

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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### ACTION AND INACTION

Even sages have been deluded as to what is action and what inaction; therefore I shall explain to thee what is action by a knowledge of which thou shalt be liberated from evil.

—Gita (IV, 16)

THE SUBJECT of Karma or “action” is the most difficult. The general understanding is that action is what we perform with our body, while complete cessation of bodily movement implies inactivity or inaction. The scriptures or *Shastras* have divided action into two categories: Karma (actions to be done), which are creative and constructive actions, and *Vi-karma* (actions to be avoided), or destructive and forbidden actions. Actions to be done are further subdivided into *Nitya karma* (daily duties), *Naimittika karma* (duties to be performed on special occasions) and *kamya karma* (actions performed with the intention of obtaining desirable reward or result). In spite of such detailed explanation and classification of action into good and bad, Shri Krishna admits, “The path of action is obscure. That man who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men.”

It is the motive with which the action is performed that determines whether the act was noble or not. It would be a folly to categorize action as good or bad, based on appearances, without taking into account the motive, the degree of development and knowledge of

the person. There are useless sacrifices, which H.P.B. describes as “crime of folly”. She gives the example of Saint Labro who sacrificed his body for forty years only to benefit the vermin, which it bred. Likewise, one may give out large sums of money to earn merit (*punya*) or with the intention of gaining name and fame, or give money to a wrong person at the wrong time. Thus, even a perfectly good-intentioned action may end up bringing about harm. It is essential to learn *right performance of action*, because that gives a clue to the real meaning of “inaction,” or renunciation of action.

The Buddhist concept of *samyak vyayama* or “Perfect Effort”—one of the steps on the Noble Eightfold Path—comes very close to the concept of right action. “Perfect Effort” is linked to *conscious* evolution of man. A spiritual aspirant must engage in Four Exertions, viz., *preventing, eradicating, developing* and *maintaining*. The effort is to be made at mind-level, and it consists in *preventing* the arising in one’s mind of the unwholesome thoughts that have not yet arisen; *eradicating* the unwholesome thoughts that have already arisen. *Developing* or cultivating within our minds wholesome thoughts and feelings which are not already there; *maintaining* within our minds wholesome thoughts and feelings which already exist. Most of us are consumed by restlessness, anxiety and haste, and experience very little peace and calm. Those who appear to be active and busy are merely restless, while those who seem to be calm and peaceful are stagnating, observes Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher. There are times when we need to act, instead of being passive for the fear of causing disturbance. “Peace with stagnation partakes of the nature of what is called in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Tamogunam*, or of the quality of darkness,” writes Mr. Judge. Inaction is not laziness or sloth. Action is better than such inaction. It is always possible to make errors of judgment while acting, and yet, action is better than inaction, because error in judgment is considered a lesser evil than peace resulting from *indifference* and *sloth*. “Out of the turmoil and the strife of an apparently untamed life may arise one who is a warrior for Truth.” Also, “Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in

a deadly sin,” says *The Voice of the Silence*. To ignore the suffering of another by saying, “it is his karma!” is gross misunderstanding of the doctrine of Karma. If a person comes to us asking for money, or seeking solace, or to solve a legal or moral problem, then it is our duty to help. But we are also cautioned, “When in doubt, abstain,” primarily, because if we do not have perfect knowledge of the act we are about to perform, we might produce hindrance instead of help.

In the Third Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna tells Arjuna that it is not possible for any person to give up actions. “No man resteth a moment inactive.” Nor is it possible to obtain happiness by total abandonment of actions. In India, especially, some people mistakenly believe that to help anyone, or take another’s help, is to get involved and create a tie with that person, which in turn means having to be born again, instead of obtaining the desired freedom from the round of births and deaths. One who keeps calculating as to the way by which he would not be bound by Karma may be called “a false pietist of bewildered soul.”

Distinguishing between action and inaction is very difficult. Inaction, as the state of actionlessness, is impossible. Even if we are inactive at *bodily* level, we are active on the *mental* plane. It is crucial to grasp the true meaning of inaction or actionless state for the right understanding of *karma-sanyasa yoga* or renunciation of action. Many seekers have abandoned action, hoping to gain salvation. There are a great number of ascetics who remain inert, because renunciation of action is interpreted to mean complete abandonment of action. Some renounce the world and seek refuge in monasteries, *ashrams* or mountain tops, deserting duties of life. The fact is that it is difficult to attain true renunciation of action without right performance of action. When a seeker renounces action, literally, by remaining inert or by shirking his duties, life after life, sooner or later he comes to realize that real meaning of the renunciation of action is that he must continue to perform the actions, but renounce desire and concern for the results, as also the feeling of doership

(*kartabhav*). There is bodily action but with *inward* detachment. It is explained by the analogy of light from a projector which causes projection of all the pictures on the screen, and yet it remains unaffected by various scenes of comedies or tragedies appearing on the screen. So also, the Self within is the cause of all actions, and yet, it is neither affected by nor involved in these acts. A self-realized person, or a *Jnani*, who is identified with the Self within, takes up the position of a witness or an observer.

Thus, even in ordinary activities like sleeping, breathing, speaking, etc., the attitude of a sage is, “the qualities act in the qualities,” or “the senses move among the sense-objects,” but Self within is not the actor. There is the story of a sage who ate food with the *gopis* (shepherdesses) on the river bank, and when the *gopis* said that they wanted to go to the other side of the river, the sage moved his hand over his stomach and said that if he had not eaten any food the river should part and make way for the *gopis*. The *gopis* were surprised, as the sage had eaten food with them. The sage explained that the food was offered to the fires in the stomach, hence, “I have not eaten the food.”

Forbearance is another form of inaction. To forbear means to desist or abstain. It spells restraint and self-control. Forbearance involves checking a hasty conclusion, decision or action and hence deliberation before acting. Moreover, it is the ability to remain passive or silent if that is what the situation demands. For instance, we are more interested in talking than in listening to others. Mr. Judge suggests that when a person has finished narrating his experiences, we must try to suppress in us the desire to tell him about our experiences and opinions. If we keep up the practice, we shall be gradually led to realize the meaning of the saying, “Man, know thyself.”

An important concept in Lao Tzu’s philosophy is that of *wu-wei* which means “without doing,” or “absence of action.” Yet, “*wu-wei* is not an ideal of absolute inaction; on the contrary, it is a particular efficacious attitude since it makes all doing possible,” writes Max

Kaltenmark. There seem to be at least four different implications of *wu-wei* or the “Doctrine of Inaction.” Firstly, it implies the Law of Least Effort. We are asked to flow along with the Tao, *i.e.*, to accept the consequences of our Karma. Surrender the personal will to the divine will and you can achieve things with minimum effort. Secondly, the doctrine of inaction seems to imply non-interference. In practising the principle of *wu-wei*, the Taoist merely imitates the Tao. For it is said, “Tao is eternally inactive, and yet it leaves nothing undone. If kings and princes could but hold fast to this principle, all things would work out their own reformation.” (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 107). Spontaneity is another name for Tao, and hence everything in the universe happens without any particular kind of intervention. When the ruler follows the principle of inaction, it makes for ideal government. In its third aspect, the doctrine of inaction advocates “resist without resisting.” How should we deal with our opponents? Resist without resisting is the plan of quiet passive resistance. Retreat within your own heart and there keep firmly still. Says Lao Tzu:

The best soldiers are not warlike; the best fighters do not lose their temper. The greatest conquerors are those who overcome their enemies without strife...This is called the Virtue of not striving. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 115)

There is a Chinese story told by Dr. Lin Yutang. There was a man who used to raise fighting cocks for the king. After ten days had passed, the king asked if his cock was ready for a fight. “Not yet,” replied the man, “the cock is still very impulsive and haughty.”

After another ten days the king asked again and the reply was, “Not yet. He still reacts to noises and shadows.” After another ten days had passed, the king asked again, and this time the reply was, “Not yet. His eyes still have an angry look, and he is full of fight.” After another ten days, the man said, “He is about ready. When he hears other cocks crow, he does not even react. You look at him and

he appears to be a wooden cock. His character is whole now. No other cock will dare to fight him but will run away at first sight.”

When a person develops inner strength, inner integrity, total harmlessness, and therefore, total absence of provocation, he is able to subdue his opponent without effort. Says Lao Tzu: “The softest things in the world override the hardest. That which has no substance enters where there is no crevice. Hence I know the advantage of inaction.”

Do you know what it is to resist without resistance? That means, among other things, that too much expenditure of strength, of “fortitude,” is not wise. If one fights, then one is drawn into the swirl of events and thoughts, instead of leaning back on the great ocean of the Self that is never moved, says Mr. Judge.

Lastly, the doctrine of inaction seems to suggest that although inactive physically, all things are possible to one who is active on the inner planes. On the other hand, when one is “inactive” or calm on the inner planes, one is able to accomplish more. *The Voice of the Silence* says, “Thy body agitated, thy mind tranquil, thy soul as limpid as the mountain lake.” A mother is seen to be active physically, giving breakfast to the child, then running around to find her husband’s towel and also taking care of the milk on the gas, and answering the doorbell, and so on. Though outwardly “agitated,” she is calm within and hence able to perform so many tasks at once.

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MENTION is made of two classes of yogis: the hidden and the known. Those who have renounced the world are “known” yogis: all recognize them. But the “hidden” yogis live in the world. They are not known. They are like the maid-servant who performs her duties in the house but whose mind is fixed on her children in the country.

—Sri RAMAKRISHNA PARAMHANSA

## H.P.B.—THE GREAT SACRIFICER

*Adhiyajna* [the Great Sacrifice] is myself in this body.

—(*Gita*, VIII)

THIS YEAR, on May 8, the Theosophical world will commemorate, what is known as White Lotus Day. It is the day on which, each year, students of Theosophy renew their resolve to dedicate themselves to the Great Work which their Leader and Teacher (H.P.B.) initiated and which she left behind when she cast of her body of flesh and blood, on the 8th of May, 1891. White Lotus Day this year marks the 120th anniversary of the passing of this greatest Theosophist of our age.

If it is possible, and without presumption, to epitomize the message brought to the world with the launching of the Theosophical Movement in 1875, it may be described as the message of self-sacrifice, and it was brought by one who had the supreme right to speak and to be heard. H.P.B. taught by precept and example that self-sacrifice is not one of the adornments of life, but that it is life itself. In the light of that philosophy we know that human evolution, the purpose of which may be summed up as the discovery of the Self, is not alone through the conflict of blind forces or through the stresses of a ruthless necessity, but that it is guided, directed and sustained by sacrifice. In a hundred places is that lesson taught, and, if we have failed to receive it, the fault is not with the Teacher, who lived what she taught, but with ourselves, and to our own loss.

From the dawn of cosmic existence the note of self-sacrifice is always dominant and sustained. In *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 208) we are told of the Solitary Watcher who is *the* “Initiator” called the “Great Sacrifice.”

For, sitting at the Threshold of LIGHT, he looks into it from within the circle of Darkness, which he will not cross; nor will he quit his post till the last day of this life-cycle. Why does the solitary Watcher remain at his self-chosen

post?...Because the lonely, sore-footed pilgrims on their way back to their *home* are never sure to the last moment of not losing their way in this limitless desert of illusion and matter called Earth-Life. Because he would fain show the way to that region of freedom and light, from which he is a voluntary exile himself, to every prisoner who has succeeded in liberating himself from the bonds of flesh and illusion. Because, in short, he has sacrificed himself for the sake of mankind, though but a few Elect may profit by the GREAT SACRIFICE.

Elsewhere, and selecting almost at random—so continuously does the same idea recur—we learn that it is through the voluntary sacrifice of the Fiery Angles that men became endowed with self-consciousness and with the power to reach the Haven of Heavenly Divine Peace:

Tradition shows that celestial *Yogis* offering themselves as voluntary victims in order to redeem Humanity—created god-like and perfect at first—and to endow him with human affections and aspirations. To do this they had to give up their natural status and, descending on our globe, take up their abode on it for the whole cycle of the Mahayuga, thus exchanging their impersonal individualities for individual personalities—the bliss of sidereal existence for the curse of terrestrial life. (*S.D.*, II, 246)

This archetypal sacrifice gave the impulse to a vast hierarchy of Christs, Buddhas, Masters, Arhats, Adepts, united for ever in aim, purpose and teaching. All of them came with the same message, the same teaching, the same insistence upon brotherhood, sacrifice, compassion, the same assurance of a vaster knowledge awaiting those who dare to claim it. It is the selfsame Fraternity of Great Souls, to which all the previous Saviours of mankind belonged, that “sent” H.P.B. in the last quarter of the 19th century to reiterate the Ageless Wisdom. What could have induced the founders of the Theosophical Movement to

sacrifice to it all comfort, all worldly prosperity, and success, even to their good name and reputation—aye, even to their honour—to receive in return incessant ceaseless obloquy, relentless persecution, untiring slander, constant ingratitude, and misunderstanding of their best efforts, blows, and buffets from all sides—when by simply dropping their work they would find themselves immediately released from every responsibility, shielded from every further attack.

Is the price any less today? Or is it paid, without heroics and without resentment, by each one who *stands* for Theosophy impersonally, fearlessly, and wholly? Theosophy, as it permeates the life of a man, withers all desire for personal profit, material comfort, or private “spiritual gain.” The Theosophist has no rights to claim; he has only duties to discharge, and discharging them with knowledge and responsibility he finds the Path of Sacrifice opening in front of him. “There is no duty nobler than self-sacrifice,” H.P.B. taught.

What better preparation for White Lotus Day than to take this teaching to heart; to resolve to banish all thought of rights and to remember, not what is due to us from others, but what is due to others from us? For in that remembrance are enshrined the opportunities, which can take us near to the Path of Sacrifice, the Path which H.P.B. showed.

As the years roll on we must look forward to the return of the cycle, which will bring in our midst once again a Teacher who will give the necessary directions, strike the necessary keynote, and bring the necessary impetus. Till then, with the Message that she left behind, the token that is in her Books, the Work to which she dedicated her life, we must go forward in our task of study, application and promulgation in a spirit of sacrifice—a reflection in the mundane world of the Great Sacrifice of the Heavenly Host.

## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

## THE SELF—II

2. *Let each man first establish himself in the way he should go and then let him teach others. Thus, the wise man will not suffer. (158)*

3. *Let each man shape himself, ere he teaches others. Subduing himself well he might indeed subdue others. Very difficult is the subduing of the self. (159)*

SPIRITUAL discipline involves study, application and promulgation. Mere desire to become spiritual or desire to benefit humanity is not enough. One must also have the right knowledge as a basis for living the spiritual life. “Good motive without knowledge makes sorry work sometimes. All down the ages there is a record of good motive, but power and zeal misused, for want of knowledge. Theosophy is the path of knowledge. It was given out in order, among other things, that good motive and wisdom might go hand in hand,” writes Mr. Crosbie in *The Friendly Philosopher*. “Right views” or *samyak drsti* is the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path. Wrong views or *mithyadrsti* about the self and the world is the root cause of our suffering and, therefore, the first step is to acquire right knowledge as contained in the four noble truths of the Buddha. These truths can lead us to the goal or *Nirvana*. The next step is to use this knowledge to shape ourselves before teaching it to others. A person who does not practice what he preaches is only an armchair philosopher. But when the knowledge is assimilated by applying it to daily life, it becomes part of his nature—it is internalized. Until then, his words are like the flower without fragrance. Only when a man has passed through the fire of trials and temptations does he know what it is to conquer oneself.

*Light on the Path* makes an occult statement that if a man demands to become a neophyte (disciple), he at once becomes a servant. He must be like the Masters who served him by allowing Their knowledge to touch him. Therefore, his first act of service is to find

someone who knows still less than himself and “let him hear the Law.” There is no pride or display of knowledge involved here.

One can succeed in teaching and improving others by setting an example. Also, we can never be effective if we have not tried to practice what we preach. It is only theoretical knowledge; and is likely to fail in touching the *hearts* of others. When a mother brought her child to Gandhiji and asked him to reprimand her son for eating too many sweets, Gandhiji asked her to bring the child after 20 days, because he himself was quite fond of sweets and needed to practice restraint before he could reprimand the child. When you have fought a vice and struggled to overcome it, you know the difficulties involved. It is said that a spiritual man knows more about evil than the evil man. This is because the evil man succumbs to evil, while the spiritual man has resisted it, at all its subtle levels. Moreover, when you have undergone that experience yourself, there is conviction when you speak about it. In the *Preface to The Ocean of Theosophy*, Mr. Judge writes: “The tone of settled conviction which may be thought to pervade the chapters is not the result of dogmatism or conceit, but flows from knowledge based upon evidence and experience.”

4. *The Self is the Lord of self; what higher Lord could there be? When a man subdues well his self, he will find a Lord very difficult to find. (160)*

5. *The evil done by oneself, born of oneself, produced by oneself, crushes the fool even as the diamond breaks a hard precious stone. (161)*

6. *Maluva creeper entwines a sala tree; just so, he of evil nature; his impiety reduces himself to the state his enemy wishes for him. (162)*

Buddhism teaches conquest of self. In the canto of “The Thousands” we have: “Better than a man who conquers in battles a thousand times a thousand men is he who conquers himself.” In the canto of “The Bhikkhu” we have: “Rouse your self by your Self, examine your self by your Self. For Self is the lord of self; Self is

the refuge of self; therefore curb yourself, even as a merchant curbs a fine horse.” These verses indicate the presence of two “self” in us—the personal self and the spiritual Self. Mr. Crosbie observes that if we think ourselves to be the personality then we tend to say: “I am happy, or I am sad,” “I am sick or I am well,” “I am contented or I am dissatisfied.” We should understand that the self-identifying attachment is chiefly concerned with the present form and conditions, although we are aware that other forms and conditions have existed in the past, to which we were attached by like or dislike and that still others will exist in the future. Passing through all the changes of the past, present and future, “we” remain unchanged and unchanging. This unchanging Self is called in the *Gita*, the Perceiver, the Knower and the Witness. If a person is able to realize his real Self, he becomes a perfected being.

The Higher Self in man cannot act directly on this plane. It has to work through the lower self. The lower self is like the ambassador of the higher Self. Unfortunately, when it functions through the body, it forgets its role as the ambassador of the higher Self. We can imagine what would happen if the ambassador of a country living in the foreign land forgets his role as the ambassador and acts as he pleases; he would fail to represent and protect the interest of his country. Something of this nature happens when we are born. We forget our divine Self and think that we are the personality. We think that we are our body, our qualification and status, our likes and dislikes, our mental and emotional nature, our strengths and weaknesses, and so on. So engrossed are we with the personal life that there is hardly any thought for the divine Self. The personal self squanders away the power entrusted to it by the higher Self and brings about its own ruin. Identifying himself with his personal self, he thinks himself to be separate from other people and becomes self-centered and selfish.

The sin of separateness ruins the man as a diamond breaks a hard precious stone. The diamond can be used to cut and shape other raw but precious stone, or even crush it. Similarly, the power

flowing from the Spiritual Self may be used by the personal self to refine the good qualities and finer aspects of our nature or destroy them. Un-checked, the passions and vices grow and ultimately destroy the man as the *Maluva* creeper destroys a *Sala* tree on which it grows. The real meaning of the doctrine of vicarious atonement is that the Divine Nature or Individuality, the parent, suffers for the transgressions and misdeeds of the child, the personality. For, at death, when the personality is gone, the Karmic focus or the responsibility is shifted to the Individuality. In other words, though during life, the higher and lower egos are distinct, at death, in reuniting with the parent Ego, the lower self fastens upon and impresses upon it all its bad and good actions, so both have to suffer. The Higher Ego though pure and innocent, has to bear the punishment for the misdeeds committed by the lower self, together with it in their future incarnation.

7. *Easy it is to do evil; deeds which are harmful to oneself come easy. Exceedingly hard it is to do that which is beneficial and good. (163)*

8. *The foolish man reviles the teachings of the holy ones, the noble and the virtuous; he follows false doctrines which bear fruit to his own destruction, even like the fruit of the Kathaka reed. (164)*

The above verses describe the state and fate of the evil and the foolish. Evil tendencies begin with small acts of selfishness and grow steadily, if left unchecked, until at last, the person becomes of evil nature. For an evil person, acts which are evil and therefore harmful to himself come easy. It is very hard for him to do that which is beneficent and good. The Buddha is said to have uttered the verse 163 when Devadatta attempted to create a split among the priesthood. He said that what is good is easy of performance by one who is good, but difficult by one who is bad; what is bad is easy of performance by one who is bad, but difficult by those who are righteous. A very good man (Yudhisthira) said he could not find a single bad man, while the bad man (Duryodhana) said he could not

find a single good man. We see things as we are and we do things according to our nature.

Seeking happiness is considered natural and legitimate within certain limits by the society and the state. The trouble starts when we overstep the boundary and seek our happiness at the cost of others. Something higher and noble within our nature, urges us not to be indifferent, harmful or cruel in our pursuit of pleasures, and choose that which is good for many. But our personal self, overrides the advice and chooses that which is for our own benefit. This tendency gets added strength by the example of similar acts of selfishness of other people and also by the images of evil deeds of millions of men impressed in the astral light, acting as a hypnotizing agent. For the average man it is now easy to do evil, because, individually and collectively, we have been making wrong choices and have set up wrong tendencies. The very first time a good person decided to steal or lie or slander, it must have been quite an effort. But slowly the “voice of conscience” is silenced and killed and a tendency is set up, just as we form bad habit. The power of habit is due to repetition. If you detect evil and do not check it, you become fond of it and begin to make allowances.

The difficulty is further increased by the false doctrines which cater to the desires of the personal man. If a man believes that one’s sins can be washed away by bathing in the Ganges or by confessing to the priest or by making an offering to the God or by dispensing charity from the surplus, the foolish man then rejects the true teachings of the Holy Ones which admonish him against doing evil. With wrong philosophy as a basis of life, the foolish create causes for their own destruction like the Katthaka reed. The Katthaka reed is said to either die after it has borne fruit or it is cut down for the fruit. Thus for Katthaka reed, fruit or fruition works to its own destruction. So it is with the foolish man who follows false doctrines; his ripened deeds become the cause of his own destruction.

*(To be concluded)*

## THE SYMBOLISM OF LIGHT, FIRE AND SUN

IN all religious philosophies light is used as the symbol of Deity. In fact light, fire and sun are synonymous symbolical terms. They are all symbols of Deity and Its numerous manifestations. The *Book of Genesis* begins its discourse on cosmic origin with a very poetic description that Darkness was on the face of the Deep, or the primordial waters of space, and that the spirit of God moved alone on them; and that, when God willed, Light issued from Darkness, heralding the beginning of the cosmic creation or evolution.

In the Laws of Manu the same idea is to be found in the first chapter which treats of the creation of the world. It says that the universe existed in the shape of Darkness; unperceived, destitute of distinctive marks, unknowable, wholly immersed, as it were, in deep sleep, and that the divine Self-Existent (*Swayambhu*) appeared with irresistible power, *dispelling darkness*. He placed his seed in the primordial waters, which he emanated from himself, which became a golden egg that *shone like the brilliancy of the sun*, and that from the refulgent egg (*Hiranyagarbha*) he himself was born as Brahma, the progenitor of the world. Here again, like in the *Book of Genesis*, we see darkness preceding light, and light is shown to be the first that appears in the progressive evolution of the universe.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Arjuna is reported to have beheld Deity whose splendour is likened to the radiance shed by a thousand suns rising together into the heavens (*Gita*, XI) and as a “mass of splendour, darting light on all sides, difficult to behold, shining in every direction with light immeasurable, like the burning fire or the glowing sun” (*Gita*, XI). We see that Deity is represented metaphorically as light, fire and the sun. We need to inquire into the meaning of these natural emblems.

What is light? Scientists say that what we call light is what is visible to us, humans. Visible light, they say, is only a small part of the wide spectrum of electromagnetic radiation which falls within the range of the sensation of sight of our visual organs. Outside of

the visual spectrum all is darkness to the ordinary human eye. But as there are creatures which cannot see in what we call light but are able to do so in the absence of our light, which we call darkness—and there are numerous instances of this observed by naturalists—and as there are many individuals who are able to see, in clairvoyant vision, things and scenes beyond the spectrum of what is called visible light, which is darkness to non-clairvoyants, it follows that light and darkness as we humans experience in our physical life are relative, and that the two are interchangeable. These considerations also underscore the fact that light is not only an objective physical phenomenon, as science believes, but is inextricably linked to subjective self or the observer in a mysterious way, and that it is much more than what physicists call light. Evidently, then, the “Light” and the “Darkness” spoken of by the ancient philosophers, are not the light and darkness that we know of, which is the object of modern scientific research, but something else and much more.

What then is the Light and Darkness of the ancient philosophers? A clue to the answer can be found in the *Gospel According to St. John*, in which it is said, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (Chap. 1, verse 4). In *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 70) the meaning of the verse is explained by a parenthetical paraphrasing of it as, “In him (in darkness) was life; and the life *was the light of men.*” The Teacher explains that Darkness here is not the “darkness” that we are familiar with, but of the condition of Kosmic Dissolution (Pralaya) at the end of its period of manifestation and activity. In that condition of universal dissolution there is neither anyone to perceive nor anything to be perceived, all having resolved into Infinite, Absolute Unknowable Mystery of Non-Being. As this Absolute Mystery is utterly beyond the comprehension of our finite minds, it is called Darkness—in the sense of being an impenetrable dark mystery to our minds.

The light, then, that is said to issue at the commencement of Kosmic awakening is the *Primordial Light* which issues from a source which is Unknowable Mystery, or “Darkness” to our minds,

though that Darkness is Absolute Life and Light in reality. As no attributes or functions can be predicated of the Absolute, IT cannot be said to be cognizant of finite and periodical appearances of things in IT. Hence the teaching, “And the light shineth in darkness and darkness comprehendeth it not.” (*John*, I:v)

What is the “Primordial Light” which first appears? It is the light of consciousness or life which lies concealed in the Unknown state of Absoluteness during the period of universal dissolution, and which radiates from IT as the first manifested or cognizable Light or Life, from which the universe evolves. This first manifested Primordial Light is the source and origin of light and life of all beings and of all things, which subsequently evolve from it. Hence there cannot be anything dead or “inorganic” in the whole universe because the ultimate groundwork of the universe is Consciousness or Spirit or Life, which is symbolized as Light. All and everything is essentially, in reality and truth, Spirit, life and consciousness. Consequently, there is that imperishable Primordial Divine Light at the core of every thing and every creature, however insignificant or obscure. We can call it Monad, meaning Unity, as it is essentially One, Eternal, indivisible and immortal. The whole Universe of Being is an expression or unfoldment, in different degrees and progressive stages, of this Primordial Light and Life, the Divine Monad.

In the apparently inert matter it is exhibited as laws of cohesion, disintegration, aggregation, physical and chemical action, etc.; in the plant, besides these, as vital activity and feeling; in the animal, a wider activity of the same coupled with instinctual desire; in man, in addition to all this, Manasic or Mind principle. It is this Mind-being, the Thinking Self, Man, who is the link between the animal nature below and the Divine Monad above, constituting the bridge between the two natures, animal and the divine, and partaking of the natures of both. It is this Divine Light that shines in the depths of human consciousness which St. John refers to as “the life was the light of men.”

Fire is another natural symbol of Deity, and though a very

commonplace phenomenon, fire is indeed a mystery. All that science is able to say is that fire is the rapid oxidation of material in chemical process of combustion releasing heat, light and various other products. Nothing is known of its true nature. Theosophy teaches that Fire is the most mystic of the five elements and the most divine. Fire on our plane of life is the unadulterated direct reflection of universal Deity, *Agni*. Hence fire is held in all ancient cultures of the world as the most sacred, and worshipped. We need to inquire into the rationale of the Fire symbol.

Life and consciousness are inconceivable without change, activity, energy—in short, Motion. The universe is perpetual motion. The first manifestation of the universe is Primordial Cosmic Motion, which potentially contains in itself all the subsequent innumerable correlations of forces which differentiate from it, which in the aggregate go to constitute the living dynamic evolving universe. This Cosmic Motion which is One is symbolized by Fire, *Agni*. When the universe reaches the end of its life of activity, all the forces are resolved into the Primordial One Fire, which, in turn, disappears into the Unknown Absolute, which is Absolute Abstract Motion, symbolized as the Dark Fire, Dark because unknowable. Fire, therefore, pervades everything, is in everything and everything essentially is Fire.

Sun, is another natural emblem of Deity, and it is inseparable from Fire and Light. Like the natural phenomena of Fire and Light, little is known of the Sun also. Science has many theories about the nature of the Sun and the solar phenomena. But nothing definite is known. The true nature of the all-pervading Fire and of the Sun is hinted at in the following teaching of *The Secret Doctrine*:

The Spirit, beyond manifested Nature, is the fiery BREATH in its absolute Unity. In the manifested Universe, it is the Central Spiritual Sun, the electric Fire of all Life. In our System it is the visible Sun, the Spirit of Nature, the terrestrial god. And in, on, and around the Earth, the fiery spirit thereof—*air*, fluidic fire; *water*, the liquid fire; the

*Earth*, the solid fire. All is fire—*ignis*, in its ultimate constitution, or the 1, the root of which is O (*nought*) in our conceptions, the All in nature and its mind. (II, 114)

Our visible Sun is then a reflection in space of the “Central Spiritual Sun,” out of time and space, in which glows the primordial Divine Fire. Of the latter a hymn of the Rig Veda sings in glorious colours: “His radiance is undecaying, the intensely-shining, all-pervading, unceasing, undecaying rays of Agni desist not, neither night nor day” (*Isis*, I, 270). Rays of the Spiritual central Sun are the all-pervading, unceasing, undecaying rays of *Agni*, the eternal and boundless life-giver.

Theosophy teaches that there is no more light or heat in the sun than in the moon or in the myriad of stars that crowd space. Light, heat, electro-magnetic radiations, etc., are all correlations of forces arising out of the action of the seven vital mystical rays of the Sun which pervade the Solar system (*S.D.*, I, 515 fn.). Hence the ancients represented the Sun-God as riding in a chariot drawn by seven horses. Our visible Sun is the source of life energy which radiates from him, giving life and sustenance to everything in his system. But the Spiritual Sun, of whom our visible glowing orb is but a shadow, is the giver, sustainer and regulator of life spiritual in the inner world of Souls who are his radiations. The Spiritual Sun shines in the depths of our Spiritual Consciousness just as the physical Sun shines for our bodies. The former is the Divinity latent in every man. It is the goal of every human being to realize the truth and merge his self with the Divine Self from which he first radiated at the beginning of Cosmic evolution. If we were to be placed in Its presence unprepared, the Teacher says, we would be consumed both body and soul (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 234). Arjuna was not able to bear the awful sight and turned away. To prepare ourselves for the Spiritual Reunion through long course of experience and discipline in the school of life is the purpose of human existence.

There are two lights in us, as also two fires. First is the light of the senses and of the mind in this body sustained by the vital energy

(*Prana*) and the instinctual fire of animal passion (*Kama*) derived from the god of the visible world, the physical Sun (*S.D.* II, 105). It is the temporary mortal life of the personality. It is the lower light which is darkness. The second is the light that shines in us, unseen and unknown to us in our spiritual Heart; it is the Light of “the Central Spiritual Sun, the electric Fire of all Life.” It is the Light and Life Immortal, our only plank of salvation.

We fall into great error if we mistake the lower life and light, our physical existence, to be the end in itself. Such is the trend of life in the modern world. *The Voice of the Silence* warns us, “*Let not thy mind mistake the fires of lust that burn therein for sunlight of life.*” Life physical is but the vehicle of the Real Man, a Ray of the Spiritual Sun, our true Self, to serve whose Great Purpose we are here on earth, in this body. Our life has any meaning and value only to the extent that we assimilate our Divine Prototype in Heaven as much as possible in each life before the body dies. All the rest—by way of wealth, power, personal honours and enjoyments—which we might accomplish, vanish into thin air, leaving behind so much of Karmic debt which we will have to squarely meet and work out in pain when we have necessarily to be born again.

It is said that terrestrial fire burns to ashes the body of the ascetic, but the Fire of Spiritual Knowledge burns away the dross of his lower nature and gives him immortality. “‘Spiritual Fire’ alone makes of man a divine and perfect entity.” (*S.D.*, II, 105)

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A TRUE gentleman carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast...his great concern being to make everyone at their ease and at home....He is seldom prominent in conversation and never wearisome....He has no ears for slander or gossip....He never takes unfair advantage....He is patient, forbearing and resigned on philosophical principles.

—CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

## ZANONI—THE TRIALS OF OCCULT LIFE

### III

[Reprinted from *THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT*, Vol. XX, pp. 125-130, for May 1950.]

THE EVIL propensities common to oneself and one’s family, one’s nation, and humanity have to be conquered. The chela is aided by the noble qualities derived from each of these three. Seven elements enter into the consideration of the struggle with the Dweller of the Threshold. The three evil and the three noble tendencies mentioned, and our attitude to these six sets of effects of our past Karma.

Now, the Dweller of the story is objective, but as we saw it need not be so to every aspirant, being felt sometimes as, to use Mr. Judge’s phrase, “bad inclinations and discouraging thoughts.” But to those who have advanced very far, it is objective like as the apparition in the story. Its particular form will depend upon (besides one factor, which Mr. Judge does not name):

(1) the stage of development to which a chela has attained or is near attaining; (2) the mode of regarding elementals and the Dweller, peculiar to the chela or occultist...to the national, and to the family legends or religion; (3) which form, more or less monstrous or incongruous, would be the most frightful and overpowering to him at the critical period.

The Dweller is one elemental when the crisis comes at the very commencement of the chela’s or the occultist’s effort to elevate his own lower nature. The later he is waylaid on his path, the more numerous are the elementals of which the Dweller is composed.

So much for the Dweller of the Threshold. The precise conditions of its appearance and other implications may be studied with profit in Mr. Judge’s article “Living the Higher Life” which is published as *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 34*.

Before we close, some passages should be noted for their close parallelism to Theosophic thought. The first is on Karma and Free-

will:

Destiny is less inexorable than it appears. The resources of the great Ruler of the Universe are not so scanty and so stern as to deny men the divine privilege of free-will; all of us can carve out our own way; and God can make our very contradictions harmonize with his solemn ends. You have before you an option.

For “God,” read “Karma,” and it will answer well to the Theosophical conception. It has often been said from this platform that ideas rule the world. Zanoni repeats the doctrine in different phrases:

“The conduct of the individual can effect but a small circle beyond himself; the permanent good or evil that he works to others lies rather in the sentiments he can diffuse. His acts are limited and momentary, his sentiments may pervade the universe and inspire generations till the day of doom.”

The first of the ten propositions of psychology in *Isis Unveiled* is: “There is no miracle. Everything that happens is the result of Law.” Mejnour repeats the idea in saying, “Magic or science that violates Nature exists not; it is but the science by which nature can be controlled.”

Madame Blavatsky writes in *Isis Unveiled*:

A thorough familiarity with the occult faculties of everything existing in nature, visible as well as invisible; their mutual relations, attractions, and repulsions; the cause of these, traced to the *spiritual* principle which pervades and animates all things; the ability to furnish the best conditions for this principle to manifest itself, in other words a profound and exhaustive knowledge of natural law—this *was* and *is* the basis of magic.

Mejnour tells Glyndon in his first talk with him:

“Nature supplies the materials: they are around you in your daily walks. In the herbs that the beast devours and the chemist disdains to cull; in the elements from which matter in its meanest and its mightiest shapes is deduced; in the wide bosom of the air; in the black abysses of the earth; everywhere are given to mortals the resources and libraries of immortal lore. But...though all earth were carved over and inscribed with the letters of diviner knowledge, the characters would be valueless to him who does not pause to inquire the language and meditate the truth.”

The Theosophical teaching that the highest Teacher is to be found within is recalled by Mejnour’s statement in that same talk with Glyndon:

“The music of the fountain is heard in the soul *within*....Not in the knowledge of things without, but in the perfection of the soul within, lies the empire of man aspiring to be more than man.”

Of the need for purity in the aspirant to Occult Knowledge, Zanoni writes to Mejnour: “Rightly is it the fundamental decree of our order, that we must impart our secrets only to the pure.” And he tells Glyndon towards the tragic end of the story:

“In ages far remote—of a civilization far different from that which now merges the individual in the state—there existed men of ardent minds, and an intense desire of knowledge....In the earliest ages, Philosophy...dwelt amidst the wonders of the loftier creation; it sought to analyze the formation of matter—the essentials of the prevailing soul; to read the mysteries of the starry orbs; to dive into those depths of Nature in which Zoroaster is said by the schoolmen first to have discovered the arts which your ignorance classes under the name of magic....And if they sought, and at last discovered how, for the wings of the Spirit, all space might be annihilated, and while the body stood heavy and solid here, the freed *Idea* might wander from star to star,—if such

discoveries became in truth their own, the sublimest luxury of their knowledge was but this, to wonder, to venerate, and adore!....

“Think not, young visionary, that to those who nursed unholy thoughts...that dawning was vouchsafed. It could be given then, as now, only to the purest ecstasies of imagination and intellect, undistracted by the cares of a vulgar life, or the appetites of the common clay.”

And Mejnour writes in his letter dismissing Glyndon as unworthy of receiving occult knowledge:

...it needs a soul tempered and purified and raised not by external spells, but by its own sublimity and valour, to pass the threshold and disdain the foe...*Thou* one of us; thou a brother of the August Order; thou an Aspirant to the Stars that shine in the Shemaia of the Chaldean lore! The eagle can raise but the eaglet to the sun.

Of the basic Theosophical tenet of the omnipresence of Life, Mejnour tells Glyndon:

“Man is arrogant in proportion to his ignorance....The traveller looks upon the tree, and fancies its boughs were formed for his shelter in the summer sun, or his fuel in the winter frosts. But in each leaf of these boughs the Creator has made a world; it swarms with innumerable races. Each drop of the water in yon moat is an orb more populous than a kingdom is of men. Everywhere, then, in this immense design, science brings new life to light. Life is the one pervading principle, and even the thing that seems to die and putrify but engenders new life, and changes to fresh forms of matter...The law of the Great System forbids the waste even of an atom; it knows no spot where something of life does not breathe.”

Another telling statement is Mejnour’s to Glyndon, which the Theosophical teaching about real dreams confirms:

“In dreams commences all human knowledge; in dreams hovers over measureless space the first faint bridge between spirit and spirit—this world and the worlds beyond.”

There are numerous other passages scattered throughout the novel. The student who makes the journey will be rewarded with a rich harvest.

Now, we have applied two keys and seen some of the inner meanings of the novel. Many will still remain, for none can elucidate the mystery completely. To other minds, the novel will doubtless yield some other meanings. And it will be well worth the labour to make the attempt. It is a fascinating work of art, especially as it combines with beauty the wisdom of inspired ideas about the ways of those great luminous beings who watch over our fate even as Adon-Ai watches over Zanoni. We may prove unworthy of such angelic guardians, but when we strive to return to the path of light, their hand is always outstretched to help.

*(Concluded)*

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I REPRIMANDED my soul seven times!

The First time: when I attempted to exalt myself by exploiting the weak.

The Second time: when I feigned a limp before those who were crippled.

The Third time: when, given a choice, I elected the easy rather than the difficult.

The Fourth time: when I made a mistake, I consoled myself with the mistakes of others.

The Fifth time: when I was docile because of fear and then claimed to be strong in patience.

The Sixth time: when I held my garments upraised to avoid the mud of Life.

The Seventh time: when I stood in hymnal to God and considered the singing a virtue.

—KAHLIL GIBRAN

## 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:** What exactly is meant when we are asked to cultivate the “art of listening”?

**Answer:** We need to differentiate between *hearing* and *listening* just as we differentiate between *looking* and *seeing*—*seeing* goes deeper than *looking*. We look at things superficially, without noticing much, and sometimes the mind is so preoccupied with other things that we look without really *seeing* anything. The same holds good for hearing and listening. When we hear another person, his words reach our ears, but then we hear superficially. Often, we do not even hear him out *completely*. Some of us cannot wait for another to finish. We prejudge from his half sentence, what the other half sentence is likely to be. We ask a question but do not have enough patience to listen to the answer fully, and to enquire into its value.

We might train our mind to focus on what the other has to say. Some people are so attentive and fully concentrated that immediately after you have spoken two or three sentences, they can repeat them *verbatim*. This, however, is but first step in listening. Besides accurately getting the words of another, we must also accurately grasp and understand what those words convey. Even that is not all. Apart from the statement of facts, in most verbal interaction, it is important to listen with the heart. In perfect listening we need to submit both our mind and heart to the speaker or the writer, as the case may be. There is the incident of a girl who complained to her father about an elderly neighbour, who would repeat the same boring incidents from his life every time he met her. The father told the girl to first learn to hear him out patiently. Then after a few days he

asked her if she could accurately repeat what he had said. After the girl had mastered that, the father asked her to listen with her heart. It was only then that she ceased to complain, because when she listened with her heart, she could feel the loneliness and frustration hidden in those words.

Listening with the heart is very important because often hidden behind the irritable or angry speech of another, are pain and helplessness. Only when we listen with heart would we be ready to consider another person’s point of view. Most people have a tendency to self-opinionatedness that is hard to shake. Some are so used to hearing the echoes of their own opinions, that they do not like the voice, which contradicts them. They wish to impose only their own views upon others, but are careless about knowing another’s opinions. The tendency of not willing to hear for long another person’s views affects the acquiring of new ideas. “If you constantly tell others what you think, you are gaining nothing. For your experience and views are your own, well known to you. The repeated expression of them only serves to imprint them more strongly on your mind. You do not receive any of the new lights that other minds might cast upon your philosophy if you gave them the opportunity.”

There are occasions which require listening impersonally, without bringing in emotions. When you are to be the judge in the matter, you need to listen to both the parties impersonally and attentively. Likewise, words of praise or blame directed against oneself must pass through the filter of impersonality. Especially is this important when we are being criticized.

In perfect listening there must be surrender of one’s mind and heart. Uniformly we come across the instruction that he who desires to learn must listen. This patient and attentive hearing precedes practice. In the Pythagorean School, *Akoustikoi* or Hearers (*Shravakas*) were allowed after a period to become *Asketai* (*Shramanas*), Practitioners. In the Pythagorean School, initially, the person was not even allowed to ask questions, but only listen. We

see the same at our Theosophical Meetings. Those who attend the meetings with earnestness, move on from being listeners to the stage where they now question. That is because the person sees the importance of questioning, not only the philosophy, but also his own basis of thought and does not mind their stability crumbling.

A person can learn a lot by being a good and attentive listener, even if he does not study books. On the other hand, a student may study many books, but he may lack the capacity to listen if he becomes enamoured of his own learning and refuses to listen to others. Some of us are doers, who want to straightaway plunge into doing this or that work. The art of listening must be cultivated because it is the key to real study and real service. By being an attentive listener one can get behind the words and phrases and reach the underlying ideas. Only when we are in perfect attunement with another, at least temporarily, are we able to listen to another and not just hear the words. The art of listening is to cut away all the non-essentials till the idea stands out clearly, while at the same time paying due care to the actual words used. The next stage is to reclothe the idea in words which express it. It is evident that only if we have been attentive in listening, would we be able to express the ideas accurately, clothed in our own words. In the early days of Humanity, Truths were taught orally, and here the great need of accuracy is seen, because having heard, the teachings were studied and recorded. It was not the words that were recorded, but the ideas and these were recorded using symbolic language. As one progresses, one realizes that teachings are not going to be given in so many unmistakable words, but only hints are thrown. One has to listen carefully to catch the hints. A perfect listener catches the underlying spirit behind the spoken and written words, and is not slave to words, the dead-letter form of scriptures.

We would do well to contemplate on the perfect *Shravaka*, the patient, humble and resolute Listener, Arjuna, in his attitude to catch the Wisdom of Krishna amidst the din of the battlefield. He was not distracted by the blowing of the conches, neighing of the horses or

roaring of the elephants on the battlefield. “What Arjuna *saw* when his chariot stood between the two armies made him despondent; what he *heard* energized and inspired him to victory in the greatest of all wars,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

Mr. Judge goes a step forward and asks us to listen carefully to our *own* words and be aware of our tone, whether it is pleasing or repellent. If our feelings are kind and charitable, they will be reflected in our tone.

**Question:** What is the meaning of “I am,” “I am That,” and “I am that I am”? Are these terms related to BENESS?

**Answer:** Absolute is also called SAT or BENESS. H.P.B. points out that the term “existence” is not applicable to It. Existence comes from *ex* means “from,” or “out of,” and *sistere* means “to stand,” *i.e.*, something appearing which was not there before, having a beginning and an end. BENESS is an ideal term, which encompasses every possible thing. Just as “triangularity” would explain every possible triangle, and redness would cover every possible shade of red. Quite erroneously, Jehovah is considered to be none other than the Absolute. The Hebrew Jehovah was “I am.” But in reality, Jehovah is only the Third or Manifested Logos—Brahma of the Hindus, and Ormuzd of the Zoroastrians. And yet, *not different in its essence from the Absolute*, just as every individual is, explains H.P.B.

When Moses asked God, “When I will go unto children of Israel and tell them that God, your Father, has sent me and if they ask me your name, what should I tell them”? God said, “tell them that my name is ‘I am that I am,’” or “*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*,” used in the Hebrew Bible (*Exodus* 3:14). *Hayah* means “existed” or “was” in Hebrew. In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 538-539), H.P.B. gives out its interpretations by two different scholars. One scholar mentions that when Moses requests the Lord to show him his “glory,” the Lord tells him: “Thou canst not see my face... thou shalt see my *a’hoor*, my back...” *i.e.*, visible universe, or lower manifestations. “As a man still in flesh thou canst not see my invisible nature” (*Exodus*,

xxxiii, 18-23). Another scholar gives a numerical interpretation. The sum of the value of the letters of the word Moses is 345; while the value of “I am that I am,” or “*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*,” or AHYH ASHR AHYH, is  $21+501+21=543$ .

In Kaballah each letter is also a number. Thus A is 1, H is 5, Y is 10, H is 5. There being AHYH twice, it adds up to 42. The second word is A, 1; SH, 300; R, 200; making 501, which added to 42 gives 543 as the number of “I am that I am.” Now Moses by the same system makes 345 or the reverse of “I am that I am.” Thus, the value of Moses is 345 or reverse of God’s name, *i.e.*, 543. God wanted Moses to know him by his reverse, *i.e.*, by Moses himself. God says, “Thou canst not see my face,” but thou *shalt see my behind*, because *behind* or reverse of 543 is the *face* of 345. In the article, “Things Common to Christianity and Theosophy,” (*W.Q.J. Series No. 15*), Mr. Judge explains that *Parabrahm* is not to be known, and that Man is a small copy of God through which in some sense we may perceive God. The Brahmanical doctrine of the unapproachableness of *Parabrahmam*, is reflected in the story of *Exodus*, of God telling Moses that he could not see his face, and which to the profane is absurd.

In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 78), H.P.B. tells us that “Kalaham-sa” or “I am I” in the eternity of Time answers to the Biblical “I am that I am.” *Hamsa* is equal to *a-ham-sa* meaning “I am he”; while in still another way it will read “*So-ham*,” “he (is) I” or (*Sah* = “he” and *aham* = “I”). In this alone is contained the Universal mystery of the identity of god’s essence with man’s essence. There is an indissoluble union between Man and the Universe.

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I DO not believe that the deeper problems of living can ever be answered by the process of thought. I believe that life itself teaches us either patience with regard to them, or reveals to us possible solutions when our hearts are pressed close against duties and sorrows and experiences of all kinds.

—HAMILTON MABIE

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

In the year 2010, one hundred years after Leo Tolstoy’s death, an attempt was made to rehabilitate him. Intellectuals accused the Russian Orthodox Church of blacklisting a national hero. The Church had accused Tolstoy of helping to accelerate the rise of Bolsheviks. As a result, the anniversary of his death, on November 20, 1910, was not commemorated with much pomp and show. Mr. Sergei V. Stepashin, a former Prime Minister in Russian government, wrote to the head of Russian Orthodox Church, asking for forgiveness on behalf of Tolstoy, who was ex-communicated 110 years ago. Mr. Stepashin, in making an appeal to the Church to revisit its ruling, aimed at bringing about a change of attitude towards a person, who did a lot for Russian culture and language. The Church’s letter of response to Mr. Stepashin, published in a state-run newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, acknowledged Tolstoy’s “unforgettable beautiful works,” and said that the Russian Orthodox readers were allowed to say solitary prayers for him on the anniversary of his death. However, inside the Orthodox churches no candles could be burned for Tolstoy, because he “purposely used his great talent to destroy Russia’s traditional spiritual and social order.” And, as in the last century, much of the discussion surrounding the Tolstoy centennial was akin to gossip, write Ellen Barry and Sophia Kishkovsky (*The Indian Express*, January 5, 2011, courtesy *The New York Times*). Russians have put Tolstoy at the apex of the literary ladder, because of the radical philosophy he preached during early years of October Revolution, and for his works such as, *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*. Lenin described him as “the mirror of the Russian Revolution,” notwithstanding his pacifism and belief in God. In his writings, Tolstoy expressed his views and opposition against the Church, the police, the army, meat-eating, private property and all forms of violence, write Barry and Kishkovsky.

Count Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian nobleman, was a genius, a

true reformer, both in the religious and in the social sphere, who tried to elevate the masses through his writings. Commenting on the ideas of Leo Tolstoy on “The Science of Life,” H.P.B. writes, “How near his views are to the esoteric and philosophic teachings of higher Theosophy....He is one of those few *elect* who begin with intuition and end with *quasi*-omniscience.” Elsewhere H.P.B. states, “His whole life is an exemplar of Christ-like altruism and self-sacrifice,” and characterizes him as “the greatest psychologist” of the 19th century. When he was about 50 he underwent an inner turmoil which shaped him into a speculator, a thinker and a life-teacher. He discovered the real sense of the teachings of Christ and began to shape his life accordingly and to teach this real Christianity through his writings. As was to be expected, this brought him in conflict with the official standards of the Church and the laws of the State, so that he was labelled a “sinner,” and an “iconoclast,” and finally excommunicated in 1901.

“Count Leo N. Tolstoy does not believe in the Bible, the Church or the divinity of Christ; and yet no Christian surpasses him in the practical bearing out of the principles alleged to have been preached on the Mount,” wrote H.P.B. Tolstoy’s ideas on education are in agreement with the Theosophical ideas. To Tolstoy, the training of the inner nature was always more important than the acquiring of university degrees. The only kind of education he thought useful was that which taught love and compassion for one’s neighbour and service to the masses.

Tolstoy has been called “the undisputed master, the noblest portrayer of his people, nay, of his century.” His *Confession* is the outpouring of a soul completely perplexed by the relation of man to the Infinite. His highly significant book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, deals with his theory of non-resistance to evil. Gandhiji, an admirer of Tolstoy, was deeply impressed and influenced by this book.

At what point does life end in a meaningful way? Perhaps this is ethically as important question as that at what point does life begin? Confronted with the complicated circumstances in the case of Aruna Shanbaug, the Supreme Court in India has rejected active euthanasia but allowed for passive euthanasia—the withholding of life-sustaining treatment—in exceptional cases. Aruna Shanbaug was formerly a nurse at Mumbai’s KEM hospital, who has remained in semi-vegetative state since 1973, when she was brutally sodomised and strangled. She has no speech, vision or mobility, but for years now, she has been fed and cared for by KEM hospital’s nursing staff. Journalist Pinky Virani and others fought for Aruna to be delivered from her condition, while the hospital’s nursing staff intends to care for her, until her last breath, by natural process. However, it is felt that where the patient is not in a condition to give his/her explicit consent, we must have cogent legal framework to decide what constitutes a case for passive euthanasia (*The Indian Express*, March 8, 2011). The procedural guidelines for giving permission to withdraw life support of the patients in persistent vegetative state (PVS) requires a case to be heard by at least two-judge bench and seeking of the opinion of a panel of three doctors. Courts are entering uncharted territory as it is not easy to determine when a patient can be said to be in persistent vegetative state. Though justification for passive euthanasia is generally based on a patient’s “right to die with dignity,” and on mitigating the patient’s suffering, it is felt that in many cases the request for passive euthanasia may be based on the “futility” of life. It may be argued that no interest is served in prolonging the life and it is “futile” to expect the patient to recover from PVS. Moreover, it appears that value of life is not intrinsic. It depends, in some cases, on costs, so that life may not be prolonged if costs are likely to be very high and no benefit is likely to come from the treatment. But in some cases life will be prolonged when someone is there to care for the patient. The court leaves open the question whether not taking food consciously and voluntarily with the aim of ending one’s life is a crime. In cases of PVS when passive

euthanasia is sought and allowed, the cause of death is act of withdrawal, and that in many cases, is evasion of responsibility. “It allows us to get away with the thought that we are not responsible for deaths of others even though our acts could have possibly prevented them. But this distinction is a reminder of our own smallness and finitude,” writes Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President of the Centre for Policy Research, Delhi. (*The Indian Express*, March 9, 2011)

Pain needs to be seen in a right perspective by both the patient as well as the attendants. “Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self,” says Mr. Judge. By trying to end life, we leave behind unexhausted Karma—which is like leaving a debt unpaid—so that in some future life we will be placed in a similar situation by the unerring law of Karma, till the lesson is learnt. It is perhaps an opportunity for the family members also to learn something in attending to a terminally ill patient, and be willing to suffer along with him, helping him to bear his suffering. There is a purpose, even in an apparently useless life, and even in cases of people who are old, disabled or suffering from some illness. The purpose of life is to learn, and it is all made up of learning.

In 1996 study, experts at the Royal Hospital for Neurodisability in London discovered on examining that of the 40 patients that were diagnosed vegetative, 17 had been misdiagnosed. They were in a condition described as LIS or Locked-in syndrome. Are people being written off while they are still living and thinking? If so, then it raises disturbing uncertainties over issues such as organ donation and euthanasia. While many healthy people may feel that it would be better to die than be kept alive in such a condition of being trapped in the body, majority of victims (patients) do not see it like that. A study by Laureys, head of the Coma Science Group at Liege University hospital in Belgium, found that “patients typically self-report meaningful quality of life and their demand for euthanasia is surprisingly infrequent.” Another patient suffering from LIS described later that it was unbearable to hear the doctor conclude

that one was going to die and to consider turning off the life-support machine. Though the chances of recovery of LIS patients is very low doctors need to take care that in the bodies that appear to be mere shells there are minds still living, thinking and trying to be heard. Apart from the financial burden, it is not true that it is no use keeping alive a person in a vegetative state, writes Richard Woods (*The Times of India [The Crest Edition]*, courtesy *The Sunday Times*). Some people are of the opinion that even passive euthanasia must be allowed in rarest of rare cases, because there is always the danger of its being misused by people as well as the doctors.

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The discovery of a scroll and 70 lead codices, which are tiny credit-card-sized volumes containing ancient Hebrew script, talking of the Messiah and the Resurrection has the Biblical Scholars excited. The artefacts which were discovered in a remote cave in Jordan, five years ago, by an Israeli Bedouin, are believed to be 2,000 years old. Experts have deciphered images, symbols and few words, which have been written on few sheets of lead, bound together with wire. Many of the codices are sealed, suggesting that they could be the secret writings mentioned in the apocryphal *Book of Ezra*—an appendage to some versions of Bible. Experts are of the opinion that the codices could reveal the last years of Jesus’s life if they are found to be genuine. (*The Times of India*, March 22, 2011, courtesy ANI)

A codex (Latin for *block of wood*, plural *codices*) is a book with separate pages normally bound together and given a cover. The term codex generally refers to collection of manuscripts put together in a book form. We are told that the codex was a Roman invention that replaced the *scroll* (a long sheet) used in Judaism. For instance, *Codex Alexandrinus* is a fifth century manuscript of the Greek Bible containing the majority of the *Septuagint* and the *New Testament*. Along with the *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*, it is one of

the earliest and most complete manuscripts of the Bible.

In *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. mentions *Codex Nazaraeus*, considered to be the Scripture of the Nazarenes and also of the Nabothians, which contains Gnostic teachings on cosmogony and theogony. The Nazarenes, although they existed long before the days of Christ, and even before the laws of Moses, were Gnostics, and many of them Initiates. They held their “Mysteries of Life” in Nazara (ancient and modern Nazareth), and their doctrines are a faithful echo of the teachings of *The Secret Doctrine*. The term *Nazar* means one “set apart.” They were a temporary monastic class of celibates spoken of in the Old Testament who wore their hair long, cutting it only at their initiation. “Over the Jordan and beyond the lake dwelt the Nazarenes, a sect said to have existed already at the birth of Jesus, and to have counted him among its number.” (*Isis*, II, 181)

The modern name of the Nazareans, in European languages, is the Mendeans. Coupled with the name of Mendeans is generally that of the Ebionites, who were the genuine *primitive Christians*. In the *Glossary*, under “Ebionites,” we read that there is proof “that *Iassou* or *Jeshu* lived during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus [103-76 B.C.] at Lyd (or Lud).” According to the Talmudic *Sepher Toldos Jeshu*, he was the son of Joseph Pandira and was put to death at Lyd, also called Lydda. This man Iassou, who lived a century earlier than the era called Christian, was the “Adept ascetic around whom the legend of Christ was formed.” Jesus of New Testament may or may not have existed as an historical personage. It is likely that the Bible allegories are clustered around the life of an initiate, an Adept, who lived a hundred years before our Christian era. Jesus passed his infancy and youth with the Brotherhood of Essenes and other mystic communities. Jesus was called *Nazaraios*, as later, he preferred the “free and independent life of a wandering *Nazaria*, separating himself from the Essenes and thus “becoming a travelling Therapeute, a *Nazaria*, a healer.” (*Isis*, II, 144)