

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 3, No. 12

April 17, 2012

### ON RICHES AND POVERTY

THERE must be very few countries in the world today, wherein we do not find the glaring contrast of the riches and luxury on the one hand, and poverty and slums on the other hand. The English word “poverty” is derived from the Latin *pauper*, meaning poor. But who can be called poor? Poverty is the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money. *Absolute* Poverty or destitution refers to the lack of basic human needs which include clean water, food, health care, education, clothing and shelter. Today, about 1.7 billion people are estimated to live in absolute poverty. *Relative* poverty, as the word suggests, is based on comparison. A person living in a hut and able to meet his basic needs may be considered relatively poor, when compared to someone who lives in a properly built building and is able to satisfy his *wants* in addition to his *needs*. Thus, there could be levels and levels of poverty, dividing people into lower middle class, middle class, higher middle class and rich.

Besides being determined by one’s income and wealth, relative poverty may be determined by one’s attitude of mind. The one who is always looking at those with greater possessions, luxuries and comforts of life, continues to consider himself/herself “poor.” On the other hand, a contented person, focused on his needs, may admire good clothes, cars and palatial buildings without wanting to *possess* them. There are also those who prefer *simple living*. Simple living

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may be characterized by individuals being satisfied with what they *need* rather than what they *want*.

A number of religious and spiritual traditions encourage simple living. Poverty is considered to be desirable condition, conducive to spiritual life. We find the *Shramana* tradition of ancient India, as also Jaina and Buddhist monks embracing poverty, considering it as an essential element of renunciation. At more than one place in the Bible we find Jesus pointing out the dangers of riches. “Riches are the thorns that choke up the good seed of the Word.” When a rich young man asked Jesus what he should do to obtain eternal life, he was told to keep the commandments, but further he was told: “If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor.” Thus, there are three counsels of perfection in Christianity, namely, Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. They are to be followed by those who wish to be “perfect.”

In the ancient days a wealthy, aristocratic young man, with the world at his feet, gave all he had to the poor and devoted himself to the service of God and to “My Lady Poverty.” That young man we know as St. Francis of Assisi. Likewise, Prince Siddhartha who became the Buddha renounced his wealth and his throne to find the way to Peace. Individuals such as Leo Tolstoy, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi embraced simple life or voluntary poverty.

What is there about the worldly possessions that makes it so difficult to find peace and truth? A rich man is full of anxiety for his possessions. When stocks and shares go up or go down, he worries: “Shall I sell out? Shall I buy? Will I lose all my money?” And then there is Income tax raid to be worried about. Many are the anxieties of the man of possession. In fact, instead of the man possessing his possessions, his possessions possess him! Often, money alone is enough to corrupt the character by leading one to pamper the body and by giving over to alcohol, drugs, smoking, gambling, and many other sensual pleasures. “Poverty has no natural tendency to engender selfishness, but wealth requires it,” writes Mr. Judge.

Spiritually advanced beings, like King Janaka, may remain

unaffected by wealth and comfort. Having learnt in some prior lives the lessons of detachment, they are able to say, “We are trustees of our possessions.” King Janaka was an Adept-king, and set a fine example of what it is to be *in the world*, but not be *of the world*. Although being outwardly engaged in managing the affairs of the state, he could at the same time be an occultist.

Paradoxically, *Light on the Path* says, “Desire possessions above all.” What kind of possessions? The answer is: “But those possessions must belong to the pure soul only, and be possessed therefore by all pure souls equally.” These refer to wealth of soul and spirit. There are people rich in love, rich in sympathy, rich in compassion, rich in wisdom. These are possessions to be desired and shared with others.

Though Jesus said that “it is difficult for the rich man to enter heaven,” there are other possessions which constitute greater hindrance to spiritual life and growth, such as, natural baseness of character, stupidity, physical sensual tendencies. There could also be the possession of wide, all-embracing, rapidly-acting brain stored with knowledge. One could use it properly or improperly. These days we increasingly find misuse of knowledge and intellect in terrorist activities. More often than not the “master-mind” behind the terrorist attack is some brilliant young man well-versed in modern technology. The one thus misusing mental powers might be punished by a life of stupidity in one of his subsequent lives. Similarly, if a wealthy man misuses his wealth or becomes selfish and tyrannical, oppressing and ill-treating the down-trodden, then he might be punished in the future with the life of poverty. Likewise, when we fail to pay attention to the misery of people who live in poverty, we might be born in slums, and that will imprint on the soul the misery of such a situation, writes Mr. Judge. Often, it is not possible to appreciate or understand some situations from mere description. Hence, we are told that poverty, motherhood and loneliness are basic experiences of life through which each one has to pass. We may be put into poor surroundings in more than one life till we have learnt

the lessons poverty has to teach.

The question may arise, “Is poverty bad Karma?” From purely worldly point of view, where a person with wealth and riches is considered to be *lucky*, poverty may be regarded as bad karma. It is true that an unhappy person or one surrounded by misery is undergoing punishment for some wrong done in the past, while a happy person is having his reward for the good done in the past. But, we must look upon the law of Karma as Eternal Justice, wherein there is balancing of the accounts in a ledger of life, or there is balancing of disturbed harmony. When that harmony is restored by awarding reward or punishment we experience pleasure or pain. However, it is wrong to say that poverty with all its miseries is always “bad Karma.” It is not necessary that a person born in the lowest station of life, who has to struggle to make ends meet, is suffering from bad Karma. Hence, Mr. Judge says that to be born in extreme poverty is not a disadvantage.

We tend to judge “good” karma and “bad” karma from the point of view of the personality. A person who suffers the misery of deprivation and humiliation due to lack of wealth, regards poverty as “bad Karma.” But from the larger point of view, from the point of view of the Ego, which gathers experience from every circumstance of life for the purpose of development, poverty is not “bad Karma.” Tests and trials are necessary for gaining moral strength and depth of character. Thus, it is quite possible for the Ego to voluntarily choose to take birth in poor surroundings instead of choosing the life of pleasures and comfort. The Ego sees the necessity for discipline and hence chooses to take birth in poor surroundings where endurance, patience and strength may be acquired through experience. Hence, we might say that “Good Karma is that which is pleasing to the *Ishwara*, and bad that which is displeasing to the *Ishwara*.” In other words, “Good Karma is that kind which the Ego *desires and requires*; bad, that which the Ego *neither desires nor requires*,” says Mr. Judge. Thus, from the point of view of experience and development of the Ego, in case of a

person surrounded by riches, comfort and pleasures of life, who does not make a good use of it, but instead wastes his life steeped in sense pleasures, we might say that riches are bad Karma. Similarly, poverty could be good Karma from the point of view of the Ego, which uses it to cultivate noble qualities.

However, it is not true that whenever we see a person born in poverty and low condition, it is to be reckoned as “good Karma.” Often we see a person of wicked nature born in poor surroundings, resorting to crime and lacking in sympathy. In such cases, poverty is bad Karma, displeasing to the Self within. But, in masses of poor people who are good-natured in spite of their low station in life, poverty may be regarded as good Karma. In *The Ocean of Theosophy* Mr. Judge points out that unhappiness in individual life may be explained as: (1) It is the punishment for evil done in past lives; or (2) it is discipline taken up by the Ego for the purpose of eliminating defects or acquiring fortitude and sympathy. However, it is extremely difficult for a lay person to judge whether a person suffering from poverty and deprivation is undergoing punishment for his past evil karma, or it is the situation chosen by the Ego for the purpose of learning and growth. Thus:

No man but a sage or true seer can judge another’s Karma. Hence while each receives his deserts, appearances may deceive, and birth into poverty or heavy trial may not be punishment for the bad Karma, for Egos continually incarnate into poor surroundings where they experience difficulties and trials which are for the discipline of the Ego and result in strength, fortitude and sympathy. (*Aphorism 28*)

The extent to which one is able to bear one’s poverty with dignity and live the life of integrity, it is in line of the experience *Ishwara* or Ego has chosen. Our endeavour should be to help people deal with poverty. How shall we help the poor? We may begin by at least sharing our surplus money, and following Buddha’s injunction: “When asked, give even a little.” However, H.P.B. points out that

philanthropists who sought to make men happy by bettering their physical conditions or external environment—by building homes, starting soup kitchens, etc.—were ultimately disappointed. Those who had spent their lives in doing such works confessed that, “as a matter of fact, misery cannot be relieved. It is a vital element in human nature, and is as necessary to some lives as pleasure is to others...that misery is not just enduring, but agreeable to many who endure it.” Right education and right philosophy are as much necessary as material help.

We find that when blankets are given to the poor during winter, they sell them off. Mme. Blavatsky advises the use of discrimination even in helping others. She writes: “It takes a very wise man to do good works without the danger of doing incalculable harm...Kindness and gentle treatment will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of man or woman who has led a fairly presentable life when kept down by pain and despair.”

Unless people’s minds and hearts are charitable, few people pouring forth their wealth is not of much use. Thus, if people lack integrity and feel that it is right for them to cheat and prosper—though others may suffer—the mere physical acts of charity are not going to be enough to bring about peace and happiness. Poverty indicates that those who “have,” have failed in their duty towards the “have-nots.” The rich have neglected their social duty by leading lives of careless indifference, material luxury and selfish indulgence, writes H. P. Blavatsky. Let us remember, “We are rich only through what we give, and poor only through what we refuse and keep.”

When an effort is made towards amelioration of the poor, it must be made with the view to their *ultimate social emancipation*, writes H.P.B. Thus, we can really help the landless labourers by awakening the *Zamindar* (landlord) to his duty towards the labourers and stopping him from the exploitation of the poor. Every effort for social amelioration must be based on four principles: universal Unity and Causation; Human Solidarity; the Law of Karma; Reincarnation.

## H. P. BLAVATSKY AND HER BOOKS

### I

ON THE 8th of May, White Lotus Day, in the year 1891, Madame H. P. Blavatsky, the Messenger from the White Lodge of Adepts, dropped the mortal coil in which she had lived and laboured for 60 years. Students of Theosophy, all over the world, must naturally realize how much they owe her for reiterating such Teachings of the Wisdom-Religion as the minds of the 19th-20th centuries were ready to receive. They must especially feel grateful to her for having given that precious gift in spite of the sufferings and hardships she had to endure and the opposition she had to face from the four quarters of the globe on their behalf. Why did she do so? Because the world was torn between the orthodoxy of religion on the one hand and the materialism of science on the other, and the time was ripe, under cyclic law, for the re-proclamation of the Eternal Verities. So she came out from the World of Light into our mortal world of darkness and ignorance to launch the great Theosophical Movement, the most serious movement of our age. Not only does the philosophy of Theosophy give profound knowledge of high metaphysics and occult truths, but it also indicates the way of right living through the practice of sublime ethics. Her aim was to change the mind and the heart of the race so that peace and good will may be established on earth and people of different countries, communities and classes may live always in unity and harmony on the basis of the great principles of the immemorial Wisdom we know today as Theosophy—a Wisdom checked, tested and verified by the Sages of old.

On such a solemn and sacred occasion it is but appropriate to pay her due homage for the wealth of wisdom given in her four books, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Key to Theosophy* and *The Voice of the Silence*. The dedication of each book is also very significant and indicates the progressive stages by which she gave out the teachings appropriate to the needs of the time. She

took the trouble to learn the English language and wrote all her books in that language, which, though not her mother tongue, was the international language, so that a larger number of people might profit by them. It is necessary to take note that her books cannot be studied in an analytical manner, by reasoning from premises to conclusions. She always advised her students to go to the *ideas* behind the words, and to try to grasp the Teachings *intuitively*.

Her first great book is *Isis Unveiled*, published in two volumes in the year 1877 in the city of New York, two years after the launching of the Theosophical Movement. The title page describes it as “a Master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology.” She herself wrote of it:

I maintain that *Isis Unveiled* contains a mass of original and never hitherto divulged information on occult subjects. That this is so, is proved by the fact that the work has been fully appreciated by all those who have been intelligent enough to discern the kernel, and pay little attention to the shell, to give the preference to the idea and not to the form, regardless of its minor shortcomings. (*She Being Dead Yet Speaketh*, p. 201)

She begins the Preface thus: “The work now submitted to public judgment is the fruit of a somewhat intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science.” So the existence of the great Adepts and her intimate acquaintance with them is the basic idea to be remembered throughout the study of H.P.B.’s books. One important aspect of her mission was to proclaim publicly the existence of the great Sages of the Orient, and, further, to give the inspiring idea that to reach Adeptship was the goal of human evolution. Further on in that Preface she states: “They [the Sages of the Orient] showed us that by combining science with religion, the existence of God and immortality of man’s spirit may be demonstrated like a problem of Euclid.” Science and religion not as they are understood ordinarily, but *true* Science and *true* Religion. In ancient times, science and religion were not conflicting forces, but complemented and

supplemented each other; therefore Theosophy is known as the scientific religion and the religious science, and it can be applied in every walk of life.

The Publisher’s Preface of the 1931 Edition gives us some idea of the importance of *Isis Unveiled*:

Without it, the Theosophical Movement as well as the Theosophical Society would have been still-born. Without it, her Mission and her Theosophy cannot be understood. Without it, her *Secret Doctrine* can no more be grasped than can algebra without a knowledge of arithmetic....*Isis Unveiled* and the *Secret Doctrine* are integral; both are parts of one stupendous whole.

In this book she points out the rationale of spiritistic phenomena and the dangers of necromantic practices. All of this is given as first hand knowledge gained through her own experience. She gives facts and figures, compares and contrasts various systems of thought, various philosophies, religions and sciences. She quotes from the Scriptures of the world and from philosophical and scientific texts, and presents ancient ideas in modern garb. She writes of the mysteries of Nature, of realms invisible, of psychic laws, forces and phenomena, and proves the impossibility of miracles, firmly stating that everything happens under Law. She points out the fallacies of materialistic science and orthodox religion with their dogmas and superstitions, and at the same time gives the true and correct principles of ancient Science and ancient Religion. Magic is shown to be Divine Wisdom, and not the tricks of jugglers. She writes of the ancient and imposing civilizations of the Indians, Egyptians, Greeks, Chaldeans, Assyrians, etc., and their achievements in arts, sciences and philosophies, which by far surpassed our modern discoveries. These two exhaustive and illuminating volumes she dedicated “to the Theosophical Society, which was founded at New York, A.D. 1875, to study the subjects on which they treat.”

(*To be continued*)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### WHO IS MY FRIEND?

“I LIKE Vishnu, Mother,” Raman said as he ran in from play. “He thinks everything I do is fine.”

“I hope everything you do is right, son!”

“Well, Srinivasan finds fault with me for the littlest thing he doesn’t think I ought to have done. Why, today, we had a race at recess time and I came in ahead of everybody and Vishnu shouted ‘Jai!’ But Srinivasan spoiled it all getting next to me as we went in and whispering, ‘You didn’t really win, you know, Raman; you started ahead of the rest.’ Is that a nice way for a friend to talk?”

“Was it true, Son?”

“Ye-es, but I was just the least little bit ahead.”

“Well, I think Srini was right and that he was a better friend of yours than Vishnu. It isn’t winning if you don’t win fairly.”

“But I like people who like me, Mother!”

“Srini showed his liking for you better by wanting to help you be a friend he can respect. You know from your adventure stories that, when people want to climb a steep hill that is dangerous to climb, they rope themselves together so that if one slips the others can help to hold him up and keep him from getting a bad fall. Would you rather be roped next to a boy who is careful where he puts his own feet and who warns you if he sees you step on a slippery place, or one who thinks it doesn’t matter where you step?”

“I’d rather be told if he sees the ground I’m stepping on is slippery!”

“Then?”

“Well, then, I guess Srinivasan was right, Mother! I didn’t feel quite good myself about having started first, but he made me feel worse and I didn’t like it.”

“We never do feel happy when we haven’t acted honestly, so that’s a good sign, Son! It shows the lighthouse of conscience is burning brightly.”

“What’s a lighthouse, Mother?”

“Where there are rocks near the surface that the sea hides, so that the captain of a ship can’t see them, men build a tall house over them with a lamp that keeps flashing all night to warn ships away from the rocks. If a ship is anywhere near, each flash says to the captain, ‘Don’t come here! Danger here!’ so that he can steer his ship away.”

“Now when we want to do something that isn’t fair, like starting ahead before the other boys in the race, a little voice in us that we call ‘conscience’ gives a warning. ‘Don’t do that! That isn’t right!’ And if we do it anyway, that little voice keeps on telling us, ‘You ought not to have done that! It wasn’t fair!’ and makes us feel unhappy.”

“How can we make it stop, Mother?”

“There are two ways, one safe and one very dangerous. The right way is to say to ourselves, ‘No, I see it was wrong! I must not cheat again!’ The other way—a very bad way indeed—is to say, ‘Who cares? Or ‘So what? I won, didn’t I?’ That is very dangerous because the oftener we do it the weaker the little warning voice sounds, till at last we may not hear it at all! It’s like setting an alarm clock to wake us up in the morning at the right time. If we get up every morning as soon as it rings, it keeps on waking us up. But if we say, day after day, ‘Never mind, I’ll sleep just a little longer,’ after a few days it doesn’t wake us anymore; it rings, but we no longer hear it, and that is a very bad thing indeed, because then we do wrong without thinking at all, just as the captain may run his ship right on to the rocks because he doesn’t notice the warning light.”

“O Mother, I see that I did wrong to start before the other boys. I will try hard to remember and not to do that again!”

“That’s my good boy! Now forget it, Son, but be thankful that you have a real friend like Srini to help you to remember always to play fair!”

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Often we ask questions such as: what is the role of conscience in character-building? How to develop conscience? It is important to listen to others when they point out our fault. We may not become aware of all our faults during self-examination, and at times, even if we do, we are likely to explain them away. When another person points out that our action was bad or wrong, we believe him after consulting our conscience. Sooner or later we need to learn to consult our own conscience. If we keep paying heed to the voice of the world we might continue to be swayed, without knowing what the right thing to do is. There is the story of an old man and his son going from one village to another, with their donkey, and the old man riding the donkey. People called the old man cruel as he was making his son walk. Then the father dismounted and the son rode the donkey. People again criticized, saying, “Look at the shameless fellow, making his poor old father walk!” Then both of them decided to ride the donkey together and again they were criticized for overburdening it, and so on, till finally they lost the donkey while crossing the bridge over a turbulent river.

Thoreau always said that it must be conscience and not majority that should decide right or wrong. Each man is the final judge of what is right or wrong for him. However, since our conscience is not infallible, it may happen that we may act mistakenly but from a right motive. Then the reaction which comes to us gives us a chance to unfold better judgment. There are in fact, three consciences. The first is remembrance of those things that we are taught in our early childhood, and throughout life, as not proper to be done. The taboos of this kind of conscience will naturally vary with the family, the nation and the civilization. The conscience of man whose religion allows him to marry more than one wife differs from that of a man who thinks it wrong to have more than one wife. Thus, it is possible to do wrong, based on a conscience built on certain religious views, or customs and traditions.

The second kind of conscience is that with which we are born and is much more deeply seated. It is the result of our experiences

in other lives, when we learnt that certain things ought not to be done. It is our innate moral code. For example, most of us would not steal even if we had the opportunity to do so; it would be against our nature.

These two kinds of consciences grow and improve with knowledge and experience. As we acquire knowledge, we are able to evaluate whether the “taboos,” were based on moral principles or mere customs. The second kind of conscience, described as innate moral code gets strengthened, and tends to become more strongly ingrained in our character, as we acquire more knowledge and experience. The third kind of conscience is that which gives us a higher and deeper sense of rightness of things. It is often called the “still small voice” or the Voice of the Silence.

Theosophy differentiates between the “voice of conscience,” and “still small voice.” The “voice of conscience,” is the negative warning which arises from the assimilation of individual experiences in this life and in some past lives, which warns and tells us what *not* to do. The “still small voice” is the positive direction, which tells us what is best to be done. It comes from higher aspect of our being, when unhampered by our lower, animal nature. The “still small voice,” is the instantaneous perception between right and wrong. The wisdom and positive guidance of the “still small voice” can penetrate us only when we have made the first two kinds of consciences strong by use. Those of the older or earlier generation had their conscience of the first kind infected right from childhood with contempt for the heathen, the foreigner, the Negro or the Harijan (untouchable). Thus, it is possible to perform a perfectly wrong action, with clear conscience, because that conscience is not free from prejudices and predilections—it is based on incomplete or false knowledge.

We can make a small beginning in developing the “still small voice,” by paying heed to positive injunctions coming from our divine nature. Mr. Judge says that we must train ourselves to heartily welcome and respond to every prompting or suggestion of the Divine within. “If you feel as if something urged you to visit some sick or

afflicted neighbour or friend, obey the suggestion without delay. If the wish to turn over a new leaf comes into the lower consciousness, don't wait till next New Year's before actually turning it over; turn it now. If some pathetic story of suffering has moved you, act on the emotion while your cheeks are still wet with tears."

How do we progress from reliance on conscience to hearing the "still small voice"? The answer is: through "mature deliberation." An animal knows what not to do by instinct. Man has to a great extent lost his instinctive faculty. Hence, before he develops his intuition, he has only his reason to guide him, when in doubt. Thus, when in doubt, we must evaluate what is suggested by our conscience, which is based on our past experiences, through mature deliberation and reason. When a father finds his son indulging in bad habit which might prove itself dangerous in the future, he may resort to beating the son, after all other methods of persuading his son have failed, and after mature deliberation. In such a case, his past experiences, his voice of conscience have not taught him that beating is bad. However, the knowledge he gains through this wrong action will teach him a higher moral code.

We say that guilty conscience pricks. The feeling of remorse and the pricking of conscience arise from heart, the seat of spiritual consciousness. For one who has not stunted his conscience, nothing is more painful than pricking of the conscience. Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart," is about the person who has carefully planned and executed the murder of an old man, and hidden the body under the floorboards after dismembering it. However, his guilty conscience manifests itself in the hallucination that the man's heart is still beating under the floorboards, and ultimately makes him confess the sin.

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THE heart has reasons which reason cannot understand.

—BLAISE PASCAL

## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

### ANGER—II

4. *Speak the truth; yield not to anger; if asked give even a little. By these three steps a man reaches the presence of the gods. (224)*

5. *The sages who injure none, and who always control their body attain the changeless state; therein is no grief. (225)*

6. *All taints disappear when a man is vigilant, studious day and night, and strives after Nirvana. (226)*

WHEN harsh realities of life hit the worldly man, when he is surrounded by troubles and harassed by mental worries, life of a mendicant suddenly becomes attractive. At times, an impulse to desert everything in order to attain *Moksha* grips one's heart without being inwardly prepared for what it entails. It is better to make a beginning by taking small steps. The Buddha asks us to be truthful, gentle and charitable. These contain the seeds of perfection. You cannot continue to be what you are and speak the truth. We tell lies out of fear or because we lack the courage of conviction. We often do that in order to remain in the good books of someone who matters. We tell lies in order to avoid unpleasant situation. It requires moral courage and inner strength, which require gradual transformation in our outlook of life itself.

Anger is injurious to man. When someone is angry, we say, "he has lost his mind." This is literally true. When one is angry, one has lost control of the mind and hence is not in a position to think properly. The physical and mental condition makes him unable to think aright. Therefore, one has to consciously strive to become gentle like sages who are harmless and who control their body. Changeless state of a sage implies equal mindedness, equanimity or total detachment or *viraga*. And in this struggle, man is required to attain greater and greater degree of detachment, so that there comes a stage which is described in *Light on the Path*, as, when all weapons

of defense and offence are given up—all weapons of mind and heart, and brain, and spirit. Never again can another man be regarded as a person who can be criticized or condemned; never again can the neophyte raise his voice in self-defense or excuse; he becomes as helpless as a new-born child. In the article, “Culture of Concentration,” Mr. Judge explains why sages dwell upon the need for calmness. After having succeeded in making the astral body coherent, when the aspirant allows anger to arise, it manifests itself in an uncontrollable trembling which begins at the centre and violently pulls apart the hitherto coherent particles. If allowed to go on it will disintegrate the whole mass, which will then reassume its natural place in the body. And each time this happens the result is the same. “There is no such thing as having what is called ‘righteous anger’ in this study and escaping these inevitable consequences. Whether your ‘rights’ have been unjustly and flagrantly invaded or not does not matter. The anger is a force that will work itself out in its appointed way. Therefore anger must be strictly avoided, and it cannot be avoided unless charity and love—absolute toleration—are cultivated.”

The Buddha does not ask us to abandon our house or give away all our wealth. He asks us to give, even if it is little. By doing that, you are honouring the *Atman* and human dignity in the person who is asking for help. By doing this, the noble impulse to help another is kept alive. Otherwise, human nature being what it is, we would find reasons why we should not help in a given case. While it is true that we do not have enough wisdom to discriminate as to whom to help and in what manner, it is best for us to err on the right side by helping even a little. In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. defines duty as that which is due to humanity; that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves. If left undone, it will make us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts.

7. *This is an old saying, O Atula; it is not of this day only. “They blame him who sits silent, they blame him who talks much, they blame him who speaks moderately in*

*measured terms.” There is not any one in the world who is not blamed. (227)*

8. *There never was, nor will be, nor is there now to be found any one who stands wholly praised or utterly condemned. (228)*

9-10. *But the man whom the discerning always praise, because he is without blemish, wise, endowed with both knowledge and virtue, who would dare to blame such an one? He is like a coin of gold from the Jambu river. Even the gods praise him, even by Brahma he is praised. (229-230)*

One major cause of our anger is blame, criticism or negative comment directed towards us by our fellow beings. Each one of us has a definite philosophy of life; we have unconsciously formulated strong biases and opinions on the basis of our experiences. We tend to generalize and make sweeping conclusions on the basis of our limited knowledge and understanding. If we come across one or two lazy or greedy officials in a government office, we are quick to brand all government officials as lazy and corrupt. If a person belonging to a particular business community cheats us, we jump to the conclusion that all men belonging to that community are cheats. Often, such hard and fast conclusions are handed down to us by the society, and we adopt them without questioning. Moreover, we get so attached to our ideas and opinions that we are unable to accept contrary viewpoint. We sincerely feel that what we are saying or doing is right. We resent criticism. We react by getting angry. The Buddha reminds us that there is no one in the world who is not blamed.

But the person who has obtained perfect knowledge, wisdom and virtue, who is without blemish, like the best-quality gold from the *Jambu* river; such a person is praised by the discerning, by the gods and even by Brahma. Until we reach that stage, it is better to remind ourselves that “all human acts are involved in faults, as the fire is wrapped in smoke.” Mr. Judge writes: “We are none of us

ever in the right—there is always that in us that causes another to offend.” This being so, we can be guided by the Master of wisdom, who writes: “Do not despise the opinion of the world, nor provoke it uselessly to unjust criticism. Remain rather as indifferent to the abuse as to the praise of those who can never know you as you really are, and who ought, therefore, to find you unmoved by either, and ever placing the approval or condemnation of your own *Inner Self* higher than that of the multitudes.” On this subject, Dr. R. L. Soni, Director of the World Institute of Buddhist Culture in Mandalay was quoted in the magazine *Theosophist* as follows:

A person is not what he or she barely seems; there is a depth in personality which only a Buddha can discern in totality. As only a fraction of a person can be seen at a time, it wouldn't be correct to assess the entire personality on the basis of the presenting part. This, because a part in the case of personality is not the mathematical average of the whole. Who knows, the next presenting section of the same person may be just a reversal of what he or she appeared earlier!

...Every person in reality is a very deep phenomenon. We can assess him only skin-deep or a little beyond that limit. Therefore it behooves us not to be led or misled by mere appearances: it becomes us to have *Karuna* (Sympathy) and *Metta* (Loving kindness) towards all. As a matter of fact, every living being is potentially a “candidate” for *Nibbana* [*Nirvana*]. Those who seem to be on the Wrong Path today, may be led through sufferings consequent to their evils, to the Right Path in due course. Buddhism holds out the “Banner of Hope” for all. This Right Road to *Nibbana* is open to all; it is closed to none. This spells the message of Universal Fellowship.

11. *Let a man be watchful of bodily irritation. Let him control his body. Abandoning the sins of the body let him dwell therein practising virtue. (231)*

12. *Let a man be watchful of speech-irritation. Let him control his speech. Abandoning the sins of speech let him*

*practise virtue with his speech. (232)*

13. *Let a man be watchful of mind-irritation. Let him control his mind. Abandoning the sins of the mind let him practise virtue with his mind. (233)*

14. *Well controlled indeed are the wise; they have mastery over body, tongue and mind. (234)*

Body, speech and mind are three avenues of action. To pander to bodily desires beyond the legitimate needs would form habits which become the source of irritation or annoyance when not fulfilled. One has to make conscious effort to be moderate in eating, sleeping and recreation. If we are not watchful, it is easy to fall prey to the sins of the body such as indulgence in sensual pleasures, excess of sleep, too much eating and drinking, indulging in sexual promiscuity, delighting in physical cruelty to weak, destroying life, stealing, improper gratification of senses, and so on.

Shri Krishna (*Gita*, XVII) recommends mortification of the body, speech and mind. “Honouring the gods, the brahmans, the teachers, and the wise, purity, rectitude, chastity, and harmlessness are called mortification of the body.” But since the body of itself is incapable of action, and it is merely an organized physical matter, used and controlled by the thinker and the actor within; it is this thinker and the actor who needs to change his modes of thought and action. In changing from one mode of thought and action to another, of an opposite kind, the man finds himself at war with habits. These have to be dis-established by instituting habits in accord with his changed basis. Similarly, “austerities of speech” does not consist of severity of tone and manner or puritanical contempt for the average mortal and his interests, a state due to an in-growing self-righteousness, but are practiced and shown in “gentle speech which causes no anxiety, which is truthful and friendly, and diligence in the reading of the scriptures.”

Speech has tremendous power and our words are like arrows shot from the bow which cannot be recalled. This is particularly so in case of a spiritually advanced person; his words are never without

power and must bear fruit. We waste a lot of divine energy by indulging in sins of speech such as idle or frivolous talk, talking ill of others, condemning and criticizing another, speaking rudely or sarcastically which hurts or harms another, backbiting and slandering another and speaking lies or carrying tales, and so on. Mr. Judge gives us a simple rule: “Never speak nor write if the slightest trace of irritation remains”; wait, or, if speaking or writing is necessary, take some subject which permits of accord. “Do not judge in anger, for though the anger passes the judgment remains.”

Mortification of mind consists of serenity of mind, mildness of temper, silence, self-restraint and absolute straightforwardness of conduct which can come from firm faith in the working of law of karma at all times. Sins of the mind are mental infidelity, aberrations, wasting time in idle thoughts, hypocrisy, misuse of intellect in cheating or misleading others, and so on. “Calmness is the one thing necessary for the spirit to be heard,” writes, Mr. Judge.

All types of irritations arise from the idea of undue importance of our personal preferences. We get annoyed or irritated by some thing another has done or failed to do. Mr. Judge tells us that at the back of irritation is our self-assertion which is detrimental to spiritual progress. It would help us immensely if we pay attention and make sincere effort to follow the advice given by Mr. Judge in *Letters That Have Helped Me*:

- (a) Criticism should be abandoned. It is no good. Co-operation is better than criticism. (b) Calmness is now a thing to be had, to be preserved. No irritation should be let dwell inside. It is a deadly foe. Sit on all the small occasions that evoke it and the greater ones will never arise to trouble you. (c) Solidarity. (d) Acceptation of others.

(Concluded)

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## SLEEP, DREAMS AND DREAMLESS SLEEP

### III

IT IS said that “In dreams and visions of the night, man is instructed.” There are dreams sent by Adepts. Sometimes people get instruction in dream, to build a temple or a church at a particular place, or to perform certain ceremony or *yajna* for re-establishing peace and harmony in certain city, etc. Bulwer Lytton says, in the *Strange Story*, that man’s first initiation comes in dreams. To be initiated means to be tested and tried by the *guru* (spiritual teacher) to determine if one is ready to take the next step on the Path. Sometimes the *guru* may test the courage of his disciple by letting loose a tiger on him during sleep, on the astral plane. Thus, the disciple may dream of a tiger pursuing him or pouncing on him. Does he get frightened or does he show courage and fight the tiger? Thus, without causing actual harm to the disciple, the *guru* could test his courage. Similarly, he could be tempted through a dream of a beautiful woman or lots of money, waiting to be taken, and so on. He is initiated if he passes the test. Such dreams may also be classed as “real” dreams.

It is indicated in our philosophy that we should try to contact the Master or spiritual Guru on spiritual plane by rising to His level, and not by dragging the Master down to our level. This level is really speaking deep sleep or *Sushupti*, called the “Hall of Wisdom.” Ordinary people return from deep sleep without any recollection of experience of any kind. “It is the spiritual Heart, and that *alone* which can function in the Hall of Wisdom. If that does not function, we plunge into *Sushupti* and emerge rested and refreshed but not *energized* and *enlightened*,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

Dreams may be roughly divided into seven classes, which include “prophetic dreams” or “dreams of premonition,” which are impressed on the memory by divine nature. In these dreams either a voice is heard or coming event is foreseen clearly. History is full of instances of prophetic dreams. Buddha’s mother dreamt of a shining six-rayed star from heaven entering her womb. She woke up with a happy

feeling. The dream reader said that the dream signified that she would give birth to a boy who would be either a great holy man or, a great monarch.

Sometimes in dreams we get warning. We are not able to make out the danger we are going to get into in the waking state, as our minds are involved in the multiplicity of desires. These are called *warning dreams*. Either the person himself may get the warning, as Abraham Lincoln had dreamt of his own death, or one can get warning dream for some other person if that person cannot easily be impressed. There are some examples of mothers dreaming about the plane crash and not allowing their children to board the plane and the plane really crashes. “Dreams of warning and premonition require the active co-operation of the inner Ego. They are also often due to the conscious or unconscious co-operation of the brains of two living persons, or of their two Egos,” writes H.P.B.

A striking instance of a warning dream is given by Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University. A man and his wife of Akron, Ohio, had booked a passage on the “Noronic,” an excursion boat. A week or so before the sailing date, the woman had a terribly vivid dream of being on a boat which suddenly burst into raging flames. Though she could not positively identify the boat as the “Noronic,” she felt very strongly that the dream was a warning. She cancelled their reservations for the excursion, saving her life and that of her husband, as the accident actually took place in which “Noronic” burst into flames and was completely charred, leaving 139 passengers dead. This was a clear case of prophesy and warning dream.

In another case a certain Mr. Strong was prevailed upon by his wife to do some trivial errand after work that would take him home by another route than his usual subway-route. After much argument, he agreed to do the errand. Later, he discovered that twenty people lost their lives under the subway wreck. When he reached home and gently awakened his wife, she asked: “Where was the wreck?” It is not stated whether she was sleeping earlier in the afternoon, when the premonition came. But even if it was not a warning dream,

something analogous took place in the waking state to make vivid impression upon the brain. It is felt that this could be the case of unconscious co-operation of the brains of two living persons, or of their two Egos. In this case, Mr. Strong’s own Ego may have realized the threat to his life, and, unable to warn him directly, may have invoked the assistance of the Ego of his wife, who was perhaps more sensitive to the Egoic impress.

Such cases may be explained on the basis of telepathy. It happens when there is close sympathy between two individuals. In the *Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. tells us that when two minds are sympathetically related, and the instruments [brains] through which they function are tuned to respond magnetically and electrically to one another, there will be transmission of thoughts from one to the other, at will. This can also happen in dream. In the article “Are Dreams But Idle Visions?” H.P.B. writes of a case of a person who was posted at a place different from where his family stayed. He was to travel to another place the next day. That night, he dreamt of his wife’s cholera attack and her suffering intensely due to it. He brushed it aside thinking that it was the result of his anxiety. Later, before embarking on the journey, when he retired to take some rest, once again he dreamt of his wife suffering acutely from the dire disease. However, he chose to travel on. Within few hours, his dreams were confirmed by a telegram. It was the case of telepathic communication in dream. H.P.B. writes that either he or his wife was intensely attached to the other, or that the question of her life or death was of the greatest importance to either one or both of them. This being so, one soul sends a message to another soul.

Dr. Rhine, of Duke University, has cited several examples of telepathy occurring in dreams. A certain woman in China, while asleep, heard her name called out loudly, “Mabel! Mabel!” It seemed to be in the voice of her mother, who was in New England, half-way round the world. She learned later that, that night, her mother had called her name just before she died.

It is true that when a mother gets a warning dream about her

child meeting with an accident, it might only be projection of her own anxieties in a dream. But it is better to pay heed to such dreams, all the same. We are told that a short time before he was killed, Abraham Lincoln had dreamt that as he was walking through the White House, he saw a corpse in funeral garments, and on asking, who had died in the White House, he was told that it was the President, who was killed by an assassin. He said that he was strangely annoyed by that dream ever since. His being “strangely annoyed by” what “was only a dream” shows the degree of emphasis in the actual warning, and also the degree of his ignorance. Such ignorance is the karmic result of former ignorance. As Mr. Judge writes, “There are valleys in which the greatest shades are due to old lives in other bodies.” There seems to be in his case, the lack of exact occult knowledge and also the lack of full confidence in the premonitions of his inner self, which failed to prevent his tragic end.

There are dreams sent by Adepts, by mesmerizers, or by thoughts of very powerful minds bent on making us do their will. The recently released Hollywood film *Inception*, with Leonardo Di Caprio in the lead role, is all about “extracting” and “implanting” ideas and thoughts in the minds of others through the medium of dreams. In the film we are shown that instruments like computers, sedatives, timers and “kick” machines are used to reach and implant ideas in the deeper layers of consciousness of the sleeping person. In the film *Inception*, Di Caprio plays the role of a specialist who helps people against “dream thefts,” or *extractions*—the possibility of someone extracting corporate secrets from the sleeping or dreaming mind. He also attempts “inception,” or implanting the idea into a sleeping or dreaming mind, so that the person, on waking up, believes that idea to be his own.

In the waking life, a hypnotizer can paralyze the will and hypnotize a person of weak will. He can implant a suggestion in his mind. Such a person is known to act on the suggestion of the hypnotizer, even after he has come out of the hypnotic state. Crimes

have been committed under hypnotic suggestions. Implanting a suggestion can also be done during sleep, because the will of the person is generally, dormant or inactive during dreams. It is possible to give certain bent to the will of the sleeping person, to produce desired results, “by mutual inter-action—produced almost mechanically—through union between two or more ‘principles’ into one, so that they will act in perfect harmony, without any friction...when awake.” H.P.B. calls this as one of the “tricks” of “black magic.” It could be used for good purpose also, and then it becomes part of the training of an occultist. It is only the spiritually advanced people whose will can act consciously during his sleep. It can also act on the will of another sleeping person, so as to be able to control his dreams and therefore, control his actions during the waking state (*Transactions*, p. 66). Our dream state is influenced by our waking state, and so also, our waking state is affected by our dreams.

There are *retrospective dreams* of events belonging to past incarnations. *Akasa* is said to be the tablet of memory of the spiritual Ego while the astral light is that of the animal man. All our thoughts, feelings, desires and actions get recorded in the Astral light. So also, thought-actions of our true Self, our higher Ego, must get recorded. The real dreams are nothing but the memory of the actions of the true Self during deep sleep. So also, during deep sleep, when the higher Ego functions on its own plane, it is able to witness actions based on causes generated by it in past lives, which in turn must produce certain results. An example of this is given in the article “Karmic Visions” which first appeared in *Lucifer* for June 1888, and was reprinted in the book “The Tell-Tale Picture Gallery.” Thus, King Fredrick III, while travelling in the train from Germany to Prussia, for his coronation, dreamt of his previous lives. He saw himself as King Clovis I, the cruel tyrant, who killed the prophetess for refusing to reveal to him the place where the treasure was hidden and for prophesizing his suffering in the future birth for all his evil deeds, and cursing him. He killed her by piercing a spear through

her throat; for which in the present life he saw himself suffering from incurable throat cancer. He also saw his other lives, fighting wars and killing other men, with consequent suffering and loneliness in the present life. His brief reign of 99 days ended with his death. Thus, for the real Ego of King Fredrick, the causes sown in past life formed the basis of his experiences in deep sleep, which revealed to him the cause of his present suffering and what was to come.

A person who has never seen mountains during his waking life, often sees them distinctly in sleep and he is also able to note its features. H.P.B. explains this by saying that it is probably because they have seen pictures of mountains or because it is something within, which has previously seen them. This is also the explanation for the feeling of “Deja Vu,” which is a common experience of people. In this, the person recognizes a place or a scene or conversation as something familiar, as something one has already seen or experienced before, though it is being encountered for the first time physically by the person. H.P.B. explains that these are often the impressions of scenes and landscapes which the astral man saw in his peregrinations during sleep. When the body sleeps, the astral form becomes free. It oozes out of its earthly prison, and “confabulates with the outer world,” and travels round the visible and the invisible worlds. The impressions of scenes and landscapes which the astral body saw during its night-travel are impressed on the brain. When one sees the same landscape or a picture, memory awakens these impressions and there is an instantaneous interchange of energies between the visible and the invisible universes. A current is established between the “micrographs” of the cerebral ganglia and the astral light, making the man feel that he has seen or experienced it before, because the acquaintance was formed during night travel of the astral body. (*Isis*, I, pp. 179-180)

(To be continued)

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## 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:** We are told that study or reading of books is useless without reflection. Is study or reading *essential* for reflection?

**Answer:** The first part of the question is affirmed in every spiritual tradition. In the old Indian tradition, a student had to be first a *shravaka* or listener and then he was asked to do *manana* or reflection on what he was taught. Mr. Judge has emphasized the importance of reflection or dwelling upon what is read, in his article, “Much Reading, Little Thought.” He says that though people claim to have read many books, we find that a great number of questions asked are due to want of thought. They have failed to assimilate what is read and reduce it to general principles. Thus, we are advised that few books, well read, well analyzed, and thoroughly digested are better than many books read over once. When one reads for the pleasure of reading, without reflecting upon what is read, he is filling his mind with a mass of half-dead images, which become a barrier to individual development.

Could there be reflection without reading or study of books? In other words, could there be reflection without previously gathered ideas? The process of reflection helps us to understand what is read. It helps us to reduce elaborate theories to few general, guiding principles. Reflection helps us to get an insight. Often reflection involves connecting one idea with another in order to get a total picture. The process of reflection may involve reasoning and intuition. For development of intuitive perception it is necessary to put in the mind the seeds of metaphysical and moral principles. Shri. B. P. Wadia gives the analogy of rain and soil. He points out that even

when you have fertile soil, without the seeds, no amount of rain falling on the soil will produce the crop needed. The function of study and meditation is primarily the preparation of the soil. When our soil is weeded out and prepared, and when the seeds of mental study are sown, then we can wait for the rain of intuition to fructify the seeds sown. *The Voice of the Silence* says that in a sense seeds of wisdom are already within our divine nature. For the manifestation or actualization of wisdom which lies potentially, what is needed is the breadth and depth of mind, and altruistic life.

In Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms we are asked to take a seed idea and meditate on it. The first step is concentration. But the next step is contemplation or *Dhyana*, which involves branching off and considering other ideas related to that seed idea, without losing the main thread. Patanjali says that repetition of "Aum" should be made with reflection upon its significance, and that will lead to knowledge of the Spirit.

There is the story of a Zen Master who asks his pupil to meditate on the sound of one hand clapping. We can create sound only by clapping of two hands, then what is the significance of the sound of one hand clapping? The story goes that once a boy approached a Zen Master and bowing down seven times he said that he had come in search of truth. The Master told the boy that two hands clapping can create a sound, go and find out "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" The boy went to meditate and heard a geisha girl singing. So, he went and told the Master that the sound of one hand clapping is like the geisha girl singing. He was asked to go and meditate some more. Next the boy heard the sound of water dripping and falling on the stone, and he concluded that the sound of one hand clapping is like the sound made by water dripping on the stone. After three months he came to the conclusion that it was the sound of locusts in the trees and again he was wrong. After a year, when the boy did not come back to the Master to give any answer, the Master went to the boy. He was sitting under a tree, silent, his body vibrating to some unknown sound, as if moving with the breeze.

We might say he was feeling the sound. When he opened his eyes, the Master said that, that was the sound. Like the wisdom which is already within, the Soundless Sound or *Aum* is already within. It is not to be created, but realized.

The process of reflection often involves elimination, and going from the gross to the subtle, till there is neither subject nor object. But before one reaches that stage when no more arguments or thoughts are required, it appears that the ground is first prepared by gathering ideas and dwelling on them and their relationship.

**Question:** The ancients said that the Divine Self is in all beings, but in all it does not shine forth. We can understand "shining forth" in the context of human beings. But how do we understand it in the context of other kingdoms below man—mineral, vegetable or animal kingdoms?

**Answer:** There is only One Life in the world which sustains everything. Everything in the manifestation has proceeded from the same Divine Source, moving towards the same goal. That great Ocean of Life, is at the same time, Consciousness and Spirit. This ocean is separable into constituent drops, and that separation is effected through the process of evolution. In the evolutionary march, we find that there is better and better expression of consciousness, with a tendency to separate into drops of *individualized* consciousness. Thus, we find that in minerals the consciousness manifests in terms of attraction and repulsion or sympathy and antipathy between various atoms. In plants, consciousness manifests as sensation. In animals, it is expressed as instinct. In human beings there is individualized consciousness, making man a self-conscious being, capable of thinking and choosing, and with the awareness of "I am I," and no other. Each human being is truly a constituent drop of that ocean, and hence, just like every drop of ocean contains all the elements contained in the ocean, so also, each of us has in him every power and potentiality of the divinity within him. We say that man has in him powers of *kartum*, *akartum* and *anyatha-kartum*,

*i.e.*, the powers of creation, destruction and regeneration. Gradually, as man stops identifying himself with the personality, and begins to identify himself with the Divine, unchanging self, he begins to manifest power, glory and wisdom of that Divine Self. In all those spiritually advanced and self-realized beings, in whom there is a realization that “I am That,” the Self may be said to “shine forth.”

All men have the potentiality of becoming spiritually perfect. Likewise, Alchemists say that Gold represents perfection and it is the highest form that any metal can reach. Gold can withstand action of fire and all known solvents, except *aqua regia*. Alchemists say that all metals have the *potentiality* of becoming gold. Thus, gold may be taken to be a symbol of spiritual perfection.

Another way of understanding the meaning of “shining forth” in the context of lower kingdoms may be in terms of the Tenth Chapter of the *Gita*, in which Shri Krishna describes his *Vibhutis* or Universal Divine Perfections. Arjuna asks Shri Krishna, “In what particular forms shall I meditate on thee?” Shri Krishna acquaints him with the chief of his divine manifestations. Here we have examples, in various departments and kingdoms of nature, of those entities which are perfect expressions of the Divine. Thus, among the planetary bodies Sun is the perfect expression of the Divine Self, being the giver of light and life, physical and metaphysical. Likewise, He is the “Lord-of-beasts” or Lion among the animals and Garuda (the white-necked-eagle) among the birds. Garuda is called the King of birds because of its powers of perception and the high altitudes to which it can fly. Garuda is the bird of Vishnu, and also means esoterically the whole manvantaric cycle. “Among the trees (I am) the *Aswattha* tree.” *Aswattha* or *Bo-tree* is wide in its expanse, and lasts for several centuries. It is used to symbolize manifested world which springs from the Supreme Spirit. Since good and evil are both encompassed within One Reality, Shri Krishna says, “Of those things which deceive I am the dice.”

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

We all accept intuitively that nothing can come out of nothing—*Ex nihilo nihil fit*. The first Thermodynamic law of energy conservation also seems to suggest the same thing when it states that matter (or energy) cannot be created or destroyed. However, other laws of modern physics allow creation of matter at subatomic level. It has been experimentally verified that sub-atomic particles, such as electrons, spontaneously come into existence for an infinitesimally small time, and go out of existence, in the vacuum of space. They are called “virtual particles.” Even though these virtual particles cannot be seen, the effects they produce can be measured. Does that mean that something can come out of nothing? Physicists have now come to believe that there is no such thing as empty space. Even perfect vacuum is filled with wave-like fields that fluctuate constantly, giving rise to a multitude of ephemeral particles, which continually arise out of nowhere and disappear into nowhere. Thus, “vacuum fluctuations” give rise to virtual particles.

That nothingness does not exist was proved by the physicist Hendrik Cassimir in 1948. He placed two metal plates extremely close to each other in vacuum. He found that these plates were drawn together as if pushed from the outside. It was discovered that attraction between two plates was because vacuum fluctuations between two plates were very small as compared to vacuum fluctuations that existed outside them. People have begun to wonder if in the Big Bang theory, the tiny bit of space, time and matter which later became a universe, could have been a massive vacuum fluctuation that began its existence as a virtual particle. “One day in the life of Brahma... is said to equal some four billion years—which is how long the universe endures before it is destroyed and recreated out of nothingness that does not exist!” writes Mukul Sharma. (*The Speaking Tree* [*The Times of India*], March 25, 2012)

*The Voice of the Silence*, the Mahayana Buddhist text, says: “Thou hast to study the Voidness of the seeming full, the fullness of the

seeming Void.” The symbols of the vacuum and the plenum are excellent metaphysical ideas, contemplation on which strengthens the virtue of *Vairagya*.

In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 289) we are told that “There is not one finger’s breadth (*angula*) of void Space in the whole Boundless Universe.” The substance which fills the Space is of a different kind than that known on earth, and hence inhabitants of the earth, seeing *through it*, believe in their illusion and ignorance that it is empty space. Speaking of the primordial Substance or Chaos, the Eastern Occultists say that it is not vacuum, but in it lie latent, spirit and matter, for “Nature abhors vacuum.” Democritus with his instructor Leucippus taught that vacuum means *latent* Deity or force. Deity in the shape of *Aether* or *Akasa* pervades all things.

From the earliest philosophers whose records passed to posterity, down to our present age, which may have denied the presence of “invisible Beings” in Space, but which can never deny *plenum*, the *fullness* of the universe was an accepted belief. If voidness in the universe is not possible, what is it that filled the universe? Hermes Trismegistus said: “Concerning the void...my judgment is that it does not exist, that it never existed, and that it will never exist, for all the various parts of the universe are filled, as the earth also is full of bodies, differing in quality and in form, having their species and their magnitude, one larger, one smaller, one solid, one tenuous.” He goes on to say that the larger bodies are visible, while smaller may be invisible, and yet of the existence of the latter we are aware by the sensation of feeling. He says that what appears to be empty space is filled with genii or elemental spirits. (*S.D.*, I, 671)

“Ether produced Sound” is said in the *Puranas*. The correction made is that sound is vibrations in the air. But air cannot exist if there were no etheric medium in Space to buoy up its molecules, writes H.P.B. While explaining the Pythagorean “Music of the spheres” H.P.B. writes that like the corpuscles of the blood, planets are floating in the common fluid, and as they move in their orbits they impart an impulse to the surrounding ether or astral light,

producing vibrations in the ether. Sound is the effect produced by the vibrations of the ether. (*Isis*, I, 275)

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Are we interconnected? Do our thoughts affect others? Megha Bajaj, a seeker, learnt the profound truth about the power of thought and the reality of interconnected existence from a tiny earthworm. Once as she was sitting in the lush green lawns of her garden she spotted a tiny earthworm moving in her direction. She wished that it should come and touch her palm, and it would have done so, but when it was only a few inches away from her fingers, she remembered having studied in biology that when you cut an earthworm into two—both its parts begin to move independently. As soon as this thought arose in her mind, the earthworm moved far away from her and hid under a leaf. She writes that so far, she was only intellectually aware that we are all connected, but now information was transformed into experience. “I realized that when an earthworm, that did not have all its senses evolved could be so sensitive to a single thought—just how much bearing must all of us be having on each other?,” writes Bajaj. She was reminded of the people in whose presence she felt loved and protected and some others in whose presence she felt agitated, restless or irritable. Simply being with someone could be an energy-giving or an energy-draining experience.

As she wondered at the beauty and intricacies of life, it dawned upon her that one of the best ways through which she could make her contribution to the world was by transforming herself, one step at a time. The evolution of every person, leads to the evolution of human consciousness. “I realized, for the first time, that the best gift we can give anyone is actually our ‘presence.’ The more and more loving, blissful and peaceful we become—the more and more the world around us will feel these emotions.” It is our responsibility to

make ourselves into such beings in whose presence others will feel loved and not judged, Peaceful and not agitated, writes Bajaj. (*Life Positive*, March 2012)

Thoughts are the foundation of our being. Lord Buddha says, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness pursues him like his own shadow that never leaves him.” As soon as a thought leaves the brain, it combines with a unit of life energy called an elemental and forms an *entity*. This “entity” gets its character from us, depending upon the quality of the thought—good, bad or indifferent. *We create, with every thought, a demon or an angel.* To think angrily or with hate about another is like sending on an invisible plane a tiny man with a stick to beat that person. We are continually affecting each other by our thoughts and feelings, besides our words and actions. It is an occult law, “No man can rise superior to his individual failings, without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part. In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of the sin, alone.”

The Pranic currents, circulating in the astral body, affect the body and ultimately stream forth as our magnetism in the form of magnetic fluid. “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. Sympathy and antipathies are based on magnetism. There are two types of magnetic attractions—sympathy and fascination; the one is holy and natural; the other is evil and unnatural.

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There are people who spare time for voluntary service or charity, in terms of time, energy and skills. We say that these are the people who have plenty of free time to spare, or they are the ones who feel

a vacuum in their lives. What motivates people to give? Is it because they understand that it is the path to salvation? Or, is it because they believe that the more they give, the more they will receive? Or, is it an unselfish act? It is not always that people indulge in charity with selfish motive. For instance, we believe that the rich dole out donations to save taxes. In surveys conducted by some banks and charitable institutions, when people were asked if they would stop donating if they were to get no tax benefit, at least fifty per cent of the donors said that tax benefit was not a motivator for them at all. It is also believed that giving away some wealth in charity makes the rich people feel that they have atoned for being the privileged ones! It is generally said that charity that hurts you is more worthwhile and holds more equity with God than that which is easily given. “However, I do not agree with that. What is given must be more relevant to the receiver rather than the giver,” says Vinita Dawra Nangia. She gives an instance of a lady who admitted that she helped others so that she was helped on her path of salvation. But the same lady uttered a profound truth that the water remains pure till it flows. The moment you build a dam and try to store it, it tends to lose its purity. The same is applicable to our wealth—be it money, energy, skill or time. “If giving happiness to another makes you happy and liberated, what greater good than that?...It is the rich in spirit and heart who give away much more than those who own great wealth,” writes Vinita Nangia. (*Times Life!* [*Sunday Times of India*], November 6, 2011)

In the present-day acquisitive culture where most of us are running around to gain too much, too soon, we have very nearly forgotten the art of giving. In learning the art of giving it is important to consider, *what we give, how we give, to whom we give and why we give.* In fact, the *Gita* classifies charity into *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic*. When we give with expectation of return, be it material help or otherwise, *or*, with the intention of accumulating merit (*punya*), such giving flows from *rajasic* quality. It is only when we give without expectation of return and to the proper person and at a proper time

that we indulge in *sattvic* giving.

The best form of giving involves sacrifice. There is sacrificial giving, when we are greatly inconvenienced in trying to help. “There are those who have little and give it all. These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty,” says Kahlil Gibran. Sacrificial giving brings about the inner transformation in the giver. In reaping karmic consequences, one of the most important factors is *motive* with which the action is performed. One may give out large sums of money to earn merit (*punya*) or with the intention of gaining name and fame, or make a charity to wrong persons at the wrong time. Hence, as the *Gita* teaches, all actions are involved in faults, like fire is surrounded by smoke, so that a perfectly good-intentioned action may end up bringing about harm.

*Light on the Path* goes to the extent of saying that when an advanced disciple helps with the feeling that in giving help to others, his own good is taken care of, he indulges in subtle form of selfishness. “Desire to sow no seed for your own harvesting; desire only to sow that seed the fruit of which shall feed the world.” All our actions must be like offerings to Krishna. In our acts of charity we must renounce the doership and feel that I am only an instrument through which the good work is getting done.

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I LAY claim to nothing exclusively divine in me. I do not claim prophetship. I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding It. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical is directed to that end. And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence, my passion for the service of the suppressed classes.

—GANDHIJI