by the *external* circumstance, as well as, the *inner* capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa illustrates it by the example of a cow tethered to a pole with a long rope. The cow feels she is free to roam anywhere but the perimeter of the area in which she can move is fixed. Similarly, he explains, every human being has a free will but the length of rope is governed by God (or Law, based upon our previous actions).

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Often we are fatalistic about another's suffering or difficulties. We can mitigate our stored up karma, by setting in motion fresh good causes, but how do we do it for others? True, we cannot stop earthquake or tidal wave but we can lift a child out of the way of the onrushing car. As Mr. Judge suggests, "The indissoluble unity of the race demands that we should consider every man's troubles as partly due to ourselves, because we have been always units in the race and helped to make the conditions which cause suffering." One of the aphorisms on Karma says, "The [karmic] effects may be counteracted or mitigated by the thoughts and acts of oneself *or of another* [Italics ours]."

Ultimately, each one of us can rewrite his destiny, by acting with complete awareness. In fact, we can become Karmaless by not doing our actions with the feeling that "I am acting," and renouncing interest in the fruits of action. We, then, cease to offer individual focus where the Karmic consequences could return. No matter where we are on the ladder of evolution, we may take to heart these encouraging words from a Master of Wisdom:

There are innumerable pages of your life record still to be written up, fair and blank they are as yet. Child of your race and of your age, seize the diamond pen and inscribe them with the history of noble deeds, days well-spent, years of holy striving.

ON ASPIRATION

"IT is my great desire and privilege to give to all sincere inquirers whatever information I may possess, and certainly there can be no greater pleasure than to further the internal progress of any real student and aspirant."

So writes Mr. Judge in *Letters That Have Helped Me*, and how characteristic it is of that great Servant of Theosophy that "any real student" should meet with such ready response and be accorded the worthy title of an "aspirant"!

What is it to be an aspirant?

The very sentence just quoted gives the answer. It is to be one who yearns for internal progress away from the mundane and the transitory, from the petty claims of the lower self so that the Higher may find fulfilment and life become what it was meant to be, a state of spiritual evolution instead of a brief sojourn in that temporary dwelling-place, the body.

"The mere fact that a man appreciates these truths and feels these aspirations is proof that he is on the right road," says Mr. Judge (*Ibid.*, p. 10), for the instinct that prompts them pertains to the Real and therefore must, if developed, find fulfilment. What matters is to make a start, even if the first step be taken from what may seem a discouragingly low level, and in this respect he cites the example of a friend of his who desired to become a chela—a high aspiration and not necessarily one for all, but the friend's viewpoint is the right one: "He held that a disciple should always think and act towards the highest possibilities, whether or not he had yet attained these, and not merely confine himself to that course of action which might be considered suited to his lower class or spiritual estate." (*Ibid.*, p. 55)

Accordingly, we must make the initial effort, and if the age we live in, the Kali Yuga, appears peculiarly unfavourable to it, Mr. Judge, as always, has a word of cheer. "To aspire ever so little now will bring about greater and more lasting effects for good than at any other time, "because Kali Yuga is "crammed four times as full of life and activity" as

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former ages (*Ibid.*, p. 103). And the very fact that it is the dark age implies more need for spiritual aspirants, especially if, in accord with the basic teaching of Theosophy, our aspiration "has for its object the enlightenment of oneself for the good of others" (*Ibid.*, p. 75). So, "accept the words of a fellow traveller; these: Keep up the aspiration and the search." (*Ibid.*, pp. 41-42)

To aspire comes naturally to real students of Theosophy, for, as Mr. Judge observes, "sincere interest in Theosophic truth is often followed by sincere aspiration after Theosophic life" (*Ibid.*, p. 58). Surely few could attend Theosophic meetings, read the books and take up the studies emerging from them, without realizing how far short we fall of our spiritual potential and how, dismissing all vague longings and idle dreams, our purpose and effort must be "serious in respect to the clearness and brilliancy of those rays of Truth which we wish to reach us" (*Ibid.*, p. 50). Such Truth can be painfully self-revealing, but only our lower self will suffer from it; the Higher will welcome the beam of its native light. Mr. Judge puts it thus: "The great struggle must be to open up my outer self, that my higher being may shine through, for I know that in my heart the God sits patient, and that his pure rays are merely veiled from me by the many strivings and illusions that I bring on outwardly." (*Ibid.*, pp. 90-91)

There we have the meaning of aspiration in a nutshell! But the achieving of the end in view is not so simple. Its stages are set forth on page 25 of *An Epitome of Theosophy*, that small, profound treatise written by Mr. Judge in 1887 as a presentation of the doctrines of the Wisdom-Religion. Stating that the essence of the process of spiritual development "lies in the securing of supremacy, to the highest, the spiritual element of man's nature," he indicates "four lines, among others," along which this is to be attained, and presents them thus:

- (a) The entire eradication of selfishness in all forms, and the cultivation of *broad, generous* sympathy in, and effort for the good of others.

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(b) The absolute cultivation of the inner, spiritual man by meditation, by reaching to and communion with the Divine, and by exercises of the kind described by *Patanjali*, i.e., incessant striving to an ideal end.

(c) The control of fleshly appetites and desires, all lower, material interests being deliberately subordinated to the behests of the spirit.

(d) The careful performance of every duty belonging to one's station in life, without desire for reward, leaving results for Divine law.

Now that we see what aspiration involves, does the prospect dismay us? Then how fortunate that we have a friend and guide like Mr. Judge who both encourages us to persevere and at the same time makes no pretence that it is easy. "I regret exceedingly," he writes to a correspondent, "all your troubles and difficulties. They are all, it goes without saying, matters of Karma, and must right themselves in process of time" (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 130). This is a point the *Epitome* deals with (p. 24). "Karma is not all exhausted in a single life...for some may be held back by various causes. The principal cause is the failure of the Ego to acquire a body which will furnish the instrument or apparatus in and by which the meditation or thoughts of previous lives can have their effect and be ripened." So any of ourselves to whom this may apply should pay particular attention to this sentence from the same letter: "In the lives of all who aspire to higher things there is a more or less rapid precipitation of old Karma."

However, the effort is not in vain. "Every aspiration higher brightens up the road connecting the higher and lower self" (*Letters*, p. 10). And we have Mr. Judge's word that "if you will look for wisdom you will get it sure" (*Ibid.*, p. 136), an aim which derives its value in great part from the fact that "the more wise one is the better he can help his fellows" (*Ibid.*, p. 134). So, if we meet hindrances we should view them differently than if this light had not been cast on them, view them as something that *must*

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come, no matter how it affects our present body, so that the next we acquire may be free of them and better fitted for spiritual development. We must just "keep up the aspiration." Says Mr. Judge, "We must aspire ardently, and blessed is the one who, after the first aspiration, is wise enough to see the Truth." (*Ibid.*, p. 3)

In warning us that we thus carry within ourselves some inevitable impediments to fulfilling our aspiration he also throws out a challenge by declaring that "We do not live up to our highest possibilities. All that prevents our reaching up to the high thoughts of the far past is our own weakness" (*Ibid.*, p. 19), and this must be overcome simply by renewed aspiration. He points out the first step, the bottom rung of the ladder, by which, says *The Voice of the Silence*, the candidate ascends—the ladder whose foot rests in the deep mire of our sins and failings—in these words from *The Heart Doctrine* (p. 53): "If we are trying to follow the rule of doing our actions because they ought to be done we will at last do only that which is right to be done."

This is a firm standpoint from which to aspire, and turning again to the *Letters* (p. 120) we find something more to aid us, whether our aim be "conscious communication with one's Master" or the humbler one of achieving a little further progress spiritually: "Devotion and aspiration will, and do, help to bring about a proper attitude of mind, and to raise the student to a higher plane, and also they secure for the student help which is unseen by him, for devotion and aspiration put the student into a condition in which aid can be given to him, though he may, as yet, be unconscious of it."

The use of the word "humbler" is merely for comparison, conscious communication with a Master implying great spiritual ascent. In another sense Mr. Judge does not in the least wish that we should be too humble. "We ought," he says, "to set up a high ideal at which to aim, for a low one gives a lower result at the expense of the same effort. We should not put before us an aim less than the highest merely because it seems that our success will not be as great as we think it ought to be"

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(*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 70).the same effort. We should not put before us an aim less than the highest merely because it seems that our success will not be as great as we think it ought to be" (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 70). This is sound advice. And there is a key-word in it, closely linked with aspiration. Outwardly unlike, they go hand in hand. That keyword is "effort." Mr. Judge never shirks it. It rings like a bell-note through all his writings. For him aspiration is no equivalent of idealistic day-dreams. "He who would live the life or find wisdom can only do so by continued effort," he tells us plainly.

Finally, we aspire towards a limitless horizon. "The path still stretches on and ever upward," and as we tread it in our present life, "attempting to erect the four pillars of Sincerity, Devotion, Determination of Purpose, and Integrity" on our way, we carry with us, like a talisman, some wondrous words from Mr. Judge's *Echoes from the Orient*—"Devachanic life is development of aspiration." (p. 48)

So much for the future, the boundless future, but on our present plane he lays this charge on us, "to live as much as possible in the higher nature, and each to crush out the small and trifling ebullitions of the lower nature which ordinarily are overlooked" (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 115). He also sets before us an aspiration than which none, however ambitious, need seek a greater: "Let us meditate on that which is in us as the Highest Self, concentrate upon it, and will to work for it as dwelling in every human heart." (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 12*, p. 15)

To live each day as though one's last, never flustered, never apathetic, never attitudinizing—here is perfection of character.

—MARCUSAURELIUS

HOW SHOULD WE TREAT OTHERS?

LOVE and TRUST are the only weapons that can overcome the REAL enemies against which the true theosophist must fight. If I or you go into this battle...from anything but the purest motives, we will fail. Let us search our souls well and look at it as we never looked before. See if in us is the reality of the brotherhood which we preach and which we are supposed to represent.

—W. Q. JUDGE

ALEXANDER the Great is believed to have defeated the Indian king Porus, in the Battle of Hydaspes. Wounded in his shoulder, standing at seven feet tall, but still on his feet, Porus was asked by Alexander how he wished to be treated. "Treat me, O Alexander, like a king," Porus responded. In like manner, if we treat one another *humanely* as one human being should treat another, two-thirds of the world's evil will vanish into thin air. Today, we prefer to follow the Mosaic Law of retaliation, "Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth." Did Moses really advocate tit-for-tat? Is it not possible that it was simply the advice to the oft-warring tribes of his times, that if someone removes your tooth or eye you must also remove his eye or tooth, and then stop at that? But Moses being an Initiate, probably was only stating the way in which the Law of Karma works, *viz.*, "Do one wrong and an equal retribution must be made." Whatever that may be, it suits us to interpret Moses' commandments *literally*. Our present culture is full of violence, corruption and cheating. Our films, television serials, video games, newspapers and magazines seem to cater to and awaken the hidden demon in us. In such a state, Jesus' injunction to offer the right cheek to one who smites us on the left, might seem out of place and impractical. The younger generation may laugh it off and call it a mere Utopia. After all, how is one to protect oneself or trust anyone in this world that is getting exceedingly unsafe—what with campus violence and school kids wielding guns! Yet, in his heart, each one expects to be loved, trusted and honoured. We must deserve before we desire and do unto others, as we would have them do unto us.

Why do the injunctions of the Great Ones sound strange and Utopian to us? It is because *our* viewpoint is based on the sense of separateness,

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while theirs is based on Universal Unity or Oneness. We see and emphasize the personality, which is but a mask hiding the actor, the real man. Like pots of varying shapes and sizes, made from the same material, people of differing nationalities, culture, ideologies and idiosyncrasies, are identical in their essential nature. We, unfortunately, cannot see beyond the personalities and are caught up in the dire heresy of separateness.

We break the unity and harmony of nature, when we act selfishly, asserting our separate existence. This is the universe of Law, which works everywhere and on all planes: physical, mental and moral. It **works as the Law of Karma, bringing reward or punishment, taking into account the motive behind the action. The Law has no favourites** and makes no exceptions. As the stone thrown into the pond creates ripples and those ripples converge back to the centre of disturbance, so also the reaction comes back to the actor. However, when we act for and *as the self* of all creatures, we do not offer a focus for the Karmic reaction to return. It is then like throwing a stone into a pond that has no boundaries, so that the ripples do not converge back to the centre. To perform such acts, our outlook on life and people must undergo a gradual but radical change. Can we for a moment look beyond the personality, be it our friend or foe, wife or child? The illuminated sage regards with equal mind, a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and even an outcast who eats the flesh of dogs (*Gita*, V). To escape from the bondage of Karma, we have to become selfless and perform our daily duties without expectation of any reward. Scriptures tell us that each one of us owes at least three kinds of debts—debts to our parents, teachers and gods, which, if left unpaid would leave us spiritually insolvent and morally bankrupt. *Light on the Path* says, "Desire to sow no seed for your own harvesting; desire only to sow that seed the fruit of which shall feed the world."

What should we do if others treat us badly or unjustly? Forgive, forgive and largely forget, says H.R.B. Our mind is tied up in knots, so long as we brood over the wrong done to us or encourage thoughts of revenge. "In this world never is enmity appeased by hatred; enmity is ever appeased by Love. This is the Law Eternal," teaches Buddha. If the Law of Love is indeed the Eternal Law,

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tested and tried successfully by the Great Teachers of the World, why do we doubt it? Why do we not begin to practise it at once and see if the result is not as promised?

In spiritual life, we have to learn to use double standard, *i.e.*, if the injustice is against us, we must let it go, but we must be ready to take up the defense as we would our own, when we see an innocent person being slandered unjustly. "Thy soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit: as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for others' woes and as hard as that fruit's stone for thine own throes and sorrows," says *The Voice of the Silence*. Every denial of individual rights or self-defense is a step towards complete self-effacement. It also stems from supreme faith in the justice of the law of Karma. Such attitude is not cowardice or weakness, nor does it mean encouragement to evil. If we have to fight then let us remember to fight the sin and not the sinner. Gandhiji fought against the *injustice* of the British, and not against the British themselves.

No man can reform another, so why not concentrate our energies on first, *finding out* our own weaknesses, and then overcoming them? Why not devote our efforts to becoming more impersonal, more child-like, more plain, honest and simple? Mr. Judge says, "Every day and as often as you can, and on going to sleep and as you wake—think, think, think, on the truth that you are not body, brain, or astral man, but that you are THAT, and THAT is the Supreme Soul....By persistence in this, by submitting your daily thoughts each night to the judgment of your Higher Self, you will at last gain light."

THOUGHTS ON "THROUGH THE GATES OF GOLD"

I

Through the Gates of Gold is a mystical treatise, and in Mr. Judge's opinion, it is the work that must be kept constantly at hand for reference and study. In certain respects it must be regarded as a commentary on *Light on the Path*—another mystical work, which H.R.B. describes as "a true jewel." Its real author is an adept, who is also the author of *Through the Gates of Gold*. As the opening pages of the book suggest, it was written down by Mabel Collins, and is based on the words of a "mysterious Visitor," who spoke with much zeal, and conviction, inspiring faith. "I have written down his words; but alas, I cannot hope that the fire shall burn as brightly in my writings as in his speech," writes Mrs. Collins. It is the treatise inspired by and is the account of the training and discipline involved in one's journey toward adeptship.

"Gate" is a powerful symbol that is used frequently in spiritual writings. "Gates" often symbolize transition from one state to another. In the olden days, in order to reach the centre of the fort the invader had to cross several gates, guarded by soldiers. *The Voice of the Silence* uses the imagery of such a fort to show that to reach the heart of spiritual consciousness one needs to cross seven gates, guarded by cruel, crafty powers—complex, psychological forces such as anxiety, anger, etc. Seven "Keys" that open the gates are seven transcendental virtues or psychological requirements needed to reach the centre of the fort.

In the book, passing through the "gates of gold" represents transition from mundane life to spiritual life. These "Gates" make us enter that part of our nature which we are not able to become aware of through physical perception. Yet, in a way, "The Gates of Gold do not admit to any special place; what they do is to open for egress from a special place. Man passes through them when he casts off his limitation." The idea is very, very old. What has the king who dreams that he is a beggar to do, in order to become a king again? He only has to wake up. This is the process of self-realization. Everything

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exists within and nothing needs to be added from outside. Hence it is that Krishna says in *Dnyaneshwari*, "*Without moving O holder of the bow, is the travelling in this road.*" Michelangelo said, "I saw an angel in the marble and carved until I set him free." Robert Browning too, sensed it intuitively, when he said, "There is an inmost centre in us all, where truth abides in fullness...and to Know rather consists in opening out a way whence the imprisoned splendour may escape than in effecting entry for light supposed to be without." There is a longing to know the unknowable and for the vision of the unseen.

A true philosopher knows that the mystery of life cannot be approached, much less solved, by ordinary thought. "Every man has a philosophy of life of his own, except the true philosopher." The purpose of life varies from person to person. Each one of us sets up a goal; on achieving one goal we set up another and still another, and so we go through life, pursuing pleasure, seeking material and technological advancement, while the real goal eludes us all the time. We are moving on the periphery without touching the core. To solve the mystery of life we need to go beyond the obvious, the tangible, the seen, to the unseen and the real. There is a dim recognition that behind the phenomenal world (world of effects) is the world of causes, the noumenal world. Layer by layer, as we break the coverings, we go from the grossest to the subtlest. Hidden behind the physical is the astral and behind that is the spiritual world. This suggestion is made in *Light on the Path*, at the very outset. Thus:

Everyone who is not a dullard, or a man stupefied by some predominant vice, has guessed, or even perhaps discovered with some certainty, that there are subtle senses lying within the physical senses....The microscope has opened a world to us, but within those encasements which the microscope reveals, lies a mystery which no machinery can probe....The whole world is animated and lit, down to its most material shapes, by a world within it. This inner world is called Astral by some people.

There is sound at frequencies below and above the frequencies which are audible to us. So too, there is perception that ranges beyond our

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physical senses. The physical form is built on the astral model, and there are astral senses corresponding to every physical sense. If someone is staring at us from behind, we "feel" the presence of the person behind us. On entering the room we *sense* the gloomy or angry vibrations with which the room may be charged. All of these suggest *inner perception*, independent of physical senses.

Interestingly, this knowledge that the essential lies hidden within the non-essential, is crucial to experience true bliss and happiness. The very first chapter of the book, entitled "The Search for Pleasure," mentions that the man of the world is contented in sensuous pleasures—fine wine, delicate food, bright sights and sounds, beautiful women, etc. We do not realize that true happiness does not lie in this direction. Pain is co-ruler with pleasure. In our search for pleasure we encounter pain. "It is part of the heritage of men, this pain and distress." How shall we exchange pain for pleasure? How could we maximize pleasure and minimize or even avoid pain? It would be disastrous to try and obliterate every sense of pain and say that one would be unaffected by pain. It is a mark of hypocritical pretension and not that of spiritual progress to say that one could see his children, wife, or parents die and not feel anything whatever. Feelings are an integral part of the constitution of man, which must be controlled and not destroyed. If we wish to experience peace and joy of life we must refrain from closing the "gates of feeling." "He who determines that nothing shall make him suffer, does but cloak himself in a profound and chilly selfishness. It will protect him from pain; it will also separate him from pleasure." The great pain and desolation that he experienced on death of his beloved friend, led St. Augustine to conclude that if love is to be a blessing, not a misery, it must be for the only Beloved who will never pass away, *i.e.*, God. Prof. C. S. Lewis comments that to love at all is to be vulnerable. You may wrap your heart carefully with hobbies and little luxuries, avoiding all entanglements. No doubt, it will be safe in the casket of your selfishness—safe, dark, motionless and airless, but it will also become impenetrable and irredeemable.

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We are not enjoined to kill out sensation, but to kill out *desire* for sensation. Whether we are aware of it or not, we desire sensation. We derive a sense of satisfaction in the very act of breathing. In the absence of a pleasant sensation, even a painful one is welcome. Why are we born again? Because there is desire to love, to experience pleasure and pain and anger and other emotions. The thing to do is to learn from pleasure and pain. As we progress, sensation becomes more and more subtle, and subtlety of sensation means increased vividness. A disciple suffers or enjoys more keenly than other men, without getting shaken from within. In true empathy, we intensely feel the pain of another, and yet, are detached enough to help the sufferer, like the mother who suffers with the child. Even as we say that we have no desire for life, our continued existence proves that we still desire sensation. When an acme of civilization is reached, as in Egypt, Greece and Rome, with perfect development of intellectual, mental and material part of man's nature, it is but an indication that the climax of sensuous perfection is reached. The purpose of civilization is to produce spiritual fruit (progress and perfection) but unfortunately after the civilization has flowered, in terms of technological and material advancement, the flower of civilization falls and dies, without producing spiritual fruit. Why do we struggle to roll the stone up the hill only to see it roll down again? Can we not see that beyond civilization, art, and mechanical perfection lie the realities of life?

It is because of indolence and incredulity of humanity, which refuses to believe that peace and happiness can lie in the direction other than material advancement. We run after pleasure like the sunflower turns to the sun and experience the painful fact that no sooner have we reached our pleasure, we lose it again and once more we have to go in search of it. In fact, that pleasure eludes our grasp at the last moment, because we are trying to satisfy our soul's hunger by contacting external objects. It takes us long to come to this realization.

We want to hold on to our pleasures through repetition and intensification. We fail to realize that the joy experienced at the first

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drinking of the cup of pleasure is unutterable, but when we seek to repeat the pleasure, it loses some of its charm and intensity. With every repetition we add a drop of poison in the cup, so that at last the entire cup is filled with poison. In Economics it is described as the law of diminishing returns. *Rajasic* pleasures are in the beginning sweet as waters of life, but at the end like poison. A drunkard turns again and again to his wine bottle and the gourmet takes delight in subtle tastes and perfect flavours. It is the same with intellectual pleasures; great writers and philosophers, who might have thrilled humanity with their inspiring thoughts and ideas, at last, come to a dull clinging to familiar thoughts and enter a "tread-mill of thought." But "Not twice can the same cup of pleasure be tasted; the second time it must contain either a grain of poison or a drop of the elixir of life." At last, our eyes are opened to the fact that we are not required to throw away pain or even pleasure but go beyond material and gross pleasures to subtler pleasures. But, how do we add a drop of the "elixir of life" to our cup?

When the acme of physical and mental perfection is reached, there is an inkling of the existence of something beyond the physical. It is indolence and incredulity that makes man cling to the familiar things. A good man must recognize the need, and feel the urge to change. For those of us who are satisfied with our present state, spiritual life is irrelevant. Buddha said of such complacent, worldly persons: "Most people go their rounds on this shore only." Spiritual aspirants long to cross over to the other shore. More often than not, what jolts us out of this complacency is some painful experience. For some, however, such a turning point can be brought about through extreme indulgence in pleasures. Generally, we feel that we can be happy if only we had a car, position, money, etc. When we have all these, we may try to get a better model of car, try for a higher post in the office, join a club, smoke most expensive cigarettes and so on. Sooner or later, a point of satiation is reached and divine discontent wakes us up to higher possibilities.

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Some few have been brave enough to go beyond the material realm. In thought and in pleasure when we try to seek *beyond* the obvious and the material, we have the glimpses of the "Gates." They are *Golden Gates* because they represent the layer of consciousness that is very near to spiritual consciousness. An extremely sensuous person is led to complete degradation, from which he may rise, phoenix-like. Swedenborg who could reach and appreciate the psychic realm is said to be at the "threshold" of the Gates. In both the cases we find that there is a going beyond the first or extremely gross level. When we attempt to get the inner meaning and essence, we add a drop of the "elixir of life" to our cup of pleasure. Thus:

He recognizes the soul within the woman he loves, and passion becomes peace; he sees within his thought the finer qualities of spiritual truth, which is beyond the action of our mental machinery, and then instead of entering on the treadmill of intellectualisms he rests on the broad back of the eagle of intuition and soars into the fine air where the great poets found their insight.... (*Through the Gates of Gold*, p. 24)

{To be continued}

THE only way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him.

—HENRY L. STIMSON

FEAR SUCCESS, LOVE, FAILURE

OUR universe is governed by the pairs of opposites or dualities of "pleasure and pain," "light and darkness," "good and evil," "success and failure." Each one of us desires "success" and shuns failure because society lauds success and the successful person. Praise fosters ambition—ambition to shine, to be looked up to. Ambition breeds competition, which arises out of and accentuates the "sense of separateness."

Worldly success comes when limited and temporary knowledge is applied and the results aimed for are achieved. This, in fact, hinders the true growth of the being. Success gives birth to pride and strengthens the personality, thus creating a barrier between the outer man and the inner God.

The seed to spiritual or true growth lies in failure. Failure makes us realize the limitation of the futile exertion in a temporary situation, the purpose of which is short-lived pleasure of achieving the desired result. It is indeed a short-lived or even elusive pleasure. As *Light on the Path* puts it:

Ambition is the first curse; the great tempter of the man who is rising above his fellows. It is the simplest form of looking for reward. Men of intelligence and power are led away from their higher possibilities by it continually. Yet it is a necessary teacher. Its results turn to dust and ashes in the mouth...it shows that to work for self is to work for disappointment.

Then, why is it that we grieve for success? It is because of the false perception of the purpose of our existence. The road to perfection lies through imperfection, so too, the road to inner success, which could never be a final destination, lies through failure. There is ever-growing perfectibility.

Success, is not achieving results by being the doer. Real success is what is learnt through failure. It is in failing that we learn how to become. And in "becoming" lies our growth, our success.

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As becoming is an endless, ever-unfolding process, so is success. Every drop of mastering failure and transforming it into perfection makes an ocean of success. In spiritual life, the only failure recognized, is the failure to *try*. Mr. Crosbie writes: "Mistakes will occur, perhaps many of them, but, as said, 'twenty failures are not irremediable if followed by as many undaunted struggles upward.'" Every seemingly abortive attempt at purifying our character has already borne fruits. Even when we fail, let us remember that at every attempt we weaken the enemy (our vices), so that the next attempt makes the task easier. "No efforts, not the smallest—whether in right or wrong direction—can vanish from the world of causes."

Arjuna as man in this world of sense and matter is either always in a battle or about to begin one, and is ever in need of advice. He is advised by Krishna to perform his actions with the proper state of mind, or mental devotion, doing them because they are his duties and not for the sake of results. "Make pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, the same to thee, and then prepare for battle, for thus and thus alone shalt thou in action still be free from sin," advises Krishna.

Every failure makes us better navigators. Every failure makes us accept others with their own limitations. Every failure brings about humility and humbleness. Every failure makes us grow and strengthens us. Let us see then, what benefits mankind more— success or failure—and then embrace the true winner. Let us take to heart these encouraging words from *The Voice of the Silence*, as we struggle towards spiritual perfection:

Remember, thou that fightest for man's liberation, each failure is success, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time. The holy germs that sprout and grow unseen in the disciple's soul, their stalks wax strong at each new trial, they bend like reeds but never break, nor can they e'er be lost. But when the hour has struck they blossom forth, (p. 69)

THE COMING OF SPRING

THE CYCLE of the year repeats itself as regularly as the smaller cycles of the hour, the day, the week, the lunar month, or as the larger cyclic sweep of centuries and yugas. Nature's processes are all periodical and rhythmic; even cataclysms come in harmony with law, except those, like ghastly wars, which free-willed beings bring upon the world.

Cycles are an expression of law. Motion there always is everywhere; rhythmic motion spells order, progress, harmony and peace, as erratic movement, action contrary to Nature's law of Universal Brotherhood, spells chaos, retrogression, discord, strife.

The element of disorder is introduced by man. Our human plans do not all go by Nature's dependable clock. We think it a matter for congratulation when our train comes in on time, neither three minutes early nor three hours late! The earth's far longer journey round the sun, timed to the minute, brings us back once more to the Vernal Equinox, to Jamshed-i-Navroz, Nature's New Year's Day.

The cycle has not changed, but we should have. It should be a different man or woman in each case from the one who joined last year in the exchange of greetings and felicitations appropriate to the day. A year is an appreciable part of the time available for our life's journey. Has it seen us marching on, or sitting by the road, or perhaps even falling behind?

Cycles are not closed circles, and in that respect the etymology of the word is misleading. It comes from the Greek *kuklos* (circle), but as applied to man a cycle is a circle only if considered as a wheel which, as it turns, moves on. If every New Year's Day we had to start from the same point exactly, life would be a weary treadmill and all our efforts at improvement vain. Let us rather view the cycle as a spiral, such as the humble corkscrew illustrates, and we shall have a more encouraging concept, as well as a truer one. Each turn of the spiral should bring us to a little higher level.

Mankind in its totality, in fact, should be much farther on than it is. Ignorance about man's own nature, mental laziness and the selfishness engendered by a false sense of separateness—these are largely

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responsible for the retardation of the race as a whole. But the whole is the sum-total of its parts. Individuals rousing themselves to effort can help all, for "no man can rise superior to his individual failings, without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is a part."

One universal aspect of this season is the ushering in of the festival of Spring. People in this part of the country miss something, in that Spring here follows after Winter with growing heat as the chief marker of the difference. New flowers, more bird-songs, yes, but here we take Spring quite as a matter of course. Not so in the north! To those who have lived through the long Winter months of ice and snow, of leafless branches spread against grey skies, Spring comes **with an unimaginable sweetness and exhilaration. The first crocus pushing through the soil, the first note of a songbird returning from the south**; however many times one sees Spring come in colder climes, it never loses its wonder and its thrill.

Even in the north, Nature has not been idle through the silent winter months. The seeds sleep in the ground; the buds already formed slumber snugly on their branches till the breath of Spring awakes them. The trees have seemed inactive, in deep lethargy, but all the time, out of sight, Nature has been all the Winter through at work, "devising leaves, blooms, blades." In Sir Edwin Arnold's beautiful phrase:

In dark soil and the silence of the seeds
The robe of Spring it weaves.

What does the Spring require of us? What shall we put on as our "robe of Spring" to be in tune with Nature's festival? Thoreau rightly warned, "Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes"! A fine new costume is not the solution. It can but serve at best as a symbol of the inner touch of Spring; at worst, as camouflage to cover up the wintry heart within.

Heart specialists there are in plenty and minute classifications of the physical diseases of the heart. But specialists do not treat nor do medical books list that commonest, most serious of cardiac diseases—the wintry heart. How many suffer from it! And what a different world it would be

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if the inner icicles would only melt under the genial warmth of the Spring sun—the icicles of communal exclusiveness, "the boast of heraldry, the pomp of power," the superiority complex rooted in race, in creed, in wealth or social standing and everything that divides man from man! If only these would melt away like frost that clouds the northern window-pane, and would let us look out clearly, we should see our fellow-men as brothers and as fellow pilgrims all.

There is another aspect of the northern Spring besides its joyousness—its challenge to renewal. Not only does its coming bring exhilaration and a sense of life upwelling after long imprisonment in silence and in darkness. He is very young or very stolid and prosaic who does not also catch the minor overtones of Spring's exuberance. Restlessness, nostalgia, longing for something undefined and indefinable, these also are the marks of Spring; there is a wistfulness beneath her gaiety. Spring seems to whisper: joys are fleeting; pleasures fade; youth is lovely, yes, but youth must pass. After the Spring and the Summer and the Autumn must come the long, cold Winter once again.

What is the lesson of our constant failure to find any permanent satisfaction in the joys of life, in Spring, their perennially recurring symbol? Is it not that man, as a spiritual being, cannot find lasting satisfaction anywhere but in his higher nature? Does it not say to us, in Francis Thompson's words, "Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me"?

At the touch of Spring the sap rises and the trees put on new leaves and flowers. At the touch of Spring man also feels the stirrings of the Spirit in his heart. Shall he not also follow the behest of Spring and let his better nature flower forth?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

Question: Can a student of Theosophy, having a diplomatic or a political assignment, which sometimes needs manipulation in favour of his own country or party, maintain integrity based on enduring principles and theosophical discipline?

Answer: Unfortunately, diplomacy and politics are looked upon with suspicion. There are negative connotations concerning these practice and profession! But in the strict sense, "Diplomacy" is skill in managing people tactfully, considering their sensibility, sensitivity and mutual need. It also involves negotiating relations and policies with other people or nations—for the common good of all. It does not necessarily need political cunning, deception or double-talk. One can be an honest but shrewd ambassador representing one's nation or party. One can keep in mind the welfare and the political interests of one's own state, but it need not be at the expense of others.

A skilful diplomat can handle disagreement or even discord, with prudence, so as to maintain congenial relationship—even in the midst of serious controversy. It means apprising the inner and outer needs of others while maintaining the objects of the mission assigned to oneself. There is a mystical statement worth remembering: "No man is your enemy: no man is your friend. All alike are your teachers." We can always learn a lesson or two from our opponents. Abraham Lincoln's policy is worth noting by the diplomats: "With malice toward none; with charity to all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

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There is something in man that expects respect, approval, recognition, etc., each in his own unique individualistic way. But in reality the true basis of respecting a man's true "human" dignity and worth arises by virtue of his being an immortal Soul encased in human personality. All human beings deserve respect and consideration because of this sacred fact.

In practice, how do we induce others to see things our way? The art of sympathetic listening creates a fair atmosphere suitable for negotiation. One must start with a conviction that human beings, as individuals or nations, are basically and intrinsically *good at the core*, but may be erring in dealing with themselves and others, because of ignorance and other reasons. We have to find points of agreement, readily concede to a valid point, or give in on minor issues. The object is not just to win a point but to appeal to another's sense of fairness and justice. One must be ready to admit one's mistaken perception if that is discovered in time.

Sometimes one has to use the tact "to touch some sour points with sweetest terms," says Shakespeare. And this is not with a view to deceive, but to handle unpleasant things in a pleasant manner, without hurting others. Better an honorable, noble defeat than a dishonest, ignoble victory. Finally, the fact that one is entrusted with a duty of representing one's nation or party shows that one is considered trustworthy and qualified for the job, morally and intellectually. But, one must have the courage to reject this privilege if one is expected to deceive, play a game of double-talk and win an unjust advantage over others.

Question: How come our Earth is still surviving in an environment which is day by day increasing in terror, hatred, selfishness, etc.? We keep hearing that the "world is coming to an end." Is that true? Answer: In his Gaia hypothesis, James Lovelock, a British Scientist, reminded us that the Earth is a sentient living being. Just as our human body is composed of billions of cells working together as a single living being, so are the billions of life forms on Earth working together as a living organism.

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The Gaia Hypothesis proposes that our planet functions as a single living entity that maintains conditions necessary for its survival. In his book, *The Revenge of Gaia*, Lovelock argues that the lack of respect human beings have had for Gaia, damaging the ecosystem in many ways, will make human survival difficult. However, he claims that Gaia's self-regulation will most likely prevent any extraordinary effects that might wipe out life itself.

Occult philosophy says that besides undue interference with nature, there is a direct relation between man's thoughts and natural calamities.

Karma operates to produce cataclysms of nature by concatenation through mental and astral planes of being. A cataclysm may be traced to an immediate physical cause such as internal fire and atmospheric disturbance, but these have been brought on by the disturbance created through the dynamic power of human thought. ("Aphorisms on Karma," No. 30)

Mr. Judge describes the power of human thought in these words:

Man is a great dynamo, making, storing and throwing out energy, and when masses of men composing a race thus make and distribute energy, there is a resulting dynamic effect on the material of the globe which will be powerful enough to be distinct and cataclysmic. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 128)

Though, often it is said that Mother Earth is not able to bear anymore the burden of the unrighteousness, it does not seem to have reached its acme, so as to destroy the earth. We can understand it by using the analogy of the human body. A human being does not *die* because of his selfishness or thoughts of anger and hatred. For a long time he may suffer from sicknesses like ulcers, etc., and only sometimes the sickness proves fatal. That is in accordance with the law of Karma. So also destruction of any planet is in accordance with the law of cycles. Cycles are the clocks of Karma. The periods of various minor and major cycles are determined by the Karma of the people who inhabit the planet.

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We can look upon earthquakes, tidal waves, tornadoes and tsunamis to be like the sickness of the earth. Mr. Judge describes physical illness as discharge of the inner sickness of the inner being on the physical plane. Similarly, "the lives of the earth that have been impressed by the harmful thoughts—the selfish thoughts—of millions of men [and women] have reached a point of explosion, which comes about just as naturally in its own order and cycle, as day follows night. Those... who suffer most from such events have earned the suffering....Man is a part of Nature, and if he makes Nature suffer, he will suffer through Nature." ("*Because— "For the Children who Ask Why*")

Theosophy teaches that earth is not a lump of gross matter, but is an entity, and like man earth too, is sevenfold. Our earth has six other companion globes and together, these seven globes form Earth Chain or Planetary Chain. These seven globes of earth's chain, while differing from one another in the substance of which they are made, are united together in a single mass.

They are not seven separate balls and can be seen when we are in different state of consciousness. For the sake of convenience, we may refer to these seven globes as A, B, C, D, E, F and G. We occupy globe D, the fourth in the chain. There are seven Root Races on each globe. When the evolution of the Egos in these seven Root Races has been completed on our earth, the stream of Egos passes from globe D to globe E for further evolution. It is stated that when evolution through seven root races is completed, that globe goes into *obscuriation*, but is *not* destroyed. The *obscuriation* is similar to the sleep of man's body, making a reawakening possible. However, it is also stated that transition from one race to the other involves cataclysms, volcanic eruptions and shifting of the continents. These cataclysms, or destruction by water, are not *obscuriations* of the globe, and are similar to the sickness and accidents that come to a man during a single lifetime.

To understand "destruction" of our earth, we must understand the concept of "Round." The course of evolution begins on globe A and proceeds through globes B, C, D, up to G. When the Egos have

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completed their evolution from A to G globes, that one circling is termed one "Round." We are in the middle of the Fourth Round. It is only when the evolution of the egos through seven rounds is completed that one by one each globe of the planetary chain is *destroyed*. This is called *pralaya* or rather planetary *pralaya*, which is similar to the actual death of the body of a man. We are in the fifth sub-race of the Fifth Root Race. Thus, the earth we occupy will go into *obscuriation* only when Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Root Races are completed, which will be millions of years later. Our earth will be "destroyed" only when evolution of the egos through seven rounds is completed.

EVERY man has two lines of descent. One is that which comes through his parents and has to do with his mental and physical make-up....These characteristics belong wholly to the physical phase and are carried down from the centuries past by inheritance, affecting the particular body you may inhabit in any one incarnation. It is your Karma to have that sort of physical environment about your inner self....

The second line of descent is that one which belongs purely to the inner man, that is, the psychical line. It is just as important as the physical descent, in fact more so, because it has to do with the ever-living man.

—W. Q. JUDGE

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Once upon a time people kept secrets, but today's blogging sites on the Internet, which are like "open diaries," allow people to expose their private lives, by relating their immoral adventures, mistakes, painful experiences and personal feelings. People have always been inclined to share their secrets, to unburden their consciences and to show off, but in the past there were confidants—priests, soul mates or diaries. Telling secrets could be therapeutic, but is it healthy to expose your struggles, fears, and adventures to the public? Daniel Wegner, a Harvard psychologist, explains that it is easier to unburden or confess through a computer than on face-to-face basis, because in the latter, we are able to see the reactions of the listener. However, it is important that there must be a sustained reaction from a concerned and involved listener, else the solo secret teller runs the risk of dissociating from the "real" life and may begin to feel that events happen to the "persona" and not to the real self. For some people blogging is only a way of getting publicity and turn one's mundane life into an electronic saga, which gives the sense of participation in the larger theatre of society. In an increasingly free-to-be-you-and-me era, more and more people believe that they are entitled to behave according to their own values rather than the norms of the society, and hence they see no need to hide or be ashamed of anything. Blogging allows you freedom of expression to the hilt and one is likely to get carried away by revealing too much and dragging too many people, who may never have wished to be exposed, writes Carlin Flora. (*Psychology Today*, May-June 2007)

Technology has shrunk the world and yet "blogging" is one of the proofs that human relations are becoming increasingly superficial. We are not able to find a single individual in whom we can confide without the fear of being ridiculed or losing our self-esteem. In a face-to-face revelation there is the personal touch and the other person, who is able to see things objectively, could guide us or at least sympathize with us. Blogging may be looked upon as the modern mode of catharsis. It seems to fulfil our deep-seated need to share, and might bring reassurance that there are others in the world who face similar problems and heartaches;

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have similar weaknesses which they find difficult to overcome, etc. But there is also the danger that when thousands and millions of people unashamedly confess of certain unethical behaviour, it can easily become a norm. Like children, we are trying to draw the attention of others by doing something bad, if we cannot be someone especially good. The advice to the one who wishes to tread the spiritual path is: "Do your crying and sighing within you."

Was France once an Amazon-like dense tropical rainforest? According to a report in *Live Science*, 55-million year old pieces of amber or fossilized tree sap were found near the Oise River in northern France. The discovery of a new organic compound in amber, called "quesnoin," has led the researchers to this belief, because the precursor of this organic compound (quesnoin) exists only in the trees currently growing in Brazil's Amazon rainforest. It is believed that amber might have dripped from a similar tree growing in France millions of years before the shifting of the continents to their current position. "The regions corresponding to modern France could have been found in geographically critical marshy zone belonging to Africa and a tropical zone 55 million years ago extending through North Africa to the Amazon," explain the authors, in their study that has been detailed in the current issue of *The Journal of Organic Chemistry*. (*The Times of India*, January 6, 2008)

The face of the earth has changed several times because of cataclysms and shifting of the continents. Before the formation of the Straits of Gibraltar, delta of Egypt and Northern Africa belonged to Europe and a further upheaval changed entirely the face of the map of Europe. American continent has been in existence even before the discovery of Columbus and geologically considered it is older than Europe. Either an identity or close resemblance between the fauna and

flora of the United States and Europe suggest connection between the American continent and Europe. There is a striking similarity between the Miocene flora of Europe and that of the United States. For instance, in the forests of Virginia and Florida are found magnolias, tulip-trees, evergreen oaks, etc., which correspond with European flora of tertiary period (*S.D.*, II, 790). Further:

Fossils found on the Eastern Coast of South America have now been proved to belong to the Jurassic formations, and are nearly identical with the Jurassic fossils of Western Europe and Northern Africa. The geological structure of both the coasts is also almost identical; the resemblance between the smaller marine animals dwelling in the more shallow waters of South America, the Western African and the South European coasts, is also very great. (*S.D.*, II, 791)

All such facts, says H.P.B., have led the naturalists to conclude that in distant, pre-historic ages, there must have existed a continent extending from the coast of Venezuela, across the Atlantic Ocean, to the Canares Islands and North Africa, and from Newfoundland nearly to the coast of France. It is stated that the last portion of the Atlantic Continent sunk 11,000 years ago, but before that it was this Atlantic Continent which bridged the ocean between America and Europe. *The Secret Doctrine* mentions that Sir C. Wyville Thompson had shown that certain *Brazilian fauna* resembled those of *Western Europe*.

Do we need a literary canon? Canon is defined as a list of sacred books officially accepted as genuine. The chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, believes that we need a common culture based on a literary canon, *i.e.*, a set of books with which everyone is familiar—in Britain, these included the Bible, Shakespeare and the great novels. He emphasizes the importance of

shared inheritance and experience. For instance, the shared experience of reading Agatha Christie or Bible or Shakespeare. He believes that this shared inheritance is now being destroyed by multiculturalism and technology, television and the Internet. Are we suffering from "canon anxiety"? Perhaps, our need for canon stems from our need for heroes, and it appears that we live in a world without heroes. Not one of the nearly 200 nations of the world is led by a person of truly exceptional quality. The general perception is that we also lack cultural heroes, as there are no great novelists, poets, painters or composers. Anthony O'Hear, the philosopher, suggests that the study of Bible as also the literature of Greece and Rome are important, not only for its intrinsic value but also because it has helped to shape our own world, from the Middle Ages onward. He says that it is an unforgivable form of intellectual and spiritual suicide, to be dissociated from such literature, as then we are cutting ourselves and our descendants off from our cultural roots. Richard Jenkyns, professor of the classical tradition at Oxford University, believes that shared references must evolve naturally, and that television has enormous power as a unifier. As for the literary canon, he is of the opinion that it is useless to force these books on people. We must first draw the young people through the works that naturally appeal to them and then bring them to less attractive literature. We should encourage development of a personal taste: the risk in stressing the canon too much is that we encourage the tendency to always like what we are told to like. There could be no true cultivation without personal predilection, writes Jenkyns. (*Prospect*, December 2007)

It is true that in our age, elevating literature and the accounts of people leading exemplary lives are becoming scarce. *Light on the Path* says that the days of highly inspiring art and literature, "when poets and sculptors saw the divine light, and put it into their own language, are buried in the long past with the ante-Phidian sculptors and pre-Homeric poets." It is indeed good to draw the attention of the people to art and literature of the past, **but** it cannot **be forced**. Every individual is at a different level of perception, so that taste for good books, music and art can be cultivated only gradually. Even animals resist when cornered. "There is no help like association with those who think as we do, or like the reading of good books," says

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Mr. Judge. Although it would be excellent to read holy books, which are instinct with a life of their own, he suggests that we may read whatever books tend to elevate our consciousness. Once he found that the abstruse theological writings of Plotinus and an explanation of the wanderings of Ulysses had very ennobling effect. Likewise, each one of us may periodically turn to the books, music, and art that we have found by experience to have had elevating effect.

Why do people lack sensitivity to how others feel, or ignore what is happening to others, such as those in their daily contact, or those belonging to other social groups? This lack of "Empathy," now a psychiatric term called "Empathy Deficit Disorder (E.D.D.)," needs recognition and treatment. Empathy as distinguished from sympathy, is the capacity to feel what the other person is feeling inside, by instinctively or consciously entering into the inner state of another person such as his emotions, desires, conflicts, etc. It is identifying oneself for a while with another person or situation without altering one's own perspective. Sympathy is the power of understanding another's state, but viewed through one's own lens.

Why is it that some people will not, or rather cannot, put themselves into others' predicament in order to empathize or be helpful? This is a malaise of the fast-paced "upward moving" ambitious society which by breeding this kind of emotional isolation (E.D.D.), is particularly dangerous in today's increasingly interconnected global world, says Dr. Douglas Labier, a practising psychotherapist of 35 years standing (*Hindustan Times*, courtesy *The Washington Post*, December 29, 2007). Thus:

It plays out in ways both small and large: In troubled intimate relationships, when partners become locked into adversarial

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positions; and in warfare between groups with different beliefs, such as Palestinians and Israelis locked in a death grip....E.D.D. develops when people focus too much on acquiring power, status and money for themselves at the expense of developing those healthy relationships.... They have become alienated from their own hearts and equate what they have with who they are....The net result is that we do not recognize that we are all one, bound together. We only see ourselves.

There are things in life that give much satisfaction, like healthy relationship with friends and loved ones, and which are "the essential part of mental health." Lack of these essentials of healthy living results sometimes in cruelty, criminality and psychopathic behaviour. It is essential to inculcate the awareness from childhood that human beings affect one another through thoughts, feelings and actions. "Humanity is a great Brotherhood by virtue of the sameness of the material from which it is formed, physically and morally. Unless, however, it becomes a Brotherhood also intellectually, it is no better than a superior genus of animals" (*The Theosophical Glossary*). Empathy is a natural outgrowth of this feeling of belonging to one another, and which must be nurtured from childhood, by example and precepts.

Unfortunately, there is another, lesser-known side to natural Empathy. An over-exposure to the horrors of life, continually projected by the communication media and others can create in weak individuals, and especially impressionable children, anxiety reaction and loss of faith in humanity.

I AM a slow walker, but I never walk back.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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(*Sd.*) DAKSHA S PARAJIA
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