

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### EAST AND WEST

THE VERY FAMOUS opening line in “The Ballad of East and West,” a poem by Rudyard Kipling, published in 1889, reads: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” The first line is often quoted to ascribe, sometimes, racism to Kipling, especially in regard to the British Empire. But when interpreted in the context of the entire poem this line only means that East and West have different cultures and ways of doing things, and will never unite in looking at the world in the same way. But as is shown in the poem, even men from very different cultures can always admire and respect courage, strength and generosity in men from another culture. There is no denying the contrast in the culture, knowledge and outlook that exists in the East and the West.

*The Ocean of Theosophy* speaks of “the lusty and egotistical, the fighting and the trading West,” in describing the western nations that were yet struggling to build their civilization, calling them “Goths and Vandals,” meaning barbarians, having no respect towards natural beauty and objects of cultural value. History shows how vast masses of historical and ethnological treasures of Central and South America were destroyed by the Spanish, and would have done the same with the ancient books and palm-leaf records in India, if they could have accessed them. The roots of the materialistic civilization of the west may be traced to materialistic thinking owing to illogical religious dogmas, which deny the existence of soul and spirit. As a result,

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they have been sceptical about the existence of beings with knowledge and power over “space, time, mind and matter,” known in the East as Mahatmas, Initiates, Sages and Rishis. As contrasted with this, in the East, there has always been a belief in the inner nature of man, in soul and spirit, and there, people have never doubted the existence of such great beings. In the East, and especially in India, “the people are fitted by temperament and climate to be the preservers of the philosophical, ethical and psychical jewels,” writes Mr. Judge.

In Kipling’s poem Britain is the West, India is the East. But definitions of “East” and “West” vary greatly throughout history. Interestingly, east is where the sun rises, and west is where it sets. In saying that the East and the West cannot meet, Kipling seems to suggest the inability of either or both to adapt to the ways of the other. The theme of the poem is that even though the two ends of the earth cannot meet, men of each territory can put aside their differences of nationality, race, and religion and appreciate each other’s universal qualities of bravery, nobility and rectitude.

In the fourth of her “Five Messages,” H.P.B. writes that one of the tasks of the Theosophical Society is to draw together the East and the West so that each may supply the qualities lacking in the other and develop more fraternal feelings among various nations and such exchange and intercourse would prove valuable in “Aryanizing Western thought.” The Hindu students of Theosophy were invited to contribute articles on Indian philosophies to her magazine *Lucifer*, with a view to influence the western thought.

Indians have long been accused, of copying to their detriment, the manners, customs and opinions of the West. There is so much that they should not copy; but there are other things it would be good for them to adopt. For instance, the best quality which Indians could find to emulate in Englishmen is the tenacity of purpose. “The English character, difficult to reach, but solid and tenacious when once aroused, adds to our Society a valuable factor,” wrote H.P.B.

The statement, “the West had knowledge but the East had

wisdom,” made by a professor of Birmingham University, nearly eighty years ago, makes a very illuminating distinction between the East and the West. For two thousand years, Western metaphysicians have devoted their attention to the study of external phenomena in their endeavour to probe the Ultimate Reality, and their attempts have failed. On the other hand, the Eastern Sages, thousands of years before the birth of Jesus, have sensed an Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable Principle at the back of the universe, and by raising their consciousness to the highest spiritual plane have found that the Self in man was one with this fundamental Principle. In that high spiritual state of Self-Realization, they intuitively sensed the ultimate Truth. Some of the fundamental teachings of these Sages have been enshrined in the sacred books of the East and particularly in the Upanishads. The esoteric philosophy differentiates between two kinds of knowledge, the real and the unreal, the Head-learning and the Soul-wisdom.

It can be easily shown that every important advancement or discovery made by modern science have been anticipated by ancient science and philosophy. Mr. Judge’s article, “The Impudence of Modern Philosophers,” clearly states that modern philosophers, especially western, who feel that their theories are original, must recognize that they are found in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and in many eastern philosophical books. It is impudence on their part to ignore the development of philosophy in the East, “where nearly all the mooted philosophical questions of the day were ages ago discussed and disposed of.” In another article, “Plain Theosophical Traces,” he writes that the attention of the West was diverted to the Eastern knowledge by the efforts of England, Germany and France. “Frenchmen first drew attention to the Upanishads, Germans went in for Sanskrit, and England conquered India, so that her metaphysical mines could be examined in peace,” writes Mr. Judge.

In the *Key to Theosophy* the Second Object of Theosophy has been stated as: “To promote the study of Aryan and other Scriptures, of the World’s religion and sciences, and to vindicate the importance

of old Asiatic literature, namely of the Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian philosophies.” This object has too often been considered as an academical proposition, whereas it is practical because an aid to furtherance of Brotherhood. Since H.P.B.’s death there has not been much Theosophical activity in this direction, though of course, there is greater interest in Eastern religion, and the philosophies of the East are better known to the public of both East and West through translations and popularization of ancient texts. Apart from Theosophy there are others who find that the study of ancient scriptures of the East is vital to the welfare of humanity.

It is increasingly being recognized that humanity must be morally united and that can happen through mutual understanding, respect and appreciation, and hence the necessity for study of other civilizations. It is believed that only by studying the thinkers and the mystics of both East and West man can attain his true nature and become like God. Professor William Norman Brown, in *The Aryan Path* for April 1938 insisted in the very title of his article that “The West must learn about India.”

In the article, “The Truth About East and West” Mr. Judge explains that the East is not just India, but also, China, Japan, Persia, Arabia, Turkey, Russia, Tibet, Mongolia, Ceylon and other parts. Tibet is a large country and that is where the Masters are according to H.P.B. India has been erroneously regarded as “the East,” though she is only a small part of it. India has done nothing for the East, for the last hundreds of years, and is also not likely to do anything for a long time. A Master of Wisdom has gone on record saying, “India has been going down for thousands of years. She must take equally long for her regeneration.” Once when a Master of Wisdom visited India he found the psychic atmosphere suffocating, and wrote: “I myself cannot endure for any length of time the stifling magnetism even of my own countrymen. . . . The present tendency of education is to make them (Hindus) materialistic and to root out spirituality.” In other words, he found that India had spiritually degraded and had done nothing for many centuries to help other countries.

The Theosophical Movement was launched in America, when the new era of Western Occultism began in 1875. But why was the movement not launched in India? It was not for any political or religious reason but because of purely “intellectual activity” and the spiritual pride of the Hindus. The intellectualism refers to their adherence to the letter of the law and not looking for the spirit, the inner, hidden meaning of the scriptures and other writings of the ancients. This intellectualism is reflected in their arguments and counter-arguments over subtle distinctions in terms, in long explanations and endless commentaries. The majority of these Brahmins were orthodox and a thick veil of theological dogma hid the truth. They adhered to idol-worship and caste distinctions. By their hard and fast beliefs, they had created an impenetrable barrier around them. Of the masses of people, one class was ignorant and superstitious, while the other with western education had lost faith in their religion, God, etc., and was materialized. The Master writes that on the other hand, a westerner had no such hard and fast beliefs and therefore in their case the only barrier was that of bad magnetic emanations which result from drink, promiscuous physical associations such as sex, etc. As a result, it was easier for them to affect the westerners than the Hindus. Mr. Judge sums it up thus: “In fact it is more difficult to make an entry into the hearts and minds of people who, through much lapse of time in fixed metaphysical dogmatism, have built in the psychic and psychomental planes a hard impervious shell around themselves, than it is to make that entry with Westerners who, although they may be meat eaters, yet have no fixed opinions deep laid in a foundation of mysticism and buttressed with a pride inherited from the past.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 75)

We are in the fifth sub-race of Fifth or Aryan Race. The Theosophical Movement was started in the West, America, also because the next new race, *i.e.*, the sixth sub-race is going to appear in America. The preparations for forming the foundation or backbone for ushering in the new sub-race are going on in America. Races

and sub-races are formed by amalgamation and separation. The process of amalgamation is going on in America, as we can see coming together of nations there. Thus, “the spiritual crest, the centre, of the wave of evolution is in the West, which includes Europe and America, and not in the East,” writes Mr. Judge.

Masters who can see far into the past as also in the future, desire that the growth and progress of the West must be based on the knowledge from the East. As they say that if “the primitive soul-satisfying philosophy of the Aryans” is not taken to the West, there is every possibility that under cyclic law our age will be pushed towards extreme atheism or will be dragged back to extreme sacerdotalism, *i.e.*, having excessive authority of priest class. What is most urgently needed is the knowledge of the doctrines of Karma and Re-birth, which provide logical basis for the practice of ethics, so that people will do good not out of fear of punishment from God or of hell-fire, but based on the knowledge that “as you sow, so shall you reap.” There is no escaping the reward and punishment under the law of Karma, as it will surely reach the individual in some subsequent life, if not in the present life. This knowledge is expected to have positive influence on human relations thereby leading to greater possibility of formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood. The knowledge of Asiatic psychology would throw more light on the hidden powers in man and unexplained laws of nature, by showing the threefold nature of man and cosmos. In short, They (the Masters) desired that the West should take from the East the philosophy and metaphysics, assimilate the same and put it into practice, which will help to change the whole social and economic order. Then the West should bring it back to the East and help in its upliftment. The Eastern nations are storehouses of knowledge, but are unaware of the treasures in their possession. The West can make the Eastern nations aware of this knowledge and teach them how to use it. “It is the destiny of the West to raise the East from its darkness, superstition, and ignorance, to save the world, it is its destiny to send Theosophical principles, literature, and teachers into even such a remote land as Tibet,” writes Mr. Judge.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE THREE HERMITS

THE THREE Hermits is a short story by Russian author Leo Tolstoy, written in 1886, which conveyed in a simple narrative, manages to reveal the very profoundest of truths. Drawing on Russian folklore and the theology of the Holy Trinity, the story introduces us to three simple monks, living on a remote island, who spend their time in prayer and contemplation, “for the salvation of their souls.” An Archbishop and several pilgrims are travelling on a ship to the Solovetsk Monastery. During the voyage, the bishop overhears a discussion about this remote island, where three old hermits live a simple life. Several of the fishermen claim that they have seen the hermits. One of them says that once he had been stranded at night upon that island, where he met these three old men, who fed him and helped him mend his boat. These three old men were very peculiar in their appearance and one of them was so strong that he turned “my boat over as if it were only a pail.” The bishop expresses his wish to visit the island. The captain tries to dissuade him by saying, “The old men are not worth your pains. I have heard that they are foolish old fellows, who understand nothing, and never speak a word.” The bishop insists that the captain steer the ship toward the island. As the ship comes near to the island, they are able to see with the telescope, three old hermits standing on the shore. The bishop subsequently sets off in a rowboat to visit them.

When the Archbishop lands on the shore, he finds the three old men just as the fisherman had described them, very aged, having long beards, and very poorly dressed. The Archbishop asks them how they make their devotions and how they pray to God and serve God. The oldest of the hermits replies, “We do not know how to serve God. We only serve and support ourselves, servant of God.” As for the prayer, he says, “We pray in this way. Three are ye, three are we, have mercy upon us.”

The Archbishop is touched and amused by the old men's simple prayer. He tells them, "I see you wish to please the Lord, but you do not know how to serve Him. This is not the way to pray; but listen to me, and I will teach you. I will teach you, not a way of my own, but the way in which God in the Holy Scriptures has commanded all men to pray to Him." He then proceeds to explain the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity. The Archbishop attempts to teach them the "Lord's Prayer," beginning with "Our Father in Heaven," but the simple hermits blunder and cannot remember the words. This compels the bishop to repeat the lessons late into the night. After he is satisfied that they have memorized the prayer, the bishop departs from the island leaving the hermits with a firm instruction to pray as he has taught them. Then he gets into the boat and returns to the ship, to continue his voyage.

While on board, when all the pilgrims fall asleep, and all is quiet on deck, the bishop sits gazing at the sea. He spots something white and shinning on the waters, in the moonlight. At first he thinks that a boat is sailing behind them, but soon realizes that the three hermits are running across the surface of the water "as though it were a dry land." The passengers see the hermits coming along hand in hand, and beckoning the ship to stop. All three were gliding along upon the water without moving their feet. The hermits reach the ship and inform the bishop, "We have forgotten your teachings, servant of God. As long as we kept repeating it we remembered, but when we stopped saying it for a time, a word dropped out and now it has all gone to pieces. We can remember nothing of it. Teach us again."

The bishop is humbled. He bows low before the hermits and replies, "Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God. It is not for me to teach you. Pray for us sinners." The hermits turned and went back across the sea. And a light shone until daybreak on the spot where they were lost to sight.

In this story Tolstoy explores the nature of prayer by contrasting the simple, faithful prayer of illiterate but devoted hermits, with the formal, doctrinal prayer of the educated bishop who is critical of the

hermits' practice. The story is aptly prefaced with the sayings of Jesus from the Sixth Chapter of the *Gospel According to St. Matthew*: "And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him." The Bishop represents the Orthodox Church of Russia, and may by extension, represent any religious body, with its emphasis on empty ritual, and which is bound to fall short of the mystical depth and inner understanding of a true spiritual seeker.

By showing how the hermits run on the water to catch up with the bishop because they forgot the "Lord's Prayer," Tolstoy emphasizes the nature of the prayer and shows how the hermits are holier than the bishop even though they do not know any special prayer. Their prayer came from the heart. "Walking on water" may well be regarded as a miracle of faith. The ability to walk on water and on fire is possessed by the truly faithful. Even in the Bible we read that when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea, they were troubled. But Jesus told that it was him, and not to be afraid. Peter said that if it was him (Jesus) he should ask Peter to go to him walking on the water. Jesus asked Peter to walk on water and reach him. Peter started walking on water. But when he looked around and saw the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me Lord," he shouted, and Jesus caught hold of him, and said, "O thou of little faith, why did you doubt me?" (*Matthew*, 14:26-31)

The Hindu epic *Ramayana* mentions the floating stones used by Hanuman and his *army of monkeys* to build the Rama Setu, a bridge, connecting India and Srilanka in order to rescue Sita who was held captive by Ravana in Lanka. Hanuman, the monkey-god, discovered that the stone that was thrown into the sea, taking the name of Rama, or with Rama's name inscribed on it, did not sink, but remained floating. With faith all things are possible. Faith establishes the Will. It has been known that by using the power of Will, a yogi can change the polarity of his body, and make it positive

with respect to earth, and hence he is able to levitate or raise his body in the air like a bird. Earth is a magnet charged with positive electricity and when any object acquires the same polarity, it is repelled. Perhaps, on similar principle, the stones floated instead of sinking.

“The Lord’s Prayer,” is the one prayer that Jesus gave, and his command was to pray “in secret.” But how is this prayer regarded by us today? Do we not mainly emphasize “Give us this day our daily bread?” If we look at the prayer as a statement of a teacher of scientific law, who shows us how to aspire with the heart and the mind and to live by action, then it takes on a different meaning.

The prayer says, “*Thy kingdom come,*” which implies that we can bring the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, once we have made friends with the Divine within. “Kingdom of Heaven” is the state of spiritual bliss and perfection. It is that peace and bliss which leaves no desire for any worldly thing. In his highly significant work, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, published in 1894, Tolstoy deals with his theory of non-resistance to evil. He has considered the contradictions that exist between our lives and Christ’s teachings, asserting that the chief reason for all the misunderstandings was the belief that Christ’s precepts could be accepted without changing our lives. He condemned Christian churches of all denominations for perverting the true teaching of Christ in order to maintain their power over the masses. The Kingdom of God on earth can be achieved only when every man first realized that the Kingdom was within him.

Tolstoy has been called “the undisputed master, the noblest portrayer of his people, nay, of his century.” His *Confession* is the outpouring of a soul completely perplexed by the relation of man to the Infinite. Gandhiji, an admirer of Tolstoy, was deeply impressed and influenced by his book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. Gandhiji’s civil-disobedience campaign and his philosophy of *Satyagraha* owe much to Tolstoy, whom Gandhiji often referred to as “the highest moral authority.”

Born in the year 1828, he was, as a child, of a reflective and philosophical bent of mind. When he was about 50 years old, he underwent an inner turmoil which shaped him into a speculator, a thinker and a life-teacher, and led him to search for the purpose and meaning of life. Some critics consider *The Three Hermits* to represent Tolstoy’s faith-journey in search of meaning and purpose of life. Neither the philosophers nor the sciences gave him the answers he sought. He studied the teachings of the East and the West, and tried to find the best in all religions. He discovered the real sense of the teachings of Christ and began to shape his life accordingly and to teach this real Christianity through his writings. As was to be expected, this brought him in conflict with the official standards of the Church and the laws of the State, so that he was labelled a “sinner,” and an “iconoclast,” and finally excommunicated in 1901.

November 20, will mark the 119th death anniversary of Count Leo Tolstoy who passed away on November 20, 1910. Russians have put Tolstoy at the apex of the literary ladder, because of the radical philosophy he preached, and for his works such as, *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*. Count Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian nobleman, was a genius, a true reformer, both in the religious and in the social sphere, who tried to elevate the masses through his writings. Commenting on the ideas of Leo Tolstoy on “The Science of Life,” H.P.B. writes, “How near his views are to the esoteric and philosophic teachings of higher Theosophy....He is one of those few *elect* who begin with intuition and end with *quasi-omniscience*.” Elsewhere H.P.B. states, “His whole life is an exemplar of Christ-like altruism and self-sacrifice,” and characterizes him as “the greatest psychologist” of the 19th century. “Count Leo N. Tolstoy does not believe in the Bible, the Church or the divinity of Christ; and yet no Christian surpasses him in the practical bearing out of the principles alleged to have been preached on the Mount,” wrote H.P.B. To Tolstoy, the training of the inner nature was always more important than the acquiring of university degrees. The only kind of education he thought useful was that which taught love and compassion for one’s neighbour and service to the masses.

## EDUCATIONAL REFORM

## I

THE WORD education comes from the Latin root, *educare*, which means to train, to mould, to shape, and *educere*, meaning to lead out, to elicit, to draw out. The two meanings seem to be complementary, instead of, as some say, pointing to two different approaches to human development. It is an old debate about nature versus nurture. Modern educationists admit that both, the hereditary traits (or, the genes, as they say) and environmental factors, contribute in an inextricable manner in the development of the human potential, and that both are seen to constantly influence each other. This is also seen in the dynamical interrelationship and interaction between what are called, in the parlance of modern science, biotic and abiotic factors in the growth and evolution of species in a given ecosystem in the natural world, and in the domestication and husbandry of animals and plants in farming practices. The same principle applies to the human being also, albeit in a much deeper and wider ambit. Man stands on the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder on earth, in whom is hoarded up—according to anthropogenesis of theosophical philosophy—the types of the whole of the lower kingdoms of nature, to which he is the macrocosm, as a physical being; and, as the heir to the potentiality of absolute perfection of universal spirit, which is the macrocosm to him, as the immortal Thinker or Manasic being. He is a potential god on earth. Therefore, in the universal scheme of things the human being has a double role; as the helper and teacher to the lower kingdoms in their evolutionary development, on the one hand, and as a learner or pupil in the great school of life, aided by his superiors, who stand ahead of him in the evolutionary journey, as his teachers and guides, on the other. The whole question of education and reform, therefore, has to be considered in this context and understanding of man and his relation to the universe as one whole, his duties and obligations to his fellow-beings, above and below him, and to himself, and of the great purpose of existence. Thus, education is an integral part of the cycle of human progress

and development in the natural order. In its truest sense education must aim at harmonious and equal unfoldment and training of latent potentialities of physical, intellectual, psychic and spiritual senses, faculties and powers, which are latent in every human being, and build character for universal service.

The system of education in ancient India was based on such a higher knowledge and spiritual wisdom, when the national cycle was ascendant, when man and nature responded to the divine nature, and the civilization attained a high degree of perfection. It is but natural that in the downward cycle of the nation magnetic sympathy between diviner part of man and nature should weaken, and people grow more material, governed mainly by intellect alone. Such is the character of the cycle at the present hour. Such rise and fall of nations and civilizations can be traced in history.

In the west, in the era prior to industrialization, access to education was limited to a few of the wealthy families under private tutors, principal content of which were formal religious instruction and classical Greco-Roman arts and philosophy. Guilds of various vocations pertaining to manufacture, trade and commerce flourished which provided opportunities for the young to acquire skills through apprenticeship. Ushering in of the era of industrialization brought about a major change, and reform, so-called, in the system of education in the west by pioneering efforts of such thinkers and activists as Horace Mann of America who championed the cause of diffusion of the fruits of education and learning among people in the mass through state funded public education system. Needs of human development, resolution of socio-economic problems, preparing intelligent citizenry for democratic governance of the state, etc., were sought to be addressed through a system of public education.

In India, from time immemorial, the system of education was woven into the fabric of social life with a clear objective of achieving the four-fold ideal of human life and happiness with major emphasis on character formation through development of virtues of right living, and final emancipation. *Gurukulas* flourished all over the

land, in which the young learned under the care and instruction of competent teachers—Gurus. People in general were grounded in laws of virtue—Dharma—and pursued one or the other of the numerous vocations according to their natural leanings and hereditary traits, and the skills were perfected and transmitted from generation to generation. Education of the masses was accomplished through spiritual values and folk lore permeating every aspect of human life. A glimpse of this ancient system may be had in the study of the epics and ancient scriptures of India. The ancient system gradually faded and finally obliterated with the advent of western education following the English colonization of India. The break from the past heritage has been so complete that educated Indians embraced western values and modern trends, and looked upon their own indigenous ancient knowledge and wisdom with indifference. In recent times however there has been attempts to reform the educational system. But in the face of highly competitive market-oriented education with over-emphasis on science and technology in the service of industrialized political economy, and lack of clear ideas of objects of true education, all such attempts at reforms are limited to just rearrangement of educational curricula in vogue, teaching methods and administrative processes. Attempts at infusion of moral values in education have been largely ineffectual for lack of theosophical perspective. Theosophy makes constructive criticism of the modern system, clearly defines the objects of true education, and how they may be achieved.

H. P. Blavatsky points out in her work, *The Key to Theosophy*, a book of practical Theosophy, that school training is of the greatest importance in forming character which should be the chief object of education, as said in the foregoing, which is wholly lacking in the modern system. The realistic scenario of the modern system is graphically portrayed by H.P.B in her above cited work written by her in the 19th century, addressed to the Christian West, which is as much true in the 21st century as then, and equally applicable to India. Materialism of the system and its pernicious effects portrayed

by her then are glaringly evident now also. Thus:

“The objects of this branch of education are, then, pounds, shillings, and pence, the *summum bonum* of the XIXth century. Thus, the energies generated by the brain molecules of its adherents are all concentrated on one point, and are, therefore, to some extent, an organized army of *educated* and speculative intellects of the minority of men, trained against the hosts of the ignorant, simple-minded masses doomed to be vampirised, lived and sat upon by their intellectually stronger brethren. Such training is not only *untheosophical*, it is simply UNCHRISTIAN. Result: The direct outcome of this branch of education is an overflowing of the market with money-making machines, with heartless selfish men—animals—who have been most carefully trained to prey on their fellows and take advantage of their weaker brethren!” (p. 265)

This is the most apt portrayal of the spirit of modern education which begins right at the primary level. The theory of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest is practically enacted in the system of examination, evaluation, and ranking in competitive race for lucrative careers and emoluments. Centuries old traditional artistic skills and vocations of diverse kinds which sustained millions of people all over the country in the past are practically decimated in the mad rush for mechanization, industrialization, privatization of common lands and community resources for speculative globalized market which the modern education subserves. Arts, literature, linguistics, philosophy, study of which humanizes man, if taught at all, are low in order of priority and preference. The entire learning process is one of rote learning and memorizing a plethora of subjects at a time, the one object of which is to pass examination and procure degrees which serve as passport to lucrative job market. The system stultifies intuitive faculties and finer sensibilities and exacerbates selfishness of the lower personality, and it is this which is the rife source of all evils of society—misery, crime, injustice, etc., and environmental catastrophes. Theosophy teaches that the neglect of social duty by the educated and well-to-do section of society is most

closely connected with the stunted and arrested development of the other weaker and less fortunate sections, in millions, the victims of the exploitative system. This is because action of the one reacts on the lives of all owing to the fact of essential oneness of humanity which is the basis of human solidarity, and the law of universal causation. The moral cause of social ills is not understood, and vain efforts are made at reform by readjustment of outer effects through legislative and administrative processes, ignoring the deep-seated moral cause in the human psyche. The one and the only remedy for righting the terrible injustice and suffering of the world lies in truly Theosophical education which develops the higher and nobler qualities of love, kindness and justice, and stimulates potentialities of soul, instilling love of fellowmen and zeal for altruistic service. This alone leads to true progress.

It is this action and interaction, this true brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental Theosophical principles that every Theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 232, Indian ed.)

Appreciation of this verity is the beginning of reform in the true sense. There is indeed a widespread discontent with the prevalent system of education among thousands of well-meaning and thinking people, and many such philanthropists have been experimenting with alternative models of educating the young. Sincere attempts are made at eliminating unhealthy competition in primary education, minimizing mechanical memorizing, inculcating moral values. Distrustful of the competitive system, many conscientious parents are resorting to “home-schooling” either singly or in small groups to save their children from the trauma of mental and emotional stress to which children are subjected in schools. Quite a few well-known institutions have been providing alternative modes of schooling with their own ideologies of what should be the right education within or outside of the official frame work stipulated by statutory authority.

Whatever may be the ideals of education the various individuals and institutions are working on as alternative to the standards stipulated in the state policy, they are all, in the ultimate analysis, more or less adaptations of a part of the true and comprehensive system H. P. Blavatsky outlined in *The Key to Theosophy* (p. 268):

A proper and sane system of education should produce the most vigorous and liberal mind, strictly trained in logical and accurate thought, and not in blind faith...Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all men, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves. We would reduce the purely mechanical work of the memory to an absolute minimum, and devote the time to the development and training of the inner senses, faculties and latent capacities. We would endeavour to deal with each child as a unit, and to educate it 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. We should aim at creating *free* men and women, free intellectually, free morally, unprejudiced in all respects, and above all things, *unselfish*. And we believe that much if not all of this could be obtained by *proper and truly theosophical* education.

In the prevailing social conditions and due to want of right educators well-grounded in Theosophical Wisdom in sufficient numbers it may not be possible to implement the lofty objectives outlined above by the Teacher, yet some of the stated objectives could be realized in practice by the initiative of a few thoughtful philanthropists who are well acquainted with broad Theosophical principles. Even such modest efforts will be productive of much good, which would indeed be a pioneering venture towards a general reform in education system. Some thoughts in this regard will be presented in the next issue.

(To be concluded)

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS  
STUDY, APPLICATION AND PROMULGATION—VII

LIGHT and darkness always go together and, as Mr. Crosbie points out, in a bigger city there are many souls who are eagerly looking for some light; but you and other friends situated in your little town have a peculiar opportunity. A strong group self-energized and self-sustained will mean a great deal for the Cause as for India. Much, if not everything, will depend upon the few earnest souls there carrying on this labour of love. Feeling for the Great Cause is the nourisher of the student-aspirant. If you love the Cause you will labour for it unceasingly and labouring for it you will see its hidden beauties and powers and therefore will love it all the more. Devotion is the talisman that works its miracle for every student, not for his own progress but for the advancement of the Cause for which his progress is intended. Study of our great teachings is a very necessary thing and extension in knowledge will take place as you study, but unless the heart quality is developed and feeling for the cause of human brotherhood is sustained, the study will produce a ring “pass not” and problems and puzzles will arise. Therefore, in prosecuting the study think of humanity which must be helped by the student, and that will naturally turn your mind in the direction of the real authors of the Philosophy. This perfect body of knowledge did not come into existence with H.P.B., however much she was the focal point to which assistance, direction and guidance came. In studying her books you must endeavour to contact her mind, and similarly in studying the books of Mr. Judge you must contact *his* mind, which, as H.P.B. pointed out, was the link between the spiritual and the material worlds. When a student-aspirant like you has begun to contact the minds of the authors and the founders, then naturally the living power of those minds will begin to work its miracle on your mind. Therefore, H.P.B. says in the first of her *Five Messages*:

The multiplication of local centres should be a fore-most consideration in your minds, and each man should strive to

be a centre of work in himself. When his inner development has reached a certain point, he will naturally draw those with whom he is in contact under the same influence; a nucleus will be formed, round which other people will gather, forming a centre from which information and spiritual influence radiate, and towards which higher influences are directed.

The duty of the Theosophists, it seems to me, is first and foremost to live his own life and set an example in his own home; he can fight the dishonesty of the black market to a considerable extent; also in his business and office routine he can set an example of efficiency and honesty which will have its beneficent repercussions on all those who come in contact with him. For this purpose daily study is most excellent. Metaphysics give a detachment to the mind, which, after the experience of the detachment, when brought in contact with concrete problems of the world, is able to deal with them in a real spiritual way. Study and application are not sufficient; promulgation of these ideas becomes necessary. True, it is done at your study group and indirectly much can be done through contact with friends, in conversation and class, as well as by visits to social and political organizations where Theosophic influence may permeate through you. We cannot be indifferent and close our eyes to the evil which surrounds us; it would be as futile and impracticable as having no light in our homes and simply closing our eyes because of the darkness or not going to sleep because there is chaos around. We have to light our own lights and each small light will enable people in that area to dispel the darkness which surrounds them as well as others. Nor would it do to worry and bring on insomnia; we must use the hours of darkness for the purpose of sleep which brings refreshment for the work to be done the next day.

It is not surprising that many of your colleagues and friends are not interested in the work of H.P.B. It is not an easy job to be interested in the higher things of life, especially when the higher things demand application so that one's own mode of daily living

has to be changed. We know what we are doing—endeavouring to affect the mind of the race during these coming decades before 1975. Make your own mind and heart clear that you yourself will not be able to do anything along this line until you have familiarized yourself very fully with the teachings of the esoteric philosophy.

We can hardly do anything for Brother——. His complaint that Theosophy does not help him brings to mind the complaint of two American members to H.P.B. They said the same thing and added that, as their appeal to the Masters called forth no response, they were going back to the “meek and gentle Jesus.” H.P.B.’s answer was: “Did you knock at the right door?” and “Did you knock in the right way?” So, we can wish Brother—— all the best in the world and let him find out for himself. If you can help him to reorientate himself, you may be doing him a good piece of service.

Mr. Judge has rightly said that “Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others.”

As to Theosophy being for those who are hungry for the soul-wisdom: This is correct. But really is there anybody in the process of human evolution in embodied existence who is not hungry for soul-wisdom directly or indirectly? We would draw your attention to two articles: “Is Theosophy for All?” and “Needless Slavery” in Volume XIII of the magazine *Theosophy*. While it is true that Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others, it must not be understood that those who do not want it are not in need of it, because Theosophy gives the next step of advance for every human consciousness, however dull or prosaic that consciousness may be.

What we must look out for is a steady nucleus of real devotees of H.P.B. and her Great Masters. People come and go, as Mr. Judge points out, but the real nucleus must remain, and it is to the real nucleus that every time we have to look for the real progress of Theosophy in any place.

I am fully convinced that students of Theosophy can save themselves and their associates a great deal of trouble and suffering if they live by the Power of Theosophy. If they can keep an inner

centre, without any ruffle getting to it, they will be able to understand our teachings in a more profound way and also will be able to help themselves and those around them, students or not, in a more efficient and thoroughgoing fashion. If a few people who know the value and power of Theosophy will not attempt this, so much the worse for ourselves and for the country. We have not only to promulgate the great ideas through classes and meetings, but more than ever we have to promulgate by becoming Theosophical in heart and mind, as well as in words and deeds.

*The Heart Doctrine* is a small book, no doubt, but it is full of good things, and one has to read Mr. Judge’s articles several times and ponder over them to be able to make the necessary application. Unless we apply the teachings embodied therein, the depth and profundity of Mr. Judge’s writings will not become clear to us. As he points out in one of his letters, our new knowledge is only an extension of our old knowledge; and Mr. Judge’s books will enable us to increase our storehouse of knowledge exactly in terms of the application we make of it. It is this practising of Theosophy in our daily lives that is so essential, and one of the very things that stand in the way of many Hindus who appreciate Theosophy intellectually is the lack of or lukewarmness towards the application of teachings given out. This is true not only in reference to the teachings of Theosophy but also in reference to the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. If the Hindus were to apply the teachings of the *Gita*, they would very soon become students of Theosophy.

(To be continued)

MAKE it a point to do something every day that you do not want to do. This is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain.

—MARK TWAIN

## THE SYMBOLOGY OF THREAD

A THREAD is a thin fibre of cotton or silk. It is a yarn, a cord or a string. Anything threadlike symbolises connectedness and continuity. The expression “thread of life,” depicts continuity of life. Theosophy teaches that man is not his body, mind or feelings as all of these constantly change. When one wakes up in the morning one does not feel that one is a different person. There is a continuity of consciousness. There is something in us which is unchanging, constant and immortal, and bridges the gap between sleeping and waking, as also, between birth and death. It is the higher mind which enables us to say “I am I,” and in conjunction with *Atma-Buddhi*, it becomes the Individuality or Reincarnating Ego. In the Hindu Sacred books, it is called *Sutratma*, which literally means the “Thread Soul.” It is the Individuality which incarnates in men one life after the other, and upon which are strung, like beads on a string, his countless Personalities, or earthly lives, or the spiritual aroma of every personality it *follows* through the pilgrimage of life. After the death of the body there is separation of the lower principles from the higher. The Reincarnating Ego departs to *Devachan* or *Swarga* or Paradise, taking with it the spiritual aroma or noble qualities of the last personality. After the completion of Devachanic state, and before rebirth, the Ego or the “golden thread” sees all its “pearls” and misses not one of them.

We read something similar in the Seventh Chapter of the *Gita*, which speaks of *Para* and *Apara Prakriti*. All the phenomenal appearances, all the different names, and lives, and innumerable beings, are hung suspended, so to say, on the Self. Hence Krishna says, “All things hang on me as precious gems upon a string.” The *Para* and *Apara prakriti* are the womb of all beings. The relation between them is like the relation between electricity and a bulb, fan or washing machine. As the thread passes through the centre of every bead, the one and the same Self is seated in the centre of all beings and all things. The powers and precious things which are the Self are enumerated in the chapter, which include the strength of the strong, intelligence of the intelligent beings, splendour of splendid

things, light in the Sun and Moon, etc. All that is perfect, splendid, noble or beautiful, derives its excellence from the Self. And as the material of the beads and the material of the thread are very different, so also, there is a gulf between the world of objects and pure consciousness which supports everything.

Esoteric Doctrine, says H.P.B. may well be called the “thread-doctrine,” since like *Sutratma*, it passes through and strings together all the ancient philosophical religious systems, and reconciles and explains them all. It also checks the discoveries of modern exact science, and shows that some of these are correct, as they are corroborated in the ancient records. (*S.D.*, I, 610)

When we seek a deeper understanding of any philosophical or ethical idea, then a thread, a finger, or a long darting current, flies out from our brain-mind and it goes in all directions and touches all other minds to receive the required information and answers. This thread from the mind of a seeker is described as a messenger going from the mind of a seeker, with a question, as it were, and touching the mind of another. If that mind has an answer or information, it gives it up. This thread, or wire from the seeker’s mind flies and touches other minds till it gets the answer from the other mind. Thus, every time we sit down to think earnestly on some ethical or philosophical matter, a thread goes from our mind and touches other minds, bringing varieties of thought. Depending upon one’s purity or impurity, the thoughts and ideas so received may be correct or incorrect. When one seeks right philosophy, and not mere adherence to dogmas, and lives an unselfish and altruistic life, such a mind will reject the wrong ideas. But the mind of a superstitious and dogmatic person is likely to attract and receive incorrect ideas, which are in line with his own thinking. This is how systems of thought are made and kept going, even though they may be foolish, incorrect and pernicious. Mr. Judge calls this sub-conscious telepathy. He points out that often a simple person might be in possession of general truths of nature, which he is unable to express. Often scientific discoveries are the result of learned minds picking up their ideas

from the minds of such simple persons and then giving them out to the world. Thus, besides accepting ideas from newspapers, magazines and books, we are receiving ideas and illumination from other minds on unseen plane, showing that truly, there is very little *original* thought. And yet, in our competitive world, out of selfish desire for power and gain, we seek to hide rather than share our knowledge and ideas. As a result, quite unconsciously, a wall is built around the minds of such people, which does not yield any idea to the messenger from a seeking mind. (*Vernal Blooms*, pp. 196-98)

The Thread is closely connected with weaving. Is there nothing for man to do but to weave the chequered warp and woof of each earthly existence with the stained and discolored threads of past actions? Each one of us is a weaver—a weaver of our own life—our own destiny in this world. Just as a weaver chooses his own material and colour pattern, his own threads, fine or coarse, so too we choose our own threads for the loom. Our thoughts and our words, our acts and our feelings, are the materials with which we weave our destiny, refined or rough, pure or impure. A spider weaves the web, thread by thread, so does every man from birth to death weaves his destiny. When the last strand is woven, we are *seemingly* enraptured in the network of our own doing, and are under the empire of *self-made* destiny.

We often make mistakes in weaving, and then instead of repairing the wrong, we go on involving ourselves more and more in the disordered pattern. But when one makes a mistake, there is no other alternative but to undo the mistake and set it right, though it may seem hard. The same applies to weaving of destiny through our thoughts and actions. In despair and sorrow we seek refuge in selfish prayers for forgiveness. We try to bribe the gods. But that will not repair the wrong. The only way out of the difficulty is to undo the wrong, by creating fresh good karma.

Kabir was a weaver. He says God is a Master Weaver, who weaved this great cloth (human body) in ten months, the gestation period for human beings. He seems to refer to both the gross and

the subtle body or *sukshma sarira*. By our thoughts, words, feelings, desires and actions, we either purify or defile the subtle and gross bodies, giving either psychic or spiritual impulse to the atoms of these bodies. Theosophy teaches that for an ordinary person in every new birth there is a *new* astral body or *sukshma sarira*, governed by Karma to be expended in that life. Hence, working in accordance with Karma, each one of us is striving to weave a glorious and pure fabric, a permanent astral body. “The permanent astral is the astral, permeated, changed, refined by the fire of consciousness and thus made permanent,” explains Mr. Crosbie. Hence Kabir says that the Great Beings use these bodies with care and concern, and return them to God unblemished and pure.

Some of the rituals and ceremonies do have an inner significance, but their mechanical performance has made us lose sight of it. For instance, the Thread Ceremony or the Investiture Ceremony, also called *Upanayanam*, is the ceremony with great inner significance. The wearer of the thread is called *upanita*, *i.e.*, one who is brought or drawn near to one’s guru. One of the names of the thread is *Yajna-Sutra*. *Yajna* means Supreme Spirit and *Sutra* means thread or tie. Collectively, the compound word signifies that which ties a man to his spirit or god. It consists of three yarns twisted into one thread. The yarns signify the great principle of “three in one and one in three.” The thread is also called *Tri-danda*. *Tri* means three, and *Danda* means chastisement, correction or conquest. The wearer of the thread is reminded of three great conquests he has to accomplish. These are: *Vakya Sanyama*, *Manas Sanyama* and *Indriya Sanyama*, *i.e.*, control over one’s speech, thought and action. Guru Nanak, even as a young boy, at the time of his thread ceremony, explained the inner meaning of wearing the sacred thread to the Brahmin priest. He said, “O Pandit, from the cotton of compassion spin out the thread of love. Make the knots of purity, truth and self-control. Let the mind remain concentrated on that thread. That thread never breaks, never need be changed, never can be lost. Revere those who wear such a thread.”

## APHORISMS ON KARMA—SOME REFLECTIONS

## VI

[Preface to the *Aphorisms on Karma* by Mr. Wm. Q. Judge (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 21*) reads: “The following, among others not yet used, were given to me by teachers, among them being H. P. Blavatsky. Some were written, others communicated in other ways. To me they were declared to be from manuscripts not now accessible to the general public. Each one was submitted for my judgement and reason; and just as they, aside from any authority, approved themselves to my reason after serious consideration of them, so I hope they will gain the approval of those my fellow workers to whom I now publish them.”]

Aphorism 9: “*The Karma of this earth is the combination of the acts and thoughts of all beings of every grade which were concerned in the preceding Manvantara or evolutionary stream from which ours flows.*”

Aphorism 10: “*And as those beings include Lords of Power and Holy Men, as well as weak and wicked ones, the period of the earth’s duration is greater than that of any entity or race upon it.*”

Aphorism 11: “*Because the Karma of this earth and its races began in a past too far back for human minds to reach, an inquiry into its beginning is useless and profitless.*”

AMONG many a narrow view of the Karmic law prevails in that the application of the working of the law is limited to man alone as an individual, that too in a fatalistic sense. If it is universally operative moral law, we must then be able to trace its working in the whole of the being of the universe and man in all planes and states in the septenary gradation of cosmos, from spirit to matter. This has been plainly stated in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (VIII-16): “All worlds up to that of Brahma are subject to rebirth again and again.” This is because universe is not a fortuitous concurrence of atoms and blind forces, without design or purpose, but embodied consciousness consisting of living, intelligent, evolving beings of every grade of development, from an atom of mineral dust through all the lower kingdoms of

nature to Man, and thence to perfect celestial Dhyani Buddha in the scale of ceaseless evolutionary progress heading towards the grand consummation of universal divine perfection. This grand progression and perfection of beings is governed by the law of Karma, the Law of all laws.

Evolution of individuals, nations, races and of the worlds proceed systematically in cycles. This cyclic progression—by rise and fall of civilizations, through birth and death of individuals and nations, activity and rest, creation, destruction and re-creation of world systems—is governed and regulated by the law of Karma. Cycles and Karma are inseparable but Karma of beings is the cause which produce cycles of time. The Law operates on all beings, from the highest to the lowest, on spiritual, psychic and material planes.

We learn again from the third chapter of the *Gita* that no one ever rests for one moment without action, and that all beings act according to their natures acquired by their own Karma determined by the quality of their thoughts and actions. This is seen in the fact that no two individuals respond to the one and the same situation in the same manner but it differs from one another. Thought underlies every act; nay, thought itself is action, which creates impression in the nature of the thinker. The cyclic law of return of impressions brings back the impression impelling him to repeat the act. Repetition of the act becomes a habit, and habit forms the character and shapes his destiny.

It is thus, by our actions, we make cycles, make or unmake character, progress or retrogress. The law being universally operative it equally applies to the family of which an individual is a part, to the nation or the race which are constituted of such families, and to mankind as a whole, consisting of nations and races, constituting the world at large. Our Earth with its seven principles, analogous to the seven principles of man and of cosmos, is a stream of evolution of beings of every grade, including man, related specifically to it; similarly other globes in space are scenes of evolution of beings and humanity related to them respectively. Collective Karma of all the

beings involved in this stream of evolution, called the Earth, is the Karma of the Earth. Therefore, Earth is not a mere lump of gross matter but a living entity, an aggregate of beings of all stages of development, from the lowest to the highest, all evolving to higher stages by smaller and greater cycles produced by their collective action. This is what Plato meant when he called our Earth an animal.

As thoughts and actions of an individual, and the moral, mental, spiritual and physical consequences which his actions produce, which the individual is compelled to experience as pleasure and pain as his just deserts, are not limited to the individual alone, but, affect for good or ill the family, the race, the nation and the world, and the Earth itself as a whole because of the fact of the essential unity of all beings and the law of universal causation. Individual Karma, therefore, has distributive effect affecting all, and aggregate of individual Karma becomes Karma of the Earth. Each individual therefore shares in the Karma of the nation to which he belongs as well as that of humanity as a whole. In this profound truth is seen the great responsibility of every individual in that by his actions he may retard or help the higher progress of all.

Thus units of human families constituting nations and races, by their thoughts and actions, generate national Karma, and the aggregate of the Karma of nations generate the Karma of the world, producing, cycles of rise and fall of nations, and thus evolve to higher stages step by step by assimilation of experiences brought on by retributive justice of Karma.

The earth being the aggregate of beings below man in the lower kingdoms of nature, man himself, and beings highly evolved beyond the stage of ordinary humanity, it will always have in its stream a hierarchy of Lords of power, holy men, Adepts of good law, good and noble minded men, as well as weak and wicked men, besides various visible and invisible beings below man, the latter having to evolve by the aid of man, the Manasa, the Thinker, who stands at the head of lower kingdoms. Advanced beings in the supra human stages of evolution are Adepts, *Jivanmuktas* and a vast hierarchy of

Dhyan Chohans, who, having become co-workers with Nature, take part in the occult world in the governance and evolution of the worlds, and descend on earth as great teachers, guides, and Avatars in accordance with the cyclic law to teach, to reform, to strike the key note of true knowledge, and give impulse to higher evolution of humanity.

Just as man goes through the cycle of birth, growth, decay, death, followed by post-mortem rest and recuperation, and assimilation of essential experiences in the spiritual realm of Devachan, and rebirth into another earth-life, so it is with everything, every creature, even a thought we think, as well as nations, civilizations, and the earth, the solar system, and so on, each smaller cycle running its spiral rounds within the greater one. As the life, character, progress, stage of development of every individual in each of his earth-life is the exact and just outcome of his thoughts and actions in the previous life, so is it the case with our Earth also.

The life-span of the earth-chain (earth with its six other companion globes of finer and subtler matter, all in coadunation with each other) is called Manvantara, meaning the interval (*antara*) between two Manus (spiritual prototype of humanity to be evolved). The earth with all its beings evolve in seven great rounds, or seven Manvantaras, each one being the period between two Manus, the whole of the life cycle of seven Manvantaras of the earth chain therefore takes place between fourteen Manus—at the end of which humanity is perfected. Our Earth, therefore, is re-embodiment of the previous planetary-chain, which was the Moon, with its humanities and beings, which died. The whole brood of beings dying out of it, liberated from the gross and subtler bodies, enter into a period of rest, undergo assimilation of the collective experiences of all beings of all grades of development, analogous to Devachan of individual soul, at the end of the seven Rounds.

The Karma of our Earth then is the result of the collective Karma of all beings who were involved in the previous Earth which went into dissolution or pralaya. Rebirth of worlds are thus necessitated

by the fact that a certain amount of the Karma of the world that ended remains unexpended, which is to be worked out in the next rebirth which follows by Karmic law. Those beings who are perfected, some enter into the bliss of Nirvana which lasts till the “age of Brahma,” in which case such Nirvanees remain in ineffable bliss cut off from all concerns with less progressed beings; while some renounce Nirvanic felicity but remain behind, though emancipated, as Nirmanakayas, to help on the evolution and perfection of fellow-beings struggling in the coils of matter when the new Earth-chain with all its denizens are reborn.

The Worlds are built “in the likeness of older wheels”—*i.e.*, those that existed in the preceding Manvantara and went into Pralaya, because the Law for the birth, growth, and decay of everything in Kosmos, from the sun to the glow-worm in the grass is ONE. It is an everlasting work of perfection with every new appearance, but the Substance-Matter and Forces are all one and the same. (*S.D.*, I, 144-145)

When did the evolution of our earth through its cycles of rebirth, towards higher and greater perfection in each appearance, began and when will it end, is a question posed by thoughtful inquirers. Theosophy teaches that this progression of worlds through cycles of re-embodiment has neither beginning nor end, because in the infinite universe there cannot be finality in progression. In the infinite universe there are infinite possibilities and endless perfection. “The Secret Doctrine teaches the progressive development of everything, worlds as well as atoms; and this stupendous development has neither conceivable beginning nor imaginable end. Our ‘Universe’ is only one of an infinite number of Universes, all of them ‘Sons of Necessity,’ because links in the great Cosmic chain of Universes, each one standing in the relation of an effect as regards its predecessor, and being a cause as regards its successor.” (*S.D.*, I, 43)

*(To be continued)*

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Do we possess our possessions or do they possess us? It appears that humans have a particularly strong and, at times, irrational obsession with possessions. Amazingly, it has been observed that every year car-owners are killed or injured as they attempt to stop the theft of their vehicles. We behave as if we are possessed, as we fret over stuff we own, and are willing to take risks in the pursuit of wealth. Even after we have achieved a comfortable standard of living we strive to acquire more wealth. Why? We like to show off our wealth in the form of possession. Expensive goods are indicative of the status of a person and hence are preferred over cheap goods, which are functionally equivalent. This is comparable to animals developing attributes and appendages such as colourful plumage and elaborate horn to attract their mates. Some of these appendages are troublesome, as is the case with peacock’s heavy tail which requires a lot of energy to grow and maintain. Besides evolving physical attributes, with our capacity for technology, we human beings can also display our advantages in the form of material possessions.

When we are driving an expensive car or wearing a branded luxury clothing, we are likely to be treated more favourably as compared to others. Adam Smith, considered to be the father of modern economics, wrote in 1759: “The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world.” Material wealth makes for a more comfortable life, but additionally we derive satisfaction from the perceived admiration of others. Wealth feels good. Luxury purchases light up the pleasure centres in our brain. We are what we own. William James observes that our concept of self included not only our body and mind but everything that we could claim ownership over, including our material property. This was developed into the idea of “extended self” by Russell Belk in 1988, according to which we use ownership and possessions right from our childhood as a means of forming identity and established status.

Fortunately, not all are possessive about their possessions. For instance, with the Hazda tribe of Tanzania, the last remaining hunter-gatherers, the ownership of possessions tends to be communal, and they live with the policy of “demand-sharing,” *i.e.*, “if you have got it, and I need it, then you give it to me.” But normally, our possessions not only signal who we are to others, but remind us who we are to ourselves,” writes Bruce Hood, a professor of developmental psychology in society at the School of Experimental Psychology at the University of Bristol, in an article in *Aeon* magazine.

It is important that we have the right answer to the question, “who am I?” because a lot depends upon our understanding of who “I” am. Our self-worth is generally measured by others, and also ourselves, on the basis of derived “self.” We tend to derive our identity from what surrounds our true Self, *i.e.*, our body, ideas, feelings, education, etc. This derived sense of self could be extremely fragile, requiring continual maintenance, nurturing and defending. For instance, when we derive our sense of identity from our interaction with others, we may work towards getting approval from others and avoiding criticism. To bolster the sense of identity we gather possessions. Our identity is often measured in terms of houses, cars, television sets, furniture and paintings we own. We fear physical death because it implies separation from everything that we depend upon for a sense of self. The word “identity” is derived from the Latin *idem ficare*, means “to make the same as ‘I.’” Thus, our body, feelings or our possessions are not “I,” to begin with. We tend to equate them or associate them with “I.”

There is nothing wrong with possessions. What we need to overcome is *possessiveness*, and learn to cultivate detached-attachment. “We must be able to use things when we need them and then relinquish them without regret when they have outlived their usefulness. We must be able to appreciate and enjoy the places where we tarry, and yet pass on without anguish when we are called elsewhere,” writes Peace Pilgrim.

Everything that is born must die, sooner or later. We are aware of the inevitability of death and to overcome the fear of death daily meditation on nonbeing or changing aspects is recommended. But when a scientist wishes to understand what death is, he finds that death is quite ill defined from both scientific as well as a medical point of view. We know that when a person stopped breathing and his heart stopped beating, he was dead. But our understanding of death changed with the advent of mechanical ventilators and cardiac pacemakers. According to Uniform Determination of Death Act of 1981, in simple terms, you are dead, when your brain is dead, thus shifting the locus of death from the chest to the brain.

However, brain death also does not seem to be the defining factor, because biological processes can persist even after the brain shuts down. A brain-dead body can be kept “alive” or on “life support” for a long time. Brain-dead bodies can continue to grow fingernails, to menstruate and there are cases of pregnant brain-dead mothers placed on ventilators to support gestation of the surviving foetus, where the child is born weeks or months after the mother became brain-dead. To the law and established medical consensus such people are dead, but for their families they are still alive, and at times are known to die after several years. In neurological death, the word “irreversible” is emphasized. But we know that with the advance in technology what was previously termed irreversible cessation of breathing has now become reversible, and perhaps the same may become true of brain death.

A large team of physicians and scientists at the Yale School of Medicine experimented on some of the pigs killed at a slaughterhouse. The experimenters could partially revive the brains of these pigs. “The team studied the brains’ viability four hours after the pigs were electrically stunned, bled out and decapitated. At first glance, the restored brains with the circulating solution appeared relatively normal....What was not present in these results were brain waves of the kind familiar from electroencephalographic (EEG) recordings....Only a flat line everywhere—a global isoelectric line—

implying a complete absence of any sort of consciousness.” This raises many questions: Can this procedure be applied to human brains? What is the precise end point of life? Is death reversible, asks Christof Koch, chief scientist and president of the Allen Institute for Brain Science in Seattle. (*Scientific American*, October 2019)

When are the “dead” really dead? What the physiologists would term “real death” is actually not so. The man is not dead when he is cold, stiff, pulseless, breathless and even showing signs of decomposition. The ancient philosophy teaches that death occurs at the instant when both the astral body (or life-principle) and the spirit leave the physical body *forever*. The man is not dead even when he is buried, till a certain point is reached. That point which an occultist calls as “real death” is, when the vital organs, such as heart, liver, brain, etc., have become so decomposed, that if reanimated, they could not perform their customary functions. But until that point is reached, the astral body, which is the design body for the physical, can be caused to re-enter the physical body, either by the effort of the spirit or through the will of an occultist—one who has knowledge and control over the potencies of nature. There are instances in medical history when the patient recovers spontaneously, and that is because the astral body has not parted from the physical body, only its external functions are suspended. In such a case, the person appearing to be dead is only in a state of lethargy or torpor. Such a state is called the state of “suspended animation.” There are cases of suspended animation as a result of asphyxia (suffocation) by drowning, the inhalation of gases and other causes.

Nothing in nature is sudden, so too, death is gradual. As it required a long and gradual development to produce a living human being, so time is required to completely withdraw the vitality from the body. In *Isis Unveiled*, several instances of suspended animation have been narrated. There is a record of great beings such as, Jesus and Apollonius, resuscitating the dead.

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Psychologists believe that anxiety is emerging as the most

prevalent psychological disorder in human beings, which manifests as a pervasive sense of lack of control and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the demands of daily life. It appears that people tend to break down under the pressure of ever-increasing demands of performance and success. We no longer have 9 to 5 jobs or five-day routine because smartphones make it possible for us to carry our work with us wherever we are. As a result, the mind is never switched off. People are aiming to have a certain kind of life, salary and relationship, which results in anxiety. In case of a problem or danger, such as encountering a lion in a jungle, it is natural to feel anxious, and then start running away to save one’s life. But if one continues to feel anxious even after being safe, then it becomes an anxiety disorder, says Delhi-based counselling psychologist Manisha Sharma. Hence the need to distinguish between plain nervousness and an anxiety disorder. There are cases where one is unable to find the reason for anxiety. “It is like *Jaws* without the shark. But often there are sharks. Metaphorical, invisible sharks,” as even when we feel that we are worried without a reason, often reasons are there, writes Matt Haig in his book *Notes on a Nervous Planet*.

Even children get anxious. A school going girl suffered a panic attack and refused to go to school. Later it was found that she was unable to deal with her emotions and needs, but avoided to talk about it to her parents as she found them to be already burdened with their own problems. One of the reasons for anxiety is the fear of judgement, which is no longer restricted to friends and classmates as people are putting things on social media and then watching the response and opinions of other people. Many anxiety related issues are rooted in relationships. The family remains a source of anxiety as well as solace. Family members can play an important role in helping to overcome anxiety, by remaining aware and awake, so that when they observe a drastic change in the behaviour of a family member, such as irritability, getting low and angry or withdrawn, they can seek help, writes Surbhi Gupta. (*Eye, The Sunday Express Magazine*, October 6, 2019)

A lot of our unhappiness arises out of our own attitude towards life, our relationship with other people and our fears. The Buddha says, “Let us, then, live happily, we who possess nothing.” When we realize that we own nothing, we become free from longing and anxiety. Besides our material possessions we need to be carefree about our achievements, our position, power and many such intangible possessions.

Modern man lives in a state of perpetual anxiety. It has become an inseparable part of our existence. We are anxious about trivialities. Having prepared for the examination, the student worries: “Will I pass the examination or not?” In the article, “Spiritual Progress,” H.P.B. advises: “Evil is often the result of over-anxiety, and men are always trying to do too much, they are not content to leave well alone, to do always just what the occasion demands and no more....”

Mr. Judge observes that our anxiety works as an occult obstacle, hindering the course of action under Karma. His advice is to trust the law and accept the results—favourable or unfavourable. He writes: “There is never any need to worry. The good law looks out for all things, and all we have to do is our duty as it comes along from day to day. Nothing is gained by worrying...by being anxious as to things, you put an occult obstacle in the way of what you want done.”

The “occult obstacle” might mean the barrier caused by our own thoughts. When we are anxious, we seem to assert, in a subtle way, our own will. We want things to happen as we desired. Mr. Judge says, “By anxiety we exert the constrictive power of egoism, which densifies and perturbs our magnetic sphere, rendering us less permeable to the efflux from above” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 12). In other words, by being anxious, we mar our chances of receiving help from our divine nature. Instead, if we learn to accept that whatever happens is for the best, we will never have any need to be anxious. Sometimes, apparently adverse looking circumstances work to our advantage or at least prove educative for the soul.