

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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#### THE HIDDEN SELF

The spirit in the body is called *Maheswara*, the Great Lord, the spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also the *Paramatma*, the highest soul.

—*Gita*, XIII

DO we really exist? The sense of “self” may just be an illusion created by a hundred billion neurons at work, writes Johnston Professor of Psychology at Harvard, Steven Pinker. Our brain is the seat of mind, thoughts and also the sense of our existence. Neuroscientists locate our consciousness in the brain and not in the soul, saying that sensations, thoughts, joy and pain are the result of physiological activities in the brain tissues. Consciousness can be manipulated by physical means. During surgery, electrical stimulation of the brain can induce hallucinations that approximate the real. We think, feel and see differently when the brain is affected by chemicals, such as caffeine, LSD, alcohol or prozac (*Sunday Times of India*, February 11, 2007, courtesy *Time Magazine*). Thus, science seems to locate the sense of “self,” and the sense of “I” in the brain—making “mind” redundant.

As far back as the 1930s Wilder Penfield who was a pioneer in the use of electrode stimulation of the brain, kept his patients fully conscious and stimulated various portions of the brain until he found the damaged tissue during epileptic treatment. These

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THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA) PRIVATE LTD.

40 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020, India  
email: bomult@vsnl.com

experiments gave rise to what Penfield termed “double consciousness”—the patient was fully aware of the hospital setting and his actions, and at the same time “reliving” the memories stored in the stimulated portions of the brain. At the end of extensive research he had this to say:

It seems to me certain that it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action within the brain, and because it seems to me that the mind develops and matures independently throughout an individual’s life as though it were a continuing element, and because a computer (which the brain is) must be programmed and operated by an agency capable of independent understanding, I am forced to choose the proposition that our being is to be explained on the basis of two fundamental elements....

I conclude that there is no good evidence, in spite of new methods, such as the employment of stimulating electrodes, the study of conscious patients, and the analysis of epileptic attacks, that the brain can alone carry out the work that the mind does. I conclude that it is easier to rationalize man’s being on the basis of two elements than on the basis of one. But I believe that one should not pretend to draw a final scientific conclusion, in man’s study of man, until the nature of the energy responsible for mind-action is discovered as, in my own opinion, it will be. (*The Mystery of the Mind*, pp. 80 and 114)

As for modern psychologists, H.P.B. pointed out the utter inability of the best among them to explain the nature of mind and their complete ignorance of its potentialities and higher states. She says that though memory—*remembrance* and *recollection*—is a faculty depending entirely on the more or less healthy and normal functioning of our physical brain, *reminiscence* is the memory of the soul, which is intuitional perception apart from and outside of our *physical brain*. Brain is the instrument of the mind and nervous system and is described to be the link between the body and mind. There is memory and consciousness in every cell of the body (not

restricted to brain). Self-consciousness belongs to man alone and proceeds from the higher Manas (Mind). Hence, unless science admits the existence of lower (animal) and higher (divine) mind in man, free will and higher manifestations of mind will remain a riddle to it. It is the higher mind which enables us to say “I am I” and in conjunction with Atma-Buddhi, becomes the Individuality or Reincarnating Ego or “Hidden Self.” When one wakes up in the morning one does not feel that one is a different person. There is a continuity of consciousness. Even in case of loss of memory, a person may forget his name and address but he still feels that “I am myself and no other.” A schizophrenic may say, “I am Napoleon,” or “I am a railway engine,” or “I am poached egg,” thus showing confusion at the level of personality, but the sense of “I-ness” remains. This feeling of identity is proof of the “Hidden Self.” It is termed “Soul” and “Perceiver” by Patanjali and it is not dependent on body and brain but works through and feels sublunary things through its *alter-ego* the (lower) mind.

But the true individuality is different from the complex feeling, “I am Mr. Smith or Mrs. Brown” which arises out of a long series of daily experiences strung together by the thread of memory. These experiences produce the sense of *Egoity* only while they last, which we call *personality*. In a child this sense of identity grows gradually. There is a subtle but important shift from “John wants the ball,” to saying, “I want the ball”—showing the consciousness of an internal self. However, as we grow, we tend to derive our sense of self from what we are not. An American philosopher, Daniel Cowan, points out that in describing a hole in a piece of wood, we may say that it is a round, brown, smooth hole and thus describe it in terms of colour, shape and texture of the wood that surrounds the hole. This is because the qualities of the hole are much more abstract so that it is easier to describe the qualities of the wood than the gaseous air that fills the hole. So also, we tend to derive our identity from what surrounds our true Self, *i.e.*, our body, ideas, feelings, education, etc. The 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 fear physical death because it implies separation from everything that we depend upon for a sense of self.

The two selves in man are described in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, thus: “Two birds, inseparable companions, perch on the same tree. Of these two, one eats the fruit (suffers and enjoys); the other looks on without eating.” The first bird is our individual self, feeding on pleasures and pains of this world, the other is the Universal Self, silently witnessing all. *Atman* or Higher Self is described as inseparable from the Universal ONE SELF, like the sunbeam is inseparable from sunlight. *Buddhi*, *Manas*, body, etc., are various vehicles (*upadhi*) which reflect the light of *Atman*, giving rise to the sense of self. T. Subba Row, in his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, gives an illustration. When the sun is reflected by a mirror, and the rays reflected by the mirror fall upon a polished metallic plate, and these rays reflected from the plate in turn fall upon the wall, three different images of the sun are created. We may compare the mirror to *Karana-sarira* (*Buddhi-Manas*), the metallic plate to astral body, and the wall to the physical body. In each case the *bimbam* or reflected image that is formed is for the time being considered as the self. The reflected image in the astral body gives the idea of self apart from the physical body, and the one formed in *Karana-sarira* gives rise to the prominent form of individuality. The lustre of these reflected images is not the same and if we compare this lustre to man’s knowledge, then we see that it grows feebler and feebler as the reflection is transferred from a clear *upadhi* to one less clear, till we come to the physical body. Our knowledge depends upon the condition of the *upadhi*. The image on a clear surface of water may be disturbed or even made invisible

by the motion of the water, so also by our passions and emotions we may make the image of our true self disturbed and distorted in appearance, and even make it so indistinct as to be altogether unable to perceive its light. (pp. 31-32)

The Delphic Oracle said, “Man, know thyself,” and in *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the guru teaches his pupil through various illustrations, “THAT thou art.” The guru asks the pupil to bring the fruit of a fig tree and divide it into two. When asked what he saw in it, the pupil replies that he saw atom-like seeds. He was then asked to divide one of these tiny seeds into two. Upon dividing it, the pupil found nothing at all within, and the guru said: “That soul that you perceive not at all, from that very soul the great fig tree comes forth. Believe then, dear, that this soul is the Self of all that is, this is the Real, this is the Self. That thou art.”

Clairvoyance of events past, of those to come and of those taking place, in which the clairvoyant had no part nor was he informed about them, shows that some instrument other than the brain is used in such perceptions. This is the Hidden Self. When one makes prediction of a future event that eventually comes to pass, it implies presence of the Hidden Self. If the brain is the mind, then we have to assume that it must have participated in the events that it reports. It calls for its presence as an actor on the scene, or it implies hearing from someone who was present there, writes Mr. Judge. Swedenborg saw Stockholm burning while he was miles away. This can be explained on the basis of this Hidden Self seeing the event and then impressing it upon the brain.

Dreams show that the Perceiver and recollector is active when brain and body are asleep. Dreams show that there is something in man—call it Ego or Soul—that experiences the feelings we note in dreams and remember afterwards. Sorrow, joy, fear, anger, ambition, love, hate, and all possible emotions are felt and perceived in dreams. As emotion, reasoning, perception and memory are found to be even more active in dreams than in waking life, it must follow that the Hidden Self does all this, writes Mr. Judge. A

professor once narrated to Mr. Judge a dream in which he saw that the duck he ate for dinner had grown to the size of an elephant and threatened him by waving his webbed foot, and that this was terrifying. It showed that “someone” within was appalled by this imaginary duck. This imaginary duck gave shock to the perceiver within. The person and faculties that cause our body to shrink from what is real danger in waking life, are the same person and faculties which are terrified by the imaginary duck. It is only on the basis of this Hidden Self that we can explain prophetic and warning dreams. During dreamless sleep the Ego is on its own plane, untrammelled by the personality, and is omniscient and able to see future events. The real man sees many facts of life, of history, of family, of nations. The Hidden Self may see a war that is to come, because it is able to see all the facts that must lead to war; and then impress on the brain, the pictures of battles and of armies. This real man is able to look on the causes and instantly calculate the results down to exact dates, and throw the picture upon the receptive brain.

There are innumerable instances recorded of people who have had OBEs [Out-of-the-Body-Experiences]—in which they describe rushing out of the body, observing it from a distance, and re-entering it—showing that the Soul can exist independent of the body. It survives the death of the body and is called *Sutratma* or “thread-soul,” because like the beads strung on a thread, experiences gained through various personalities in different lives cling to this Soul. Says *Katha Upanishad*:

Smaller than small, greater than great, this Self is hidden in the heart of man. He who has ceased from desire, and passed sorrow by, through the favour of that ordainer beholds the greatness of the Self.

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A MAN’S reach should exceed his grasp, else what’s heaven for?

—ROBERT BROWNING

## TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

If one cannot, owing to circumstances or his position in life, become a full adept in this existence, let him prepare his mental luggage for the next, so as to be ready at the first call when he is once more reborn.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

ONCE again as students of Theosophy prepare for White Lotus Day on May 8, their thoughts centre on H.P.B. and on all she did for the world and for us. Looking afresh at her work, some points strike us which perhaps we have not paid sufficient attention to before. We come to see that the help she gives us is not only in the form of the Teachings; she also shows what the attitude of the learner should be, and points to the Teachers and the way to Them.

What qualified her to give this help? She gives her credentials at the very outset of her first work, *Isis Unveiled* (Preface, p. v): “The work now submitted to public judgment is the fruit of a somewhat intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science.”

She tells us that, when she first travelled over the East, two ever-recurring questions oppressed her thoughts: “*Where, WHO, WHAT is GOD? Who ever saw the IMMORTAL SPIRIT of man, so as to be able to assure himself of man’s immortality?*” “It was while most anxious to solve these perplexing problems,” she writes, “that we came into contact with certain men, endowed with such mysterious powers and such profound knowledge that we may truly designate them as the sages of the Orient. To their instructions we lent a ready ear.” This last declaration is very important and gives us a clue as to what our own attitude should be. We should note especially what H.P.B. goes on to say about her receiving “the assurance that the Oriental philosophy has room for no other faith than an absolute and immovable faith in the omnipotence of man’s own immortal self.”

Her own faith and conviction in what she had learned made her offer the result of her study “to such as are willing to accept truth wherever it may be found, and to defend it, even looking popular prejudice straight in the face.” There are two qualifications here: *willingness* to accept truth wherever it may be found, and *courage* to face popular prejudice. At the end of the first volume of *Isis Unveiled* (p. 628) she reminds us of the apothegm of Narada: “Never utter these words: ‘I do not know this—therefore it is false.’ One must study to know, know to understand, understand to judge.”

Closing the second volume of the same work, she tells us what her motive in writing it was, and what its study will yield to us:

Our fervent wish has been to show true souls how they may lift aside the curtain, and, in the brightness of that Night made Day, look with undazzled gaze upon the UNVEILED TRUTH.

Eleven years later, her second great work, *The Secret Doctrine*, was published. “It is written,” she declared, “in the service of humanity, and by humanity and the future generations it must be judged.” Once again, at the very outset of the work, she gives credit where it is due. She looks upon it as an advantage that, unlike her predecessors, “she need not resort to personal speculations and theories.” For, as she declares, she is again passing on “what she herself has been taught by more advanced students, supplemented, in a few details only, by the results of her own study and observation” (Preface, pp. vii-viii). What a hint we have here for the many commentators on the great scriptures of the world, the critics who mangle them with their own blurred vision, who impute motives to the writers, declare what the writer meant, or try to show how wrong he was! All this has been done to H.P.B.’s own books, even by those calling themselves her “students”!

What is this stupendous knowledge that she learnt and passed on to us? She says (*S.D.*, I, 269) that, as a whole, this knowledge cannot be found *in full* anywhere. “It is not taught in any of the six Indian schools of philosophy, for it pertains to their synthesis—

the seventh, which is the Occult doctrine.” Those who taught her this Occult doctrine, likewise, were the followers, not of this or that aspect of Truth, but of its synthesis. Most so-called gurus emphasize one or another aspect of knowledge or way to the goal; hence the many systems of thought, the many categories of teachers and of pupils. The Theosophical Mahatmas, as They are sometimes called, that is, Those who taught H.P.B. and who form the Brotherhood of Adepts, see the various systems of progress within the vast Whole, wherein there are as many ways to the goal as there are individuals on earth.

She gives us the wide sweep of evolution and reminds us that “Humanity is the child of cyclic Destiny, and not one of its Units can escape its unconscious mission, or get rid of the burden of its co-operative work with nature” (*S.D.*, II, 446). Therefore it is that she tried to help us “to fell and uproot the deadly upas trees of superstition, prejudice and conceited ignorance” (II, 797). For, we have to get rid of the religious ideas in which we were brought up, the prejudices based on our own personal inclinations, and pride in the little knowledge we possess, which, in fact, reveals our ignorance of the greater knowledge. Hence it is absolutely necessary that we should “Lead the Life necessary for the acquisition of knowledge and powers,” for then and then only will true Wisdom come to us naturally.

Just as she herself recorded faithfully what she had learnt, so it is the duty of those who study her writings to teach and pass on what they have learnt from her. But, she warns: “Believers in, and the defenders of, the Secret Doctrine...will have to bear the accusation of madness *and worse*, as philosophically as for long years already the writer has done.” (*S.D.*, I, 676)

With regard to the Teachers and the way to them, we know that “one of the prime objects of H.P.B.’s mission was to open up communication between the world of men and that of Masters, and to create a suitable Embassy in the former domain through which the work of the Lodge could be carried on.” Her work was

“to create an organism in which human egos would be drawn by a *natural* attraction to its principles and rules, and undertake the heavy labour of self-purification, self-education and self-attainment.” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, second ed., p. vii)

So, it is *we* who have to be willing to accept truth wherever it is to be found; it is *we* who have to be ready to defend it; it is *we* who have to get rid of our *own* prejudices, our *own* superstitious beliefs, our *own* conceited ignorance, not those of others. And it is *we* who have to get beyond being hurt by what the world calls us when we defend the Truth. Always it is individual *self-effort* which brings *self-success*. All of us working together in the above mentioned “organism,” which is a “brotherhood of Peace, Love and mutual assistance,” can turn it into a suitable “Embassy” through which Masters’ work can be carried on.

We are told that “man ought to be ever striving to help the divine evolution of *Ideas*, by becoming to the best of his ability a *co-worker with nature* in the cyclic task” (*S.D.*, I, 280). Even though most of us “are not ready to *practise* this true Occultism,” yet “all are in a position *theoretically to study* the problems connected with the Divine Science” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. x), and thus prepare our “mental luggage” for the next life, “so as to be ready at the first call” when we are once more reborn.

H.P.B. instructs us to put ourselves upon “the path which leads to the knowledge of what is good to do, as to the right discrimination of good from evil; a path which also leads a man to that power through which he can do the good he desires (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 16). Any one of us can start with this in mind, for all of us wish to know good from evil, to discriminate, and to gain the power which will enable us to do the good we wish to do. But let us remember that it has to be *self-effort* all the way; we must “first deserve, then desire”; for everything—knowledge, power, success—depends entirely upon each one.

We so often have fanciful notions of what we are capable of doing, and we get discouraged when success does not come to us

at once. Let us try to learn first what we can do under the conditions in which we are at the moment, and do it with all our might. By doing to the best of our ability what we *can* do we shall strengthen our character and increase our knowledge and possibilities, until we are capable of doing more, and in this way we shall be in a condition of progressive contentment. As the Buddha pointed out when one of his disciples wanted to sacrifice himself, “The power of the Master is one thing; the power of a disciple is another.” H.P.B. wrote: “Let him aspire to no higher than he feels able to accomplish. Let him not take a burden upon himself too heavy for him to carry.” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 30)

In H.P.B. we find a true guide and helper, as with humility and gratitude we continue her work in the world and on ourselves. The end is sure; “it is, once for all, ‘To be, or Not to be’; to conquer, means ADEPTSHIP.”

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THE reasonableness of *Conscious* Existence can be proved only by the study of the primeval—now esoteric—philosophy. And it says “there is neither death nor life, for both are illusions; being (or *beness*) is the only reality.” This paradox was repeated thousands of ages later by one of the greatest physiologists. “Life is Death,” said Claude Bernard. The organism lives because its parts are ever dying. The survival of the fittest is surely based on this truism. The life of the superior whole requires the death of the inferior, the death of the parts depending on and being subservient to it. And, as life is death, so death is life, and the whole great cycle of lives form but one EXISTENCE—the worst day of which is on our planet.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

## A CALL TO RESPONSIBILITY

Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

—IMMANUEL KANT

MAN is not alone, all to himself. In many ways he knows, or is otherwise eventually compelled to know, that he is inescapably related to and dependent on his fellow travellers in life. However, there are a few men who can walk alone and yet are willing to be related, reciprocally, warmly, and in a mature way, with others. Consequently, in this process of being wholesomely related with others, his innate capacities, specific to the human being, unfold. Any learner who makes himself isolated in prideful seclusion cuts himself off from opportunities for growth and learning experience, such as are available in responsible interrelationships.

The best form of productive and sincere kinship is built on love, trust and responsibility toward one another. We learn it from our childhood. The elder sibling naturally feels a sense of responsibility or concern for the younger ones and even toward his/her pet doll, dog or kitten. The school prefect in a classroom enjoys the authority vested on him or her, but also feels personal responsibility toward his peers as well as the elders whose expectations he would strive to meet. Even in the animal kingdom the parents are so protective and caring that they are willing to neglect their own comfort and security in favour of their young ones. These are the common instances of an innate sense of responsibility with which we are endowed.

Responsible behaviour may also be learnt by emulating the elders and those in prominence, or it may be based on some wholesome norms, at first meekly accepted from an authoritative figure or doctrine during childhood, and later taken as one's own responsibility to oneself and others. The conscience is moulded

by such *internalized* impressions, besides the instinctual and still higher and innate sense of right and wrong. But unless some appropriate responsibility is laden on young shoulders from childhood, this innate faculty will miss the opportunity to unfold.

Mature responsibility should be fair and free, unencumbered by any outside influence, and based on our own conscience, our own sense of right and rational consent. This is important because, psychologically speaking, our so-called "conscience" may be a servile echo of our dependent nature. The dogmatic voice of an assertive influence may be so sharply impressed on one's psyche that it may masquerade as "Voice of Conscience." Man must be inwardly free from all pressures of bias or of outside manipulations that may brainwash.

Man's true welfare lies in accepting those rules and proper ways of life that could satisfy his own higher nature and the sane principles he has first examined, admitted and adopted. In the words of a practising psychoanalyst, Dr. Erich Fromm: "Man must be responsible to himself for gaining or losing life. Only if he understands the voice of his humanitarian conscience (as against the authoritarian), can he return to himself." Therefore, "to be himself" and to be personally responsible for one's own life, man must give account of himself, not to any outside dominating agency but, as a Master of Wisdom writes, to one's inward authority—prosecutor, defence, jury and judge—one's own Inner Ruler who is the "guardian of the integrity" (Fromm). The only approval worth seeking is that of the sovereign admonisher, monitor, and protector of one's true self-interest, *viz.*, integral welfare of one's being.

Responsibility is not just an ethical or social injunction but an inward need or an urge of one's own higher nature. Man's own sense of justice directs him to be concerned diligently with the "office" or the function he is entrusted with, and this "sense" belongs to the inner authority just mentioned.

In ancient *Dharma-Shashtra* (Laws of Duty) there are no specific words pertaining to the expectations of one's personal "Right,"

while the words used colloquially today for our rights and privileges (such as *adhikar*, *adhipati*) originated in terms of one's responsible *function* and not of status or authority (*adhipati*). This is because one's so-called "authority" was believed to be arising, not out of the official position or power, but out of *accepted* functional responsibility connected with the position sanctioned by a still higher authority, such as the Divine Will or the will of the people. So long as one remained loyal to these "wills," one may hold the status and enjoy the trust vested, as an "authority." And more seriously, the power was wielded out of regard for his *accountability* to "men and God."

People envy men of prestigious standing in a society, unaware that "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." The glory of high status and power is short-lived and is truly enjoyed only if one is equal to the moral and official task assigned and undertaken.

Man's own station and role in life are decided by Karma alone, under the just law of our being. For, it is this law of reward or retribution that puts us in the situation and the role which are appropriate for our inner education and progress. Therefore, the ambitious claims upon life, without the deserving merits, qualities and suitability, are irresponsible demands ignorantly made. But the ignorance of the law does not excuse one from the consequences of such opportunistic and arrogant demand. For, even if one achieves one's undeserved target, say, that of a high position as an executive or an administrator, the overwhelming responsibility will soon frustrate the individual by the pang of inadequacy felt and of having disappointed the Inner Ruler. Mental and medical (cardiac and neurological) wards are full of patients suffering from psychosomatic illnesses arising out of gradually accumulating stress ("guilt") from the failure to meet the essential moral obligations to oneself. People are not aware of the dire effects of irresponsible ambitions and mad drive to gain power, etc.

Also, one may be careless about meeting one's obligations at the workplace, family and social relations. One may sometimes

succeed in escaping the consequences of the dereliction of the particular responsibility, however insignificant-looking, assigned at one's job. But one has made oneself impoverished in the refined qualities of integrity and trustworthiness. It lowers one's true self-esteem and worth as a mature individual, even if outwardly one may have achieved advantages over others.

There is no escaping the profound fact that we are answerable to the essence of our inner self, the pure Ego. For, there is no "God" outside of us who punishes and rewards us. This inner being, who can patiently wait for us to grow up as a spiritually mature person, is like (metaphorically speaking) a wise "mother," who cares for her erring children, does not interfere with their growth, gently chastises and would punish with a view to reform, and gives the counsel for their free acceptance. Indeed, the word "responsibility" reflects the Latin word "*respondere*," meaning to answer or to respond appropriately.

*Commitment*, therefore, is yet another trait besides the care and concern for those dependent on us, and which is an expression of the selfless love for others. It is also an aspect of devotion that assures our loyalty to a cause, a person, or a job in hand. Carlyle said that a man could not make a pair of shoes *rightly*, unless he does it in a devout manner.

Ordinarily, a man may be devoted to pursue, in his own way, a certain object, a cause or a goal he values for himself. But for a committed student of Theosophy, perhaps more important than his knowledge or learning is this quality of steady devotion, loyally sustained, to the Cause he has seen to be worthy. No one is expected to give more than he is capable of giving. He alone is the judge of his own *sincerity* in study, application and work. The more sincere one is in matters of Theosophy and its grand Objects, the more earnest is his devotion and effort. This is the test of his responsibility to himself, if he has pledged himself to the task of the welfare of humanity, for which Theosophy was ushered in.

We cannot close this last thought without referring to one kind

of responsibility, which Theosophy greatly emphasizes and which we are apt to overlook—our responsibility to Mother Earth or Nature. As the ancient philosophy states: “Everything in the universe, throughout all its kingdoms, is conscious, *i.e.*, endowed with a consciousness of its own kind, and on its own plane of perception.” That is why the advice is: “Man ought to be ever striving to help the divine evolution of *Ideas*, by becoming to the best of his ability a *co-worker with nature* in the cyclic task.” (*S.D.*, I, 280). This is our responsibility to man and Nature.

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A GROUP of alumni, highly established in their careers, got together to visit their old university professor. The conversation soon turned into complaints about stress in work and life...Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups—porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite—telling them to help themselves to hot coffee. When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said: “If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. It is but normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. What all of you really wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups and were eyeing each other’s cups. “Now if life is coffee, and the jobs, money and position in society are the cups, they are just tools to hold life, but the quality of life doesn’t change. Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee in it. So don’t let the cups drive you...enjoy the coffee instead...”

—From an e-mail forward

## THE EVOLUTION ON EARTH

Who knows the secret? Who proclaimed it here?  
 Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?  
 The Gods themselves came later into being—  
 Who knows from whence this great creation sprang?  
 That, whence all this great creation came,  
 Whether Its will created or was mute,  
 The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven,  
 He knows it—or perchance even He knows not.

—*Rig Veda*

THE *Secret Doctrine* teaches that everything in the metaphysical as in the physical universe is septenary. Hence, every sidereal body, every planet, whether visible or invisible, is credited with six other companion globes which are in coadunation with one another—just as physical man has six other principles, each with a different function and a differing consciousness. The evolution of life on the seven globes proceeds from the first to the seventh (A, B, C to G) in succession, the movement from A to G constituting one Round. This company of seven globes has been called the planetary chain, and its life lasts through seven such Rounds. Between each Round there is a period of rest or “obscuration.”

When the seventh and last Round of one such planetary chain is reached, the first globe when it ends its evolutionary cycle does not go into obscuration or fall asleep, as it did during each of the preceding Rounds. It begins to die out. So also with each of the other six globes as they reach time’s end. Each globe has now to transfer its life and energy to another planet. Thus, as one globe after the other of the moon chain entered upon the end-period of its life, it sent its energy and “principles” into a centre of latent force, calling it into activity and giving it life. So was formed the Earth from the energies released from the dying moon.

Occultism states that the planetary chains have their “days” and their “nights”—*i.e.*, periods of activity or life, and of inertia or

death. But, though they become personally extinct, their spiritual principles live on in their progeny as a survival of themselves.

As for our Earth, it forms and consolidates during the first three Rounds. During the fourth, it settles and hardens. It is only in this fourth Round that Humanity develops fully. We are at present in the fourth Round and on Globe D, having already passed more than half of the life-cycle of that Globe. We are taught that our present physical mankind began a little over eighteen million years ago, though “man” or “Humanity” in other shapes and bodies is much, much older.

According to *The Secret Doctrine*, the Monad is first of all shot down by the law of evolution into the lowest form of matter—the mineral. Passing thence, through all the forms of vegetable matter, into what is termed animal matter, it reaches the point at which it becomes the germ, so to speak, of the animal that will become the physical man. All this, up to the third Round, is formless, as matter, and senseless, as consciousness. This Monad or *Jiva per se* is a ray or breath of the Absolute, or the Absoluteness, rather, and the Absolute Homogeneity, having no relations with the conditioned and relative finiteness, is unconscious on our plane. Esoteric philosophy, which teaches spontaneous generation, shows that the lower angels could only construct physical man. The Monad, however, requires not only a physical form but also an intelligent consciousness that will guide its evolution and progress. This link is provided by the Elohim, or Pitris, the creators of mankind. The Occult doctrine teaches that while the Monad is cycling on downward into matter, these very Elohim or Pitris are evolving *pari passu* with it on a higher and more spiritual plane, descending also relatively into matter on their own plane of consciousness. After having reached a certain point, they meet the incarnating senseless Monad, encased in the lowest matter, and blending the two potencies, Spirit and Matter, the union produces that terrestrial symbol of the “Heavenly Man” in space—Perfect Man. It thus happens that when the hour strikes, the Celestial “Ancestors”

(Entities from preceding worlds, called in India the *Sishta*) step in on this our plane—as the lower Pitris had stepped in before them for the formation of the physical or animal man—and incarnate in the latter.

In the history of the Earth, 300,000,000 years of mineral, vegetable and animal evolution on the astral plane preceded the still more material processes for the production of the tangible kingdoms of nature, including man. On Globe D which is destined to see the development of man, the periods of human evolution are divided into seven Root Races. But before these Races there came on Earth the Self-Existent. They are the “Spiritual Lives” projected by the absolute Will and Law at the dawn of every rebirth of the worlds. These Lives are the divine *Sishta* or the Progenitors and the Pitris. From these proceeds the First Root Race, the “self-born” which are the astral shadows of their Progenitors. However, though the Higher Self or Monad was within the earthly frame, there was neither intelligence nor will because Manas (the human mind) was not there. The First Race emanated the second, called the “sweat-born” and the “boneless.” The earliest of the Third Race which issued from the Second became oviparous. The emanations that came out of their bodies during the season of procreation were ovulatory, the small spheroidal nuclei developing into a large, soft, egg-like vehicle which gradually hardened. When, after a period of gestation, it broke, the young human animal issued from it unaided.

The Occultists maintain that during those periods when there must have been insufferable heat even at the poles, successive floods, upheavals of the valleys and constant shifting of the great waters and seas, none of these circumstances could form an impediment to human life and organization, such as is assigned by them to early mankind. Neither the heterogeneity of ambient regions, full of deleterious gases, nor the perils of a crust hardly consolidated, could prevent the First and Second Races from making their appearance on planes undreamt of by science. Man

then could remain impervious to any state of atmospheric conditions around him. Aristophanes speaks thus in Plato's *Banquet*:

Our nature of old was not the same as it is now. It was *androgynous*, the form and name partaking of, and being common to both the male and female....Their bodies were round, and the manner of their running circular. They were terrible in force and strength and had prodigious ambition. Hence Zeus *divided each of them into two*, making them weaker, Apollo under his direction, closed up the skin.

When the Second Race produced the androgynous early Third Race, "the mighty, the powerful with bones," the Lords of Wisdom said: "Now shall we create." Then the Third Race became the *vahan* (vehicle) of the Lords of Wisdom. It created the so-called "Sons of Will and Yoga" by *Kriyashakti*, the mysterious power of thought, and these became the "ancestors" or spiritual forefathers of all the subsequent and present Arhats, or Mahatmas, in a truly immaculate way. They were created, not begotten. They were the "holy seed-grain" of the future Saviours of humanity.

It is the Third Race that inhabited the great Lemurian Continent. It preceded the veritable and complete human races—the fourth and the fifth, and therefore it is said that "this Race could live with equal ease in water, air, or fire, for it had an unlimited control over the elements. These were the 'Sons of god'; not those who saw the daughters of men, but the real *Elohim*....It was they who imparted Nature's most weird secrets to men, and revealed to them the ineffable and now lost 'word.'" Happily for the human race, the "Elect Race" had already become the vehicle of incarnation of the intellectually and spiritually highest Dhyanis before Humanity had become quite material. When the last sub-races—save some lowest—of the Third Race had perished with the great Lemurian Continent, "the seeds of the Trinity of Wisdom" had already acquired the secret of immortality on Earth, the gift which allows the same great personality to step *ad libitum* from one worn-out

body into another.

In the course of evolution, when the physical triumphed over, and nearly crushed under its weight, spiritual and mental evolutions, the great gift of *Kriyashakti* remained the heirloom of only a few elect men in every age. Spirit strove vainly to manifest itself in its fulness in purely organic forms, and the faculty which had been a natural attribute in the early humanity of the Third Race became one of the class regarded as scientifically impossible by the materialists. In modern days the assertion that there exists a power which can create human forms—ready-made sheaths for the "conscious monads" or *Nirmanakayas* of prior fields of evolution to incarnate within—is of course pronounced absurd and ridiculous.

*The Secret Doctrine* asserts that physical man existed before the first bed of the Cretaceous rocks was deposited. It further asserts that in the early part of the Tertiary Age, the most brilliant civilization the world has ever known flourished.

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You speak of control. Control is the power of direction, and when exercised in one way, leads to its exercise in other ways until it covers the whole field of operation. A way to control speech is to think of the probable effect of what one is about to say. This insures deliberation, and the speech carries with it *the force of the intention*. The deliberation takes no appreciable time in practice—a thought towards it, a glance at effects; it is really an attitude of *purposive speech* wherein all the processes are practically simultaneous. If in any one thing control is difficult, begin with the purpose of control in mind, and *stop* at the first indication that control is being lost. Everything should be made subservient to the idea of control, if that is the purpose.

—ROBERT CROSBIE

## THE RITE OF TRUE SACRIFICE

IT is rarely recognized today that sacrifice lies at the root of the manifested universe and is exemplified in every incarnation of the human soul. To keep the ideal of sacrifice before the minds of the early races of humanity, the great Sages of the past gave them symbolical representations and allegorical dramas in which bloodless sacrifices were enacted. It was very much later that those symbolic dramas were degraded into animal sacrifices in the name of religion. That happened when the priests, desiring to exploit the masses, substituted this grossly material and cruel practice for the true, joyous act of creation that real sacrifice is. The *Bhagavad-Gita* nowhere demands animal sacrifice, but speaks of offering in sacrifice a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, in a spirit of devotion. The great Buddha fought the ghastly degradation of animal sacrifice. It was one of the noblest acts in the career of the Prophet Mohammed that he succeeded in abolishing the abomination of human sacrifice in Arabia. The very ancient *Yasna* scripture of the Zoroastrians, all but a fragment of which has been lost, is a symbolical representation of the rite of true sacrifice. Now it has been overlaid with wrong interpretations, but studied with the help of even a little of the knowledge of Nature and Nature's laws which Theosophy gives, the true meaning may be perceived.

Sacrifice is but an aspect of one of the fundamental laws in Nature—the law of interdependence. The visible and invisible cosmos is one whole and nothing is separated from anything else. Even the most distant stars are related to our tiny earth. The human kingdom depends on the lower kingdoms and they in turn on man, all together making up the great pulsating rhythm or harmony of Nature, in which man plays an important part. Everywhere there is give and take; life throughout the universe is sustained by the act of sacrifice. But, outside the human kingdom, sacrifice is spontaneous. It is in the human kingdom that it assumes a deliberate and responsible expression.

Because of the widespread misery and suffering prevalent today, we recognize that it is necessary for every one of us to give something in service or in wealth, or what it can procure. Each one must sacrifice something in his life. This to be effective must be done in terms of spiritual knowledge—an inner creative activity. Man's power of free will and volition is a terrific power, for it makes it possible for him to break the universal harmony. When he violates the law of brotherhood he reaps misery and agony for himself and for the whole of humanity; chaos results.

The rhythm of life may be violated by acts of commission or by acts of omission. It is not enough that we simply refrain from evil; that is a negative form of goodness. If we are failing to create love, reverence, charity and nobility by our thoughts, feelings and actions, we are breaking the laws of Nature and of our own being. "Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin," says *The Voice of the Silence*. Or, as Ruskin put it, "The man who is not actively kind is cruel." No passivity is possible in spiritual progress.

Sacrifice of material things is most commendable, but it cannot be compared with the sacrifice of spiritual knowledge—the spreading of instruction about the way of life that gives peace and joy.

Madame Blavatsky wrote in the first of her Five Messages to the American Theosophists:

Theosophists are of necessity the friends of all movements in the world, whether intellectual or simply practical, for the amelioration of the condition of mankind. We are the friends of all those who fight against drunkenness, against cruelty to animals, against injustice to women, against corruption in society or in government, although we do not meddle in politics. We are the friends of those who exercise practical charity, who seek to lift a little of the tremendous weight of misery that is crushing down the poor. But in our quality of Theosophists, we cannot engage in any one of these great works in particular. As individuals we may do so, but as Theosophists we have a larger,

more important, and much more difficult work to do....The function of Theosophists is to open men's hearts and understandings to charity, justice, and generosity, attributes which belong specifically to the human kingdom and are natural to man when he has developed the qualities of a human being. Theosophy teaches the animal-man to be a human-man; and when people have learned to think and feel as truly human beings should feel and think, they will act humanely, and works of charity, justice and generosity will be done spontaneously by all.

Many people with good motives try to serve, but because they lack spiritual knowledge they make blunders and often bring about more misery than they set out to relieve. Spiritual knowledge is necessary in every sphere of life.

When people make a sacrifice for others they often feel self-righteous. This arises through misunderstanding of the fact that when we sacrifice for others we are not primarily obliging them but merely fulfilling our own *Dharma* and co-operating with the rhythm of Nature. True sacrifice is a corollary of the Law of Unity. Life itself is a sacred and holy sacrament when it is lived in terms of spiritual truths.

For living a life of true sacrifice and service we must remember that the Universe is one living whole and that Spirit is present everywhere. The energies of Soul enable man to show forth that sacrifice and to obey the law of his own being. The tools he uses are the activity of his hands, his brain and his heart, and also the energies of his own Soul.

If man is the performer of sacrifice, why need he have an outside priest? No sacrificial rite which priests are paid to perform can be beneficial. Instead of depending on outside ceremonies, each one must become his own priest and recognize life as a religious rite.

There is in reality no division between that which is sacred and that which is secular. All life is sacramental. The compartmentalization of life is the curse of our civilization. Not only

followers of various sects, but even those who have emancipated themselves from creedal limitations make a distinction between service performed for the community and ordinary activities. The whole of life is one. In the silent performance of our own duties, with an attitude of consecration, of self-responsibility and self-understanding, observing the rhythm of life, we serve all Nature. We thus transform our duties from drudgery into inspiring actions, through which our lives become luminous and all beings are benefited. To take an example: A petty clerk in his office can be an altruist, serving his community, his country and the whole of humanity, if he works with a pure and attentive mind and a noble and unselfish heart, keeping himself energized spiritually so that he observes punctuality, accuracy and efficiency in all that he does. Humdrum details, like keeping his pen, paper and ink clean, making his handwriting clear and legible, steadily observed in the right spirit, make his life a spiritual drama in which every act is a true sacrifice. He is serving not only his employer, but also his city and country. He is helping Nature by keeping his mind alert, his heart pure, his fingers mobile, his work tidy. Such a clerk is a patriot and a philanthropist. Were the scavenger and the scholar, the professor and the politician to do their appointed tasks in the same fashion, the world would become a different place from what it is now.

All of us must regard the outside tools of our profession as also our inner faculties as channels of spiritual sacrifice. Beginning where we are and performing our own duties, we shall become capable of performing the rite of true spiritual sacrifice, the offering of our actions to our spiritual ideals. Then we may come to the realization of what Krishna meant when He called Himself "*Adhiyajna*," "the Great Sacrifice," the Soul offering itself as a sacrifice within this body of flesh and blood.

Energizing himself by Compassion, the spirit and essence of philanthropy, altruism and selflessness, the Emancipated Soul on the threshold of final *Nirvana* performs the supreme Sacrifice of remaining with the darkness of the world and radiating the Light

of Wisdom of his own Diamond-Heart. He sacrifices himself for the sake of mankind, though but a few elect may profit by the Great Sacrifice. Such an one not only remains with the world but incarnates among the men on earth; free, he assumes the bondage of flesh; above Karma, he shoulders the responsibility of contacting causes and effects; beyond the influence of yugas and cycles, age by age he is one with their vicissitudes. Says Krishna:

I produce myself among creatures, O son of Bharata, whenever there is a decline of virtue and an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world; and thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness. (*Bhagavad-Gita*, IV, 7-8)

Contemplation on such a Great Sacrifice kindles the fire of devotion in the human heart. As the child's first feeling is for its mother, so the first spiritual aspiration of the awakening inner nature is for the Spiritual Preceptor or Guru who embodies and expresses that devotion through his sacrifice. At his Flame we can kindle our little lamp and, protecting it against the winds of impurity, the fogs of superstition, the mists of sense-attraction, the biting snows of selfishness, we march forward to the goal of Compassion Absolute which is the Great Sacrifice.

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THE human mind is not capable of grasping the Universe. We are like a little child entering a huge library. The walls are covered to the ceilings with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written these books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. But the child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books—a mysterious order which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

**Question:** In verse 76 of *The Dhammapada* we are told to follow the wise man who detects faults and blames what is blameworthy, and to value him as “a revealer of hidden treasure.” Why? Should not the wise man be tolerant of the weaknesses of ordinary human beings, knowing that we are all striving towards perfection?

**Answer:** Buddha has been called the greatest psychologist of all time. The general human attitude towards faults and weaknesses has been described in *The Dhammapada*:

Easy it is to see the faults of others; difficult it is to see our own. One winnows others' faults like chaff, but his own faults he hides even as a cheat hides a losing throw. (Verse 252)

Thus, in the first place, it is very difficult to become aware of one's own faults, and even if we do discover our faults, we are more likely to ignore them and avoid taking any remedial measures. The mental attitude and motive in criticism and faultfinding by an ordinary person is quite different from that of a wise person. A wise man knows more about evil—vices and weaknesses—than an evil person because he has resisted evil in its subtlest form and not succumbed to it. A wise man does not love or hate vice but understands it. Hence, his aim in opposing evil is to instruct and it would never be accompanied by hate or righteous anger. Verse 77 makes clear the intent: “Let such a man admonish, let him instruct, let him forbid what is improper.” On the other hand, the ordinary man may turn away in horror and disgust from the evil, though he

may feel sad and charitable towards the erring or sinning person. The correct approach to vice or evil is well described by Mr. Judge in *Letters That Have Helped Me*:

To “turn away in horror” is *not* detachment. If we hate anything, it seizes on our inner selves by reason of the strong horror we feel for it. In order to prevent a thing we must understand it; we cannot understand while we fear or hate it. We are not to love vice, but are to recognize that it is a part of the whole, and, trying to understand it, we thus get above it.

The wise man understands the vices and weaknesses of human nature and hence can show to what depth one is likely to fall if one continues to indulge in the same. Moreover, he is full of compassion and charity. As per the Buddhist precept, if one is forced to reprove a person, one must do so on his face, but gently, and in words full of charity and compassion, because the human heart is like the Kusuli plant that opens its cup to the sweet morning dew but closes it before a heavy shower of rain. The wise man is able to separate the sin from the sinner and has subtle ways of instructing and correcting mistaken notions. For instance, when a woman brought her dead child to Buddha, requesting him to revive it, Buddha did not sermonize or tell her that death is inevitable for all mortals. Instead, he asked her to bring a few mustard seeds from a house where no death had taken place. When the woman returned without the mustard seeds, her eyes were opened to the truth that all who are born must die one day. Similar is the tale of transformation of Valiya Koli, the robber, into Valmiki rishi. Sage Narada corrected his mistaken notion by asking him to find out if his family would share in his bad Karma. The wise man who draws one’s attention to a fault, becomes a “revealer of hidden treasure” because evil is good gone astray. As *Light on the Path* points out, the vices of men become rungs on the ladder of spiritual progress, one by one, as they are surmounted. It may also mean that we may not fully understand the qualities of the Good without seeing them in contrast

to their opposites. It is also illustrated by the story, wherein Krishna had to marry sixteen thousand princesses, after he released them from the captivity of the demon of filth and darkness, called Narakasura. The princesses represent higher potentialities and faculties that are trapped by the lower aspect in man, which need to be extricated and linked back to the Lord. In other words, a lot of energy is trapped within the evil, which when released, can be put to higher use.

Moreover, the wise man detects faults and *blames only that which is blameworthy* as he has the necessary wisdom. It is extremely difficult for an ordinary person to judge, especially when the judgement is based on action. As Mr. Crosbie says, no two people act from the same basis of perception. The wise man is more likely to denounce systems and organizations, social and religious evils, rather than individuals. That is also the advice given by a Master of Wisdom when he writes that as *an Association* (be it the Theosophical Society or U.L.T.) “it has not only the right but the duty to uncloak vice and do its best to redress wrongs, whether through the voice of its chosen lecturers or the printed words of its journals and publications—making its accusations...as impersonal as possible” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 22*, p. 12). H.P.B. points out that we abstain from denouncing persons, as they are victims of their environment.

**Question:** Why is it said that Good and Evil are relative terms? On the physical plane they are relative. For instance, salty water is good for the sea fish but not for river fish. However, on spiritual and moral planes, can there be relativity?

**Answer:** The relativity of good and evil can be understood in more than one sense. It is true that there are *universal* ethics and morals that guide us as to right and wrong or good and bad conduct. They are the categorical imperatives. Also, there are actions that are forbidden by the scriptures. Then, there are actions that are recommended to be performed, such as acts of *Dana* (charity),

*Tapas* (mortification) and *Yajna* (sacrifice). But a close observation reveals that acts of charity, asceticism and sacrifice are not always wholly good. There is false asceticism, like piercing the cheeks or standing on one leg. There are useless sacrifices which W.Q.J. describes as crimes of folly. H.P.B. gives the example of Saint Labro who sacrificed his body for forty years only to benefit the vermin, which it bred. Similar is the case of the Christian missionaries who sacrificed their lives in South Sea Islands to spread Christianity, trying to give philosophy to people (irresponsible cannibals and savages) who were not yet ripe for any truth and were killed in their turn. Likewise, one may give out large sums of money to earn merit (*punya*) or with the intention of gaining name and fame, or make a charity to wrong persons at the wrong time. Hence, as the *Gita* teaches, all actions are involved in faults, like fire is surrounded by smoke, so that a perfectly good-intentioned action may end up bringing about harm. Thus, it would be a folly to categorize action as good or bad on appearances, without taking into account the motive, the inner state of the person, the degree of his development and knowledge.

As mentioned in the *Preface* to the *Dhammapada*, we need to retain ethical awareness but reject *categorical morality* which then leads to self-righteousness. We need to dig deep and go to the base of apparent good and evil actions. For instance, a mother scolds her child and punishes him, but the motive is to bring him up as an upright individual. A person hypnotizes another to cure him, but in the process interferes with his free will. There are stories which suggest that if our speaking the truth is going to cost a person his life, it may perhaps be wise to keep silent or even tell a falsehood. Hence, it is difficult to compartmentalize and classify a wholly good and a wholly bad act. We need to take into account the motive, the means, the inner state of the person, and so on. Mr. Judge points out in *Letters That Have Helped Me* that what seems evil and “painful” may be necessary for the soul’s progress. Murder is evil, we may say, but as a result the soul is incarnated into adverse and

miserable circumstances and the man is chastened and softened. Was the deed absolutely evil? Not really. We are also told by H.P.B. that often kindness and charity bring to the surface those bad tendencies that were kept down by pain and adverse circumstances. Only an adept may know who needs to be kept in the mire, which is often their best teacher, and who needs to be relieved. It takes a very wise man to do good works. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 31*)

Again, depending on the degree of development, what is good enough at our level might not be so for the person on a higher rung of the scale. Competition is euphemistically called “friendly rivalry,” and is not classified as evil by our society. Self-identifying attachment to one’s wife and children is considered noble sentiment by our world. However, this love for near and dear ones can be an obstacle in the path of one who aspires for a higher life. As H.P.B. mentions in the article “Occultism *versus* the Occult Arts,” even love for wife and family—the purest as the most unselfish of human affections—is a barrier to *real* occultism. When the heart is full of thoughts for a little group of *selves*, there would be very little space for the rest of mankind. Likewise, competition and personal ambition make it difficult to inculcate the spirit of non-separateness.

Under the Law of Karma, wrongs done in ignorance attract physical consequences but not moral responsibility. *Light on the Path* describes the situation by saying that masses of men go through life waveringly, not having a definite goal, and hence their Karma operates in a confused manner. But those who wish to walk the path of occultism are brought to the tree of knowledge and the tree of good and evil, and are compelled to choose. No longer is such a person capable of the indecision of ignorance. Knowingly, he takes steps on the right or wrong path, and every step produces great karmic results. The severity of karmic backlash is more when the action is performed with knowledge.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity. But if you want to test a man’s character, give him power. “Is it true that powerful people are unable to enjoy fulfilling relationships because power eats into the emotional stability? Research in this direction has shown that for a person in a powerful position it is difficult to understand other people’s perspective or to correctly interpret emotions. The reason why they do not have too many people around them is that they look upon sentimentality as a sign of weakness or are afraid that their empathy could be misunderstood. They tend to be aggressive and thus instil fear into those around them, says psychotherapist Dr. Anjali Chhabria. Almost invariably powerful people have some sad saga surrounding their lives. They may have the power to change the destiny of a nation, but fail miserably in making their families and friends like them or even understand them, because they are drunk on the elixir called power. Psychologist Cameron Anderson, who has studied power dynamics, observes that power tends to intoxicate and lower one’s inhibitions so that baser acts can be committed without any sentiment attached to them. A boss in the office tends to be apathetic to the suffering of his subordinates, being interested only in the deliverables. What will the real person behind the authoritative mask be like? asks Abha Srivastava. (*Sunday Times of India*, February 4, 2007)

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” warned the historian, Lord Acton. A man behind the authoritative mask is a miserable individual who hides his vulnerability. A person in power tends to be selfish and self-centred. *Light on the Path* describes the situation graphically:

When a man begins to live for self he narrows his horizon steadily till at last the fierce driving inwards leaves him but the space of a pin’s head to dwell in....A man who becomes selfish

isolates himself, grows less interesting and less agreeable to others...and people shrink from a very selfish person at last, as from a beast of prey. (p. 79)

It is very difficult to be in a position of power without compromising the humane qualities. The one who happens to be in a superior position should make himself agreeable and approachable to his subordinates, but at the same time he must maintain a healthy distance. Only a few, in positions of power, are able to master this art. The person in power has to imitate the ocean. The tiniest as well as the greatest creatures feel at home in the ocean and yet even the greatest of these creatures cannot overpower it.

The paradoxical concept, we must “stoop to conquer,” is explored by Robert Greenleaf in his book *Servant Leadership*. A servant-leader is a *servant* first and hence different from the person who is *leader* first. Greenleaf advocates that the leadership concept must be based on openness, the ability to listen, humility, the cultivation of intuition, as a means to insight, introspection, faith and so on.

In the spiritual context, *Light on the Path* says, “Desire power ardently....And that power which the disciple shall covet is that which shall make him appear as nothing in the eyes of men.” (p. 4)

Traditionally, a city guarded itself by installing huge, fortified gates at its entrance, letting in friends and keeping out foes. As individuals, we tend to “shut” our “gates” when we feel threatened, not allowing others to touch us or our lives in any way. When we close the gates of our heart due to some past hurt, we are cut off from human interaction, paving the way to stagnation and inner death. But then we may gainfully shut the gates and thus prevent vulgar, demeaning and demotivating information from reaching

us. When we do open up the gates of our heart, we let in a great deal of freshness and warmth and are able to forge lasting and fulfilling relationships and open ourselves to new experiences. Metaphorically, gates to heaven and hell represent the states after death—a threshold where good is separated from the bad. When Jesus described the way to heaven to be narrow, while that to hell (perdition) to be wide, he was representing the idea of a gate as being a way of conserving or losing one's life. "Opening the gate to life is to be open to the forces of faith, trust and hope that lead us to eternal life," writes Janina Gomes. (*The Times of India*, January 11, 2007)

"Gate" is a powerful symbol that is used frequently in spiritual writings. "Gates" often symbolize transition from one state to another. In the book, *Through the Gates of Gold*, passing through the "gates of gold" represents transition from mundane to spiritual life. In the olden days, in order to reach the centre of the fort the invader had to cross several gates, guarded by soldiers. *The Voice of the Silence* uses the imagery of such a fort to show that to reach the heart of spiritual consciousness one needs to cross seven gates, guarded by cruel, crafty powers—complex, psychological forces such as anxiety, anger, etc. Seven "Keys" that open the gates are seven transcendental virtues or psychological requirements needed to reach the centre of the fort. *Through the Gates of Gold* mentions "gates of feeling," saying, "If peace is to be found on earth, or any joy in life, it cannot be by closing up the gates of feeling, which admit us to the loftiest and most vivid part of our existence.... He who determines that nothing shall make him suffer, does but cloak himself in a profound and chilly selfishness."

The symbol of "gate" carries with it the symbol of the "threshold." Very definite experiences and preparations are associated with that symbol. We cross the threshold and step into the higher life. At the threshold, mistakes could be corrected and it is easier to do so, but if we carry them with us, these weaknesses take subtler form and are difficult to surmount. There are

"ceremonies of the threshold" for neophytes or novices in spiritual endeavour, and they are subject to the tests of loneliness, enduring the shock of bitterest pain and anguish, of loss and despair, without losing balance. There is the "Dweller of the Threshold," comparable to a person sitting at the threshold, who bars one's entrance to the next room. When the student-aspirant aspires towards the spiritual life and is determined to reach the goal of truth, he awakens forces of evil which at last array against him, taking a definite shape, and thwart his efforts to reach the aspired goal.

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"Whether it is a better job or a bigger bungalow, everyone's running around in a bid to gain too much, too soon," reports Abha Srivastava (*Sunday Times of India*, January 14, 2007). Patience is a rare commodity. It is as if our civilization has contracted "hurry-disease," where people are continually racing towards good, better and best, in order to attain the next level of materialistic heaven—jeopardizing mental and physical health. Just where is the marathon heading? Apparently, to a more stressful, less satisfied and increasingly depressed state of affairs. This hurrying habit is inculcated since childhood, so that the child is always under the pressure that he has to hurry up and become something soon. We tend to live in the future and not in the present, leading an extremely mechanical life and regarding feelings as unnecessary distraction. Things get outdated in the blink of an eye and hence under the pressure of keeping up with the Joneses we find ourselves in a mad rush to nowhere. "We think we are chasing some happiness that's at the end of the tunnel," says consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist Dr. Anjali Chhabria. Further,

This pursuit is also the result of a basic anxiety from within. An inherent restlessness that is caused due to the belief that life really is all about survival of the fittest. It is almost like believing that if you do not pile up your plate with everything

from the buffet table, and eat it as fast as possible, your food will actually sprout wings and fly away.

Agrees Manasi Hasan, a Mumbai-based clinical psychologist, and adds: “That is why you see people cramming their schedules with numerous hobby classes, business appointments, simultaneous or back-to-back relationships.... They just hope that something will fill the vacuum in their lives and this makes them run around aimlessly.

“Haste makes waste.” In this jet age, can we possibly live up to Mr. Judge’s advice to perform our duty “carefully and cheerfully,” putting “our whole heart into it”? Hurry brings with it anxiety, not happiness. A realized ambition becomes a bore, and hence those who achieve the desired objects too quick in life, at a very young age, are bound to feel an existential vacuum. One needs to follow these short-term goals, keeping in mind the ultimate purpose of life. Each of us knows the field or object in which we find our chief delight and hence we turn to it systematically through life, be it money or position or career. But it is also an experiential fact, as *Through the Gates of Gold*, points out:

No sooner has he obtained his pleasure than he loses it again and has once more to go in search of it. More than that; he never actually reaches it, for it eludes him at the final moment. This is because he endeavours to seize that which is untouchable and satisfy his soul’s hunger for sensation by contact with external objects. How can that which is external satisfy or even please the inner man—the thing which reigns within and has no eyes for matter, no hands for touch of objects, no senses with which to apprehend that which is outside its magic walls?

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WHAT I need to realize is how infinitesimal is the importance of anything I can do; and how infinitely important it is that I should do it.

—HERBERT SPENCER