

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA) PRIVATE LTD.

40 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020, India
email: ultmumbai@mtnl.net.in ♦ Phone : 22039024
website: www.ultindia.org

ON PROCRASTINATION

“I LOVE deadlines,” English author Douglas Adams once wrote. “I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by.” Probably that is how a well-meaning procrastinator speaks. Procrastination has been defined as the avoidance of doing a task which needs to be accomplished. One may prefer to do more pleasurable things in place of less pleasurable ones. Sometimes the task is postponed until the “last minute” before the deadline. We tend to procrastinate in various aspects of life, such as, postpone seeing a doctor, cleaning the house or repairing a leaky roof or a tap.

It has been said, “Never put off for tomorrow what you can do today.” Saint-poet Kabir says, “*Kaal kare so aaj kar, aaj kare so ab, pal mein pralay hoyega, bahuri karoge kab.*” In other words, “Do today what is to be done tomorrow, do now what is to be done today. Any future moment could be the apocalypse, so do what you have to do, while you still have time.” In this *Doha* (couplet), Kabir has clearly tried to explain the human tendency of laziness and procrastination. We fail to realize that by postponing, the work does not disappear. Often, the more we postpone, the more it piles up, and when we try to finish accumulated work in a hurry, the quality of work is sacrificed.

Sometimes we end up paying a very heavy price for delaying. For instance, when one delays going to a doctor, ignoring the symptoms, the disease may become worse. Likewise, when one delays insuring one’s house, he will regret it when the house is gutted

by a sudden fire. We may postpone seeing a friend, because we are very busy, saying, “I will see him next Sunday.” Thus, eternally postponing, one day we might learn that we have lost our dear friend forever. It is too late. Hence, we are asked to *act at once* on the suggestion from our divine nature.

The Buddha says, “A man should *hasten* towards the good; he should restrain his evil thoughts; if he is slack in doing good his mind inclines to delight in evil.” In this verse, Buddha asks us to respond *immediately* to an impulse to do good and restrain evil thoughts, because if we are slow in responding to noble impulses, we are more likely to delight in evil. If we feel like helping a needy person, we must do so without delay, otherwise we are very likely to come up with some convincing reason as to why we cannot or must not help. By not responding, we subject ourselves to the “blunting” process by which our sensitivity gets blunted or dulled. The first time we come across a starving man, a man suffering from terminal disease, a person who has lost a dear one, a distressed person, our heart goes out to him and we want to be of help in some way. Such natural responses, unless nurtured, tend to get atrophied. Self-centeredness makes us more and more selfish whereby the old virtues give way at first to the minor indulgences and then to positive evil for obtaining happiness. This is particularly so at the present stage of our development when Spirit has not yet mastered the animal within. Mind of a man is forever active, and amidst a host of ideas vying for attention, good ideas tend to get displaced by personal and selfish thoughts. “Eat, drink and be merry, for we know not tomorrow” seems to be the *mantram* of life for the masses of men having materialistic outlook of life.

When we allow the evil tendency to lie latent, it may return with a greater force, especially when our energy to resist is weakened. When we suppress a vice, a desire or a weakness, by a strong effort of will, instead of eradicating, it is like allowing the fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ash—a whiff of wind can cause flames to leap up. We are then behaving like that Spartan boy who hid the baby fox under his coat, when he was caught stealing it, and while he

valiantly kept answering the questions put to him, the baby fox was eating away his entrails. H.P.B. points out that similarly our suppressed desires tend to corrupt the better part of our nature, when we refuse to kill out or transform them. Some of these desires are unconsciously pushed into the subconscious. For instance, the child who dislikes the father and wishes to kill him, does not admit that he has this desire and thus slowly that desire gets repressed. If a person has tried to conceal or repress his desires or tendencies, they will come to the front irrepressibly, and he *will* have to fight a hundred times harder than before, until *he kills* all such tendencies.

When a person who can complete a task in an hour delays it, he wastes time and often loses a rare opportunity. Hence the proverbial saying, “procrastination is the thief of time,” which comes from a poem by the English poet, Edward Young. Mr. Crosbie writes: “Opportunity to understand and apply Theosophy comes under Karma to the very few.... This comes from neglect or misuse of opportunities in former lives, in many cases.” Those of us fortunate enough to contact Theosophy in this life may ask: “How do I use this opportunity?” “It is the height of unwisdom to neglect the opportunity again, most especially in those cases where it is brought home without effort,” writes Mr. Crosbie.

One of the greatest impediments to progress is the tendency to put off doing what we know is the right thing to do. Postponement due to laziness, timidity or self-interest must be distinguished from an action withheld because of sincere uncertainty as to the best course to be adopted. When we postpone doing that which we know to be right, it may tantamount to inaction, and may become “an action in a deadly sin.” In Theosophy a sin of commission is that action which is performed even though the actor knows it to be wrong in his own conscience; while the non-performance of that action which not only he knows to be right, but which he ought to do, is a sin of omission. Procrastination comes under the category of sins of omission, in respect of actions that we know must be performed.

At higher levels, the tendency to procrastinate can but bring dire consequences. *The Secret Doctrine* mentions that there was refusal

to create thinking men in the Third Root Race. While one third of the *Manasaputras* or *Kumaras*, obeyed and incarnated in the forms which were ready, producing the “Sons of Will and Yoga,” others deferred till the Fourth Race and had to incarnate in defiled bodies due to the sin of the mindless. For failing to do their karmic responsibility, they became responsible for the sin of the mindless. The “sin of the mindless” refers to the unnatural union between mindless man and females of the animals.

Procrastination may equally be applied to our choices. A newcomer to Theosophical meetings, who is energized by the teachings, may find that soon his initial enthusiasm has begun to wane. We may hold external factors responsible. A friend whom we had not met for some time drops in exactly at the time we were about to start for the lodge meeting and we give in to the temptation, with justification, to skip the meeting in order to be with the friend. If only we realize that by giving way to such temptations we are not only making it easy for the cycle of this tendency to repeat itself, but are also adversely affecting others who may be more resolute than ourselves. A conscious, continuous and persistent effort is needed to sustain the choice. The battle must be fought and won again and again, until the entire nature becomes constitutionally incapable of deviating from the chosen path.

It is equally important that every student-aspirant recognizes that he should not postpone making his contribution in the spread of theosophical teachings till he has *thoroughly mastered* the same. A little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump. So also, an obscure student fired with devotion and zeal for Theosophy can quicken another person’s conscience and enthusiasm. The Supplement to *The Theosophist* magazine for February 1889 mentions the case of Benjamin Lundy, who was a member of the Society of Friends in the U.S.A. In the early nineteenth century he carried on such agitation against slavery as was in his power. He was poor, deaf, feeble in health and a bad speaker. But he was enthusiastic about eradication of slavery. Hence, despite his handicap he travelled from town to town, holding meetings. Ultimately, he kindled the enthusiasm of

William Garrison, an able speaker and a fiery writer, who succeeded in bringing about abolition of slavery.

“Tomorrow,” is a word which denotes hope and promise, only if we are doing all that we can today. Otherwise, it is an addictive word which allows us to postpone things endlessly. We say, “Next week,” “next month,” “next year,” “next life,” and so our present opportunities slip away. We can never hope to achieve anything in the world physical or spiritual with such attitude.

We have Lord Buddha’s sage words in the *Dhammapada*: “Men who have not lived the disciplined life of a chaste mind, who have not gathered soul wealth in young age, pine away like old cranes in a lake without fish” (Verse 155). This verse shows us the true intent of the Buddha’s discourse on old age. It warns us of the consequences of not making good use of the young age. Living of the spiritual life must not be postponed to old age. It must begin when we are young and strong. In old age, we are like worn out bows which have lost tension and are useless to the warrior. In the same way, one who has not lived disciplined life in young age will have nothing to reflect upon. This is the reason why some religions have initiation ceremonies such as *Navjote*-ceremony, thread-ceremony, etc. to impress upon a child’s mind the importance of gathering spiritual wealth. What was neglected to be moulded in young age will be difficult to mould when we are old. The old crane in a lake without fish does not have strength to fly to another lake. A person would find it difficult to begin the arduous journey in an old age, and can but sigh for the lost opportunity.

Psychologists define procrastination as a gap between intention and action. Laziness involves lack of desire. In procrastination the desire to start the work is there, but that desire loses out to our tendency to delay. That delay is caused because we prefer to do something else which is seemingly more rewarding. We are given some tips to end procrastination, which include forming a concrete mental image of the goal we are trying to achieve, as though it were happening in the present. For instance, a person who is procrastinating on saving for the retirement might vividly imagine himself/herself living on their potential retirement savings. We may

resort to mindfulness meditation and learn to keep focussed attention on the task, which can help to reduce procrastination by strengthening self-regulation (*Psychology Today*, September-October, 2009). According to Elliot Berkman, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Director of the Social and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Oregon, the decision to work on something is determined by how much we value accomplishing that task—what psychologists call subjective value.

When we both value and enjoy a task we need no incentive to pursue and complete the task. The same applies to spiritual pursuit. We postpone living of the spiritual life because it is easier to carry on along the beaten path, swimming along the stream instead of against it. We are asked to make all our desires lean to and centre upon acquirement of spiritual knowledge so that the natural tendency of our thought is in that direction. Dhyneshwar gives the example of a gambler who is oblivious of thirst and hunger or even family because his heart is set on playing the game. Children, when they come home from school, after finishing their homework, run to their base, and their base is the playground. So also, we have to make spiritual knowledge such a base, so that when there is nothing pressing or urgent on our mind, our thoughts naturally turn to spiritual themes. We have not yet reached that state. Often it is life that brings us to a state, where we face pain and then begin to ask questions. And when we find our answers in the spiritual knowledge we naturally turn to it with all our heart.

An incident was narrated in the *Reader's Digest* magazine of a young man who happened to be sitting by the side of Albert Einstein at a dinner party, where Bach's music was being played. When Einstein asked him how he liked the music, the young man confessed that he did not have "ear for music." Einstein took this young man to a room and first played simple songs and then guided him through more difficult songs and then played music without words, till finally the young man was "ready for Bach," and he did learn to appreciate Bach's music. If we are sincere, we might meet a person who may help kindle our interest in spiritual matters.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT MIRACLES: OCCULT POWERS

ONCE upon a time the inmates of an Ashram who were devoted to spiritual practices, assembled in a place to discuss about the utility of occult powers. There was a great controversy over the topic of discussion. At the outset, there was a division amongst the spiritual practitioners. One party held that the "*Ashta Siddhis*"—eight occult powers—*viz.*, becoming (1) the smallest of the small, (2) the largest of the large, (3) the heaviest of the heavy, (4) the lightest of the light, (5) attaining overlordship, (6) getting anything and everything at will, (7) bringing everything under subjugation, (8) obtaining the power to pervade, etc., are but divine expressions and as such they are not negligible things. The opposite party held that these powers do not contribute to the unfoldment of spiritual life of the owner in the least; but, on the other hand, they drift farther and farther away from the real moorings of the spiritual life and therefore they are abominable.

Both the parties had at last agreed to approach their preceptor who brought the controversy to an end saying, "People of small intellect seek occult powers—powers to cure disease, win law suit, walk on the water and such things, but the genuine devotees of God never run after such things. They care only for that which is likely to develop their spiritual life."

Once Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was prevailed upon by his nephew Hriday to ask the Mother of some powers. Sri Ramakrishna was a man of child-like simplicity and while practising *Japa* in the temple at Dakshineswar said to the Mother, "Mother, Hriday asks me to pray to you for some occult powers." The divine Mother at once showed him a vision—a middle aged prostitute, about 40 years old, appeared and sat with her back to him. She had large hips and was dressed in a black bordered sari. She was covered with filth in no time. The Mother showed him that occult powers were as abominable as the filth of that prostitute.

People with a little occult power gain name and fame, power

and position of a Guru, gain people's recognition, make disciples and followers. People, of course, say of such a Guru, "Ah, he is having a wonderful time. How many people visit him! What a number of disciples and followers he has! His house is overflowing with things and articles of enjoyment. People give him presents. He has such powers that he can feed any number of people if he desired." But all these make the man more and more attached to these powers and he forgets God altogether, the highest end of human life.

The next day when they all assembled before the preceptor the disciples prayed to him to throw a little more light upon yesterday's subject. The preceptor explained: "Once upon a time a Sadhu acquired great occult powers. He was vain about them. But he was a good man and had some austerities to his credit. One day the Lord disguised as a holy man, came to him and said, "Revered Sir, I have heard that you have great occult powers." The Sadhu received the Lord cordially and offered him a seat. Just then an elephant passed by. The Lord, in the disguise of the holy man, said to the Sadhu, "can you kill this elephant if you like?" The Sadhu said, "Yes, it is possible." So saying, he took a pinch of dust, muttered some *mantras* over it, and threw it at the elephant. The beast struggled a while in pain and then dropped dead. The Lord said, "What power you have! You have killed the elephant!" The Sadhu laughed. Again the Lord spoke, "Now can you revive the elephant?" "That too is possible," replied the Sadhu. He threw another pinch of charmed dust at the beast. The elephant writhed about a little and came back to life. Then the Lord said, "Wonderful is your power. But may I ask you one thing? You have killed the elephant and you have revived it. But what has that done for you? Do you feel uplifted by it? Has that enabled you to realize God?" Saying this, the Lord vanished.

Once a man attained the power of walking over water. He was extremely proud of this attainment. One day he made a demonstration of his power by crossing over a river by foot. Most of the people were wondering at his power when a saint-like man asked him if it were really worth something. The man with a smile said that was really a wonderful thing, whereupon the saint said, "Well, at the

most it is worth only a pice [a penny]. A man can cross the river by paying only one pice for the ferry boat. After all, if it has any worth it is worth one pice and nothing more."

It is very troublesome to possess occult powers. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort; so he said, "Let the storm stop." His words could not remain unfulfilled. At the moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly, the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man and because of that sin he lost his occult powers.

About the occult powers, Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, "Friend, if you find anyone who has acquired even one of the eight powers, then know for certain, he will not realize me." For powers surely beget pride, and God cannot be realized if there is the slightest trace of pride.

[Taken from *Vedanta through Stories* by Swami Sambuddhananda, July 1950]

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Each one of us has in him the germ of every power exhibited by the so-called supernaturally gifted people and even those in possession of a spiritually advanced person. Mr. Judge mentions that great musical ability is not usual or common but it is natural. Any person with proper training can learn music and even become a good musician. Likewise, with proper training of astral and spiritual senses, and following the necessary discipline, one can develop, or rather unfold, the psychic and spiritual powers.

Powers are of two types, lower and higher, psychic and spiritual. While one can obtain lower or psychic powers without becoming morally chaste or having highest altruistic motives; the spiritual powers cannot be acquired unless these conditions are fulfilled. Some men develop powers through excessive ascetic practices like standing on one leg, or through various *asanas*, or through regulation of breath. The practice of *Hatha Yoga* involves mastery of the body as

a way of attaining spiritual perfection. It is the physical or psycho-physiological training in asceticism. Such a person may be able to read the mind of another, know facts of his life or see future events. Development of these powers without corresponding moral purity is likely to lead them into Black Magic by misuse of these powers. Therefore, Theosophy asks us to purify our motive, live an altruistic life and work upon ourselves to eradicate every vice and personal desire. Powers are the *by-product* of spiritual development. Then, when the powers come, we would be ready for their judicious use.

The Key to Theosophy mentions that one can be a Theosophist (spiritual seeker) without being an occultist, but one can never be an occultist without being a Theosophist, otherwise he is simply a black magician, unconsciously or consciously. We might say that an occultist is a Theosophist with the knowledge of the secret workings of Nature. In other words, if a spiritual seeker, who lives a morally good life, tries to get practical knowledge of occult sciences without having the philosophical *rationale*, he moves towards a dangerous form of mediumship and is like a rudderless boat on a stormy ocean.

In the article “Occult Powers and Their Acquirement” Mr. Judge tells us how the acquired powers may lie dumb and dormant in their potentiality like the wheels in a music box. It requires winding of the key to start them. The Master can wind the key and thus start the machinery, but he can also refuse to give the necessary impulse to start them. Further, he may not only refuse to give the impulse, but may even prevent the wheels from moving. Since they can clearly see the motive and readiness, they know when to make an exception. Such is the *Raja-Yoga* tradition. In this tradition the Guru will not allow the disciple to exercise the powers he may possess, until he has mastered the knowledge of the SELF and has acquired control over his lower nature. There are several reasons why acquirement of powers is considered secondary as compared to developing altruism and purity. These powers are sure to be used for money-making or for some other selfish or evil purpose by men. It is very easy for a spiritual aspirant to wander away from the true path and

run after acquirement of powers. And even when he has acquired only *psychic* powers he may feel that he has advanced far on the Path. Mr. Judge calls it *astral intoxication*. The exercise of the occult force produces far-reaching effects. For instance, if we were to explode gunpowder to split a rock, it might knock down a house in the vicinity. We are all Magicians. By purifying our will, imagination and magnetism we can benefit others around us. A true occultist with spiritual discrimination can do the good he desires, apparently even without lifting of a finger, by using spiritual powers.

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E-mail for correspondence: ultmbai@mtnl.net.in

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA OCCULTISM OF GOOD COMPANY—II

IT IS not possible for the man who has made the Supreme Resolution, of finding the Masters, and of service to Humanity, to mix and mingle indiscriminately with all kinds of people, to go to all kinds of places, and not be affected in his own higher desire or aspiration. In fact, he risks having this resolve fade out entirely in himself, beyond his own power of recollection, and then he would have to start anew the supreme vow, because this resolution must be kept for many lives, before it really comes to fruition, and blossoms forth. Krishna is very emphatic on this subject. The great teachings come to our help, by guiding us in choosing our friends and our own inner possessions—because there is two-fold companionship in the spiritual world, so there are also two kinds of companionship in our personal life.

We have the relationship with outside beings, with our own fellow men, and we have our inner friends and intimates, and those are the foods that we give our mental nature, emotional or desire nature, and even our own physical body. Influence is a real law in the Universe, based on the great principle of Universal Brotherhood. Influence, technically speaking, simply means an exchange of “lives,” mentally and emotionally, and all physical molecules or particles from the physical point of view. When we come in contact with other human beings, an exchange takes place, of ideas, thoughts and arguments on the mental plane, and desires and emotions on the psychic or emotional plane, and all molecules between our bodies. That is the real meaning of influence, and since the law exists and works all the time, whether we are conscious of it or not, it is our own responsibility to try and keep away from the company of those, who instead of helping us to strengthen our own supreme resolution, might weaken the same and influence us against the spiritual service of the race to which we belong.

The same applies to our inner friends. We cannot think of all subjects, read all kinds of books, hear all all types of music, and give to our body all types of food and drink, and not be influenced against this resolve. The food that we give our nature and our

instruments must be harmonious with our own spiritual nature, and Krishna, the Great Living Master, cannot shine forth in us unless we observe this great rule of inner companionship. The thoughts that we accept and that we brood upon, the desires we entertain, and the food we eat, leave their own impress upon our nature in terms of their own inherent nature, and it is for us to guard against all types of food that might be really detrimental to our resolve and spiritual aspirations. This sometimes appears very limited and narrow to the outsider, but just as he would agree to the fact that it would be simply foolishness to give our body poisonous foods, for example, so too it is foolish and really very dangerous to give our mind and emotional nature vicious and poisonous foods. But this great principle has also been misunderstood and people have isolated themselves and gone away from human beings and all human activities on the ground that they wanted to achieve spiritual growth. But this is the reverse of the process and the opposite of spirituality—it is selfishness.

The law is that evolution proceeds from within without. We cannot begin by the outside environment and expect to get inner results. We cannot possibly, for instance, attempt to speak wise and pure words when we have allowed our thoughts to be impure and the reverse of wise. We would fail in our attempt. Nor can we manifest in our activities harmony, if in our emotional nature there is discord and disharmony. Unless we have been careful to establish a correct relationship in our own hearts, between the Master and ourselves, we cannot try to work on the correct relationship and friendship that should exist between ourselves and co-students and co-workers. We cannot make of our personality something useful and beautiful if we have not taken care of the spiritual aspect of our own being.

But if we keep our thoughts pure, our words will come pure of themselves, and we shall not have to watch our words for it will be a logical process. It is when we take care of our spiritual nature that we find our personality full of weaknesses and blemishes, as it may appear, fall in line without practically any effort.

Arjuna, after having heard about the wise men, interrupts Krishna and asks a very important question. Arjuna’s question is based on

the fact that he now recognizes who Krishna is, for he says:

Thou alone can fully declare thy divine powers by which
thou hast pervaded and continueth to pervade these worlds.
How shall I, constantly thinking of thee, be able to know
thee, O Mysterious Lord?

Mr. Judge has rendered the word Yogi, as “Mysterious Lord,” but it might be useful to consider why Krishna has been called a “Yogi” at this time. He is the one who has established the union and contact. When He comes down upon earth and lives among men is the union that is referred to here. This question is important for it will explain to us why the answer is so difficult. Krishna’s answer follows and it gives us the description of the manifestation of divine powers. But Arjuna asks in what particular form should he meditate on Him, and then comes Krishna’s answer pointing to the fact that these manifestations are not subjects for discussion or argumentation—they are really a matter for inner meditation, for quiet thinking over in our own minds. Each one is really to the disciple like unto a seed—just as when a seed is properly taken care of, it will blossom forth and come to fruition, so too, each one of these great perfections will reveal a great and deep significance from the spiritual point of view. But at our stage we should try to find out the method whereby we can take care of these great seeds given here by Krishna. How can we have these *vibhūtis* reveal to us their own import and significance? They are subjects then for meditation and in verses 20, 25 and 28 Krishna points out the very method the student must use to meditate on these great manifestations. In verse 20, Krishna says: “I am the Ego which is seated in the hearts of all beings.”

That is important to know. He is not in the minds, senses, or organs, or in all the molecules, but he is in the heart, for often because Krishna has been spoken of as an impersonal and universal principle, people have gathered the conception that he is to be found everywhere, *i.e.*, one can find truth in lies, knowledge in falsehood, goodness in evil. But if Krishna is in the heart of man, then unless his own mental activities are energised by the heart quality, unless

his own emotional principle reflects the heart principle, we cannot say that Krishna is shown forth by that man. If we want our words, emotions and all our activities, to show forth and express the divine power of Krishna, which really stands within our hearts, then we must make our mind obedient to our heart. We must make the desires lean to and centre upon the heart quality and then only will Krishna express Himself in our own lives.

It is also important to consider that in verse 20, Krishna addresses Arjuna as “*Gudakesha*,” and that has often been rendered as *Master of Sleep*. This does not mean Arjuna has overcome sleep in his own physical body, for even the great Masters must sleep so far as the physical body is concerned, but it does mean that Arjuna has become lord and master over the passivity and sleep of his own spiritual nature. Thus spiritual awakening has taken place in him, and unless that awakening has already in a measure taken place, this whole discourse becomes incomprehensible. It reminds us of the verse in the *Upanishads*: “Arise: Awake: seek the Great Ones and learn.” That is the spiritual awakening necessary for the understanding of these spiritual truths.

In verse 25 Krishna says that of all forms of worship he is the silent repetition of sacred texts, which means to begin to apply what is contained of truth therein, for it is the silent application which shows itself in the everyday life. It also shows that we should not talk about the spiritual activities that we are trying to follow and pursue. The importance of silence is given in verse 38: “Among the wise of secret knowledge, I am their silence.” The Wise Ones who possess knowledge of Spiritual Truths are silent about certain aspects of these truths, and the would-be disciples who want to make of themselves Buddhas, must begin to practice that quality of silence for unless we are silent now about unimportant and seemingly trivial matters, how can we possibly become silent when these great secrets are revealed to us, through our own unfoldment. Here we are told that there is significance in silence. These three *vibhūtis* do give us the clue as to how we can meditate and arrive at the full benefit of what Krishna has given us.

Krishna is not by any means giving all the manifestations of the perfected natures of the Great Masters. He has only given a few, giving examples and illustrations with which people, 5000 years ago, were familiar. If Krishna were to preach today and repeat the answer to Arjuna, he would naturally include other teachers and beings that are not included here. We would find no doubt Buddha and his *Dhammapada*, Zoroaster and his great *Gathas*, Jesus and his *Sermon on the Mount*, and finally we should find Madame Blavatsky and her great *Secret Doctrine* or *The Voice of the Silence*. What are we to do with these *Vibhutis*? Just as the teachings lead us to the teachers, these great *Vibhutis* which are manifestations of the Great Lodge in the World of men, lead us to the real understanding of the nature of these Great Beings, and we find in verse 33 the leading point to our next subject: “I am endless time itself, and the Preserver whose face is turned on all sides.”

He has a face on every single side, and these *Vibhutis* are going to take us to the idea of *Vishwa-rupa*, or the Universal Lord of the whole of the Great Lodge, and this subject is dealt with in the Eleventh Discourse. In proportion as we meditate on the *Vibhutis* so in proportion are we going to know of the Great Lodge of Masters. The idea that there are those Great Living Mahatmas that exist today, and forever, and that we can enter into their company, is the spiritual energy which enables us to understand their recorded message. If we want to understand the *Gita* we must have in ourselves the vital conception that Krishna is a living Human Teacher, and it is as we try to contact the living teacher in the Book that the book becomes clear. And as the contact is made, and when that conjunction between *Buddhi* and *Manas* has taken place in ourselves, then something begins to incarnate in us, which at the present time is still unborn, and what that something which incarnates is, will be considered in the Eleventh Discourse. The subject is “incarnation”—not “Reincarnation,” and not Divine Incarnations—which refers to the union within ourselves, the second birth.

(Concluded)

ON SACRED PLANTS

IV

A TREE is a botanical fact as well as a mythological symbol. But only a true philosopher is able to read the symbol of the Tree and the Marks (*Lakshanas*) of many trees. There are certain plants and trees that were specifically used as symbols to convey some deep truths. Thus:

From the highest antiquity trees were connected with the gods and mystical forces in nature. Every nation had its sacred tree, with its peculiar characteristics and attributes based on natural, and also occasionally on occult properties, as expounded in the esoteric teachings. Thus the *peepul* or *Ashvattha* of India, the abode of Pitris (elementals in fact) of a lower order, became the Bo-tree or *ficus religiosa* of the Buddhists the world over, since Gautama Buddha reached the highest knowledge and Nirvana under such a tree....The banyan tree is the symbol of spirit and matter, descending to the earth, striking root, and then re-ascending heavenward again....A large volume might be written upon these sacred trees of antiquity, the reverence for some of which has survived to this day, without exhausting the subject. (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

All the kingdoms of visible Nature are but reflections of their invisible prototypes. Therefore, every form in every kingdom has occult meaning besides its ordinary and outward meaning. Each kingdom and each form is a symbol, *i.e.*, an embodied idea. Any form on our plane is but a concrete image of an abstract form or idea on the higher plane. “The meaning and mission of any object in Nature can be comprehended only when the higher abstraction which ensouls it, and of which it is a representative and a symbol on earth, is perceived,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

Ashwattha is the mundane tree (or Tree of Life) of the Hindus. It is described as having its roots above and branches below. The most obvious implication of the Ashwattha is that the entire world is presently “upside down” from the standpoint of spiritual

perception and evolution. Its branches represent the external visible world of senses, or visible universe. The leaves are the Vedas or the universe in its intellectual or moral character. The roots represent the Spiritual World and Supreme Being, or First Cause, the Logos. But one has to go beyond the roots to unite oneself with Krishna, the *Brahman* who is greater than the First Cause and is indestructible. He, who is able to cut down this tree with the strong axe of dispassion and go beyond the roots, will not have to incarnate during this “age” of *Brahma*. Thus, *Parabrahmam* is the seed, First Cause is the root, *Mahat* or Universal Soul is the trunk, while the branches are the great egoism. We are asked to cut the tree with an axe of knowledge or secret wisdom (*S.D.*, I, 406 and 536). The trunk of this tree has been compared to the caduceus, with two serpents entwining a rod. The two serpents represent spirit and matter (life and death), and descending along the trunk, with their tails joining below, produce the *maya* or illusion of worldly existence.

From the universal viewpoint, the Ashwattha, the sacred tree, is the symbol of never-ending universe, as described in the Fifteenth Chapter of the *Gita*. In the description of the tree in the *Gita*, we have an instance of progress from universals to particulars. This tree has (1) “its roots above,” (2) “its branches below,” (3) “the lesser shoots,” (4) “the leaves,” and (5) “those roots which ramify below.” An article in *Theosophy* magazine (July 1951) offers deeper insight into the symbology of Ashwattha tree as described in the Fifteenth Chapter of the *Gita*. The growing of the tree “from above” is easy to understand, as it refers to the beginning of each period of evolution on the spiritual plane above. The psychological parallel of it is to be seen in the initiation of all material effects by the “Higher Self.” The evanescence of leaves, blossoms and fruit is an evident analogy for the transitory, purely personal pleasures. Here we may note how aptly the leaves also symbolize the “Vedas” in the world of Doctrine. They also, “come and go and are brief and changeable,” against the background of eternity. Yet the *tree*, its roots and stable trunk, can also be the tree of all knowledge about manifested things. Proceeding from this earthly plane we first contact the branches,

which are closest to us, and like the giraffe, man nibbles on the leaves of the “Vedas,” to finally stretch his neck for further food of learning. But the “eating” of the “Vedas” is never fully satisfactory, and the being who feeds thus, is never self-sufficient, but must be ceaselessly seeking provisions. The true stature of Mahatmaship is said to be attained only when neither ordinary doctrines nor the most common food are needed.

Further, the *Gita* mentions not only the roots which come from the “regions above,” but also, “those roots which ramify *below* in the regions of the mankind.” It is very difficult to imagine such a tree. The tree appears to have both branches and roots, mingled, at the earth-level of material existence. What are these secondary roots? If they grow from the branches, they fasten the tree down so securely that it can no longer respond with graceful motion to gentle breezes which might be favourable for evolutionary adaptation. These terrestrial roots probably represent the lowest and grossest of our material appetites, which, at death, become *kamarupa*, or desire-body. This is left behind by the Ego in its flight to *Devachan* or *swarga* or paradise. These “*tamasic*” roots may be thought of as the possessive nature of man, with his strange passion for expensive jewels, self-esteem, his self-identifying attachment to children, wife and household. These are roots indeed, hard to dislodge. Such rigidity endangers the whole tree, from the bottom to the top, since in case of a storm, insufficient pliancy is left for the trunk.

Vishnu, in one of his incarnations, is shown resting under the Banyan tree and there he taught humanity the philosophy and the sciences. Under the shade of this Banyan tree the gurus teach their disciples lessons of immortality and initiate them into the mysteries of life and death. The Banyan tree is called both the “Tree of Knowledge” and the “Tree of Life” (*S.D.*, II, 215). *The Secret Doctrine* mentions “the-ever-living-human-Banyan” which represents a “Wondrous Being” from whom all sages, rishis and hierophants have descended in antiquity. Further:

It is under the direct, silent guidance of this MAHA—(great)—
GURU that all the other less divine Teachers and instructors of

mankind became from the first awakening of human consciousness, the guides of early Humanity. (*S.D.*, I, 208)

Each man assimilates by self-effort, knowledge and experience, and grows. But as a free-willed being he grows either into a tree of life or a withering tree (black adept).

The symbol of the “Tree” standing for various Initiates was almost universal. Jesus is called “the tree of Life,” as also all the adepts of the good Law, while those of the *left* Path are referred to as the “withering trees.” (*S.D.*, II, 496)

Like the story of Sita’s hair turning into Kusha grass, H.P.B. mentions a curious tale about the sacred tree of Kumbum (*The Theosophist*, March 1883). When two enthusiastic missionaries entered the interiors of Lhasa, to spread Christianity, they saw a wonderful tree—“Tree of Thousand Images,” at a Lamasery of Kumbum. There goes a Tibetan legend that when Tsong-Kha-Pa, the renowned Buddhist reformer, devoted himself to religious life, according to custom, his mother cut off his hair and threw it away. A tree sprang up from it, bearing, on every one of its leaves, a Tibetan character. On each leaf there were well-formed Tibetan characters, all of green colour, some lighter and some darker than the leaf itself. These letters were part of the leaf itself and grew along with the leaves. The bark of the tree and branches were also covered with these characters. When one removes a piece of bark, the young bark under it displays different characters from those on the upper layer of the bark. The characters were more perfect than typeset characters of the best type-foundries in the world. The missionaries also noticed “religious sentences” self-printed by nature in chlorophyll. Each lamina (layer), when lifted revealed distinct type. H.P.B. mentions that this is not an uncommon happening in nature. On the shells in the waters of the Red Sea some Hebrew alphabets were found. Upon certain locusts, English alphabets were found. So also, we find animals mimicking vegetable growths and caterpillars looking like tree-barks, mosses, etc. Tiger’s stripes are mimicry of the stalks of jungle grass. “All these separate instances go to form a case of probable fact as to the... story of the Kumbum tree, since they saw that it is possible for

nature herself without miracle to produce vegetable growth in the form of legible characters.” H.P.B. states that the letter-tree of Tibet is a fact and the inscriptions in its leaf-cells and fibres are in *Senzar*—a sacred language used by the adepts.

Isis Unveiled (I, pp. 465-67) mentions the mandrakes or love-fruit, which is kabalistic *mandragora*. “The mandrake is a plant having the rudimentary shape of a human creature; with a head, two arms, and two legs forming roots. The superstition that when pulled out of the ground it cries with a human voice, is not utterly baseless. It does produce a kind of squeaking sound, on account of the resinous substance of its root, which it is rather difficult to extract; and it has more than one hidden property in it perfectly unknown to the botanist,” writes H.P.B. Its human-like form may be explained on account of its occupying a transitional place on the evolutionary ladder, between the plant and animal kingdoms. H.P.B. writes, “This *mandragora* seems to occupy upon earth the point where the vegetable and animal kingdoms touch, as the zoöphites and polypi do in the sea; the boundary being in each case so indistinct as to make it almost imperceptible where the one ceases and the other begins.”

It is said that when some missionaries tried persuading Lithuanians to cut the trees, many women protested saying that the trees were the houses of gods, from which they were getting rain and sunshine. The Mundaris of Assam believe that if a tree were felled, the forest gods would display their wrath by withholding rain. Vishnois, a Vaishnavite sect living on the fringes of Thar Desert, in western Rajasthan, are lovers of Nature, who believe that “if a tree is saved from felling at the cost of one’s head, it should be considered a good deed.” For them, it is a cardinal sin to cut green or flowering trees. They are willing to go to any extent, even sacrifice their lives, to protect the environment. In 1604 C.E. two Vishnoi women in Jodhpur, and then again in 1730 around 363 men and women sacrificed their lives to prevent the trees from being hacked. (*The Speaking Tree*, May 20, 2012)

(Concluded)

MEANING OF DEATH AND PURPOSE OF LIFE

LIFE IS full of mysteries. We encounter them at every turn. So immersed are we in the humdrum routine of life that we pay little attention to them. Death is one such mystery. We are very well aware that all things that exist must end. Scarcely can one find a household the members of which have not suffered from the pangs of separation due to death of one or the other of their loved ones. Yet people in general give little thought to the mystery of death—what it is, why it comes, and so on. Strange indeed is the feeling in people, generally, that death will not somehow visit them, at least in near future.

Thought of death instills fear in many, and talk of it is considered inauspicious, and to be avoided. Yet the great Teachers of life commend us to meditate on the meaning of life and death. In the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita* we are taught that the spiritually wise meditate upon birth, death, decay, sickness and error. Thoughtful people, however, think of the mysteries of life and death. Poets have sung of the great mystery and thinkers have written upon it. Felix Adler (1851-1933), the great American thinker and reformer, in his work, “Life and Destiny,” invites his readers to “learn from the lips of death the lessons of life.” He concludes at the end of his meditations that death exists not, and says, “As for myself, I admit that I do not so much desire immortality as that I do not see how I can escape it.”

Relatively few meditate on death. One main reason why death is feared by people is because fear is instilled in their minds by superstitious religious beliefs. Sojourn of the soul after death in hell of the so-called unfaithful, is portrayed in priestly religions in such dreadful colours that a morbid fear of death is instilled in people’s hearts. In orthodox Islam and Christianity the belief is instilled in the faithful that souls of the unbelievers after they die are tormented in hell for ever and ever, and that those of the faithful are rewarded with endless joys in heaven. Hence the fierce struggle for life, and selfishness among people in countries where such beliefs prevail.

But the ancient Eastern philosophical religions have a more rational view. They come closer to the Theosophical perspective.

Arjuna is dejected, when facing the destruction of his near and dear ones in the war he had to wage in the cause of righteousness, and he refuses to fight, contrary to the call of his duty. His negative attitude towards death is dispelled by Sri Krishna with the axiomatic truth, “Death is certain to all things which are born, and rebirth to all mortals; wherefore it doth not behoove thee to grieve about the inevitable.” (*Gita*, II)

In this perspective death though inevitable to mortals, yet it is not the end but is followed by rebirth. In the ancient view, what is called hell is only a temporary phase, or a state of consciousness, in post-mortem life wherein the disembodied soul casts off the lower material qualities before it passes on to a blissful spiritual state of consciousness called heaven, to reap the fruition of its higher, nobler thoughts and deeds of its life on earth. It is taught by old philosophers that both these states are finite, having a beginning and an end; “hell” being a state of purification, called purgatory, and “heaven” a just reward for good deeds, at the end of which the soul must return to another life on earth according to the decrees of the just law of Karma, in order to reap the fruits of its good and evil actions in its previous life. Among the people in whom this belief prevails there is an acceptance of life’s vicissitudes, with more fortitude and less struggle for existence.

Fear, it is said, is the child of ignorance. We fear death because we are ignorant of the truths about life and death. When knowledge of the mysteries of life and death grows in us, we find ourselves gradually losing that dread and fear of death which afflicted us before. Belief on mere blind faith in religious dogmas, and its opposite—materialistic skepticism—both are equally pernicious, and are obstacles to true progress.

That the universe is pervaded by duality, and that everywhere, in every department of nature, the law of cycles operates, are facts so self-evident even in our everyday life that no elaborate proofs are needed to demonstrate them. Life consists of the pairs of opposites. We cannot have perception of heat without a perception of its opposite, cold. The same is the case with all other pairs of

opposites. There is nothing existing in the universe the opposite of which does not exist also. If there is life, its opposite, death, must be, and death must be followed by another life or rebirth, just as day follows night and night follows day in perpetual cycles.

The pairs of opposites are the two opposite poles of one unity, which transcends both, and in which the dual pairs become one and non-dual. The Real Man, Soul, is the Ego, the Perceiver and Experiencer of the pairs of opposites of the embodied life, but he is beyond birth and death, standing on high unaffected by them, though he seems to be involved and identified with them, suffering and enjoying. This may be understood by the analogy of dreams. In the dream state of consciousness we identify ourselves with the spectacles we see, and suffer and enjoy, but upon awakening we realize that they were not real but mere illusions, and that we, the Perceivers, were witnesses of the dream spectacles, standing apart unaffected though seeming to be affected while the dream lasted. So too in waking life, the Ego is the witness of, and apart from, the experiences of its embodied life. What is called death is disintegration of the body, and birth is formation of another body for the Soul to dwell in, to experience life on earth. The Soul precedes birth of the body and survives its death, untouched by either birth or death. The whole purpose of life is to overcome the illusion that we are the *body*, its relations and circumstances, and realize that we are none of these but are the Self eternal, immortal and divine, transcending the pairs of opposites of birth and death.

But we cannot realize the unity and eternity of Self at once. Till the realization comes the ceaseless vicissitudes of life which afflict us seem real to us because of our self-identifying attachment to the body and its circumstances. It is only by our learning from life's experiences through countless cycles of reincarnations caused by our own Karma, that we begin to learn to discriminate the real from the unreal, Self from non-Self, culminating at last, after many ages of experience, in the realization of the Self as the Self of All, eternal and boundless.

Far from being a terror, as we ignorantly imagine, death comes as a deliverer and friend. It is not to be feared. Immediately after the

death of the body, the Soul stands in the presence of the sublime light of its divine Self, which is Absolute Justice of Karma itself, and reviews the whole of its life on earth in minutest detail with absolute impartiality, and sees the perfect justice of all the suffering it had to endure, the sins it had committed, which have to be redeemed in future lives. The highest and the noblest thoughts, aspirations of its life, all the good that it has done, cannot die, but become the basis for a heavenly bliss of a spiritual state of consciousness which dawns upon it. That post-mortem heavenly bliss, called *Devachan*, is the idealized continuation—as in a vivid dream—of the happiest moments of its earth life just ended, wholly devoid of even an iota of any element of sorrow or pain, surrounded by those whom it loved on earth. Every tear of pain it shed on earth, the sufferings it endured, are compensated a hundredfold with an unutterable bliss of *Devachan*. There, the Soul is rested and the quintessence of its life's experiences are assimilated into its being which, added on to other experiences it had gathered from the many past lives, makes for Soul's evolution towards the goal of absolute perfection—which is conscious existence in Spirit as a glorified Dhyani Chohan. Why, then, asks the Teachers, should man grow weary and disheartened when he is heir of all things.

What then is death in reality? This is the question, in the *Mahabharata*, the sorrowing Dhritarashtra poses to Vidura after the terrible war in which he lost all his sons. Vidura invokes Sanat Sujata, the Kumara, to answer the question. The sublime dialogue between the two is a fit subject of life-time meditation and practice by all seekers of Truth.

“I have heard your teaching, O Sanat Sujata, that death exists not. If so, why then gods and demons practised austerity of continence (*Brahmacharya*)?” was the question of Dhritarashtra. Sanat Sujata teaches:

“Some say that immortality is obtained by works, while others say that there is no death at all. Hear my words and have no doubts about the truth I utter. Both the views are right, and have been prevalent from the beginning. The Wise say that what is called

Delusion (*Moha*) to be death. I say that Heedlessness (*Pramada*) to be death, and freedom from heedlessness (*apramada*) to be immortality (*Amritatvam*). Through heedlessness the demons met with defeat, and the gods who were free from heedlessness obtained victory. Death does not, like a tiger, devour creatures. Its form cannot be discerned. Nor is Yama, the immortal, who rules and dispenses justice to mortals according to their merit and demerit, is death, as some say.

“Death called heedlessness first manifests itself in men as egotism, through egotism it transforms itself as lust (*Kama*), anger (*krodha*), and delusion (*Moha*). This egotism, moving in devious paths, fails to reach union with Self (*Yoga*). The deluded, the slaves of passions, departing from here, senses surrounding and following them, fall into generation again and again. They thus go from death to death. Action presenting itself to them, interested in the fruits thereof, they follow after and enjoy them, and thus do not cross over death. Ignorant of the science of union with the Supreme Self (*Sat-artha Yoga*), following the dictates of passions on all sides, they wander, intent on enjoyment of objects of the senses (*Bhoga-artha-yoga*).

“Their thoughts intent on the objects of the senses first destroys them, then are they slain by lust and anger, and children are thus carried away by death. But those who are wise in spiritual knowledge cross over the gulf of death. The seeker of the true Self, not dwelling upon the fugitive objects of the senses, well knowing the bondage they lead to, uninterested in the fruits of actions, destroys them in his heart and mind. He thus becomes, as it were, the death of death itself, and devours death.”

Then the victorious warrior, the courageous conqueror of death, says with St. Paul, the great Initiate (II *Corinthians*, 15-54): “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

IF IT is remembered that the purpose of life is to learn and that it is all made up of learning, the ordinary duties of everyday existence are seen to be the means by which we learn many things.

—ROBERT CROSBIE

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: The Second Chapter of the *Gita* mentions: “Make pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, the same to thee, and then prepare for battle.” Why “then”?

Answer: Perhaps because the general tendency is to put the cart before the horse in this matter. We act first and then try to pretend we are indifferent to the outcome, whether it is pleasant or painful. Sometimes we are driven to make the effort by the fact that the fruit is bitter; in which case to follow the advice of the *Gita* is really nothing other than to give a kind of indirect comfort to ourselves, saying as it were on the best possible authority, “Never mind; I did my best and now I may leave the result to the Law.” At other times we are reminded of the need to renounce the fruit of action by the exultation we feel at the success we have achieved. Then we say: “Let me not be elated. My interest must be in the act and not in what I get out of it.” Now by emphasizing the word “then” we are reminded that in both the above quoted cases the renunciation is unreal, and will always be unreal unless the mind is cleared of all personal considerations of loss or gain, joy or pain, *before*, and not *after* the act is performed. In the passage cited, three stages are distinguished, namely, renunciation, preparation, and action. If the one who does the deed wishes to “still remain free from sin” and display skill in action, these steps must be taken in the order given. For if plans are made while the mind and heart are clouded by personal prejudice and desire, the subsequent action will, in part at least, be determined by the latter, and when the deed is done it will be too late to talk of renunciation in any real sense. First we should cleanse the mind of hopes and fears, then survey the situation, and then act.

Question: “No one can do anything that is not *related* to past

experience whether in this life or some other,” says *The Friendly Philosopher*. But we also say that man is a thinker—*Manas*—and that *Manas* is creative and free. Does it mean that man is not free but bound to his past?

Answer: The difficulty probably arises from a mistaken idea of what is meant by freedom and creativeness. Man is free and the action of *Manas* is creative. But creation does not mean making something out of nothing. Every sort of making, whether of a material object or of an idea, implies material from which it is made. The artist makes. But he must have something to make out of, and Nature supplies the medium. Furthermore, in moulding the material the creator has to consider and respect the laws that govern it and the possibilities inherent in it. In other words, he is bound by what his medium can or cannot be made to produce. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, as the saying goes. But this fact does not make the artist less of a creator. The genius, the truly creative worker, is the one who takes the old material as he finds it and fashions it into something new. By the use of his godlike faculty he forms, as Browning puts it, “of three notes, not a fourth, but a star.” The same old notes that bore us when we hear them as a finger exercise, hold us spell-bound in certain combinations devised by a master musician. The same old words that sound dull and banal in one connection are inspiring in another. The familiar hymn which speaks of the servant making drudgery divine by sweeping a room as to God’s laws refers to the really creative element in action.

Now the material, out of which the thinker has to make his life, is all related to the past. Where could he get his tools and his clay except from stores he has himself accumulated in former days? In the earlier years of this incarnation, or in previous lives? The creative act performed by *Manas* is to select, arrange and reshape the results of the past in accordance with present aims.

Question: The student of Theosophy is asked to be cheerful under all circumstances, and yet is told to respond “to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes.” How can he play this double role?

Answer: Ordinary personal sympathy for others’ suffering is not accompanied by cheerfulness of disposition; these two emotions are distinct; the presence of one kills the other. But compassion and soul-joy or *ananda* are like a diamond and its sparkle—they can never be separated.

Some of the theosophical teachings are misunderstood. As a result, a person drawing “a long face,” fancies that it denotes his sympathy with suffering humanity. This has led to the belief that Theosophy envelopes people in gloom and forbids joy! Theosophy accepts the truth the poet gave: “Do not wear a mournful face, getting back to God; scatter sunshine on the place, going back to God.” The true student has to learn to be cheerful and radiate active peace which is joy on all those he contacts. But this is not frivolous hilarity.

This does not mean he is irresponsible to the cry of woe. The sympathy of the ordinary man is emotional. His “thrill” is but a feeling, temporary and short-lived. When it is aroused intensely, it overpowers him. For instance, in case of great calamities he becomes numb, unable to reason; his mental vision is clouded and as a result the “sympathizer” is left without any intelligent means of rendering help. This is not the kind of sympathy required of a student. True compassion is Divine; it wells up in the Higher Self. It grows through a series of lives. It is strengthened by countless acts of small sacrifice, and results finally in the Great Renunciation of the Perfect Soul. How to develop this higher sympathy which is compassion?

The student must recognize that suffering has a purpose. He must learn to appreciate the words in the *Secret Doctrine*: “Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage?” A comprehension of this teaching produces inner equipoise; and if it is real, and if it is heart comprehension, then sympathy is deeply felt when misery is contacted. These two, misery and equipoise give birth to wisdom. By its light the Soul perceives the cause of any particular suffering and then its cure. When this is actually experienced by a real student, his passive sympathy becomes

active and enlightened compassion—the higher feeling. The service rendered by the higher feeling is spiritual service, which is very different from social service, mental service or other kinds of service; and the joy experienced is also different and superior. That joy has nothing to do with the frivolity of the clown.

To be devoted to the interests of others is the most soul-satisfying task. It is a happiness which only “fortune’s favoured soldiers may obtain.” The desires of the personality are but distorted shadows of that real Joy of the Spirit with its roots in eternity. But, however distorted, these shadows have a message for the discerning eye—they are earthly symbols of heavenly phenomena. Thus, the pleasure felt by ordinary men and women when they make gifts of charity, with whatever motive, is not purely spiritual and complete; all the same there is a reality in it, for it is a response to their longing for some inner happiness.

Just as by teaching we learn, so in rendering service we recognize what we have never seen before, that we are being served. This unfolds the virtue of gratitude not only for those who sacrifice on our behalf, but also for those who give us the opportunity to make our own sacrifices. The ordinary philanthropist feels the joy of giving but not the additional joy of this gratitude which the Theosophical philanthropist experiences. The student has also to learn the graciousness of receiving.

The spiritual servant of humanity therefore does not *seek* happiness—he is that happiness itself. Cheerfulness is the natural outcome of spiritual contentment—he is “content with whatever cometh to pass” (*Gita*, II). But that contentment is not passive resignation to the ills of existence or personal enjoyment of the good things of life, but an active response to both. Thoughtful sympathy is a spiritualizing influence. The attitude of thoughtful sympathy begets insight and courage to cope with all things including the ills of life—with a blessing and smile. Rightly it has been said, “He who smiles, achieves.”

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Are Human souls mere commodities? The question is asked in the context of surrogacy, which has become today a Rupees 900 crore business in India. A documentary entitled “Womb on Rent” portrays the emotional journey of a surrogate mother from India, and the travails of a woman from the economically weaker section of the society, who agrees to become a surrogate mother for a fixed sum of money. The number of couples that experience difficulty in conceiving a baby has been increasing, and the reasons include lifestyle, stress levels, diet and delay in starting a family until established in their careers. However, in last few years many rich people and even single parents have opted for surrogacy, making it appear that anyone can go and “buy” a “soul” by hiring a surrogate mother, like any other commodity. Some people do not understand what exactly surrogacy is and hence come up with ridiculous comments such as “chemical children” and “synthetic babies,” sparking debates. They fail to realize that all babies have a soul, no matter how they come to this earth, which includes babies born through IVF (In-Vitro-Fertilization) and surrogacy.

Many years ago, people who could not have children had to come to terms with it, or opt for adoption. Surrogacy raises many ethical and legal issues: What if the surrogate mother gets emotionally attached to the child and refuses to part with the baby? Or what if the baby is born with a serious physical or mental defect and the adoptive parents refuse to accept the child? What are the legal rights of such a child? If it is illegal to sell a man’s kidney should it not apply to renting of a woman’s womb? “At a purely spiritual level, how very messed-up and complicated must be the karma between adoptive parents, the surrogate mother and the baby?...The major share is taken by the agencies who fix this whole thing and the poor woman who delivers the child is the least paid and that too after a delay and several reminders....Unless there is a proper law in place and compulsory legal agreement, vetted by the state Medical Council, chances of surrogate mothers receiving a fair deal are definitely low,” writes Ruby Lilaowala. (*Parsi Times*, September 3, 2016)

Altruistic surrogacy is comparatively rare, in which a woman

may agree to carry the child of an infertile couple without asking for any financial compensation, with the altruistic motive of giving joy to the childless couple of having a child of their own, or to relieve another woman of the social stigma of being childless. In gestational surrogacy the surrogate mother has no genetic ties with the offspring. Both the eggs and sperm are from the couple or donors, which after *in vitro* fertilization are implanted into uterus of the surrogate. *In vitro* fertilization involves ethical issues. A number of ova are fertilized and at times the unused embryos are discarded. According to Theosophy “life” starts with conception, so how appropriate it is to throw away unused embryos? H.P.B. describes foeticide as a crime against nature. “The crime committed lies precisely in the willful and sinful destruction of life, and interference with the operation of nature.”

It is difficult to justify surrogacy when a woman has no infertility problem but she resorts to it because she does not want to disrupt her career or because she does not want to ruin her figure! Such women look for a ready-made child without having to go through the trouble and pain of child-bearing or delivery.

Motherhood is one of the archetypal experiences, which gives the opportunity and joy of creation. There could be karmic causes of the past that deny the woman that experience. Could it be that she was indifferent to her children in the past lives? Could it be that she ill-treated her children in the past? There could be several other reasons for which both the parents have to go through the pain of being deprived of parenthood. It is true that one must make efforts to overcome Karmic consequences by every legitimate means. It is very difficult to say whether surrogacy is a morally acceptable method of overcoming childlessness. When one resorts to surrogacy to obtain a child, it is likely that one is only *postponing* the karma of remaining childless, to some future life.

We must also take into account the influence of the mother on the child in the womb. The imagination of the mother has deep influence on the formation of the physical form of the baby. The story of Abhimanyu, Arjuna’s son, in the *Mahabharata*, who learnt certain war strategies while he was in his mother’s womb, hints at a

far-reaching influence of the thoughts and emotions of mother, and her surroundings and experiences, on the child in the womb. What could be the attitude of a woman towards the child in the womb, when she is only carrying it for someone else, and that too for money?

If we married ourselves before we married another, we could create a more egalitarian and joyous world, writes Shivi Verma. The concept of self-marriage emerged when marital issues cropped up as a group of ladies shared their dreams, aspirations and problems on a ladies only Whatsapp group. For instance, how they felt constricted by the expectations placed on them. How they felt taken for granted by the men in their lives, and so on. The best way to deal with these issues, the group felt, was to marry oneself before marrying anyone else. In normal marriages couples pledge lifelong commitment to each other, and to be there for each other in good and bad times. However, the concept of existing as equal partners, as soul mates aiding each other in their spiritual, mental and material growth does not find place. Both the partners feel that they have to sacrifice their many wishes and aspirations at the altar of marriage. In short, people are not trained well to handle the complexities of marriage.

“Self-marriage, on the other hand, affirms that an individual is complete and whole in himself. Self-marriage involves loving and respecting oneself unconditionally and working in one’s highest interest. Self-married people forge relationships to share what they already have, instead of seeking things from outside,” writes Verma. It is very important to realize that each one of us is whole and complete in ourselves. “What attracts us in another is also present in us but since we are not in touch with it fully, we seek it from out. Only when I am fully in relationship with myself, at peace with myself, and find in myself all that I seek outside, will I be able to relate deeply and fully with others,” says Abhishek Thakore, founder of the Blue Ribbons movement.

Self-marriage does not need an elaborate ritual and involves taking a pledge to oneself of a life committed to inner growth. People

take vows never to let themselves down, to forgive themselves, to not lead a life ruled by fears and not let anybody take advantage of them. Self-marriage helps create a world where people support each other rather than compete, because they know their own value and do not feel threatened. Imagine a world where people truly love each other—because they love themselves, writes Shivi Verma. (*Life Positive*, August 2016)

Self-marriage, in a spiritual sense may mean being wedded to one's divine nature, and learning to go closer and closer to and identifying with the divine within. In the process of spiritual development, help and guidance comes from the inner planes of being and to avail of it we must stop inner and outer chatter. We might learn to spend some time every day in solitude, and in quiet contemplation. If we are connected with our divine nature, which is indeed, the Asylum and the Friend, we would never feel lonely. Shri Krishna says, "I am the goal, the Comforter, the Lord, the Witness, the resting-place, the asylum and the Friend" (*Gita*, IX). The one who has complete faith and devotion in his Higher Self can never be alone, is self-dependent, and can have healthy relationship with other human beings.

Such self-marriage is absolutely necessary seeing that human relationship is undergoing a radical change, and finding a true friend, a close friend, is becoming increasingly difficult. Often there is not a single person with whom you can share the deepest secrets, your problems and weaknesses, without the risk of being ridiculed or the information being used against you.

With loneliness on the rise, people are willing to pay for companionship. In the West, if you have the money, you can Rent-a-Friend, pay for cuddles, or dine with strangers. All of us need social connection. "If we support programmes that ensure the elderly have company, why do we not do the same for the young?...And as our children and their children grow more and more incapable of making friends of their own, paying for connection may seem as ordinary as paying for therapy," writes Emily White in *The Guardian*. Human disconnectedness has grown so much that even in India

there is a demand for these services. (*Sunday Times of India*, September 25, 2016)

When a son or a daughter goes abroad for further studies, questions arise: Will he or she adapt to the new life? Will the parents adapt to the life without their child? What exactly is adaptability? Adaptability is the great human ability, because it does not just mean acclimatizing to new weather conditions, but "a whole lot of changes that happen in the mind—in the process of successfully mastering a new situation. It is very important to realize that adaptation does not mean meekly and sadly accepting a new situation. It means developing new skills and achieving what one wants—even in the new circumstances," writes Dr. Shrirang Bakhle. As human beings we face varieties of challenging living conditions that are not just atmospheric. Getting married or having children; losing one's spouse by divorce or death; managing a new job, losing one's job, especially in middle age, are some of the adaptability challenges faced by many of us.

What are the specific mental abilities that allow us to successfully adapt to these changes, and why is it that some people are unable to adapt and hence become miserable? Every situation has opposing perspectives, such as, the comfort of a "normal" routine versus the uncertainty of the change; the boredom of the same old life versus the excitement of the novel experience! Adaptability seems to be determined by one's perspective of the situation and the mind-set of the person. Do you look at the new situation as a problem or a challenge? If the change is seen as an opportunity to grow and improve then that person will put in all the efforts to adapt. Those who are exposed to a variety of people and situations have a chance of becoming more mature and can understand the broad spectrum of life. In cases of sudden, major disabilities, an intense wish and the determination can make a person learn new skills and overcome the limitations. A person who is content and happy by nature can, not only adapt better, but actually enjoy the process of transformation.

With adaptability we can come out winners, facing the twists and turns of life, writes Dr. Bakhle. (*Weekend Life, The Free Press Journal*, September 25, 2016)

Both inner and outer environment are the result of Karma and do not come to us arbitrarily. It is through them that we fulfil our Karma. We find ourselves in a body or in surroundings that are not so pleasing. Life places us where we can best learn the necessary steps in evolution. Hence there are not so conducive environments—inner and outer—which we must learn to adapt ourselves to, if we are unable to change, in spite of our best efforts. Adaptability is one of the chief virtues of discipleship.

When we learn to accommodate our mind to other minds and natures, in one life we may have the benefit of many lives, as we observe and learn from the lives of others around us. This opportunity to alter our minds and adapt to others is daily and hourly presented to us. This adaptive process requires strenuous efforts. When we strive to adapt ourselves to adverse circumstances, which are beyond our control, we gain physical, mental and moral strength.

Adaptability implies *detachment*, the capacity to be where one is required and to grapple with the new environment. While Karma gradually unfolds the quality of adaptability in ordinary people, a disciple or a *chela* hastens the process of mastering his environment. A *chela* may be and often is, called upon to go anywhere and do whatever is required of him. New physical surroundings raise obstacles, and without the virtue of adaptability failure and frustration result.

“Adaptability is a very rare virtue in Occultism; in a subtle way our likes and dislikes work havoc and we fail to practice and to realize that co-disciples, co-workers and co-students *have* to march forward together. The first test of an earnest aspirant, the first manifestation of descending Karma on his head, is always around this quality—Adaptability. To adapt oneself to one’s teacher means conquest of doubt in the first and of despair in the second instance; further the accomplishment of throwing away the contents of our consciousness, wherever and whenever necessary...” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.