

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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### MUDITA—SYMPATHETIC JOY

SPIRITUAL LIVING is often, erroneously, thought to be a solemn affair. An earnest spiritual aspirant is thought to be someone who is serious, divorced from joys of life. Sangharakshita points out that in the olden days joyfulness was associated with impiety, so much so that in Scotland you could be prosecuted for laughing on the Sabbath! Commenting upon it in her article, “Sunday Devotion to Pleasure,” H.P.B. writes that the present observance of Sunday in England is founded on the practices of the later and degenerate Jews, who were not upheld by Jesus in their observances. She suggests that Sabbath was essentially declared to be a day of rest, but indulgence in innocent pleasure was not a forbidden thing. She argues that in fact, man should not be so much devoted to personal work during the week, as to have no time or strength left for prayer or meditation, so that Sunday has to be set apart for that purpose. Generally, joy and happiness characterize a spiritual person, and are important indicators of one’s spiritual progress. In fact, a spiritually perfect being experiences *Sahaj Ananda* or Unconditional happiness, which is not dependent on any person or thing.

Meditation practices in Buddhism aim at cultivating mindfulness or awareness, as also, cultivating positive emotions, and acknowledging and eradicating negative emotions. *Brahmavihara* is a term in Pali and Sanskrit, variously translated as *divine abodes*, *divine emotions*, or *sublime attitudes*. These are four positive aspects

of perfect emotion. They are four wholesome emotions, which include *maitri* or *metta*, meaning love or friendliness; *karuna* or compassion; *mudita* or sympathetic joy and *upeksha* or *upekkha* meaning tranquillity or equanimity. These are four Buddhist virtues which are recommended in *Brahmavihara Sutta*, to be endlessly, and without limit developed by every person. These are explained in *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, written by the scholar and commentator Buddhaghosa. There are four meditational practices connected with cultivation of these qualities or attitudes.

Love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity are interconnected. True love must be based on compassion, joy and equanimity. Likewise, true joy can only stem from love, compassion and equanimity. *Mudita* or sympathetic joy is a feeling of joy or gladness in the happiness and well being of others. It is possible to share in happiness of another when we are ourselves in a happy and positive state of mind. But generally we experience a tinge of jealousy or even unhappiness at another's success or achievement. If we are honest to ourselves, we will admit that at times, we feel a subtle satisfaction at the misfortune of another person, which sometimes includes our friends also. Sangharakshita says that we should watch our reaction when someone tells us about his misfortune. We will observe that at first there is subtle sense of satisfaction, after which comes the *conventional reaction* of sympathy which smothers our first *real* reaction.

In the book, *Meditation—The Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight*, the author, Kamalashila, a member of the Western Buddhist Order, while describing the four *brahmaviharas*, gives an outline of each quality by describing its “near enemy” and “far enemy.” The “near enemy” is a negative quality which we tend to mistake for the true quality. The “far enemy,” is the opposite negative quality. The opposite or far enemy of *mudita* is envy or resentment. The near enemy of *mudita* is very subtle, wherein we indulge in a kind of vicarious enjoyment, without actually being appreciative of the happy people. We may be only deriving some sentimental kind of

satisfaction from our *idea* of their happiness, but we have no real awareness or interest in that person. We must pay close attention to the person and try to *feel* the happiness of that person.

We may cultivate *mudita* by becoming aware of our mental states, and by first making a conscious effort to *appreciate* others. In a Buddhist practice called “rejoicing in merits,” one appreciates the good qualities of other people. In our times, when newspapers and news channels highlight the ugly side of human nature, it is essential and important to dwell on the good works and virtues of our friends and neighbours. We might dwell on the inspiring example of Gandhiji, Albert Schweitzer, Mother Teresa and many other lesser known individuals, and learn to appreciate and rejoice in their virtues and noble deeds.

Mr. Judge tells us that there are times when we may wish to do something good, but are unable to do it because of lack of money, or strength or simply because we are far away from the place or the person who needs help. However, if we earnestly and intensely desired to help then “your strong desire will strike like Vulcan upon other hearts in the world, and suddenly you will find that done which you had longed to be the doer of.” Then instead of regretting that we could not do that good work *ourselves*, we should rejoice that someone else was fortunate enough to make such meritorious Karma.

More often than not instead of sharing in the joy of another's achievement we try to take away credit. For instance, when our neighbour's son passes with high percentage of marks, instead of appreciating we try to show that there was nothing commendable about it because he had personal tuition, a quiet place to study and other facilities, which our child did not get. Probably, we would do well, as H.P.B. suggests “To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbour's efforts.” Unfortunately, human nature is so constituted that any good said of a person is immediately forgotten and never repeated. But one has only to utter a calumny, a malicious, slanderous statement, which might even be absurd and false, but if it pertains to a person who is

already looked down upon and is unpopular, then not only will it be readily believed, but also freely spread by the listeners, writes H.P.B. A rumor starts as a gentle breeze and ends up becoming a roaring storm (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 275). This shows that we must first train ourselves to “listen” about the good fortune and achievements of other people, be ready to say a few words of praise, keeping aside for a while, even the desire to achieve what another has achieved. *Mudita* tacitly implies looking for the good in others and learning to recognize and admire what good there is.

Comparison and competition may be considered great obstacles to practicing *mudita*. The extent to which we have cultivated genuine detachment, to that extent we are able to feel the joy of another. We may also observe that we are especially attached to certain areas or certain pleasures, and when we find other people enjoying those pleasures, we feel depressed. Being non-judgemental also helps in cultivating sympathetic joy, wherein there is readiness to view life from another’s point of view. “You have to really feel and connect with your own inner wealth in order to overcome that sense of deficiency and to truly open yourself to joy. If you have judgemental thoughts about yourself, for example, chances are that you are extending those thoughts to others. Judgemental thoughts cause the mind to become rigidly attached to how it thinks things should be—a sure obstacle to appreciative joy. *Mudita* is non-judgemental and allows that others can find happiness in things you might not. Can you accept that others might choose to live their lives differently from you, and still feel happy for them?” asks Frank Jude Boccio.

Sympathetic joy must be cultivated right from childhood. A child may be taught to share his toys with other children or even gift a toy to another less fortunate child and watch the joy on the face of the recipient. He is quite likely to be pleased with himself, at least at the thought of having made another person happy. This seed of desire to make others happy, and wanting to see joy on their faces should be nurtured so that it can go beyond random acts of pleasing another, to the sublime state of unselfish joy.

*Mudita* is “sympathetic” joy. Sympathy or empathy means getting into the shoes of another and being in attunement. Sympathy is an intense and involved emotion wherein we are identified with the other person. If he suffers, we too feel the pain, if he is excited, our heart leaps with joy. It comes very easy with those who are near and dear ones, but it can be cultivated between co-disciples and others when we stop being self-centred. We are quite taken up by our cares, concerns, opinions and judgements to pay attention to another person’s needs, views, opinions, etc. It is not only essential to be in sympathy with another’s joys and sorrows but also with his opinions and views. Especially in theosophical work, each student comes with his own peculiarities as also educational, cultural and religious background. It is only when we have the foundation of sympathy that we are ready to get out of the rut of our own thinking, and are willing to look intelligently into the hearts of co-students or co-disciples.

Though it is easier to empathize with close friends and our near and dear ones, one of the conditions for learning practical occultism is empathy or a “spiritual bond” that one needs to forge with co-disciples. “The *upasaka* while studying must take care to be united as the fingers on one hand” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*). A Master of Wisdom writes:

A band of students...who would reap any profit spiritually, must be in perfect harmony and unity of thought. Each one individually and collectively has to be utterly unselfish, kind and full of goodwill towards each other at least—leaving humanity out of the question. There must be no party spirit among the band, no backbiting, no ill-will, or envy or jealousy, contempt or anger. What hurts one, ought to hurt the other—that which rejoices A must fill with pleasure B.

*Mudita* is said to be an antidote to indifference, boredom, or even positive depression. Our “blues” or depression comes in cycles. In *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 24*, Mr. Judge mentions that if we maintained

a diary we would observe that depression occurs at regular intervals of time. When the depressive cycle returns, we must compel ourselves to feel joyous, even against our will—or at least *try to feel the joy of others*. We may do this next day or even two days later. We would then have implanted joyous impressions, so that when the depression returns, it brings along with it the impressions of joy and they would counteract each other's momentum. Soon we would succeed in establishing a joyous cycle. The teachings tell us that the practice of *mudita* produces a mental state that is calm, free and fearless, open to deep insight.

The *Mudita Bhavana meditation* begins by first developing the feeling of loving kindness. The next step consists in directing that loving kindness towards someone who we find as being particularly happy and joyful. They might be happy for a while, or they are happy because of wealth, or position or success in life. We must be able to congratulate them on their good fortune and earnestly wish that their happiness continues for a long time. We have to continue the meditation by developing in us the feeling of appreciative and sympathetic joy towards a friend, a neutral person and an enemy, by dwelling particularly on their good qualities and their happiness. In the next step we should rejoice in our own merits and good qualities, just as we rejoice in merits of others.

Happiness, like love and knowledge, increases when it is shared. When we truly feel happy for others our own happiness and peace increases. The Dalai Lama speaks of *mudita* as a kind of “enlightened self-interest.” He says that there are so many people in this world that it is simply reasonable to make their happiness as important as your own; if you can be happy when good things happen to others, your opportunities for delight are increased six billion to one! We are interconnected on the inner plane. One person's happiness can enrich not only his own inner being and of those around him, but also the collective psyche of which he is an inseparable part.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### “KIM”

[Reprinted (abridged) from *The Theosophical Movement* for May 1948. What follows are the extracts translated for *The Theosophical Movement* magazine from the letters and diary of “Kim,” a young Danish patriot who died at the hands of the Nazis in 1945, at the age of twenty one. As a young child he had a deep love of nature and a vivid imagination and he was always thinking things over. He was still a child when he declared “You must not say ‘he’ of God.” The collection entitled *Kim*, published in Copenhagen in 1945, had already passed through several editions then.

His reflections on sorrow, happiness, Truth, honesty and forgiveness are as inspiring today as they were at the time when he wrote. We are reminded of the statement in *Light on the Path*: “A slave may be dragged through the streets in chains, and yet retain the quiet soul of a philosopher, as was well seen in the person of Epictetus.” On the other hand a person with all the worldly possessions and freedom may not experience peace, because he is shaken inwardly, so that he is affected by passing impressions and passing shows of life. “A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.” wrote Hugh Downs. A mature person possesses creative mind, which has the capacity to create heaven in hell's despair. There is an ordinary person behind the mask of every superhero. We all have it in us to rise above our limitations.]

22nd May, 1941.

(From a letter to his girl friend while he, aged seventeen, was lying ill on board ship, after an accident followed by blood poisoning.)

IF PEOPLE would be honest with themselves, how much more happiness there would be, what satisfaction and joy would prevail! ... Truth is what unifies everything in a wonderfully beautiful and natural way. On the other side lie makes everything complicated and intricate, it cunningly befouls all that is lovely and pure in a dangerous and insidious way. Nobody notices that it has invaded,

slowly but surely it breaks down all that truth and love had built up, it picks the small stones from out the foundations of the integral whole.

In reality one is of no importance, and therefore one is not entitled to make demands or lay down conditions. Don't you know the feeling that may come upon one, when one is in the company of a really great and spiritual man, one feels small and insignificant and sits there only and harkens with devotion to what he may think of the various problems. So you and I should also listen with devotion to the great master teacher, life itself, and do what we are able to, to learn from it.

*24th May, 1941.*

...A culture should be developed which would estimate human beings according to their human value, and not according to birth, inheritance or what they have obtained by swindle. If a people could be lifted so high in its culture as to make them forget their own personal desires and be committed to a higher goal, that goal which is now sought blindfold and is covered up by war and tumult, that would be a culture so grand and strong, that it would yield inconceivably great happiness....

*10th November 1941.*

...I ask myself, how is happiness found in this world if not in one's inner world?...There were those days when people believed in Odin and Thor, and they did it with exactly the same conviction and certitude as any priest in Christianity does now...according to the basic Law of Nature, their religion, their belief, had to move apace with the development. In course of time, Christianity as now formulated will be thought of as we now think of the gods of our forefathers. The idea has struck me more than once, that all religion is an expression of a sort of cowardice, a perfectly unconscious cowardice. You have perhaps discovered that the one thing we human beings fear is the unknown, that which we do not understand. Therefore we must have something by which to explain it—and the

explanation on which we will build everything we call religion...I realize that the weak ones need laws, as prescriptions to be followed, or there would be no difference between them and the brutes...On the other hand, the strong can himself formulate his laws. He himself has the power to keep them without any promise of punishment or reward. These, he knows, will come spontaneously, according to nature, without any unnatural, not to say supernatural, explanation. He knows that if he follows his laws...the extravagant happiness, his developing spiritual health, will be his greatest reward possible....

I don't think we understand thoroughly the responsibility that falls upon us here in life, that we are a link in the world's development, and that every time we fail, we weaken or break down some part of that on which our children, grandchildren, etc., should have to build. There is infinitely much that our human understanding will never reach, but I think it is all infinitely more simple and single than what we make out of it. The laws of nature are simple, single, beautiful, while those of men are involved and complicated.

During the last years this idea has struck me time and again, that just as everything in Nature is grand and wonderful, so is each and every little event in our lives placed there for our benefit; like the small atom, one of many that constitute a living being, just as simple and heavenly beautiful is each little event there in our life, to create conditions for a still deeper happiness and feeling of joy.

*3rd December 1944.*

...The longer I live in town and among the people who always live here, the more I realize what immense value the quietude and earnestness of Nature have for one's development. Something is being lost, I know, when one lives too much together with other people. Something has slid away from me, something that I could see, understand and feel when alone.

(On December 19th, 1944, Kim and two comrades were taken by the Gestapo and brought to the "Western Prison.")

*21st January 1945.*

...I have always lived with the feeling that all that happened had a meaning of its own, and that the whole of this chain of events should lead me forwards, towards something definite. This feeling is now stronger in me than ever....It is glorious to live, what it is to die I do not know yet, but I feel it must be something of the grandest in one's whole life.

*3rd March 1945.*

(Found in the prison after the war had ended. From witnesses his mother learned that Kim had been carried, unconscious after the torture, back to his cell.)

...I have later thought over the strange thing that happened to me. Right after it I felt an indescribable relief, a victorious, rejoicing exaltation, a joy so extravagant that I felt paralyzed. It was as if the soul had made itself entirely free of the body. ...Suddenly I realized how fantastically strong I am. When the soul returned to the body, it was as if all the jubilation of the world was gathered, but it came to pass like so many other enjoyments, when the spell is over, the reaction comes. I discovered that my hands were trembling, something in me was high-strung, as if an element in the roots of my heart was discharging electricity quickly...and still I was quiet and my mind far stronger than ever. Still without my being afraid, without any shrinking back, my heart beats faster every time someone stops outside my door. It must be something physical although caused by a sense impression....Still, one remarkable thing. I did not feel any hatred at all. Something happened to my body, it was only a boy's body, and it reacted as such, but my spirit was quite otherwise occupied, it could see some small beings together with my body, but it was too full of itself to observe them closely.

*27th March 1945.*

(From his Diary, found after his death)

...Many times I have thought of Socrates' speech of defense. I thought of it last time when I was tried....I have also thought of

Jesus. Well I can realize the infinite love he has felt towards all men, and especially for those who drove the rivets through his hands. From the moment he left Gethsemane he was exalted above every passion...when he is standing before his executioners they have physically brought him away beyond anything earthly. He has found himself so liberated and exalted that he could not look at them with ordinary human eyes, but with a quite superior forbearance, that is always an effect of seeing the narrow horizon from which the others act.

The purification that is felt causes the world to be seen from a new level. A level exalted above all that is called pain and fear. One is exalted so high and sits there immovable, so that the basis of the hatred that otherwise would be felt as a result of the fear they ingraft into us, disappears. All those who are near in everyday life do not intrude on us in that moment, they stand apart, and one sends them only a loving thought, while all that which was before one as the holiest ideals, grows and becomes the main part of one's soul.

*4th April 1945.*

(To his sweetheart)

...I am thinking of Socrates, read him, and you will hear Plato express what I feel just now....There lives something in me—a love, an inspiration, call it what you like, something for which I had not yet found expression. Now I die and I do not know if I have lighted a little flame in another mind that shall outlive mine, but still I am quiet, for I have seen and know that Nature is rich; nobody notices if some single sprouts are trodden underfoot and die from it. Why, then should I despair when I look at all that richness which still lives?...Remember, and I swear it is true, that all pain is transformed into happiness, but only the very few will admit it to themselves....The truth is that after pain comes depth, and after depth comes fruit....

Yours not for ever,  
KIM

## STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA ON DEATH—I

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

IN THE SEVENTH Discourse, Krishna explained his nature as three-fold. His lower nature was described as the material or objective side, *Mulaprakriti*, or Matter; his higher nature being the illusive nature which enveloped his real Self, *Daiviprakriti*, Energy or Fohat, and above both the lower and higher was Krishna himself. Krishna symbolizes here the totality of the Universe, the One Life, or the One Universal Self. And if the Universal Self is a three-fold being then naturally everything in this Universe, all beings and creatures must necessarily also be three-fold. However, in man, we find that one or other of these three aspects predominates, and according to the nature that thus predominates there are three classes or types of men. We have those men who only recognize themselves as *Mulaprikriti* or Matter, the material side of their Nature. We have those who have mastered and controlled the workings of matter and are now centred and energized by *Daiviprakriti*, their higher nature. We also have those who have overcome both *mulaprikriti* and *daiviprakriti*. The first class of men, those who are identified with the material side of their nature only know one-third of their constitution. The second class of beings, know two-thirds of their constitution, and only such beings as have arrived at the third aspect and now understand and control all three aspects, are complete beings. We call them Perfected Men, or *Mahatmas*, and as mentioned in the last discourse, such a *Mahatma* is difficult to find.

When a man has perfected his being, he is said to know the OM, the complete symbol of the universe. This will explain why this Eighth discourse is known as “Devotion or Union through the Omnipresent Spirit named as OM.” In the Sanskrit language, the word used to signify and explain this mystic and purifying syllable OM, imperishable, indestructible which always is in the Universe,

is *Akshara*. OM means the One or the Universal Self, the Word become flesh, and undoubtedly the Christian expression that we are familiar with, and which we find in the *Gospel according to St. John* originated from the Sanskrit phrase, which is *Shabdabrahman*, i.e., *Brahman* becoming *Shabda*, and *Shabda* simply means word. OM represents all these three natures, the lower nature or *mulaprakriti*, the higher nature or *daiviprakriti* and Krishna’s true nature, Himself. It also symbolizes the three aspects of the Hindu branch, creation, preservation and destruction, which really means regeneration. He who knows himself has become one with the OM, he knows the OM, and how to attain this highest goal, the highest aim possible in evolution is what is explained in this discourse. It is Yoga or Union with that OM.

This eighth discourse continues with the subject discussed in the seventh. It is only separated by a series of questions which Arjuna asks the teacher, and also the eighth corresponds to the second portion of the second Discourse of the *Gita*. In that second portion we were explained the teachings in terms of *Buddhi-yoga* philosophy, whereas what is said on the subject of death in this Discourse is going to make clearer to us the injunction Krishna gave to Arjuna when he said, you have to kill all these people or enemies, and then in the same breath he said you cannot kill because they are immortal. This seeming contradiction is explained when we realize that there are two aspects, the mortal and the immortal self. Since the Eighth Discourse begins with the series of questions, let us first deal with the definitions Krishna gives to Arjuna. Krishna uses very simple and short definitions, for each term. But instead of using the language of the *Gita*, we shall simply give those definitions in terms of the terminology used by H.P.B. in *The Secret Doctrine* and that used by Mr. Judge in the *Ocean of Theosophy*. What is *Brahman*? *Brahman* is the Absolute. *Adhyatma* is the One universal Life, or the co-eval and co-eternal emanation from the Absolute. Karma is the differentiation which takes place in terms of that great law of periodicity or duality, and to state that law in terms of this very

discourse, light and darkness are the world's eternal ways. The moment we have duality or spirit and matter, we naturally have the connecting link between spirit and matter. In other words, the trinity arises immediately. Hence, it is this differentiation of the One Life through the Law of Karma which produces the three natures, and in terms of the *Gita* they are *Adhibhuta* or *Mulaprakriti*, the lower nature; *Adhidaivata* or the Higher Nature, which is Fohatic energy, or the link between spirit and matter. Finally, *adhiyajna*, and Krishna stating, that is Himself in the body.

What is the difference between *Adhyatma* or the One Universal Life, and *Adhiyajna*, or Krishna in the body? All of us as human beings have these three aspects. There is the One Life in us, there is also *Adhibhuta* or the mortal side of nature, and there is this *Adhidaivata* or *Daivi-prakriti*, which is our Higher nature. The difference between all of us and perfected being like Krishna is that in us these three aspects are not united in a harmonious way. We do not know ourselves as this three-fold being, but we either identify ourselves with the one or the other, and in the one condition we lose the memory of the other two-thirds of our nature. A perfected being, like Krishna is the being who has succeeded in galvanizing his three natures, so as to make of them a self-conscious unity. His incarnation is different from ourselves and we call it a Divine incarnation, the GREAT SACRIFICE of which *The Secret Doctrine* speaks. It is the sacrifice of the Perfected Being, the *Mahatma* into a physical body. It is Krishna incarnated as a Spiritual Teacher and Server of mankind.

After these definitions, Krishna proceeds to answer the other question of Arjuna, namely, "Tell me also how men who are fixed in meditation are to know thee at the hour of death?" This "thee" here refers to Krishna as the Great Sacrifice, not as impersonal *Adhyatma* the One Life, but that One Life which has become self-conscious through a perfect unity and unison with both the lower and the higher natures, so it is Krishna as the Divine incarnation which we are to know at the hour of death. Arjuna is a very practical pupil and Krishna is also a very practical Teacher, for instead of

stating how to know Krishna at the time of birth, He prepares Arjuna for the time of death. We ought to follow the example, and instead of troubling ourselves with past incarnations or even our past in this incarnation, we must meet the present and prepare for the future in front of us. If the question is to know Krishna, the Supreme Sacrifice at the hour of death, we must first understand what this death is. Death is simply a change of condition, and that change occurs to the mortal frame which we inhabit, and use as our instrument. But if this is a change and we call it death, we can likewise apply it to any change and all changes. In fact, there is a wider meaning to the term "death." Arjuna and Krishna are not only referring to the death of the physical, but to death as a general principle, which is to be found under many aspects in this universe. From the moment of birth until the time of the scientific change which we call death, the body is constantly dying, because it is constantly changing. At the time of the great change the body dissolves entirely, and it ceases to be as a unit or form, but the body as substance, as *mulaprakriti*, still exists and even matter is immortal in the philosophy of Theosophy.

This change, this dissolution of the body corresponds and really is the shadow of a change that takes place in the higher nature of man. In general we can state that all the evolutionary changes in the lower nature of man are simply precipitated in the material world because of changes that take place in the Higher or Spiritual nature of man. However, it does not mean that all changes of the physical body are spiritual changes, only evolutionary changes represent spiritual changes. For instance, the evolutionary changes of a flower means certain definite changes or processes of evolution through which that flower must pass, if it wants to come to fruition or complete evolution. The flower must be a bud, a blossom, and then open up entirely and completely. All natural changes in the lower nature represent changes which first take place in the higher nature. Then it is not only true of man's death, but also of the death of the greater Unit, the cosmos. Thus, when the universe is ready to go into manifestation, the change first occurs in the higher nature, in that

“will to live” which springs up in *daivi-prakriti*, and it is only when that change occurs that the change precipitates itself in *Mulaprakriti*. In other words, the will to live, must create proper instruments through which to manifest that desire to live.

We can apply it to man himself. Man, or the microcosm undergoes seven kinds or series of death. There is the death of the physical body. There is the death of the *Kama rupa*, or the body of desire, which is a second death. Then there is the death of the *deva rupa* of man, which is the *rupa* or body, which Mr. Judge calls the ethereal vesture of the Soul, in which man functions in the state known as the heaven world. Finally, there is the death, the most serious of all, which is the loss of the real memory of the individual spiritual being, when he comes into incarnation. We all understand the first death, the death of the physical, which simply means the separation of the physical body from the rest of man. The body has then become a corpse, and is destined to disintegrate and dissolve completely. Then we have a second corpse, which separates itself from the rest of man. This is the reunion or gathering of all that is evil, selfish, and material in his last personality, and that makes up the *kama rupa* or second corpse, which is going to disintegrate and dissolve itself.

Thus, first we lose the physical body, then we lose the selfish lower part of our nature, and we find ourselves clothed in the ethereal vesture, made up of our good thought and desires. H.P.B. refers to it in the *Voice of the Silence* as the *Mayavi Rupa* or *rupa* made up of mind stuff. In that ethereal garment in the heaven world, we are not exactly what we were in our last life on earth, for we have lost both our senses and our *kamic* lower impulses. We are no longer Miss So-and-so, but that image, ideal image of Miss So-and-so which we tried to be during the earth life. This very ideal of ours also must die, and it dies when we finish the period of meditation, and wake up from the divine illusion of that world and find ourselves as our real spiritual consciousness.

(To be concluded)

## AFTER DEATH CEREMONIES

IN EVERY community, in every part of the civilized world, death of a member of a family is followed by observances of certain religious rites and ceremonies by the survivors as regards the manner of disposal of the mortal remains of the deceased, and for securing—according to their belief—favourable conditions for the departed soul in its passage through post-mortem conditions of life. H.P.B. points out in her *Notes from The Theosophist* that funeral rites originated among theocratic nations, such as, the ancient Egyptians, Aryans and Jews, and that they have been adopted by religions of almost all nations. The Christian custom, for instance, of sprinkling the coffin three times with earth at the time of its internment in the tomb, is to be traced to the custom among ancient Greeks and Romans. Royalty among the ancient Egyptians preserved the bodies of the departed souls in the sepulchers to last for centuries by means of an efficacious process of embalming and mummification. Modern commentators ascribe this practice to superstitious religious belief because the philosophical rationale of it is not understood by them. In Theosophy we learn that ancient customs, rituals, folklores and traditions of peoples, however fanciful, when sifted, will be found to have a basis in truth and fact in nature, once well known but mixed with much error over many centuries, giving rise to superstitions. For instance, the Teacher points out, there is a commandment by Ahura Mazda, which reads: “They shall kill the man that burns corpse...He who burns *Nasa* (dead matter) must be killed...Burning *Nasa* from the dead is a capital crime.” (*Fargard VIII*, verse “74” 233, and *Fargard I*, 17 (63) of *Vendidad*) H.P.B. explains the inner meaning of these apparently absurd injunction, thus:

Twelve hours at least had to elapse between the death of the person and the burning or the destruction by any other means of the corpse of the dead. This old law was equally forgotten by the Brahmins as by the Zoroastrians. It was not the act of *burning* that was forbidden, but burning before

the corpse was empty, viz., before the inner principles had had time to get entirely liberated. (*The Theosophist*, June 1883)

Loss of the knowledge of the laws underlying separation of principles of man after death, and of the post-mortem states of consciousness of the disembodied soul, has not only led to many wrong practices and superstitions but to numerous unfortunate instances of pre-mature burial or cremation of man or woman who was not dead in the real sense, though pronounced clinically dead by the specialists of modern medical science. The latter, being empirical in its methods, is ignorant of the post-mortem processes taking place on the occult plane. According to ancient Science the rule is that till the subtle invisible vital cord which connects the Astral Body to the physical body, from which it had separated at death, is snapped in the natural course the physical body is not really dead, though clinically declared to be so, and that there is every possibility of the *Inner Man* re-entering and re-animating the body that is apparently dead. Annals of the civic bodies and medical records in every country are full of such pre-mature burials. Initiated Tibetan Buddhist monks freely teach this, and have demonstrated this truth to Western scientists with undeniable empirical evidence, as reported in the recorded dialogue between the scientists and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, *vide Gentle Bridges—conversation with the Dalai Lama on the Sciences of the Mind* (Shambala, 1992). There is an interesting verse in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* which teaches that the burning of the dead bodies is an act of religious merit:

This indeed is the highest tapas that they carry a man dead to the forest. The world highest wins he that knows this truth. And this indeed is the highest tapas that they place a dead man on fire. The world highest wins he that knows this truth. (5-11-1)

What is the truth spoken of here? The ready commonsense answer seems to be that the decaying dead bodies left without proper disposal contaminates the surrounding atmosphere, causing diseases

and epidemics in the population, and that, therefore, disposal of it is an act of meritorious service rendered to the community. While this is true, there may yet be other not so well-known psychological factors affecting the psychic health of the community due to undisposed corpses. On this issue H.P.B. approvingly quotes from the writings of the French Occultist, Eliphas Levi:

The Preservation of corpses is a violation of the laws of nature; it is an outrage on the modesty of death, which hides the works of destruction, as we should hide those of reproduction. Preservation of corpses is to create phantoms in the imagination of the earth; the specters of the nightmare, of hallucination, and fear, are but the wandering photographs of preserved corpses. It is these preserved or imperfectly destroyed corpses, which spread, amid the living, plague, cholera, contagious diseases, sadness, skepticism and disgust of life. Death is exhaled by death. The cemeteries poison the atmosphere of towns, and miasma of corpses blight the children even in the bosoms of their mothers. (*The Theosophist*, October 1881)

This is the reason why, at one time, in the far distant past, cremation was the universal mode of disposal of dead bodies as it was well known that it ensured not only the best psychological and physical health of the communities, and especially of the surviving relatives, but also it facilitated a quicker disintegration of the *Kama Rupa* of the deceased in the *Kama Loka*. It augurs well that in the West cremation of the dead is now becoming more popular.

In almost all religions—by custom rather than by injunctions of the sacred scriptures in their original correct sense—rituals are prescribed for performance at stated times, year after year, for the well-being of the departed soul. Christians have their Masses conducted for the welfare of the departed souls of their relatives. They pray to their dead saints for fulfilment of their wishes as it is believed by them that the departed saints act as intermediary between men and God and answer the prayers of men. Worship of ancestral

spirits is a universally pervasive custom among all the older races. Among the Hindus prevails an ancient custom of offering cooked rice ball and water (*pinda-udaka*) to the departed souls of their relatives every day for ten days after death, and, thereafter, annually, for the souls of immediate three preceding ancestors. Hindus consider it as an act of religious merit to thus honour the spirits of the dead, as it is believed that the offerings give satisfaction to the departed souls, prevent them from regressing into hell, and that they, thus gratified, bless the worshippers. Enormous amounts of money is spent for these ceremonies which are conducted by the priest, often resulting in financial ruin of poorer classes. Like all old customs this, too, is steeped in superstition as the real practice and the science underlying the same has been forgotten. Speaking of this, says Mr. Judge in his *Notes on the Bhagavad-gita*:

*Shraddha* and *Pinda* are now neglected because the inner constitution of man, and the constitution of the Macrocosm, are not understood in such a way as to make the ceremony of the slightest use.

The after-death ceremonies now in vogue is a development which came into usage with the loss of true knowledge of the constitution of man, and of the states of consciousness the disembodied soul successively enters, following the separation of principles, according to its Karma, after the physical death. When true knowledge prevailed in society, and Initiated Adepts were at hand to help and guide people, the whole ceremony after the death of a person consisted of one single measure initiated by the Adept with his occult knowledge to safeguard the *Kama-Rupa* with an armour against terrestrial attractions, which *Kama-Rupa* the departed soul relinquishes in the Astral region, as it left the physical body earlier on earth, before entering into the state of spiritual consciousness, called *Devachan* or *Swarga*.

Barring such exceptions as stated above, the belief that performance of elaborate after-death ceremonies under priestly guidance helps the departed soul in its passage in the other world

has no basis in truth. A correct comprehension of the Law of Karma will dispel such false ideas. The more or less suffering of the soul in the *Kama Loka* before relinquishing its *Kama-Rupa*, and the more or less duration of disintegration of *Kama-Rupa* in that region, the quality and the duration of the *Devachanic* state of consciousness of the Ego, and the conditions of its passage to reincarnation are all the exact and just consequences of the thoughts and acts of the Ego in its embodied state on earth, which no earthly rituals can annul or alter.

As no person's Karma can be either lightened or overburdened with the good or bad actions of the next of kin of the departed one, every man having his Karma independent and distinct from that of his neighbour—no more can the departed soul be made responsible for the doings of those it left behind. (*The Theosophist*, June 1883)

No living being, no god or goddess has the power of impeding the immutable law of nature called *Karma*, especially after the death of the person that evolved it. (*The Theosophist*, October 1883)

The only beneficiary of all these ceremonies performed for the dead is the priest who has invented them, and exploits the gullibility of ignorant people for his personal profit. Tenderness, love and reverence, the kith and kin feel for their dear departed relatives, moving them to commemorate the passing away of the loved one by some sign or gesture is quite natural. This is the real meaning of *Shraddha*—feeling of devotion and gratitude for the departed. Other than this no other religious ceremony is really required. Finally, the Teacher says:

And if we are asked to give our honest opinion upon both the modes adopted by the priests of every religion to make the living spend their money in useless ceremonies upon their dead, we say, that both means are in our sight no better than a legal and authorized extortion, the tribute paid by credulity to cunning. (*The Theosophist*, October 1883)

## EMERSON'S CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN THOUGHT

### III

The spirit of man has at last awakened, and now asserts itself. A death struggle between mysticism and materialism is already raging.

—*Lucifer* (November 1889)

THE FACT that these two rivals, Mysticism or what Emerson calls Transcendental Religion, and its sworn enemy, Materialism or the worship of material forms and the dollar god, have always arrayed on the opposite sides of the battle field. But when the battle-cry reaches crescendo at certain epochs, they are led by the great battle-heroes. Citing the example, such as that of Dostoevsky's influence on the Russian minds, H.P.B. wrote: "Every new (and noble) current of thought, and every new and enduring tendency of the age will have its rivals." Such was the time of struggle in the early history of the birth and development of the North America into an independent Union or Nation. As stated, great stalwarts and writers came on time to lead the confused mass of emigrants. Thus, Emerson's voice was recognized as one of the few first ranking voices which helped to some extent in the historical process, and especially in the formation of the American ethos relevant to the needs of the time, such as the *liberty of thought*.

The ideals that the American leaders desired to keep before the public mind were LIBERTY, EQUALITY and UNITY (Fraternity) for the whole nation. These have always had the appeal, as they could open up for each the opportunity, peace and progress. The latter were the immediate need for these hard-working and struggling people. Hence, these or their equivalent concepts got slowly woven into the very fabric of common life and culture. No wonder, subsequently these grand ideals got enshrined in almost all authorized "Declaration" of their CONSTITUTION of the nascent nations of the world. Lest they be misunderstood, some writers, like Emerson,

had to take pains to elaborate on the philosophical, psycho-social and ethical bases that could justify logically their idealism as the guiding spirit of governance.

Emerson strove by reasoning and practical interpretation particularly of the ideal of individual Liberty in his essays (Self-Reliance), so that it was made the first of American creed in their struggle for socio-political independence.

Being aware of the essential "Rights of Man" (elaborated by Thomas Carlyle) Emerson saw that sooner or later the American creed could be primarily motivated by the spirit of "Liberty" for the individual conscience and as the social ethos. Hence, his essays had often veered around what he called "Individualism" and Man's Divine nature, as the basis that fortifies one's ideal of Liberty.

Self-Reliance has many aspects, one of which is that of Self-Trust on which a man may bank his "worth." It takes into account that immortal SELF-hood which is every man's non-dying CONSCIOUSNESS and Life. This is also the basis of his true DIGNITY as the human soul. This human dignity is not to be mistaken for the much touted self-confidence in our self-opinionated personal ego. For, the latter has an exaggerated self-image, and builds confidence on his personal merits and assets. Hence, Emerson's constant labour to bring about SELF-awareness in us and to avoid passivity or the slavish surrender to outside influences and enticements.

What are the foundational ideas that characterized the American spirit of those days, and which their leaders like Emerson coined, like the slogans, to guide and inspire the individual citizen?

Among these, the most practical one seems to be Self-Reliance. Emerson firmly stood for the inherent "Human Rights" in his constant theme on Individualism and the philosophical Transcendentalism including the first principle of the Divinity and Dignity of man's nature. At the national level there were the familiar ideals (Liberty, Equality, Unity) which were later enshrined permanently into the CONSTITUTION of United States of America.

To justify these ideals, the basic moral and rational principles

will have to be expounded. Emerson took upon himself the "mission" to work and to bring the light of understanding in all his works, as we could see even from the simple titles of his essays and lectures.

Summing up the philosophical strain in all his messages, many commentators on his books of essays have collected the following seven relevant issues:

1. Celebration of Man as the Individual Soul, and its source in the Universal Spirit at the core. This is his frequent reference to the Divinity presiding in all life and more actively expressed through evolved human Ego or consciousness.
2. Self-Reliance: The Self being the immortal Reality that presides over each human Soul (See his essay on "Over-soul").
3. The basis for the Dignity of Man and its scope as an astounding human potentiality that awaits unfoldment (see his essay on "Nature").
4. The Spirit that pervades his essays, poems, etc., reveals robust idealism, enthusiasm, optimism and the intuitive hope brooding over the stream of the whole "Human" Kingdom.
5. Emerson has no illusion about the enfeebling influence of the religious institutions and dogmas in the West, and hence, his contribution to the evolution of the "American Religion" in the New World.
6. The *sure basis* for *Ethics* and for living the higher life, was clearly expounded by Emerson in his essays and orations (See his essay "Compensation").
7. Valuable "Lessons" are to be learnt by befriending mother Nature, and by the study of its laws, by heartily responding to her. It may reveal the intelligent source of life, and the universe of law.

To understand Emerson's influence on American thought, we can do no better than take up one of his earliest essays, *viz.*, SELF-RELIANCE, which represents not only his personal philosophy of life, but like the Bible for the masses, it covered the philosophy of Ethics and the Metaphysical bases for the informed choice, and right and joyful living. It turned out to be the "Manual of Self-Help" and also the guiding religion of Emerson himself.

Emerson was always, in the true spirit of Self-Reliance, a sort of

"non-conformist" from his teens, as an aspect of its policy. He once related an episode from his own early life, to prove his point, how we may respond to an unasked advice. He wrote: "I remember an answer, which, when quite young, I was prompted to make, to a valued advisor, who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrine of the Church. On my saying, 'What have I to do with the sacredness of the traditions if I live wholly from within,' my friend suggested: 'But those inclinations may be from below, not from above.' I replied: 'They do not seem to be such; but if I am the Devil's child I will live then from the Devil.'"

Speaking about his trust in the Self, Emerson suggested: "No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. The only 'right' is what is after my 'constitution' [one's true nature]." To him it was always the man's Higher Self, which he had often recognized to be his only reliable source of the higher inclinations that always prompted him to live with integrity. For, he was also well aware of the weakness of human personality. He recommended to "Be yourself," and none other, in the practice of Ethics and Self-Reliance. A truly mature person must know and put his trust in his true "worth" as the soul, which is himself as the true Self at the centre of his Being, and which he must keep in front. After all, "Man is made in the image of God." And, "It is this universal nature of each human entity that gives worth to each particular man."

"Of the Universal Mind, each individual man is one more incarnation of the same." We can see that Emerson based his teachings on the firm recognition of the Divinity in man. And the true "dignity" in man has nothing to do with the outer achievements, status, or "worth" the world is coveting. For, every "worthy" soul carries its own divine aura and is the only valuable entity of each man. "There is the great responsible Thinker and Actor working, wherever man works." "Do your own work and you shall reinforce yourself," unmindful of opinions, beliefs, rewards, etc., and out of "reverence for the Divinity in us." "That the 'true man' belongs to no other time or place, but in the centre of things."

Emerson insists on “self-effort.” Thus, “In the world mental or in the world spiritual, each man must progress by his own effort, unmindful of others.” “What I must do concerns me and not what other people think.” But that also means that I am solely responsible for my mature choice and attitude to life, as the test of my maturity and independence from bondage to human nature. In fact, in his essays, Emerson gives with such lucidity so many instances of our slavish dependence that we may be taken by surprise! Shri Krishna in the *Gita*, calls them all bondage to personal existence and which is the “womb of human suffering.”

There is the tacit independence and sacredness in one's hour of solitude, and also to respect that of another. There is the story of the respect given by Emerson due to his senior friend, Thomas Carlyle's choice of silence. Emerson, on his visit to Europe, sought out his interview with this notoriously reticent and difficult but wise friend he revered. He was given a pipe by his host Carlyle who took one himself. They sat together smoking, in perfect silence, until bedtime, and on parting shook hands most cordially, congratulating each other on the fruitful time they had enjoyed together!

The three key-words, Liberty, Equality and Unity were made popularly convincing and constitutionally relevant through the labour of enlightened writers. The former became the guiding principles for the social and political transformation. But Emerson saw the *need* for the *deeper change* in the very human nature. Such a great reformation cannot be sustained by religious and political platforms. The Church, even after two thousand years could not touch the root of the “human” problem. For human soul functions through enlightened mind, and it cannot be touched deeply by the platitudes that could not convince or nurture the rational and spiritual part of man. The three mighty Ideals had behind them the great thinkers and men of integrity and self-sacrifice, like Carlyle, Paine, Emerson, and Lincoln, who were their guiding Stars, sent by providence as their leading lights.

(To be concluded)

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

**Question:** In the *Gita*, Arjuna is advised to rise above the three qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. What does it imply? Why are we advised to rise even above *Sattva*?

**Answer:** In the manifestation, the three *gunas* or qualities of *Prakriti* are not equally distributed. It is because one of the three *gunas* preponderates over the other two that we see varieties of things and manifold objects. These *gunas* are the properties of *Prakriti* and that means that they are the very constituents of the elements of *Prakriti*. They are not qualities like whiteness of cloth which is different from the cloth, or the colour red of the flower that is different from the flower. These *gunas* are qualities of *prakriti* in the same way as the three strands of a rope are qualities of the rope. We do not say that the strands are qualities of a rope; we say that they are the very substance of the rope, explains Swami Krishnananda. When *Sattva* quality has the upper hand we experience happiness, clarity of perception and sharpness of understanding. The preponderance of *Rajas* quality is characterized by desire, distraction, activity, passion and attachment. When *Tamas* quality predominates we experience confusion, lack of proper judgement and laziness.

The highest path which leads to emancipation is “separation from three qualities,” or rising above the three qualities. In the real sense, it is not possible to separate oneself from the three qualities, but what is meant is not being attached to or identified with the three qualities. It is because we identify with forms and conditions that we feel we are separate from others, and as a result act in a manner which binds us to this worldly existence. When a person is able to see that all the drama of life is the play of three qualities and that

there is something, the real Self, which is above and beyond these three qualities, he attains to immortality, and is said to be above the three *gunas*. We are given a description of the person who is above the three qualities. He is someone who is not affected by the presence or absence of these qualities; he does not long for them, nor does he dislike them when they appear. He is someone who is equal in pain and pleasure; with those who like or dislike, or with those who praise or blame, or those who are enemy or friend to him. Thus, one meaning of rising above the three qualities is being *stithaprajna* or equal-minded, having risen above the pairs of opposites.

*Sattva* also, though of the nature of goodness, purity and light, tends to bind the Spirit through attachment for the pleasant things and for knowledge. We are given examples of a painter being bound to painting, or musician getting lost in his music, which they pursue even in worst condition and without which they feel lost. In the *Gita* we are told that “As the flame is surrounded by smoke, and a mirror by rust, and as the womb envelopes the foetus, so is the universe surrounded by this passion... Its empire is over the senses and organs, the thinking principle and the discriminating faculty also.” These three illustrations cover three *gunas* (qualities) and three kinds of desires. There could be inert (*tamasic*) desires, such as sleep and idleness; active *rajasic* desires for power, name, fame, wealth, love for gain, etc.; divine or noble (*sattvic*) desires such as for achieving peace, happiness, knowledge and perfection. Fire is enveloped by smoke, but it is only partially veiled by it. A flame could be seen through the smoke, and a whiff of wind clears off the smoke and the flame becomes visible. So, even *sattvic* desire could veil the infinite glory of the Spirit. It is quite possible to be like Mejnour in *Zanoni*, who is pure intellect that has won its wisdom through detachment from the life of the senses. He is not touched by human passions, but also his wisdom is of no benefit to humanity, as he denies his relation with the world. He says, “I live but in knowledge, I have no life in humanity.” Bulwer Lytton describes him by saying, “He asks no charity and gives none—he does no

evil and seems to confer no good.” Likewise, someone who loves quiet and peace, or cleanliness or punctuality, can well be *attached* to these qualities and therefore, could be upset when placed in dirty or noisy environment, or when faced with irregularity and unpunctuality. The wish to be in a particular place, for doing the work or to meditate, shows that we have dislike for the place we are in, and that is *attachment by opposite*.

When a person rises beyond the three qualities of nature, he combines in himself the three qualities or aspects of *Brahman*, viz., SAT, CHIT, ANANDA, where pure being, pure truth and pure goodness, are all merged into one. It is the sphere of pure *sattva*, which is beyond *sattva* quality, where there is neither matter, nor soul, nor spirit, but something which is all, and yet none of these.

Another way of looking at it is from the point of view of various bodies. Our physical body, our subtle body and our Causal body, are all three made of *gunas*, and to go beyond the three *gunas* we have to go beyond the consciousness corresponding to these three bodies and that state is described in the book, *The Dream of Ravan*, as SPIRIT-CONDITION or *Turya State*, a state of high spiritual consciousness, beyond Dreamless Sleep State. In this state the individualized spirit possesses true knowledge and the universal, eternal, ever-present intuition. The Ego in dreamless sleep state exists in Causal body. When the Ego crosses this boundary it enters the dream-state, and exists in subtle inner body and comes under the influence of illusion. The Ego in the waking state begins to identify itself with the body with its five senses and five organs of action. Thus, as the Ego moves from *Turya* to waking state, the True Being is more and more forgotten and obscured through false identification. **Question:** Certain types of vegetables and animals are considered *Rajasic-tamasic*. Can they change their quality and become *Sattvic*? How can we become *Sattvic*?

**Answer:** All the three *gunas* are always present in all beings and objects surrounding us, but vary in their relative quantity. We humans have the unique ability to consciously alter the levels of the *gunas*

in our bodies and minds.

How should the *Tamas*, which partakes largely of *Rajas* and in lesser measure of *Sattva*, be transformed into *Sattva*, or be controlled by it? How should brute selfishness be changed into universal sympathy and love? We are told that this can only be accomplished through *Rajas*—the life of passion—the life of suffering, because every passion, including love, leads to suffering and sorrow. Growth from unconscious matter into conscious animal life involves physical pain, while emotional life of the soul leads to mental suffering. It is only when we encounter pain that we begin to question life, try to get knowledge, so as to alleviate or avoid pain and suffering. Gradually, we begin to acquire wisdom and compassion, and the dross of our Titanic nature is transmuted into the pure *Sattva*, where purity, goodness and truth are predominant.

There is a suggestion in the “Dream of Ravan” that at one stage Mandodari will no longer be the wife of Ravana, but because she would serve Ravana and his new wife Zingarel, with love and affection, she would receive from them kindness and help, and thus, her further progress in the *Tamas* sphere of life would be helped by love. “There is much practical advice for us here as to the attitude we should adopt towards those who serve us in a so-called low capacity. If we adopt this idea of mutual trust and respect, the result will be that those who minister to us as attendants now will grow towards the higher *gunas* in a natural way, and their devotion will be our recompense.” (*The Theosophical Movement*, March 1965)

Probably, the same can be applied to lower kingdoms. By the way we handle them and by the thoughts and feelings we encourage in our minds, we make either psychic or spiritual impression on every object or creature, and thus either help them, not only to evolve into higher forms, but also to move out of the sphere of *tamas* and *rajas* into *sattva*, or hinder their progress. A lion is not always *rajasic*. For instance, a lion playing with cubs is in *sattvic* condition; while chasing its prey, he is *rajasic*. Our good thoughts and feelings may lead him to be increasingly in *sattvic* condition.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

If we regard a little closely the idea of education and the way we are taught, we would be horrified at the scandal that education is. Of the many textbooks on many subjects which we pored over, few of us can claim to have retained anything meaningful from most of these textbooks, even ten years after having learnt those subjects. Apart from the other benefits of formal education, it fails to impart certain minimum amount of knowledge to the learner, and as a result, we tend to live uneducated lives in spite of our education, for education is something we pass through rather than gather.

Students in schools and colleges seem to be imprisoned by textbooks. A textbook can be memorized, it can be occasionally understood, but can it be liked? Can it ever inspire one to read more? Can it foster an abiding curiosity in the subject it covers, and make one a seeker of knowledge? Such questions seem out of place, for textbooks are clearly designed for a much more limited purpose. Textbooks are dry, they deliver knowledge in a capsule form, and present information in an organized way. As a result, neither the process of acquiring knowledge, nor the possession of the knowledge so acquired, has the slightest residue of pleasure in it. The textbooks treat the world as a knowable place that can be summed up in a series of chapters, with questions at the end of each chapter. Textbooks tend to view learning as a closed system, in which the world is presented as a collection of loosely related facts, with distinct and separate boxes that do not come together as a whole. Textbooks tend to compartmentalize knowledge, such that geography, for instance, seems to be clearly separated from history, physics or geology. The concept of “syllabus” further complicates the idea of true education. Students are forever concerned with what is needed at examination, how much one needs to study, what chapters in which books one needs to remember—in other words, how much knowledge is sufficient for one to escape more knowledge.

“Multiple texts that offer diverse perspectives, reading lists that

correspond with the questions in one's head, the use of other forms of media that bring alive aspects of a subject, the telling of stories about the great debates in any field, the application of concepts and ideas in our everyday lives—those are some of the things that would help us radically re-imagine the idea of the textbook," writes Santosh Desai. (*The Times of India*, April 4, 2016)

Education has altered somewhat since H.P.B.'s day, but even now much time is devoted to cramming an ever-increasing flood of facts into memory. As far back as in 1947, in her article, "The Lost Tools of Learning," Dorothy Sayers justly accused the practice of teaching the pupil "subjects" instead of teaching him how to think. The pupil must be first taught to handle the tools of learning before he could be expected to pick up detailed knowledge, and the power to reason and express himself. She suggests that keeping in mind the stages of child's mental development, the first is the "Poll-parrot" stage, in which greater emphasis may be laid on learning by heart, when the child generally takes pleasure in accumulation of things memorized. In the next "Pert" stage, discursive reasoning develops and may be emphasized. The third, the "Poetic" stage of adolescence, brings a yearning for independent self-expression, the dawn of creativeness and of a synthesizing power. It would be useful to follow the method of proceeding from Universals (the general principles of learning) to Particulars (the subjects), and it would doubtless be of value to consider the completion of the circuit, the return from the Particulars to Universals.

The importance of the tools of learning is to cultivate and develop the mind in the right direction. However, in addition, the purpose of education must be to develop and strengthen the character of the learner. H.P.B. suggests that we should "educate it [child] so as to produce the most harmonious and equal unfoldment of its powers, in order that its special aptitudes should find their full natural development," and "to inculcate in them the love of one's neighbour and the feeling of mutual interdependence and brotherhood; and thus to train and form the character for practical life." A proper and

sane system of education should produce the most vigorous and liberal mind.

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Recently, in the space of a week, four beautiful young women gave up their lives, for varied reasons, which included love affair, unemployment and depression. This was shocking and intriguing news, especially, given that all of them were educated and from good families, and viewed dispassionately, none of their problems seemed insurmountable. What kind of pressure can be so intense as to cause reasonably well-off, educated young people to end their lives? Why are they not able to cope when life throws them a curveball? Are we failing to pass on coping skills to our youngsters? Statistics reveal that family problems and illnesses are recorded as leading causes of suicide in India. Next in line are marriage issue and love affairs, followed by addiction, failure in examination, unemployment and poverty. Of those who committed suicide in India in 2014, eighty per cent were literate. Male suicide rate is twice that of female, writes Vinita Dawra Nangia.

One of the reasons to end one's life could be that the problem or emotional turmoil seems insurmountable, when one takes short-sighted view. When viewed in the context of one's entire life, the problem may seem no bigger than a pebble in the path. The second reason could be that one wishes to teach a lesson to the person, who is considered to be responsible for one's grief. It is a mistake to believe that after one's death that person will feel guilty and regret for having caused such suffering.

Life is about dealing with issues, and one should not try to run away from them or get overwhelmed by the difficulties. "We have to learn to deal with all kinds of situations and the varied emotions these arouse—happiness, grief, triumph, helplessness, ecstasy, depression, hopelessness and so on. Opting out should not even be an option.... We need to focus on helping people acquire coping skills—to teach them that there is life after hopelessness, light after

dark, and the solution to all problems lies in remaining stoic and believing, and in developing the ability to distance yourself from a tough situation,” writes Vinita Nangia. (*Times Life, Sunday Times of India*, April 17, 2016)

It is true that there has been unprecedented increase in the number of people committing suicide, and some of them for trifling reasons. Materialism, consumerism and glamour seem to be mainly responsible for suicides. In some other cases it is loneliness, depression and boredom which lead a person to commit suicide. Often it is exploitation or emotional or psychological torture of one human being by another, which is the cause of committing suicide.

The remedy lies in learning to be content. Weakening family bonds and deteriorating human relationships wherein we are not sensitive to the needs and sorrows of another human being, are also to be blamed for increasing number of suicides. Ultimately, what we need is the right philosophy which can open our eyes that when we commit suicide, we are actually trying to dodge the law of Karma. By ending our life, we are trying to run away from a person or the situation in which we are placed under Karma, in this life. We may seem to succeed in escaping, but not forever. The fact is that even the most unbearable and painful situation we are placed in has come to us under Karma and only we are responsible for it. All we need to do is to try and learn the necessary lesson, if we are unable to change it. There is no escape from responsibility. In any of our next births we will be once again placed into that same situation from which we tried to escape by committing suicide, till we have learnt to handle that situation and learnt the lesson.

Theosophy also teaches that a person committing suicide finds himself in the astral atmosphere only partly dead, only minus the physical body, moving around in the astral atmosphere, near the earth, wanting to satisfy certain desires but unable to do so in the absence of the body. *Through the Gates of Gold* describes suicide to be only “change of mode of existence, and perhaps a more active form of misery.”

To most of us, medicine comes from the chemist. But the original source of drugs is much more exotic than the local pharmacist. For instance, the first HIV drug came from a sea sponge, while a heart disease drug is derived from the foxglove plant. Scientists are now turning their attention to venomous animals. Venoms are cocktails made up of between tens and hundreds of different toxins. Venoms help animals to immobilize predators in self-defense. To qualify as venom, as opposed to poison, the toxin mixture must be “injected” into another animal. Around 1,50,000 animal species have evolved the machinery to produce a venom and inject it into prey. Some of the examples are: snakes, male duck-billed platypus with the venom-bearing spurs on its back legs, toxic saliva of particular types of shrew, etc. It is evolution that has made venom such a good source of drugs, says Dr. Zolatan Takacs, a Hungarian-born scientist-adventurer, who founded the World Toxin Bank. Each toxin has specific effect on the prey’s vital bodily functions, so that some toxics attack the nervous system, causing paralysis by interfering with nerve-to-muscle communication, while some others prevent blood clotting, resulting in massive bleeding. Yet, it is these same dangerous properties that could make them useful. Substances that interfere with the nervous system could make great painkillers, while blood thinning is a vital part of the treatment of heart disease.

Using venoms as a source of drugs is not a new idea. Ancient civilization used venom in medicines. In modern-times, the first venom-derived drug was available in 1981. Using Designer Toxins technology, Dr. Takacs, fuses natural toxins from different venomous animals into a single molecule. Today, there are around 20 different medications originating from animal venoms. While research is in its infancy, it is believed that Honey Bee venom will one day be effective weapon against HIV transmission, as toxin from the Brazilian wasp *Polybia paulista* will be ideal weapon against breast cancer, skin cancer and rheumatoid arthritis. The drugs derived from snake venom are used for lowering blood pressure, to stop blood clotting and for giving relief against chronic pain. The toxins of

carnivorous sea-snails, found mainly in the warm Indian and Pacific Oceans, are used in drugs which cure chronic pain, and these toxins are likely to be effective in treating Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Schizophrenia and lung cancer. With around 20 million venom toxins in nature left to explore, it looks like we may be seeing more and more drugs inspired by nature's powerful venoms, writes Kath Nightingale. (*BBC Knowledge*, June 2016)

It is interesting to note that in the fifth century B.C. Hippocrates used arsenic to treat ulcers. Arsenic derivatives are still used to treat African sleeping sickness. In 1890, William Osler pronounced arsenic the best drug for leukemia, and even today it remains an effective chemotherapy agent for acute forms of the disease.

Paradoxically, poison can kill as well as cure. H.P.B. points out that everything in this Universe of differentiated matter has a light and a dark side to it, and when applied practically, one leads to use and the other to abuse. A chemist who has mastered the science of "essences" knows that every one of them can both heal and kill. Every ingredient and poison, from the harmless wax to deadly prussic acid, or from the infant's saliva to the poison of a cobra, can be used for dual purposes. There is neither "elixir of life" nor "elixir of death" *per se*, nor poison *per se*, but all is contained in the universal essence—the good or bad effect depends upon the degree of its differentiation and its various correlations. The light side produces life, health, bliss, divine peace, while the dark side brings death, disease, sorrow and strife. This is proven in some of the most violent poisons, where even a large quantity of it fails to produce any evil effect on the organism, while a grain of it can kill with the rapidity of lightening. Also "the same grain, again, altered by a certain combination, though its quantity remains almost identical—will heal. The number of the degrees of its differentiation is septenary, as the planes of its action, each degree being either beneficent or maleficent in its effect, according to the system into which it is introduced."