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**A Magazine Devoted to
The Living of the Higher Life**

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सत्यत् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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SMALL PLAIN DUTIES OF LIFE

WHAT is my place in this vast universe? What is my contribution to the world? As we live the humdrum existence, sometimes we pause and ask these questions. There is a sense of joy, satisfaction and fulfilment when we have found our mission in life. On the other hand, a sense of "worthlessness" assails us while we are doing the work that clearly does not match our inner longings, inclination and temperament. Young and old alike experience this void created by the longing for more meaningful work than what they are engaged in. Unfortunately, not only is there a brain-drain, but very few are able to find their calling and say, "I am doing what I always wanted to do." *Svadharm*a (one's own duty) is fulfilling *svabhava* (one's inner nature). By being in the place which matches our inner longings and skills we can give our best contribution to the world. Krishna says in the *Gita* that humanity was divided into four classes or divisions depending upon the inner disposition or temperament. Thus, a man of "Kshatriya" or warrior temperament can serve the society or nation best by joining the police force or army, and a person with good business acumen can give his best contribution by being a businessman. For the healthy functioning of the society the work of a doctor, lawyer, professor or trader is equally important, as they are complementary and hence must be co-operative and not competitive units in the whole.

It would be good to endeavour so as to succeed in doing what we truly love, but how about disciplining ourselves to love what comes to us under Karma? We can change our job and thus escape the unpleasant duty at office, but can we run away from our household duties or duties to neighbours or to humanity at large? It would be so easy to be "spiritual" if it meant sitting in a quiet corner, reading good books and living in an ideal atmosphere, surrounded by like-minded people. But true spiritual life involves interacting with and concern for people. If we have obtained true knowledge, it is our duty "to meet all men not only halfway, but more than that to seek them," and with a cheering word "strive to lighten the burden for some struggling soul." Let us be willing to develop the necessary "skills" to perform this duty, just as much as a worker learns to use the instruments required for performing a task on hand.

Happy the person who succeeds in identifying his unique calling and is able to do what he truly loves. But is it always possible to identify and then follow this inner calling? For instance, it is not always easy to give up the security of a comfortable job or profession, and take up social work, when one has a family to feed. Could you live in the ashram while you have aged parents to look after? One is not allowed to desert family duty in order to devote himself, almost entirely, to theosophical work. In Theosophy, great emphasis is laid on performance of family duties. Besides fulfilling one's obligations as wife, father, mother, child, etc., family duty consists in learning and cultivating cooperation, as also inculcating and strengthening noble qualities. In changing times, the roles of husband and wife overlap, yet even in modern world we need to keep before us the ideal of *Grihastha* or Home-Builder. We have, somehow, lowered the dignity and sacredness of home as well as the institution of marriage. If we shirk family duty, some day we might discover with shock that this tendency extends in all directions. Some day we might find ourselves becoming apathetic to our nation, to our own divine nature, and even to mankind. "From the loving example of one family a whole state may become loving; and from its courtesies, courteous," says Confucius. Explaining the importance of family duties, a Master of Wisdom writes:

Does it seem to you a small thing that the past year has been spent only in your "family duties"? Nay, but what better cause for reward, what better discipline, than the daily and hourly performance of duty? Believe me my "pupil," the man or woman who is placed by Karma in the midst of small plain duties and sacrifices and loving-kindnesses, will through these faithfully fulfilled rise to the larger measure of Duty, Sacrifice and Charity to all Humanity.

Often, work at office or home feels like drudgery. Who wants to do the same thing, day in and day out? Who wants to do work, where one is unable to see immediate results? The small plain duties of life hourly call upon us to acquire skill in action as well as concentration of mind. It is only by careful performance of small plain duties that we are fitted for greater duties. If we are restless or feel bored attending to prolonged sickness of an old parent, do we think we would be able to serve humanity, life after life? It is no use coveting responsibilities of proven souls, without deserving. If the duty of a servant is to serve his master with devotion, then it is duty of the master to accept the service with appreciation and gratitude. Though the master may not be required to perform the menial work of the servant he ought to be able to perform those tasks better than the servant, and bring his service to higher excellence.

Many a time we do not know the importance of performing tasks with care, which to us appear to be insignificant. Every little part in the machine is important for its smooth functioning, so also with human life. An incident in history shows that when a battle was lost, an inquiry was set up to find out the cause. The inquiry revealed that the battle was lost because the soldiers were discouraged, as the horse slipped, killing the General of the Army. But why did the horse slip? Because the horseshoe came off, and that in turn was because the blacksmith had not nailed it properly. So the saying goes that "the battle was lost for the want of the horseshoe nail." Hence the importance of careful and cheerful performance of one's *dharma* or duty in life. We know that a city is thrown into utter chaos when the garbage collectors or chemists or motormen go on strike. No duty is insignificant, and at times we are unable to see instantly the effect of our

efforts. A Master of Wisdom writes, "Ah! if your eyes were opened, you might see such a vista of potential blessings to *yourselves* and mankind lying in the germ of the present hour's effort, as would fire with joy and zeal your souls!" For instance, attending U.L.T. meetings with prepared heart, charged with zeal and enthusiasm, would go a long way in elevating our consciousness, and enable us to pursue our individual study, as also work for humanity.

Are we impatient to be lifted up to higher, spiritual planes while we detest the dreary routine of the daily duties? The way lies through small plain duties of life. We meet our Karma in our daily duties and we are tested in our performance of those duties. The world is kept going because everything in nature performs its repetitive duty without complaining. For instance, the stars follow their course through the sky, cyclically; the seasons and the tides repeat themselves, and the heart pulsates endlessly and repeatedly without complaint. How can we hope to come to our initiation by escaping the "repetitioned sweep of daily toil"? One has to be prepared to perform every humble labour as though it were exalted.

Duty is called the royal talisman. There is the story, narrated by Marguerite Theophil, of Dumbo, a baby elephant in the circus, who was rejected by all, for his big ears. A little mouse gets a crow to tell Dumbo that *magic flying feathers* are what really make the crows able to fly. A feather plucked from crow's tail is given to the baby elephant, saying, it was a "magic flying feather." Surprisingly, Dumbo is able to fly and hence included in daring performances such as leaping from a high platform. However, one day, when he is about to dive off the high platform, in the middle of the act, Dumbo loses the magic feather. The little mouse shouts and tells him, "It is not really magic. You can fly on your own." As the baby elephant flaps his big ears, he discovers that the power of flying was within him and not in the feather. The feather worked as a bridge to put him in touch with the gift he already possessed. Thus, talismans open us to our own capacities. Sincere performance of duties brings forth the hidden potentialities. By doing the task we do not like, or are not good at, we acquire good discipline. It works as mortification of mind and heart.

Talisman repels evil, so also the antidote to loneliness, depression or negativity is cheerful performance of duty. "Try to take pleasure in doing what is your duty, and especially the little duties of life." All mothers prepare food. Some do it grudgingly, while others do it without complaining, and then there are a select few who put their heart and soul into it—whether the husband or children appreciate it or not. The food so cooked, with love and care, is more nourishing, in its own way, than any other vitamin-rich food. That mother, for a moment, becomes the Mother Nature, "Mata Annapurneshwari," nourishing her family. When Buddha was nearly fainting—after indulging in wrong ascetic practices—he was given food by Sujata, a simple and pious housewife. It is said that so wonderful was the virtue of that meal that Buddha experienced strength and life returning to him instantly. Though duty must be performed for duty's sake, unmindful of reward and irrespective of praise or blame, it must be imbued with love. As Kahlil Gibran puts it:

All work is empty save when there is love;
And when you work with love you bind yourself to
yourself,
And to one another and to God.
And what is it to work with Love?
It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your
heart,
Even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

Are we aware that when we fulfil our duty, cheerfully and carefully, and with complete resignation, we open wide the doors to the full play of the power of the Spirit within? There is moment to moment vigilance called for, in thoughts, feelings and actions, because we stand as gods to the lower kingdoms. Every cell in the body, as every atom is made up of tiny units of life energy, called "lives." The way we handle our books, clothes, keys, bag, broom, etc., carefully or carelessly, determines whether we impart good or bad impressions to those "lives." When we bang our book in anger or impatience, thousands of tiny "lives" constituting the book are given the same impression. Depending upon the

quality of thoughts and feelings, we help or hinder the evolution of every particle of matter. If we give brutal impressions to the matter that comes in contact with us, through anger or hatred, the "lives" composing those atoms fly back to lower kingdoms, to be absorbed there. In other words, those atoms now go in formation of plants, stones, or animal bodies, instead of being refined and kept on human plane. One day, every particle of matter has to reach the human stage, and then a state of conscious godhood. By lack of understanding of our true nature and without comprehension of universal unity and brotherhood, we are performing our duties *imperfectly*, and are able to help only marginally, the evolution of lower kingdoms.

LET all the strains of joy mingle in my last song—the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

MAY 8th is the anniversary of the death of that great woman and lover of India, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who, after years of self-sacrifice and work, was called by an ungrateful world the greatest "impostor" of the 19th century, but was, in fact, the greatest teacher of that century and of ours.

She came to the Western world at a time when the poor were struggling to gain their rights, and the women to assert their rightful position in the world. This was the period when the fall of the bigoted Christian Church began, caused by the growth of science which was opening up the mysteries of the material universe. At the same time the Fox sisters in the United States were drawing attention to an invisible side to matter, performing apparent miracles and causing the appearance at seances of the so-called "spirits" of the dead. The Spiritualistic movement has given rise to the psychical societies of today and to the investigation of extrasensory perception and other paranormal phenomena. This same century also had its wars. Today's wars are no longer "local" affairs but have begun to affect the lives of non-combatants and combatants to a phenomenal degree, and are fought not only for aggrandizement but for the sake of ideologies.

Looking back on this past, and studying it in the light of the present, we can the more easily see what was the mission undertaken by H. P. Blavatsky.

Turning to the East, India, she it was who brought about a renaissance of the ancient knowledge embodied in the age-old scriptures, and enthused the apathetic spirit of India to rise and to learn to appreciate its grand philosophy and to assert its birthright.

Having studied for years under the Teachers of the Ancient Wisdom which is to be found in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and elsewhere, and learnt from other old sources of religions in such lands as ancient Mexico, ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, H.P.B. began to give out what she had learnt so that the struggling mind of the age could find what it needed for its further advance in

knowledge. And to help those who were ready to carry on the work that needed to be done if humanity was to survive, she founded, on November 17th, 1875, in the city of New York, the Theosophical Society, with the help of Colonel H. S. Olcott, Mr. William Quan Judge and others. With H.P.B.'s arrival in India, in 1879, the scene of Theosophical activity shifted from the United States to this country.

The Theosophical Society embodied in its three objects the three necessary sign-posts for our age. First, the recognition that all men are brothers, and the establishment of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood without distinction of race, caste, religion, sex, or colour. Without such a conception, how can wars be avoided and injustices cease? Though the time for the fulfilment of this idea may not yet be ripe, still a beginning must be made to draw together those who, at least in theory, believe that we are all human beings first and foremost, and therefore brothers. This idea has certainly spread throughout the world, but the true reasons underlying it have not been grasped. Today, the concept is understood in the light of emotionalism, and therefore it constantly fails to express itself in practice when views opposed to ours are expressed and emotions are aroused. A common basis has to be found if Universal Brotherhood is to become a reality.

The second object of the Society was calculated to remove some of the causes of strifes and wars. Any civilization reflects the religious and other ideas held by men, and we find that one of the main causes of wars in the past has been the religious ideas held by collectivities of men. It is necessary, therefore, to study all great religions. Such a study will convince anyone of the fact that these religions are the same in essence. All the differences we see today have grown up with time and have effaced the original ideas, erecting dogmas which now divide man from man, religion from religion, and the spiritual concepts that pertain to man and life have become materialized and lost their significance. Get rid of the overgrowths, and all men can see that there is but one Source from which all religions and systems of thought have sprung.

The third object, the study of the psychic powers latent in man and in

Nature, has of late aroused the interest of men of science. In view of our materialistic ideas of life and the loss of any belief or faith in unseen realms, the only thing that will help us is, on the one hand, the realization on the part of science that behind the matter we see is an invisible medium, and, on the other, the acknowledgement by the Church that "miracles" are but the result of laws not yet discovered by our science.

This idea is elucidated in H.P.B.'s first book published in 1877, *Isis Unveiled*, wherein she shows that there is no such thing as a miracle, but that apparent miracles, whether performed by Jesus, Buddha, Simon Magus, or others, all occur under the laws of Nature. She gives the scientific thinking behind this statement by pointing out that all things have, as a basis, subtler matter; everything, including man, is, in fact, threefold: there is the outer physical form, the indwelling vital soul, and Spirit. Magic, as a science, she wrote, is the knowledge of these principles, and this knowledge can be applied for good or bad purposes. Hence the importance of motive in the use of this knowledge.

Good motives will never be employed by all unless it is understood that the evolutionary growth of man is through the "cycle of necessity," of birth and death and birth again, leading man to his goal—*i.e.*, the realization of his godhood, and the perfection of the divine powers which are his. Since the universe, where there is constant movement, or action and reaction, is ruled by law as rigidly on the moral as on the material plane, that law, *i.e.*, Karma, brings growth and also retribution. Man is his own saviour and his own enemy. In such a universe of law there is no place for a personal god who can remove the stains of our sins of cruelty, selfishness, lying, cheating, etc. We must pay our debts and thus set right the wrong we have done. Harmony must be restored.

To the student of the Ancient Wisdom, God is synonymous with Law. With the use of Nature's laws, nothing can stop a man from doing that on which his heart is set. Only this idea can bring confidence to man through the strengthening of the moral sense of justice. There is no need for prayers to any god for this or that. No god or gods or goddesses listen to us and give us what we ask for.

H. P. Blavatsky brought one further fundamental fact to the notice of the West and resuscitated it in the East—the knowledge that if the teachings she gave out are true, then there must be a long line of perfected human beings who are the custodians of those teachings. Some of them, she told us, live in physical bodies, working with and for humanity, though unknown to most men. Some of them work on other planes, in subtler bodies. From time to time the Fraternity of these Elder Brothers sends out messengers to the world, to revive the memory in men of spiritual truths and to help those who are in need of help. They work on the seen and unseen planes and keep back as much of the evil in the world as they can, not as gods, but as Elder Brothers working for all alike. One such messenger was H. P. Blavatsky. Her works are in print and in use today—though much has been given out as Theosophy which contradicts her teachings.

It was out of fear of the change that would take place in men's attitude to life were her teachings accepted that humanity dealt with her as all great reformers have been dealt with, and she was maligned by those opposed to what she taught. Fortunately, her works and her influence remain with us and show the stupendous knowledge she had, the devotion and compassion that were hers. Her life-work showed her capacity for self-sacrifice, and the memory of her great heart remains as a source of light and warmth for her students in the disturbed world of today.

WE are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full.

—MARCEL PROUST

FOR most people the basis of morality and the so-called philosophy of life seem to be based on some kind of subdued sense of awe or wonder, conscious or unconscious, about some supreme power. Thus, they yield to the dictates of the religious commandments or the traditional practices. Their religious life has a pivot on some kind of omnipotence which completely orders their life. Therefore, they must be humble, dependent on the supplier of their daily needs! Some may have an irrational awe of being watched over by an authoritarian judge and executor, however kind and just! Therefore, they must constantly maintain good visage for the sake of the reward of a happy future, here and in heaven, as otherwise they have to suffer dire conditions of some kind of hell!

Such is the general view of life based on a Personal God, personal in the sense of being an almighty personage, who like a kind father forgives or rewards, and like a powerful and benevolent monarch must be obeyed and prayed to, in order to get concessions and pardon.

On the other hand, the Ancient Wisdom down the ages, called *Gnosis* in the Western Gnosticism and *Atma Vidya* or *Sanatana Dharma* in the East, discourages such a narrow concept of divinity propagated by the theological authorities and the religious commandments, declared by the Church or the priestly officialdom.

For the common people, an abstract reality is very difficult to conceive of or be related to. Human nature *needs to depend* on something or someone very powerful and objectively approachable. This dependence on an outside power is taken advantage of by the priestly institutions which have always thrived on man's credulity, and a psychological *need* to belong to an approved social and religious group, cult or sect, or a popular organization. Although, throughout the religious works we are told that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, many would prefer an objective, high-powered being, that they could lean on. It is well said that even if God does not exist men would somehow create Him, often in their own likeness!

However, there are men and women who have been sincerely striving to live an admirably noble and productive life where ecclesiastical views

have little place, if any, and where people are not bothered about religious paraphernalia like prayer-books, bells, altars and offerings to any God whatever. For some of them (Count Leo Tolstoy, for instance) the *basis* for their very thoughtful and richly cultured life is not postulated on a "God-idea" and His unsustainable authority. They may neither deny nor affirm God's role, as per the theological doctrines, and yet base their pursuits on honourable principles and value system.

Following words from Albert Einstein convey a different outlook where traditional religions and their God-idea have little room to influence it. He refers to the "cosmic religious feeling," as follows:

The individual feels the nothingness of human desires and aims, and the sublimity and marvelous *order* which reveal themselves both in nature and the world of thought. He looks upon individual existence as a prison and wants to experience the Universe as a single significant Whole. The beginnings of cosmic religious feelings already appear (historically) in the earlier stages of development, for example, in many of the Psalms of David, and in some of the Prophets. Buddhism, as we have learnt from the wonderful writings of Schopenhauer, especially contains much stronger elements of it [religious feeling]. (*Treasury of philosophy*, p. 357)

Many works of mystical religious experience, for instance, by Dr. William James, refer to the possibility of an awareness of the deep undercurrent of a reality, not necessarily arising out of the preconceived notion of divinity. Then what else can be the sure *foundation* and rational basis for an ethically sound life for those thoughtful people like Albert Einstein? In his own admission, the deep "feeling" seems to arise out of the *connection* or rather a firm and clear personal knowledge of the *orderly universe of Law* y self-evident to those who study and attach themselves with Nature and its unchanging laws in all departments of existence. There is also a settled conviction regarding the "existence" as a vast whole, a unified reality purposefully interdependent.

Intuitive poets too, have arrived at this perception of the harmonious whole. There is a sense of certainty that "Harmony in the physical and mathematical world corresponds to Justice in the spiritual world," as expressed by H.P.B. To serve and to preserve harmony within and without, is the natural responsibility (*dharma*) of man. This is also the valid criterion in ethics as to what is good and right for man at all times.

Apart from the rare religious experience and certainty, recorded by the pure-minded and intuitive people, there dawns a conviction of the presence of another Law—"Everything existing, exists from natural causes," also known as the Law of Karma in the East. This has led to the dependable ethical principles on which their regulated life and perception are based. Each person then should be governed, not by an appraisal by a master outside oneself, but by this intrinsic Law of our being which sustains the evolution of Nature and Man. This is the "Tao" of the Zen Philosopher and *Vangheus Ashaem* (supreme order) of Zarathushtra.

Other than the ever-present Law of our being, there is *no outside power* which determines one's life or which rewards, punishes or pardons. Also, man's intuitive faith in truth and goodness, in all forms and departments, should motivate him to strive for them in a rational way. However, man is also susceptible to the intuitive impulse toward devotion and gratitude. Unfortunately, this impulse gets stunted through neglect, to be replaced by animal instincts in favour of oneself and one's own interests.

Are goodness and devotion enough to fulfil life's purpose? We have seen that knowledge of Law, Order and Harmony in Nature are essential to justify proper and altruistic behaviour. It is necessary to cultivate clear understanding and also the purity of consciousness to guide our choices and actions. In other words, reliable working knowledge concerning Man and Nature, their origin and destiny, is a sure foundation for productive, satisfying and theosophical living.

Man is conceived as functioning at two levels—the familiar, external, changing and mortal, and the other, the inner Real Man, intuitively felt as an immortal individuality, imprisoned within the mortal personality. The

pursuit of this inner Real Man is to *strive to free himself from* the encumbrances and temptations of the material and vital existence, since these tend to a sense of separateness and the ego-centric pursuit for personal welfare and pleasure.

Being an inseparable part of the whole, man's true fulfilment is sought in uniting in congenial relationship with all other fragments of the one vast whole. For a responsible and mature person, goodness consists in striving for the greatest good of all fellow beings by maintaining concord and sympathy. Therefore, discord or the lack of soul-satisfying relation with others, is to be considered evil for all men. Such are the simple but valid ethical principles of free men and women who do not need crutches of the outside god of temples, and the dictum of churches and priestly authority, and who are responsible to themselves essentially.

However, one step further to the ethical sense and the way of life, is an inexplicable but certain yearning toward "something" without which a devout person feels incomplete and inadequate. There are born Mystics who have given themselves to the deep strivings within and have responded to the inner call, *without a need to turn to an outside religious form* and practices, or an agency for supplication. They *have found their own sacred space*, their true intimate religion, which satisfies their deepest spiritual aspirations.

These brave souls, such as Leo Tolstoy, Sri Aurobindo, R. W. Emerson, Rabindranath Tagore, have liberated themselves so as not to be dictated by any authoritative figure, whether of a god, demon or theology. The light that shines forever within, is their only judge, executor, and defender.

II

THE FIRST chapter, "The Search for Pleasure," seeks to convey that "Not twice can the same cup of pleasure be tasted; the second time it must contain either a grain of poison or a drop of elixir of life." When we attempt to get the inner meaning and essence, we add a drop of the "elixir of life" to our cup of pleasure. When we are in the process of achieving this we are in the Transition State—standing at the threshold. The Second chapter of the book is called, "The Mystery of the Threshold." If we wish to hold the cup full of elixir, we must be willing to give up, gradually, something of the old ways of life. The author says, "Man's cup is always full to the brim; and if he chooses to taste of the fine and life-giving essence, he must cast away something of the grosser and less sensitive part of himself." Not only are we called upon to break old moulds of thought, old ways of looking at life and its meaning, but also touch deeper levels of consciousness through refinement of feelings. Sensation cannot be killed out, nor sensitivity. As we advance, "Sensation for the first time becomes real." Sensitivity is not destroyed, it becomes acute as we progress. One needs to avoid the extremes—the extremes of overindulgence and stoicism, while having the capacity for both. Hence, the author says, "Only he who has the potentialities in him both of the voluptuary and the stoic has any chance of entering the Golden Gates." We cannot appreciate life by remaining at the periphery or know about the depths of the ocean by sitting on the shore and wetting the feet, for fear of being drowned. The universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. What is expected when we are told to blend the capacities of a stoic and a voluptuary? "He must be capable of testing and valuing to its most delicate fraction every joy existence has to give; and he must be capable of denying himself all pleasures, and that without suffering from the denial." In other words, it is developing the capacities, which enables us not to be *dependent* on the pleasures.

"When those are put back, there is the next range of more refined pleasures to be dealt with," and it is thus that we finally reach the essence of life.

The first rule of *Light on the Path* suggests that before the *eyes can see*, they must be incapable of tears. To become incapable of tears is to be able to experience simple human emotions without being swayed by them. The book points out that a disciple enjoys and suffers more keenly than an ordinary person, but he has so disciplined himself that he does not allow these joys and sorrows to shake him from his fixed purpose. To achieve this, we are asked to "wear out," first pleasure and then pain—transcend both pain and pleasure. What does "wearing out" pleasure mean? In the systematic search for pleasure, the ego learns not to seek pleasure by hurting someone. Then, one learns to sacrifice legitimate pleasures for the sake of others. Next, one comes to analyze the pleasures and appreciate that pleasures are short-lived. Finally, the person may come to a stage when he is able to say, "I have seen all sorts of pleasures, and I am not going to look for them. It is fine if they come, and it is perfectly alright if they do not come my way." Simultaneously, there is refinement of pleasures. As we progress, the psychic nature looks for refined food. For instance, we would prefer quiet surroundings and the solitude on the mountains and at seashore, and proximity to nature than activities and pleasures that involve going to crowded places. There is attraction for artistic pleasures such as music, painting, drama, literature, etc., but as our taste refines we look for more depth and substance in these pleasures to satisfy our psychic nature. The test of inner progress is, whether there is an easy acceptance when any or all of such pleasures are absent. We are so dependent on outside things and people for our happiness that if any of them are missing we feel thoroughly miserable.

The author points out that the stoic, who subscribes to the philosophy of being indifferent to pleasure and pain, misses the point and thus throws away the baby with the bath water. "The stoic does not allow that there is joy within pleasure, and by denying himself the one loses the other. But the true philosopher... sees that the kernel is within the shell, and that instead of

crunching up the whole nut like a gross and indifferent feeder, the essence of the thing is obtained by cracking the shell and casting it away." It would be a folly to eat the walnut along with the shell. We have to take the trouble of separating the husk from the grains; the shell from the kernel. Every emotion, sensation and experience must be subjected to this process. Hence the need of testing and valuing every joy of existence. *Light on the Path* suggests weighing, observing and testing every sensation, without yielding to the seductions of the senses. We may experience the sensations without feeling horror and with confidence that a time will come when they will affect us no longer. A certain amount of detachment is required to enable us to learn lessons from our experiences. Our involvement in any event is like raw material and reflection upon it is like processing of raw material. We process it the best when we are detached. The more detached we are, the less is the time gap between experience and analysis. A time comes, when part of us remains detached and observes—making it possible to analyze and experience simultaneously. We can learn to experience pain and pleasure with detached concern. There should be a dissociation of "I" from happiness and unhappiness.

This sifting of pleasures, this weighing and testing of experiences must be done daily, hourly, at almost every moment, so that drop by drop we can fill up the cup with elixir of life. To gain this end, each one of us must become a tough taskmaster, and be ready to practise austerities. Occasions for mortification or ascetic practice come in our day to day living. We do not have to starve ourselves, but we should be able to do without food when the occasion arises. We must not get irritated or angry if the food has a little more or less salt. We must not be disappointed if things do not go the way we wanted them or others do not live up to our expectations. Mortification is a matter of mind more than that of the body. H.P.B. hints at the true mortification when she says that the duty of a theosophist is to control and conquer his lower, personal nature through his spiritual nature, and to drink without a murmur up to its last bitter dregs whatever the cup of life may hold for us. Each spiritual aspirant has "to take himself steadily in hand and put the bit into his own mouth; no one else can do it for him.

THOUGHTS ON "THROUGH THE GATES OF GOLD"

"A 'bit' is a restraining instrument put into the mouth of the horse, and is painful for the horse. The painful discipline and consistent practice of mortification must be self-chosen.

We are reminded that all this needs strength and will power, to be acquired by use and exercise. "It is vain to expect to be born into great possessions. In the kingdom of life there is no heredity except from the man's own past." It is the result of our own past Karma. As a man sows, so shall he reap. We gradually develop the necessary strength and will power, life after life. Not only are we born again and again in order to accumulate strength and power, but it is inevitable that we do so. So long as soul's longing for sensation is not worn out, it is compelled to take birth and "surely the seeds of desire spring up where the sower has sown them." *Light on the Path* points out that only when the crude wish to live has departed and when there is no longer any desire to take birth for the sake of emotion and experience, then that soul takes birth to pursue some divine object, to accomplish the work of the Masters. "He looks neither for pleasure nor pain, asks for no heaven, and fears no hell."

The Chapter closes with a profound thought: "On the mental steps of a million men Buddha passed through the Gates of Gold." This hints at universal unity and interdependence. This is a central concept and cannot be lost sight of by one who wishes to reach and open the "Gates of Gold." The statement suggests that there is never growth in isolation. Einstein's explanation of his genius, "In science... the work of the individual is so bound up with that of his scientific predecessors and contemporaries that it appears almost as an impersonal product of his generation," is more than an expression of modesty, says the great American novelist, E. L. Doctorow. Einstein grew up in a culture where many scientists in Europe—Albert Michelson, Edward Morley, Hermann Helmholtz, etc.—had been indirectly hinting at the theory of relativity by questioning the concepts of absolute motion and absolute rest. These concepts were the building blocks that provided Einstein with the tools with which to think. The English poet and essayist, Matthew Arnold, says that the work of literary genius is the combination of the power of man and the power of the moment, *i.e.*, of a

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certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere. Newton said: "I appear tall because I am standing on the shoulders of the giants." Buddha drew inspiration and teachings from the Vedas and Upanishads, and the writings of rishis, sages and other perfected beings. Thus:

The particular individual in whom the final illumination appears is called a genius, an inventor, one inspired; but he is only the crown of a great mental work created by unknown men about him, and receding back from him through long vistas of distance. Without them he would not have his material to deal with. Even the poet requires innumerable poetasters to feed upon. He is the essence of the poetic power of his time, and of the times before him. It is impossible to separate an individual of any species from his kin. (*Through the Gates of Gold*, p. 12)

However, modern man is ever eager to claim fame and glory for the ideas, inventions, discoveries and achievements that he sincerely considers to be the result of his own individual effort. He knows it not that he has received much from those lesser beings who are less expressive, less articulate and apparently less intelligent. We are often guilty of appropriating to ourselves the credit that rightfully belongs to others.

(*To be continued*)

LIFE is the sum of all your choices.

—ALBERT CAMUS

LOVE BEYOND PAIN AND PLEASURE

MAN is always in search of love in one form or another, at times to fill the void, to complete himself, and yet in the end he never feels whole. Something vital seems to be missing. Why so, when we say, "Love is God"? Why is it that love deludes us, forsakes us or at times even betrays us? Yet, we know it exists. Neither do we have to become mystics to feel it, nor leave this world to know it.

Often, we welcome pain because it brings the sensation of "being alive." Something within is touched; someone inside is awakened. But not all of us are aware of these processes in the inner planes of our being. It is because outer senses grieve for not getting what they desired. Pain, grief, sorrow push us to take refuge in some thing or some one, higher and constant. Without consciously knowing, we are going a step closer to the real self. Sadly, we do not observe this process while in it and that is why misery and sadness overpower love.

The cycle of pain and pleasure will follow as night does day, until one learns to recognize in one the other, and the outcome of both in love—real love. "Love is the state of being alive."

It is because of our inability to experience this "love" in pleasurable times that nature promises pain. Forgetfulness of "duty" creates wants, and wants give rise to binding attachment and desires. When desires remain unfulfilled, we say, "we are hurt." But who is hurt? It is the identity (personality) whose *duty* is to serve the Master. By not recognizing the Master within when one should have, *i.e.*, in moments when life is blessed, that we invite pain.

A person dedicating the good things and beautiful circumstances to the Higher Self will only experience an outpour of Love from the Self. He will stop *seeking* and will find love everywhere—not just in one person or relation. When pleasure can be transformed into something so divine, why wait for pain to force it out?

THE BASIS OF FAITH

Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see.—*Hebrews*, xi, 1

In a word, there are three things that last for ever; faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of them all is love.—St. Paul: *1. Corinthians*, xm, 13

There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance. Love will never come to an end.— St. Paul: *7. Corinthians*, xm, 7-8

SRI KRISHNA says in the *Gita* that all men have faith of some kind. But what is faith? Can it change? Is it permanent, reliable, inspirational? Is it negative or positive? What are its characteristics? Is it worthwhile to analyse our own faith?

The questions, if seriously asked, lead us to discover that there are three *kinds* of faith. One is pure and expresses itself in harmony and rhythm. Another is mobile, always in motion, always changing from one thing or idea to another. The third is negative and never changes, because it is founded in inertia, acceptance without reason, and because no thought is given to it. This last is *tamasic*, just as the second kind of faith is *rajasic* and the first is *sattvic*. But above any of these is the union of them all, namely, the stability of *tamas*, unchanging because firmly fixed; the motion of *rajas*, because with further and further knowledge the faith becomes wider and deeper; and the rhythm of *sattva*, because at its foundation are *principles* instead of fleeting ideas or likes and dislikes. This is the true faith. How shall we discover which kind of faith is the ruling factor in our own lives? We can find this by watching our faith in action in our daily lives. And in order to gain a deeper knowledge we have to look at the human beings around us and try to see how each one's faith expresses itself.

If we look at the stable, unmoving, unrhythmic kind of faith in action, we find that it is that of the ordinary religious man of any creed. He never questions the root of his faith and therefore never moves from it. Whether his sacred book is the Bible of the Christian, the Koran of the Mohammedan, or the Veda of the Hindu, whether he worships in a church, a mosque, or a

THE BASIS OF FAITH

temple, his belief is the same in quality, stable and unchanging. Because he is unworried by doubts, this belief often turns into dogmatism or fanaticism. This is one of the great dangers which is present in every religion or sect, for it leads to isolation and strife.

The faith which is energized by motion, which wants to move on, is that which exists chiefly among the scientists and intellectual people. They feel urged to move on, want to delve deeper into things, and are not bound by the knowledge already gained. They feel a constant need for self-expression, for new ideas, new forms, new freedoms. This is why this faith is said to be of the *rajas* quality.

The third kind of faith is that which shows rhythm in its changes. It is not sporadic, but goes to the root of the changes, delving deeply into the beliefs, until from the depth of consciousness comes inspiration which brings the inner sense of joy. These two qualities, joy and inspiration, are to be found as the effects of rhythm everywhere. We see them in art, in literature, in music. Rhythm strikes an inner chord in us, and our whole nature thrills in response to it. The man who is thus illuminated, who sees the underlying rhythm within the chaos of the world, is full of joy, for he has combined the three kinds of faith in himself. His faith has the stability on which mobility rests, and he feels instinctually that all is well in reality.

If we analyse faith still further we begin to understand that the *quality* of our faith is not determined by what is believed in. In the final analysis, it is immaterial whether we believe in Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster, or any other teacher, leader or guru. It is *how* this belief shows itself that is important, and this brings us to the quality of the belief. Is it of the nature of joy and inspiration, or of fanaticism, or of constant change? Of what quality is our faith? Are we dissatisfied with it? If so, are we not subconsciously expressing our own lack of true faith? Is that on which we are basing our faith insecure? Is it because of this insecurity that we are seeking a new basis? If this is so, our faith will change many times, for it is based on our likes and dislikes, our sense impressions and our new and ever-growing knowledge. This faith is not based on stability but on emotion and on ideas which change.

THE BASIS OF FAITH

In time we begin to realize that a changing faith is no real faith. We begin to want something which is stable, not rigid, as is the belief of the fanatic, but stationary because resting on reality. In this way we begin to understand that the only faith that is worthwhile is rooted in ourselves, in our higher Self, for that is the one static feature in the whole universe. Objects change, our knowledge changes; the Self alone is changeless, beyond sense impressions, accumulated knowledge and varied desires and passions.

Here we see again the different characteristics of the three kinds of faith. The faith which shows as inertia, the faith which is motionless, is dependent on others. That which shows as motion depends at one time on one belief and at another time on another belief. But there is that faith which knows that the only permanency is Man himself. There is nothing else to be dependent on. He who has that faith has attained self-dependence.

All men at some time or other go through these phases, for they are part of the evolution of man. What each one can do is to cultivate here and now the right kind of faith.

The first step for each is to realize that he must train himself to acquire true faith. That is to say, he must begin to realize that through every step in life he must rely on himself, have faith in himself.¹ It is obvious that this will lead him to that aspect of himself which is immortal, which can never be destroyed; that aspect which urges him on through all obstacles and which brings him to the realization that he is greater than any obstacle.

Secondly, he must learn to use the knowledge he has been given as to the workings of the material world, namely, that throughout all manifested things law, rigid and impersonal, rules. That is the one thing that he can put his faith on in his path through life. Without knowledge of the law he cannot hope to achieve. Law is not his master but his servant, his instrument, and

¹It is only when we place our faith on *persons* that the question of *authority* arises. There is no such thing as *authority* in the spiritual life. There is only teacher and taught, the teacher of the law and the listener. Who can claim authority over another human soul? The whole concept is absurd.

in it he can have perfect trust. His recognition that law works everywhere, and that he himself directs that law with respect to himself, makes him progress towards his real nature which is fundamentally spiritual and not material. If the law is his instrument, then he is superior to that law; not that he can alter it at his will, but he can use it to help himself. Whereas in the past he put his faith on that which was outside of himself, that which was unstable, he now begins to see that there is an unchanging element in him which is superior to any manifested being or form. The term soul, or ego, or individuality, is often used, but these are words. It is the realization that we are not merely our changing bodies, feelings, or thoughts and ideas that will help us. All these may and will change, but the "I" which experiences them does not change. Does this seem like the attitude of the "haughty fool" described in *The Voice of the Silence*, who sits alone at the top of a lofty tower, unperceived by any but himself? Does it seem to advocate isolation, a separation of oneself from all others? A moment's thought will show that as the one Law works in the one Matter, man is eternally linked with it all. He stands, as it were, at the centre of a circle which has no circumference but embraces infinity. He is bound to that whole, is a part of it; and as he is, so are all others. Each man is the centre of the whole, seeing the same horizon, vibrating with the whole, making the whole vibrate. Moving from this centre, he enlarges his horizon from that which encircles his family, his nation, his race, to that which encircles infinity. As he now has faith in himself as an integral part of the whole, so he recognizes that all others are like himself, struggling to widen their horizon, trying to help all others.

In this process, at first he does find himself isolated from his friends and acquaintances. He no longer thinks like them or feels or acts like them, and loneliness takes possession of him. But even in this loneliness he begins to understand that wherever he turns there are beings, and there is himself. He has now to change his outlook and see himself as one who, from being turned inward, must look outward, to the "high places" beyond the horizon, beyond the stench of physical individual life to the sun which shines on all alike. It is from those who have gone beyond that will now come his help,

for he is not the first, nor will he be the last tiny point of individual consciousness which struggles or has struggled to reach upward or inward and outward to the reality which is within and without.

It is because of this loneliness and ignorance of humanity that great Teachers have come from time to time to show man the reality of a superior world and the final goal. They are often called "saviours," for indeed they save man by showing him the way and by extending a helping hand to him. But man must not forget what he has learnt, namely, that he himself is responsible for his progress. Help will no doubt be given him when he deserves it, but it is not to be begged for. He must keep in mind that those who have learnt the Law have done it themselves, and so must he. There are no gifts to be given in the mighty struggle between man and spirit. Spirit has to burst asunder for itself those material limiting bonds.

This is a tremendous struggle. In fact, all progress is a struggle. Hence man must know what he is striving to gain, what ideal is strong enough to make him never doubt and never slacken his efforts.

Man has never been without a friend, for there have always been in the universe those who have attained the goal of evolution. What enabled them to march on to victory in spite of all odds? Love for their fellow creatures. St. Paul, the Initiate, the Master-builder, had learnt that, and he tried to pass on this truth, which is so well expressed also in *The Voice of the Silence*: 'To live to benefit mankind is the first step.' It is for this very purpose that the "six glorious virtues" have to be practised. All humanity is bound in one whole. Knowing how mankind suffers, the perfected being out of his compassion stays on to help others who are a part of himself. There can be nothing more wonderful than the Vision of the One as given by Krishna to Arjuna. It was so wonderful that he had to be given the divine eye by Krishna. At the final goal he must see the Vision by his own self-effort.

How can this be made possible? By starting now to try to understand the *principles* of action in our own lives and throughout the manifested universe. These principles have been handed down to us from time immemorial. Each time we practise a virtue which is not yet part of our nature, we are feeding the fire of that principle of action for the benefit of the whole. Each time we have an ennobling thought, we are helping the thought of the world. Each time we use our reason to know more and better, we are helping to free the world from illusions and delusions, priestcraft and bondage. Each time we act "for and as the Self of all creatures," we are binding ourselves more firmly to those great Helpers whose heart beats only for the good of all. As the tree shelters both the good and the evil, so must we do as they do who know that all that separates them from the criminal, the ignorant and the evil is TIME—evolution, and EFFORT—self-help.

This is the beginning for us. We can do it if we have faith in the underlying principle of all that is, was or ever shall be, which can never fundamentally change, which is our Light, our Comfort and our Spur.

"Faith has its centre everywhere," it is said. When trials and tribulations come, we may bend as the reed bends before a storm, but we shall never be uprooted while we have faith in the Self, in our own immortality and in the Law, and while we are devoted to Humanity as a whole, from the lowest creature to the highest Mahatma. "Love will never come to an end."

[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 spirituality, could one "bite more than one can chew"? How dangerous is this for the person?

Answer: "To bite more than one can chew," means to try to achieve too much, too soon. Though it is possible for a person to go through the required discipline and achieve perfection in seven years or in seven minutes, the strain involved would be enormous. One aspiring to be a weight lifter will end up having pulled muscles if he tries to lift a very heavy weight, all at once. For a number of days, he practises lifting light weights, and only gradually attempts to lift heavier weights. So too, with living the spiritual life, which involves purification of lower nature. This process begins at the level of mind. We are warned that it is a gradual process, stretching over a series of lifetimes. As the smith removes impurities of silver, little by little, vices and weaknesses must be overcome gradually. Hence, the caution that violent control is not so good as gentle control which must be continuous and firmly unrelaxed. Gentleness is better because always an opposite reaction is aroused. We start with our ordinary self with its various desires and interests, and are required to give up even some of our legitimate desires. What happens when a person decides to remain a celibate without making much effort to overcome the *desire* for the opposite sex? He is bound to experience an inner conflict. The personal self must be firmly but gradually controlled. "Living the higher life" means waging a war not only against our *vices*, but also against our habits, beliefs, pet theories and our likes and dislikes.

When we attempt to do this, there is an opposition on the inner planes from our own tendencies. A small resolve to take a walk for 15-20 minutes every day in the morning will give rise to many conflicting forces. Our habit of late rising, reading the newspaper in the morning, having our tea

leisurely, etc., will clash with this resolve. Why are we habituated like this?

Our body cells are made up of very tiny units of energy, called elementals. Many such elementals form one cell. All our thoughts and feelings are impressed upon these elementals. All our habits leave a deep impression upon these elementals because we have been doing it for many years and many lives. Such elementals may be compared to an army of soldiers, who are trained in a particular way to follow a given set of commands. If the colonel of the army changes and he wants them to work in a different way, then he would give a different set of commands. But as the commands change, the soldiers would unite and oppose. Now, it would require great effort on the part of the colonel to efface their old habits as also the memory of old commands. Breaking habit amounts to washing the concerned elementals clean of their first impressions and giving them reverse kind of impressions. The whole struggle could be physically and psychologically draining.

In trying to achieve too much, too soon, one may rush into psychic realm *unprepared*. There is a great danger of slipping into black magic, in the absence of inward purity. In proportion to the intensity of one's aspiration, sincerity and devotion, there is quicker precipitation of karma that could throw the aspirant temporarily off-balance. Even at mental level, it is suggested that study of metaphysical and abstruse books, such as the *Secret Doctrine*, must be gradual because every new mental effort calls forth adjustment and destruction in the brain substance, and if indulged in injudiciously it may do serious physical harm to the brain.

A student-aspirant must not take up more theosophical work than he can manage, else it would be in constant conflict with home duties, and he may discover that he is unable to do justice to either.

Question: When we meet certain individuals we find that at the end of our interaction we are left physically drained of energy. How does one explain this?

Answer: We are floating in ocean of life or *Jiva* that permeates every object on earth. Strictly speaking *Prana* is breath. Generally, the terms *Prana* and life energy are used to denote that principle which permeates every part

of our constitution. It is also suggested that astral body is the vehicle of *Prana*, and just as blood circulates through the body, life energy or *Pranic* currents circulate in the astral body. The *Pranic* currents circulating in the astral body, affects the body and ultimately streams forth as our magnetism in the form of magnetic fluid. Purity of magnetic fluid or pure magnetism is not to be obtained by water and soap, and though it is affected by cleanliness of skin, hair, nails, etc., it is not dependent on it. "Man makes his magnetism with his mind," says an occult aphorism. Any person who lives a morally pure life can purify his own magnetism and also the psychic atmosphere around him. Pure magnetism works as a wonderful talisman, repelling evil influences.

It is said that every human being throws off, *unconsciously*, the magnetic fluid that affects the objects and beings around him. A mesmerizer projects the same fluid from himself on any object or being, *consciously* and under the guidance of his will. When we hold any object in our hand we transfer our magnetism to that object. In a healthy and young person these magnetic emanations are strong while the same are weak in case of diseased or old person. When two such people come in close proximity of each other, there is transfer of magnetic fluid or vitality from the stronger to the weaker person, which may leave the stronger person exhausted. H.P.B. points out that breeders never herd together young animals with old; intelligent physicians forbid parents to have young children occupy their own beds. When David was old and feeble his vital forces were replenished by bringing a young person in close contact with him so that he could absorb her strength. As an extreme example, there is the case of the Seeress of Prevost, Madame Hauffe, who repeatedly stated that she supported life merely on the atmosphere of the people surrounding her and their *magnetic emanations*. H.P.B. points out that the seeress was a *magnetic vampire*, who absorbed vitality of stronger people in the form of *volatilized blood*. (*Isis*, I,463)

A pure and healthy magnetizer or mesmerizer cures his patients by projecting or imparting his healthy, vital fluid. When a healthy operator mesmerizes his patient with a determined desire to cure him, the exhaustion felt by the former is proportionate to the relief given to the patient. A process of endosmose takes place, and the healer parts with a portion of his vital aura to benefit the sick man. When this vital fluid is imparted in greater degree, the healer himself begins to feel weak and exhausted. Hence, H.P.B. cautions:

The curative magnetism that is forced by their will into the bodies of their patients, *comes out of their own systems*. What they have, they can give; no more. And as the maintenance of one's own health is a prime duty, they should never attempt healing unless they have a surplus of vitality to spare, over and above what may be needed to carry themselves through their round of duties and keep their systems well up to tone. Otherwise they would soon break down and become themselves invalids. (*The Theosophist*, April 1883)

When unconscious exchange of vitality takes place we have no control, except to avoid coming in close contact with such a person who, is shown by experience, to drain us of our vitality.

At a simple level, an older person may feel, mentally and physically fatigued after interaction with an *extremely vivacious* younger person.

TIME is the moving image of eternity.

—PLATO

Why is everyone so angry? If we look around us we come to the conclusion that the world is getting angrier and angrier. These days, there are plenty of books on the cause and cure of anger. Do they indicate growing level of anger in the world or just a greater interest in the topic? For instance, a study conducted by the American Automobile Association Foundation for Traffic Safety showed an increase in road rage incidents since 1990s and described it as "an epidemic of aggressive driving." However, in an article published in *Atlantic Monthly*, Michael Fumento suggested that what was reported to be an increase in incidents of road rage was the result of *increased awareness*, as in the past such incidents never got reported. Are the statistics on assaults, murders, etc., indicators of rising anger in the world? We seem to get "mad" about trifling matters. Domestic violence is a cause for concern. "Is there something in the way we live our lives—maybe the frantic pace we set, may be our relentless emphasis on personal fulfilment—that is bringing our rage to the surface?" asks Andrew Santella. (*Utne Reader*, November-December, 2007)

Anger is one of the seven deadly sins. On closer analysis we find that it is not at all in our interest to be angry because at the end of an angry outburst, we are only left with hurt feelings, probably violent ones, but never with the solution to our problem. The great paradox of anger is that often, it can fuel our drive to achieve, help us maintain our self-respect and stop the world from walking all over us. In 1982, Carol Tavris described anger as "misunderstood emotion," suggesting more subtle and complex approach to anger. Some of us complain about things and people that seem to provoke our anger. But then how to explain the anger of fourth century hermit, Abbot Ammonas, who lived in a remote and desolate region of Egypt and ceaselessly prayed to be delivered from his anger? What exactly does a hermit have to get angry about? In the end, there is one thing we cannot escape from, our own angry self, writes Santella.

Gita teaches that anger leads to delusion and finally to the loss of discrimination and loss of all. Anger is the second link in the chain of causation. *Gita* shows how attending to the inclinations of the senses produces concern and that in turn produces passion, and from passion is

produced anger. Thus, the root-cause of anger is *Desire*. At the present, the desire nature is uppermost, as is seen in the increasing consumerism, ambition, sexual perversion, competition, etc. We have placed our little self at the centre of the universe, wanting everything else to arrange so as to suit our needs and fancy. 'Accept the woes of birth,' says *The Voice of the Silence*. When we fail to accept what life brings us—people and circumstances—we grumble and complain. Anger and violence are only the more marked ways of displaying non-acceptance. Mr. Judge's advice is to "sit on small irritations," so that the bigger ones will not have occasion to arise. There is no such thing as righteous indignation. Let us learn to *act* from within instead of *reacting* to the stimuli from outside. "Let a man overcome anger by gentleness," teaches Buddha. There is also the advice to "resist without resisting," or nonviolent non-cooperation. Often, learning to forgive is the best antidote to anger. "Do not judge in anger, for though the anger passes the judgment remains."

Doctors are studying two people, Brad Williams and a woman (called AJ), who can recall the most trifling dates and details about their lives, hoping to achieve deeper understanding of memory. Once you name a date from the last forty years to Williams, he is able to tell, after a few moments, what he did that day and what was in the news. Doctors say that they know this person is carrying all the information with him all the time, but they do not know *how he recalls* the same. As for the woman, when she hears a date, memories from that date in previous years flood her mind like running movies.

She describes the phenomenon as nonstop, uncontrollable and totally exhausting, and finds it a burden rather than a gift. "I run my entire life through my head every day and it drives me crazy," she laments. There are examples of people who could memorize series of 100 or more random letters and digits or reproduce these verbatim, or even the contents of a book after reading it twice. However, the memory of these two persons is unique, described as "superior autobiographical memory"—an above-average ability to remember dates and events from the distant past. (*Sunday Times of India*, February 24, 2008)

H.P.B. describes memory as the despair of the materialist, the enigma of the psychologist and the sphinx of science. Scientists and psychologists are unable to understand the nature of memory because of their inability to understand the nature of mind, and potentialities of Higher Mind. Astral Light is the tablet or storehouse of the unseen universe, where every fleeting impression, feeling, thought and action, as every pulsation of the visible cosmos, is recorded. Memory, says H.P.B., is that power which every human being unconsciously exercises, to look with inner sight into the astral light and there see the images of past sensations and impressions. In other words, memory is unconscious looking into and reading the impressions in the astral light. But there is also "soul memory," possessed by perfected beings, which enables recalling experiences of all past lives. Mercifully, a veil seems to separate our present from the past, and prevents our looking into the past.

How far does our appearance affect our moods, behaviour, self-esteem and self-confidence? Jeremy Bailenson and Nick Yee of Stanford University studied the effect of altering one's appearance. They used avatars, *i.e.*, digital representations of players in such games as Second Life, and assigned it to volunteers for the study. These avatars ranged from attractive to plain. Using a virtual-reality, headset, when the volunteers—actually

their avatars—interacted with other avatars, it was discovered that attractive avatars had greater self-confidence, and feeling attractive increased self-esteem and hence friendliness. The researchers found that the effect of "appearance behaviour" was carried from the virtual world to the real one, with intriguing consequences. After their virtual reality session, when volunteers were asked to pick photos from an online dating site and asked to pick those who "would be interested in you," those who were assigned attractive avatars picked more attractive candidates than those who were assigned homely or plain avatars. This, in spite of the fact that both classes were on equal footing in real life. "Your physical appearance changes how people treat you. But independent of that, when you perceive yourself in a certain way, you act differently," says Bailenson. It is one of life's inequalities that the world sees attractive people as possessing a long list of desirable traits, including honesty, generosity and kindness. The goal of the research is not to show that if you create hot, young, powerful avatar, you will have more money, virtual friends, power, etc., but serves a therapeutic purpose, by helping those with social phobia to become more confident and friendly. It was also found that those who played powerful avatars were more aggressive after they played the game and similarly those, whose avatars wore doctor's coat, became friendlier in real life. The potential of the virtual world affecting the real world seems impressive, knowing that there are online players who spend, on average, 20 hours a week as their avatars, writes Sharon Begley. (*Newsweek*, February 25, 2008)

What the modern world calls playing "avatars" on computers is akin to people playing various "roles" in dramas or movies and then identifying themselves with those roles. Our civilization is built on appearances. In our society, anything that would achieve success has to be built on *appearances*, not on *reality*; on *self-assertion*, not on *intrinsic value*, writes H.P.B. It is unfortunate that we are unable to look beyond the personality, and we tend to judge the inner worth of a person by his outer appearance. The word "personality" is derived from *persona* or mask, which hides the real person *i.e.*, our body, ideas, feelings, education, etc. This derived sense of self or "Individuality." We tend to derive our sense of self from what we are not,

could be extremely fragile, requiring continual maintenance, nurturing and defending. For instance, when we derive our sense of identity from our appearance, we may work towards improving and maintaining an attractive appearance. We may go to any length to look beautiful. Instead of being guided by world's reactions, it is better to direct our efforts and energies at improving our inner character. Let the world realize that appearances are deceptive.

Zero is of symbolic importance to both physical and spiritual worlds—as an atom is to the physical world and *Atman* to the spiritual world. The brilliant mathematicians of ancient India transformed an abstract concept into a numeral—a symbol called zero—and revolutionized the number system. In a way, zero is a symbol that defines nothingness. Zero has been used to describe mystical concepts in philosophy. In Hindi, zero is called *shunya*, meaning void, the supreme state of awareness where everything comes to nothingness. It is *Nirvana*, where the soul is restored to its original state, free from all impressions, influences and impurities of the earthly life. Further:

Zero looks like an elliptical circle representing infinity—the eternal cycle of creation. Everything returns to zero or nothingness before being created anew. Hence most spiritual orders emphasise on attaining the zero state, *i.e.*, emptying the mind of all worldly thoughts and detaching from the awareness of physical body in order to attain liberation and peace....In its original state every soul is like a zero—it has no worldly identity or role but like a seed it has infinite power and qualities merged within, which manifest when the soul enters the field of Karma in this world....Any number multiplied by zero gives zero while any number divided by

zero gives infinity. Interestingly, when we add zero after a number, its value grows ten times. These specialities can be ascribed to God, who remains unchanged in the cycle of eternity. He does not enjoy the fruits of karma and nothing can be added or subtracted...from His powers. (*Purity*, February 2008)

Zero or cipher or circle is the Arabic "cifron," meaning empty, and is derived from Indian *Shunya*. The circle or disk represents Kosmos in Eternity, while the point in the disk or circle symbolizes the dawn of differentiation. During the process of manifestation, when the universe comes into existence, it is as a result of differentiation of matter on various planes. At the time of dissolution everything is said to merge back into *Laya* state or changeless and undifferentiated state or *Zero-point*, where all differentiation ceases. The concept of void or nothingness represented by zero does not imply emptiness. For instance, *Nirvana* does not mean annihilation, because one who enters *Nirvana* loses his objective existence, but retains subjective being. To objective minds this seems as becoming absolute "nothing"; to subjective perception, it is "No-thing," *i.e.*, nothing to be displayed to the senses, explains H.P.B. Similarly, the ever-incognizable Deity is "void" only to the finite minds. *The Voice of the Silence* asks us to study "the voidness of the seeming full, the fulness of the seeming void."

WHAT is purification but the separation of the soul from the body...the habit of the soul gathering and collecting herself into herself from all sides out of the body; the dwelling in her own place alone, as in another life, so also in this, as far as she can.

—PLATO