

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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RELIGION, REASON, FAITH

ONE of the reasons why religion continues to play an important role in the world is because in human beings there is will to meaning, and many of us turn to religion to find the meaning of existence. For some others, religious ceremonies and rituals provide the crutch they need to lean on in times of trouble and despair. Karen Armstrong, the British ex-nun and author, is of the view that good religion is in the danger of being engulfed by bad religion. There seems to be suffocation of the sacred by man-made dogmas and rules. Psychologist Carl Jung rightly remarks that so much of the religious practices seem to be designed precisely to prevent people from having a truly religious experience.

Today, spirituality and religiosity are equated with ritualistic worship—careful performance of rituals and ceremonies as per the scriptural injunctions. Often, a Hindu devotee performs an elaborate worship of his several deities, purely mechanically. He considers his worship as an end in itself, instead of the means to his goal. It tends to become sacrosanct and is often performed at neglect of one's duty. A doctor refused to attend to a serious patient as he would not leave his *puja* (worship) halfway! “Compassion is the key to religion, the key to spirituality. It is the litmus test of religiosity in all the major world religions. It is the key to the experience of what we call God—that when you dethrone yourself from the centre of your world and put another there, you achieve *extasis* [ecstasy],

you go beyond yourself,” says Karen Armstrong.

Let us distinguish between religion and religiosity. The priest class of every religion encourages the gullible devotees to perform austerities, sacrifices and ceremonies, to go on pilgrimages or to undertake fasts, promising in exchange the heavenly or other-worldly rewards. It suits people because it is easier to practice rituals, penances and offerings than to understand and apply the deep moral, social and philosophical tenets of religion. We find that teachings of every religion remained pure as long as the prophet-reformer or the Teacher was on the scene. In most cases, these teachings were transmitted orally and were reduced to writing only after the death of the Teacher. It is at this stage that there is found to be conscious as well as unconscious corruption of the original teachings, with gradual shift from the study and application of ethics to rites, rituals and ceremonies. Brahmins, priests and purohits, instead of being true interpreters of the scriptures, not only misinterpreted and interpolated them but gained prominence only in relation to the performance of rituals and ceremonies. God, instead of being the Omnipresent, Omniscient, Immutable and Impersonal Principle, came to be regarded as a person, who must be propitiated and worshipped and from whom favours could be asked.

Besides emphasizing rituals and ceremonies, the priest class began to present the ethical principles as commandments and dictates, instead of self-evident truths. To continue their hold over the masses, in certain religions, doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation were rejected and a series of dogmas came to be introduced. As a result, today religion plays a major role in dividing man from man. But it is not the priestly class alone that is to be blamed. How many people want the truth? How many of us are ready to suffer the consequences of our actions? Do we not look for a quick and easy solution to our problems, and are only too happy to offer a scapegoat for our sins? We look for ceremonies to dodge the Law of Karma.

However, no Rishi, no Mahatma, no Prophet, ever tried to establish *a religion*. Each and every one of them was a reformer,

protesting against the falsehood of prevailing religious views. Each one of them has protested against mere mechanical performance of rituals and ceremonies, explaining the underlying significance. Every prophet-reformer taught a Way of Life, a Way to Wisdom and Brotherhood, and that is the function of true religion.

The Sanskrit word for religion is *dharma*, which means the ultimate order of the universe. The word *dharma* comes from the root, *dhr*, which means to sustain, to unite or to protect. Religion must unite and protect the people. The English word religion means “to bind back,” as it is made up of the root, *re* (again) and *ligare* (bind or connect). A truly religious person must be aware of his myriad connections, with deity, with other human beings, with all the creatures on the earth. However, today, institutionalized religion and religious fundamentalism divide man from man, so that more atrocities are committed in the name of religion than otherwise. It is the aim of Theosophy to show that all the world’s religions are based on the same essential truths. It shows that various religions and religious sects are like branches and twigs sprung from the same trunk called the WISDOM RELIGION. It shows that the source of all religions is one, but all religions without exception are overlaid with superstition, corruption and dogmatism. All are true at the source and false on the surface. “As the white ray of light is decomposed by the prism into the various colours of the solar spectrum, so the beam of divine truth, in passing through the three-sided prism of man’s nature, has been broken up into vari-coloured fragments called RELIGIONS,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, II, 639)

To arrive at the truth it is necessary to analyze and question the philosophy underlying a religion. Somehow there is a feeling that to question the scriptures or religious authority is to be irreverent towards your religion, and that religion is a matter of beliefs and emotions in which there is no scope or need for enquiry, questions or seeking of explanation. It is out of moral cowardice, out of fear of public opinion that we are afraid to step out of the circle of wrong religious ideas, and continue to follow the beaten track. Our strong

opinions, faith and beliefs are seldom the result of independent, deep thinking. “It is rare that men regard a thing in either its true or false light, accepting the conclusion by the free action of their own judgment. Quite the reverse. The conclusion is more commonly reached by blindly adopting the opinion current at the hour among those with whom they associate,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 39). “The greatest curse to a nation”, remarks Dr. Inman, “is not a *bad religion*, but a form of faith which prevents manly inquiry.... So long as every man does to other men as he would that they should do to him, and *allows no one to interfere between him and his Maker*, all will go well with the world.” (*Isis*, II, 121-22)

How shall we distinguish true from false philosophy? Any philosophy that is presented as “revelation” can never be a true philosophy. A true philosophy must be impersonal, universal in its application and true at all times. It must enhance the feeling of goodwill and brotherhood. Similarly, a true teacher always presents the truth in the spirit of, “Thus have I heard,” and leaves it open to be accepted or rejected. In deciding the validity of any philosophy, we might ask ourselves two questions: Does it satisfy my reason? Mr. Crosbie says that Truth always explains. When we have the explanation, we have the truth. Each has to make his own verification of the truth. We need not accept the teachings on anyone else’s authority or endorsement. The second question to ask is: What is my heart response? When we encounter truth, there is an intuitive feeling: “This is true.” Mr. Judge puts it thus: “Do not adopt any conclusions merely because they are uttered by one in whom you have confidence, but adopt them when they coincide with your intuition. To be even unconsciously deluded by the influence of another is to have counterfeit faith.”

True religion must seek to replace blind belief by reasoned, and then intuitive faith. H.P.B. points out that between *faith on authority* and *faith on one’s spiritual intuition*, there is a very great difference. Blind faith, based on human authority or hero-worship, is like logic of some emotional women, for whom 2 plus 2 is generally 4, but it

could be 5 also, by the will of God. It is this kind of blind faith which leads to religious conflicts and fanaticism. When we accept our religion on such a faith, we are more likely to be intolerant of other religions. It is comparable to canine instinct, like a dog that guards his master’s property, we become possessive and protective about our religion with a deep feeling of religious exclusiveness.

Faith is an agreement between man’s higher and his lower nature. Faith is necessary because there are things, which could be experienced and verified only when we reach a certain stage in our inner development. Sometimes a poet or an artist brings to us things that we are not able to understand or experience at our level. The same applies to the Spiritual realm. Faith is required not just in accepting things we have not seen or are not able to verify, but most of all faith is required in holding on firmly to things, which we have found to be good and true. For instance, we need to have faith in God as also the faith that the Law of Karma works unerringly and impartially. We have very little faith in our higher nature because we have very few direct or self-certifying experiences of the presence of the higher nature. It is the kind of faith, which makes one accept that the higher in me may lead to loneliness and pain, but it still leads me towards something good and great.

True religion should change our sense of values and must present universal ethics. Maha-Prajapati, the Gotamid, asked the Buddha to show her a teaching, hearing which from the lips of the Exalted One, she might dwell, “alone solitary, zealous, ardent and resolved.” Buddha never asked her to accept anything because *He* said so. Buddha’s reply (*Vinaya*, II, 10) was that only the teachings that helped spiritual progress must be accepted, and reject that which did not help the spiritual advancement. Mr. Crosbie gives a very simple definition of true religion: “True Religion must give us a basis for thinking, and consequently, a basis for acting; it must give us an understanding of nature, of ourselves and of other beings.”

THE COSMOPOLITAN OUTLOOK

A true theosophist must be a cosmopolitan in his heart. He must embrace mankind, the whole of humanity, in his philanthropic feelings. It is higher and far nobler to be one of those who love their fellow men, without distinction of race, creed, caste or colour, than to be merely a good patriot, or still less, a partisan.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

IN THE FIRST of her *Five Messages* to the American Theosophists, H.P.B. wrote:

But you must remember that, although there must be local Branches of the Theosophical Society, there can be no local theosophists; and just as you all belong to the Society, so do I belong to you all.

The phrase “local Theosophists” is a remarkable one. In the Declaration of the United Lodge of Theosophists it is said: “The true Theosophist belongs to no cult or sect, yet belongs to each and all.” Universality is the hallmark of the true Theosophist, and the *idea* of the universality of Theosophy should be the background for all the actions and thoughts of those who call themselves Theosophists. But this, alas, is very often not so. The universal gets crowded out by the particulars. As human beings we can be only in one place at one time. As human beings we must largely direct our Theosophical efforts in the environment in which we find ourselves, so far as personal considerations go. But although in a sense locally circumscribed, physically speaking, our outlook should, and can, be more universal than it is. The place where we find ourselves under Karma is the place where we have to work. When we have accomplished that work satisfactorily, Karma will doubtless remove us to a sphere of wider activities. That is Karma’s affair. But Theosophy transcends place. However keen, and rightly keen, we may be about the Lodge for which we are working, we must always

remember that there are other Lodges devoted to the Cause of Theosophy; other associates in other countries also striving to contribute their “mite” towards the endeavour to change the mind and the heart of the race.

H.P.B., the devoted mother of the Theosophical Society, explains in her Message that “for the present my duty lies in England and with the Western Theosophists, where for the moment the hardest fight against ignorance and prejudice has to be fought.” Her chief attention has to be given to the child that needs her most—the attitude of every true mother. Like every true mother she has no favourite child but belongs equally to each and all. Her *Five Messages*, although especially addressed to America, taking a special note of America’s peculiar needs, are in themselves *really* universal in character. There is no theosophist, wherever situated, who cannot benefit by them. And they are as valuable today as when they were written, for H.P.B.’s writings are “not for an age, but for all time.”

Even when we have learnt to regard our local Lodge as part of a great whole, we must remember that the world is wider than any Theosophical organization, and if we would be universal in character, we must fight against narrowness and keep our interest in what is going on in the outside world. And we shall find that there we have our friends and allies. Let us remember H.P.B.’s words:

Many who have never heard of the society are Theosophists without knowing it themselves; for the essence of Theosophy is the perfect harmonizing of the divine with the human in man, the adjustment of his god-like qualities and aspirations, and their sway over the terrestrial or animal passions in him.

Is the power of the Spirit in man to be limited to “Theosophical organizations” only? Perish the thought! We have to look for Theosophical *Ideas*, ideas which, largely owing to the life of sacrifice of H.P.B., have percolated (albeit unconsciously) into the minds of our great thinkers—and welcome them whenever and wherever we find them.

In H.P.B.'s time, life was in some ways even more difficult than it is now. Crass materialism was more widespread than it is today, though "today" has its own peculiar difficulties rooted in psychic aberrations. If we read her *Isis Unveiled* and her *Secret Doctrine*, we find the immense range of her outlook, and the hand of fellowship stretched out in welcome and in help wherever she sees a Theosophical "seed" struggling to manifest. It is true that she—some may think ruthlessly—uproots the "tares," but wherever a seed shows a possibility of growth it is fostered. Like the wheel of the Good Law, she drives the "worthless husks...from out the golden grain, the refuse from the flour." Science, Philosophy, Religion, all swim into her ken, and she deals Theosophically with them. This illustrates her universal outlook. The value of every department of life and knowledge is gauged by the measuring-rod of the Wisdom-Religion, the one, consistent *universal* Truth.

H.P.B.'s life and teachings show clearly the *futility* of being a "local Theosophist." The "local Theosophist" is a personal being; the true Theosophist is an impersonal being. Throughout the writings of both H.P.B. and W. Q. Judge there is the constant cry: Get rid of the personal self. Most of us are personal to a smaller or larger (generally larger) extent. If we allow our personality to gain the upper hand in our study of the philosophy of Theosophy, we shall find ourselves in a state of self-gratulation, and our study will avail us nothing. To gain a more universal background means that we have to change our point of view, to men and things from a spiritual centre and not from a personal centre.

This is uphill work for personality-ridden people, but an effort must be made. It will take time, but we have eternity before us—and the study and application of the Theosophical principles laid down by H.P.B., if persisted in, will bring us, slowly or quickly in accordance with our efforts, to a plane of thought where we shall be able to gaze on things as they are in reality, and not as they are distorted by our petty personal vision.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

JUDGE NOT!

"OH COME on Ganesh! We need one more to make up a team. We have got to win that match."

"Honestly I would like to, fellows, but I can't!" Ganesh flushed painfully as he walked away, followed by "Spoilsport!" "Killjoy!" "Old Grind!" and "He hasn't a bit of the school spirit!" "He wants to come first in the exams, his family and the school's cricket can go hang!" The last taunt, shouted bitterly by Narayan, the captain of the team, whom Ganesh shyly but ardently admired, made him blink hard to keep the tears back, but on he strode, back straight, chin up, till he was out of sight.

It wasn't the first time his resolute avoidance of the playing field had been resented by the other boys, but Narayan's gibe had gone home. Ganesh was studying hard. He had to get a scholarship; so much depended on it for his family! "I don't blame them," he told himself. "They don't understand and I can't tell them."

As he neared the shabby little house at the edge of the town where he and his mother had brought the younger children a few months before, when they had to give up their home, three boys and a small sister who were playing in the compound rushed to the gate to welcome him with gleeful shouts. Ganesh paused only to run in to greet his mother before he ran out to set the children to their tasks. "Anand, you and Nila come over here with me and we will put in the seeds in this new bed that we all dug up yesterday. We have to get the place giving us plenty to eat and have it looking fine when father comes! The children all accepted happily and with a sense of importance the roles assigned them by their elder brother. When he went in to study his own lessons the little ones resumed their play.

The first few days there had been many questions from the children about father, questions which their mother and Ganesh, who was

her confidant, had answered reassuringly if rather vaguely. “He’ll be coming some day! When he comes he must find every one of us doing his very best, as he would like to have us do.” “For father’s sake” became the watchword of the little family, holding them all to the performance of their *dharma* or duty, which their father had impressed upon them.

The news that came from the distant sanitarium was not cheering and mother told her younger children only that father had sent them his love. But, after all the others were asleep, she would pour out to Ganesh her anxieties and fears, and he would straighten his young shoulders and give her all the comfort and reassurance that he could. “Never mind, mother, I’ll take care of you and the children,” he would say. And she would take strength from his young strength and devotion.

The captain of the team was waiting for him one morning as he walked to school. “Look here, old sobersides,” as he fell into step with Ganesh. “Didn’t you ever hear that ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’?”

“Of course I have heard it, and I don’t blame you for thinking me a dull boy. Probably I am, but honestly, Narayan, I don’t have time to play. It isn’t that I would not enjoy doing it.”

“You have 24 hours a day, the same as the rest of us, don’t you? Cut out some of your ambition and you’ll find time,” Narayan urged. “Don’t you have any feeling at all for the school?” he asked.

“If you mean, wouldn’t I like the boys to win games, why, yes; but don’t you think, Narayan, that each one has to decide what is right for him to do? That’s what my father always told me.”

“I suppose that is so, but why can’t you be satisfied with passing marks? Why try so hard to get ahead of all the rest of us?”

“Look, Narayan, it isn’t that I want to outshine the others; truly it isn’t. But you don’t know how important it is for me to get a scholarship!”

“There you go,” cried Narayan. “Selfishness again! Do as you please, then! Let the team go hang and get your scholarship!” And

with a scornful look that hurt Ganesh worse than the words and tone did, Narayan ran ahead to join some other boys.

Ganesh’s stricken look, however, went with his self-appointed judge. Hard as he tried to, Narayan could not dismiss that look from his mind or forget Ganesh’s question, “Don’t you think that each one has to decide what is right for him to do?” Nothing went right all day from his lessons to team practice after school, when he felt that he was bungling. His conscience was giving him no peace and he thought he would feel better if he looked up Ganesh and told him he was sorry that he had gone so far. He knew that Ganesh lived at the very end of the street the school was on, and he found the place without any difficulty.

A tired-looking lady in a torn sari opened the door. Yes, she said, Ganesh was at home, but he had a headache and a little fever and was lying down. “I think something had hurt him very much today, but he wouldn’t tell me what had happened; I only saw that he was unhappy. You see,” she went on with a sudden burst of feeling, “he has such a lot of responsibility on him for a boy of his age; he never complains, but I think sometimes it is just too heavy for him!” Perhaps the sympathy in Narayan’s face encouraged her, and she went on. “His father is in a sanitarium, very sick, and Ganesh is doing his best to take his father’s place with the young children, four of them. And when I am worried—I do get very much worried—he tells me he will take care of all of us. But how can he ever do that and get the children educated unless he gets a scholarship himself? That’s what we are hoping for; and every minute Ganesh isn’t working in the garden or hearing the children’s lessons he is working at his own, except when he eats and sleeps. I don’t know any of the boys he’s met at school. I think you must be a friend he has made there?”

“I hope so, aunty, but I don’t deserve to be,” Narayan said with a humility new to him. “Will you tell him, please, that Narayan said that he was very sorry—he’ll know what I mean—and that all of us will be happy when he wins his scholarship; and I’ll be seeing him tomorrow?” He put his hands together in a parting greeting.

“*Namaste, aunty!*”

We must not sit on judgment of any person, because the *inner state* of the person is known only to the Law of Karma. There is the instance of a lady who moved into the new neighbourhood and was labeled “proud” and of “loose character.” Later, they came to know that she was shy and afraid but not proud. The man who visited her almost every day was her lawyer, since her divorce case was going on. We, sometimes, sit on judgment even when we do not have enough data on hand. It is even more difficult to know the *inner state* of the person and the motive behind his actions. The inner state of a person is not determined by his background and circumstances in the given life, but also his experiences in earlier lives. A stingy and unkind person often has the background of a difficult childhood or an exposure to severe poverty. So also, our mental, moral and psychic constitution is a result of Karma from previous lives. We must learn to *respond* and not *react* to situations and people. Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher, puts it thus: “When someone... performs what seems to be a thoughtless gesture or even an outright evil act, think to yourself, ‘If I were that person and had endured the same trials, borne the same heartbreaks, had the same parents, and so on, I probably would have done or said the same thing.’ We are not privy to the stories behind people’s actions, *so we should be patient with others and suspend our judgment of them*, recognizing the limits of our understanding,” and instead exercise the muscle of charity and compassion.

Mr. Judge’s sage advice is that whenever we are tempted to judge another person, thinking he has done wrong, we should ask ourselves two questions: “Am I the judge in this matter who is entitled to try this person? Am I any better in my way? Do I, or do I not offend in some other way just as much as they do in this?” Moreover, “Do not judge in anger, for though the anger passes the judgment remains.”

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

MISCELLANEOUS—III

9. *The disciples of Gotama who are truly awake always think, by day and by night, of the Sangha. (298)*

10. *The disciples of Gotama who are truly awake always think, by day and by night, of the true nature of the body (Kayagata sati). (299)*

11. *The disciples of Gotama who are truly awake always think, by day and by night, of the delights of Ahimsa—Non-violence. (300)*

12. *The disciples of Gotama who are truly awake always think, by day and by night, of the delights of Bhavana—Creative Meditation. (301)*

WHEN the disciple has proceeded thus far in his thinking, he is then able to recognize the presence of unknown and unnumbered companions, who are similarly attempting to realize something of “the Buddha within themselves,” and who have achieved at least some measure of understanding concerning the basic laws of spiritual life. It is in this context that the concept of a Brotherhood of Adepts—of Great Teachers and a corresponding *natural* brotherhood for disciples—comes into focus; those disciples are fortunate who, able to live and study together, so provide mutual assistance in preserving the various necessary disciplines. The strength of all, banded together, is infused to some degree into the striving heart of each individual, and we might speculate that here is the pure concept of mutual aid and companionship which lies behind the practices of monastic orders.

It is interesting to note by the sequence of verses seven through twelve that it is only after disciples have passed through *three* stages that they are naturally fitted to undertake specific disciplines of body. As the Buddha discovered in his own lonely wanderings, mechanical mortification of the flesh will not lead to enlightenment, but rather away from it. One can undertake various forms of physical

yoga only when he has known something of the yoga of the Soul—and learned, in Patanjali’s terms, “to hinder the [delusive] modifications of the thinking principle.” Verse eleven again stresses both the necessity and the beauty of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, and it is easy to understand that one cannot practice *ahimsa* unless he has brought his body and physical passions under control.

The last stage, of *dhyana*, or creative meditation, may only be undertaken when the disciple has progressively achieved the understanding and control provided by the preceding steps. Every man must and will “meditate” to some degree, but creative meditation should never be confused with wishful thinking, or with the focalizing of any ideal concept he himself is not prepared to live in its completeness.

The comment on verse 10 in the book tells us that in the *Buddhist Dictionary* by Nyanatiloka, [*Kayagata Sati*] mediation referred to here is on “32 parts of the body.” The term “*kaya*” however, may well be said to possess a clue to the mystical doctrine of *Nirmanakaya*, *Dharmakaya*, and *Sambhogakaya*—the spiritual forms or robes sublime of those who attain perfection. And the comment on verse 11 tells us that *Bhavana* is a particular type of meditation; it is creative and so delightful to the consciousness. There are numerous *Bhavanas* mentioned. *Kaya-bhavana*; *Metta* (Pity)—*bhavana*; *Karuna* (Compassion)—*bhavana*; *Mudita* (sympathetic joy)—*bhavana* and *Upekkha* (Equanimity)—*bhavana*.

These verses speak of various stages of consciousness, beginning with thought for the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*, ultimately leading to the consideration of true path and appreciation of higher laws of spiritual life. While science may deny the fact of *creative meditation*, there is no discovery that is not the result of meditation followed by investigation and analysis. Spiritual insight is the result of creative meditation. In this meditation, we rise beyond the mundane plane and get attuned to the universal consciousness. It is the archetypal or creative world—the source from which a person may receive the flash of intuition, which makes him a genius.

The *Dhamma Encyclopedia* defines *kayagata-sati* as mindfulness immersed in the body. This is a blanket term covering several meditation themes: keeping the breath in mind; being mindful of the body’s posture; being mindful of one’s activities; analyzing the body into its parts [its impurities]; analyzing the body into its physical properties; contemplating the fact that the body is inevitably subject to death and disintegration. It outlines the development of mindfulness through contemplation of the body in order to reach *dhyana*.

The *Kayagata-sati sutta* stresses the need for constant awareness of the body’s position, “When walking, the monk discerns, ‘I am walking.’ When standing, he discerns, ‘I am standing.’ When sitting, he discerns, ‘I am sitting.’ When lying down, he discerns, ‘I am lying down.’” The *Sutta* also outlines the practice of “reflections on repulsiveness of the body.” In this practice a meditator reflects on various parts of the body (nails, hair, bodily organs, fluids) and notes their impurity. The *Sutta* also recommends meditation on the impermanence of the body and death by contemplating human corpses in various states of decomposition. “Furthermore, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid, and festering, he applies it to his own body, ‘This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.’” The *Sutta* then explains the attainment of the first four *rupa dhyanas*, states of calm concentration reached through meditation. Finally, the *Sutta* outlines the ten benefits of these practices. Mindfulness immersed in the body when developed and practiced is said to be of great benefit.

13. *Hard is the life of the recluse, harder to enjoy its discipline. Hard is the life of the householder, harder to enjoy at home. Painful it is to live with the unsympathetic. Painful also to be a solitary wanderer. So let him not wander. Let no one fall into suffering. (302)*

The Buddha points out that the life of the recluse is hard, and so

is the life of the householder, particularly when one has to live with the unsympathetic people. And if we think that we can escape from the unpleasant circumstances by abandoning our home and becoming a wanderer, we would soon realize that it is equally painful to be a solitary wanderer. Therefore, we must not wander but accept the life's situations and circumstances we find ourselves in and try to make best use of them.

14. *Wheresoever a man goes who is endowed with faith, with virtue, with fame and prosperity, even there he is revered. (303)*

15. *Good people shine from afar like Himalayan peaks; the wicked like arrows shot in the night vanish unseen. (304)*

The Buddha said that the fragrance of the good wafts even against the wind, it pervades all his ways. It is natural, therefore, that a man of faith, virtue, fame and prosperity is revered, wherever he goes. This is Buddha's way of making ordinary worldly man to aspire to become like him. He emphasizes this further with a striking analogy. While the good people shine from afar like Himalayan peaks, the wicked like the arrows shot in the night vanish unseen.

16. *Let one sit alone, sleep alone, act alone and unwearied subdue the self by the Self; he finds delight being out of the forest of desires. (305)*

The great battle of the Self with the self has to be fought by oneself. In this verse the Buddha does not advocate selfishness, but self-effort and self-reliance. This appears to have been particularly addressed to the aspiring disciples. In the article "Chelas and Lay Chelas," we are told that before a chela could be put to test, he must have developed certain qualities by his OWN UNHELPED EXERTIONS. The only help and the best help that he can look for is the help from his own higher nature.

(Concluded)

NUMBERS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

III

THE PYTHAGOREANS taught that the perfect man was a quaternary (four) and a ternary (three) with four material and three immaterial elements. These three elements we also find in number five, which represents man or microcosm.

Makara (Capricorn) is the tenth sign of the zodiac into which the sun enters at winter solstice. There is a mystic connection between *Makara* and *Kumara*. *Makara* contains within itself the clue to its correct interpretation. In Sanskrit, the word *Ma* is equivalent to number 5, and *kara* means a hand with its five fingers, as also five-sided figure or pentagon. So *Makaram* or *Panchakaram* means five-pointed star representing the five limbs of man. Since *manas* or mind is the fifth principle, the figure of five-pointed star represents not just five-limbed man, but rather man with mind, or thinking, conscious Man. *Kumara* (in this case an anagram for occult purposes) is an anagram for *Makara*, and there are five *Kumaras* in esotericism. *Kumaras* are the Solar deities who lighted up the mind of man eighteen million years ago, endowing him with a power to think and choose. The sign of *Makara* is connected with the birth of the spiritual "microcosm," and death or dissolution of the physical Universe, or rather its passage into the realm of the Spiritual, and the *Kumaras* are connected with both (*S.D.*, II, 578-79). It is *Manas* or mind which differentiates man from animal, and depending upon the use he makes of his thinking faculty, he can become worse than an animal or rise higher and become divine.

In the article, "Numeral Five in Religion and Philosophy" appeared in *Bhavan's Journal* (December 31, 2012), Shri Satish Kapoor points out that Indian tradition has number of philosophical concepts, moral codes and rituals condensed in pentads. For instance, knowledge is said to be of five kinds: *tattva* (cosmology), *muktiprada* (that which gives liberation), *bhakti prada* (that which confers devotion), *yaugika* (that which unites one to the divine) and

Vaishayika (that which is related to the objects of desire). There are five elements (*bhutas*), five subtle elements (*tanmatras*), five *jnanendriyas* (senses), and five *karmendriyas* (organs of action). Some of the important shivalinga shrines are associated with the five elements: *Prithvilinga*, the one related to earth is situated at Kanchipuram; *Ablinga* or that related to water is at Jambukeshwar; *Tejolinga* related to fire is at Arunachala, *Akasha linga* related to ether or Akasa is at Chidambaram, while the fifth, *Vayulinga* or the one related to air is at Kalahasti, in the state of Andhra Pradesh. In the Vedic religion, an individual is expected to discharge five debts (*panch-rina*) through five obligatory duties (*pancha-mahayajna*). Thus, there is debt to gods (*deva-rina*) to be fulfilled by performing prescribed sacrifices, to sages (*rishi-rina*) by imbibing Vedic knowledge, to the fathers (*pitri-rina*) by expiating rites, to the Brahmins (*brahma-rina*) by bestowing gifts, and to men (*nri-rina*) by offering hospitality. The ethical code of Buddhism comprises five precepts called *panchashila*. Time calculation is done through *Panchang*, the Hindu almanac, having five limbs.

Vedic Astrology divides time into five fundamental parts, together called the *Panchang*. The *Panchang* is used by Vedic Astrologers to judge the auspiciousness of the time and is also used to calculate the vedic birth chart or horoscope of a person. The word *Panchang* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Panchangam*, where *pancha* means five and *anga* means limb. These refer to five limbs or parameters of calendar, namely, day (*vaar*), lunar date (*tithi*), constellation (*nakshatra*), *karana* (half a lunar day) and *yoga*. Calculations are based on sun and the moon, and also the combination between these two.

In her article, “Stars and Numbers,” H.P.B. mentions that conjunction of two planets happens but rarely; that of three is rarer still; while the conjunction of four and five planets becomes an event. In fact, in historical times, the phenomenon of the conjunction of five planets happened only once, and that is in the year 2449 B.C., when it was observed by the Chinese astronomers and has not

recurred since then. All kinds of evil happenings for China were predicted by the Chinese astrologers, and true to their predictions, during the following 500 years, a series of revolutions, wars and changes of dynasty marked the end of the golden age of China.

Twelve is another significant number. There are 12 months in a year, and 12 signs in the zodiacal belt. The *Kumbh mela*, which is a religious gathering, is connected with the 12-year cycle. There is the well-known Hindu myth of the “churning of the ocean” *Samudra Manthan* in which the *Devas* and *Asuras* jointly churn the ocean for obtaining *Amrita* or nectar of immortality. According to this myth, through deceit, Vishnu gave the *Amrita*, the heavenly nectar of Immortality, to the *Devas*, leading to the “War in Heaven,” between the gods and the demons. The myth goes on to say that as the fight between the gods and the demons continued, the pot of heavenly nectar of immortality was hid at four different places, by turn, to protect it from the demons. These places are said to be Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik—the four cities in India. It is believed that a drop of nectar spilled from the pot at each of these places, so that they acquired mystical power. A *Kumbh Mela*, considered to be world’s largest religious gathering, is held at one of the four places by rotation: Haridwar, Prayag (at Allahabad), Nasik and Ujjain. *Kumbh* means a pitcher and *Mela* means *fair* in Hindi.

Kumbh Mela is celebrated at different locations depending on the position of the planet *Brihaspati* (Jupiter) and the sun. Jupiter is one of the largest planets and takes around 12 years to traverse through the 12 signs of the zodiac. Sun, on the other hand, takes one year to move through 12 signs of the zodiac. Thus, Jupiter remains in each zodiac sign for a year, during which time sun passes through all the 12 signs of the zodiac. In other words, Jupiter and Sun act like short hand and long hand of the clock, respectively. The cycle of *Purna Kumbh Mela* starts when Jupiter is in the sign Taurus (*Vrishabha Rashi*) and Sun is in Capricorn (*Makar Rashi*), when the *mela* is held at Prayag, and which will be repeated every 12 years when Jupiter comes back to sign Taurus. Likewise, when

Jupiter and sun, both are in the Zodiac sign Leo (*Simha Rashi*) the *mela* is held at Nashik; and will be held at the same place again after 12 years, when Jupiter moves once again to sign Leo. When Jupiter continues to remain in Leo for a year and Sun moves to Aries (*Mesha Rashi*) the *mela* will be held at Ujjain, which will be repeated after 12 years. Lastly, when Jupiter moves to sign Aquarius (*kumbha rashi*) and Sun moves to sign Aries the *mela* is held at Haridwar, and the same will be repeated when Jupiter again moves to sign Aquarius after 12 years. The *Maha Kumbh Mela* is held at Prayag after 144 years, when Jupiter enters the sign of Taurus for the 12th time, which was celebrated this year.

The placement of Jupiter and Sun in certain signs must be producing beneficent and positive influence. The *Kumbha Mela* is said to have been instituted by shri Shankaracharya so that *sadhus* (holy men) could meet for an exchange of views, for the discussion of religious doctrines and possible reform, and the pilgrims could benefit from the same, by interacting with these holy men.

It appears that number 9 was terribly dreaded by the ancients, writes H.P.B. while writing about the year 1890, the digits of which number add up to number 9. With them it was a symbol of great changes, cosmic and social, and it is a sad emblem of fragility of human things. Figure 9 represents earth under the influence of an *evil principle*. The digits of the previous year, 1889, added up to 8, which is a perfect cosmic number, as it represents regular motion of the universe, but it also symbolizes animal nature or *lower self* in man. In the Eastern philosophy number eight symbolizes equality, order and symmetry in heaven, which is transformed into inequality and confusion on earth, by selfishness. The Kabalists hold that number 9 symbolizes the act of reproduction and generation. That is to say that the year 1890 was preparing to *reproduce* all the evils of its parent year 1889, and also, to *generate* plenty of its own. The ancients regarded nine as the symbol of matter and materialization. According to Plato, *three times three* is the symbol of gross matter. The reason being, that according to Pythagoreans, each of the three

elements which constitute our bodies is three-fold: water contains earth and fire; earth contains aqueous and igneous particles; and fire being tempered by aqueous globules and terrestrial corpuscles serving it as food. Hence the name given to matter is “nonagous envelope.” (*Lucifer*, January 1890)

Superstitions about numbers are often based on events which are linked by the same numbers. Some numbers are considered lucky or unlucky based on their association with nature, religion or history. Many superstitions could be based on accidental luck or misfortune. In the book, “Superstitions,” Deborah Murrell mentions that the earliest reference to 13 as a generally unlucky number dates back to 1852, and it was for the idea that it was unlucky to have 13 people at a table or in company. To this day, houses with a “13” in address do not sell easily. Some builders skip the number 13 and use 12a instead. Apartment buildings and hotels frequently lack a thirteenth floor. One prevailing theory about the roots of the unlucky 13 superstition seems to date back to the 16th and 17th centuries, when it was believed that witches met in covens of 13 members. The second theory is based in mythology, where Odin, chief of the Norse gods, held a banquet in Valhalla for 12 people. But Loki the trickster giant arrived, making the number 13. He then murdered god Baldur. A third theory is based on the Last Supper of Jesus, which had 13 people, with Jesus and his 12 disciples. It is also possible that 13 is regarded as unlucky simply because it is one number beyond 12, which is said to be the number of perfection, as can be seen in the 12 months of a year, 12 hours in a day and a night, as also in 12 signs of the zodiac, writes Murrell. She points out that while number 13 may have proved unlucky for some, it was not so for all. In Basketball, Wilt Chamberlain wore number 13 shirt saying that it was unlucky only for his opponents and he was one of the greatest players of the game, who scored 4000 points in a season.

(To be concluded)

THE CAUSE OF DISEASE AND ITS CURE

THE HEALTH of the body as a whole depends on the integrity of all its parts, and their harmonious association and co-operation. Non-cooperation and discordant action of any organ, tissue or cell of the body, claiming less or more than its share of food and energy, throws the whole of the body into discord, causing disease. "Disease of the very tissues of man's body is neither more nor less than the 'sin of separateness,'" writes Mr. Judge (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, p. 16). By the same analogy, non-cooperation and discordant action of any one unit of the human family throws mankind as a whole into a diseased condition, which is evident in the innumerable ills that afflict human society. Here we can sense the *moral* cause of disease of individual units, as well as, of the collective body of mankind.

It is well known to medical science that positive emotions have a salutary effect on bodily health, and these also enable the body to recover faster and more fully from illness. On the contrary, negative emotional disposition, adversely affects the health of the body, and impedes its recovery from disease. A good physician always takes into account these factors in the treatment of diseases.

Defects and diseases of the mind are more difficult to understand and to remedy. Prominent illnesses of the mind, such as, various types of insanity, and other disorders variously termed as hysteria, phobias and manias have been extensively studied and classified by psychologists. But the moral cause of these is not taken into consideration. This is because modern science does not admit that man is essentially spiritual, and, therefore, a moral being. Physiology being the basis of modern psychology, mind is regarded as the epiphenomenon of neuro-cerebral functions. Accordingly, mental illnesses are traced to changes in the cerebral biochemistry and treated with biochemical drugs and psychiatric counselling. While these palliatives are helpful to some extent in managing the symptoms the deep-seated moral causes remain wholly unaddressed.

While some of these prominent illnesses of the mind are taken

note of, defects of the mind, such as, bias, prejudice, vanity, selfishness, greed, etc., are not only overlooked but even regarded as normal. Every thought and action with a selfish intent is productive of severe infraction of the law of universal harmony, called Karma, bringing about far reaching mental, moral, psychic, physical effects and circumstances by which man becomes bound, and reaps them in pain and sorrow. Every individual action and external circumstance leave indelible impressions on the mind. These are called *Samskara*, which like live seeds, have the power of self-reproduction, causing rebirth and shaping the character, tendencies and circumstances of life of the individual. Therefore, the real cause of diseases is to be found in our moral nature.

Diseases may be broadly classified into two sorts: Those which are caused by our action in the present life, on the one hand, and those we have brought over from previous life or lives either as hereditary transmission (atavism), or as Karmic heirloom, *i.e.*, one's own personal Karma in prior lives on earth. The first sort may be due to improper or untimely intake of food and drink, or lack of exercise, or due to stress or anxiety, and like reasons. These can be easily diagnosed and remedied by appropriate counteraction. Another ripe source of diseases under this head is that which is caused by unhealthy imagination. The power of imagination, in both causing and curing diseases, is well known. Imagination and fear together are known to cause diseases of every kind, classified in modern medical science as psychosomatic diseases. Scores of instances of "Faith cures" can be cited, in which imagination coupled with strong faith have effected marvellous cures.

One must examine the soundness of the philosophical basis of the systems of healing and the psychological laws underlying them, before opting to avail of them, and not be misled or lured by merely the statistics of apparently successful healing actually effected. This caution applies to some of the popular healing methods and practices variously called, "metaphysical healing," "Christian Science," and "Mind Cure." It is the system of affirmation and denial. The patient

is taught to imagine with a concentrated attention and *affirm* that he is well, that he is full of health, he is all spirit, all good, all is light; and *deny* that there is any disease at all, that there is no evil, that he has no disease at all. The more imaginative and greater the concentration of the mind on these lines, the more pronounced and surer is the cure. If the patient is unable to do it himself, the healer of this system does it for him, and it works very often. Many otherwise intractable diseases are thus cured.

Attractive as the system seems it is nevertheless full of danger. Man is the microcosm of the Macrocosm—both being constituted of spiritual, psychic and physical principles and forces. Through such mental abstractions the practitioner unconsciously exercises the hidden abnormal powers of his inner being which, reacting on the physical body, accomplish the apparent cure. Most diseases are the fructifications of unwholesome thoughts and deeds of ours in past lives, which have been lying latent as seeds in the mind. These must be allowed to flow out of our bodily organism, and when they are exhausted, the disease ceases, and thus our inner nature is purified of the moral taint. But by the exercise of such mental abstractions referred to in the foregoing, the disease, which is streaming out of our inner self through the body, is thereby stopped, and is lodged back in the mind. The person thinks he is cured but actually he has succeeded only in thrusting the taint back into his inner self, thus replanting the disease for the future. It will nevertheless work its way out either in this life or in a later incarnation but with a force many times more in virulence than before—with such force in some instances that, Teachers say, even insanity may result. Moreover, through such affirmations and denials which are contrary to obvious facts of life, the mind is given a wrong basis and unnatural bent. The Buddha teaches that wrongly directed mind does more harm to man than his enemy might wish for him. Thus the apparent cure actually turns out to be worse than the disease itself.

There are healers who by the exercise of their will power are able to draw upon the universal spirit of nature and direct the life

current to the patient and extirpate the disease. If the patient has implicit faith in the healer and the healer is determined and robust in health with a strong will, disease may be expelled from the patient's system. Patient alone, unaided, may also heal himself if he has unshakable faith in a saint, or a holy relic or a talisman. In such a case, the power of patient's unconscious will brings about the cure. The influence of mind over body is powerful and has brought about cures in all ages. While these seem to be attractive alternative remedies, one must nevertheless be aware of the limitation and dangers implicit in them.

If the healer himself is physically diseased, he may not only fail but often imparts his illness to his patient, and robs him of what strength he may have; *or*, he may displace the disease and cause it to be shifted to another part of patient's nature, where shortly it will reappear. What is worse, if the healer is *morally* diseased, he will infect his patient with his moral taint. Teachers warn that it is easier to cure a bodily disease but difficult to cleanse a constitution infected with moral turpitude. This is not to say that there are no good healers. H.P.B. says: "Only the pure in heart 'see God,' or exercise divine gifts—only such can heal the ills of the body and allow themselves, with relative security, to be guided by the 'invisible powers.' Such only can give peace to the disturbed spirits of their brothers and sisters, for the healing waters come from no poisonous source" (*Isis*, I, 218). But such are not to be found easily, nor do such holy ones impede the just Karmic law but can heal, only if the Karma of the person permits it.

It is, therefore, wiser and safer to always treat diseases of the body with ordinary physical remedies, and avoid attempting healing by mental abstractions. To call down divinity to heal our body is blasphemous, and will incur heavy Karmic penalty. Higher Self of man is synonymous with the Law of Absolute Justice—Karma. One of the aphorisms on Karma says, "Karmic causes already set in motion must be allowed to sweep on until exhausted." It is thus that our inner self and nature are purified of past Karmic sins. Whatever

relief is possible to be obtained through appropriate physical remedies may be availed of.

One must have a high aim in life based on the knowledge of the true Self and nature, and the moral law of our being. Our duty—*Dharma*—is to so live as to bring our nature to accord with our Divine Self, following the dictates of Divine Conscience, to which are subordinated all selfish considerations of personal self. This is the highest, most efficacious and permanent remedy for the greatest of all diseases, from which arise countless other diseases without end—Ignorance, *Avidya*. Once such a firm stand is taken with the highest ideal of life ever in view, allowing the effects of past Karma to work themselves out, while creating no new causes that violate the harmony of life, man becomes in a few incarnations purged of all taint, and becomes *whole*, which is true Health—a healthy mind in a healthy body, in the truest sense. Disease itself, in the scheme of living the Higher Life, will be viewed not as something to be avoided but as a spiritual discipline of self-purification. Teaches the *Brihadarnyaka Upanishad*, “That indeed is the highest mortification (*Tapas*) which a man afflicted with disease (*vyadhi*) suffers, and the world highest wins he that knows this truth.” Sri Shankaracharya, commenting on the verse, says that the suffering of the wise man that comes from illness will wipe out the effects of his past deeds, who takes the suffering as *tapas*, looking on it without blame or complaint, and wins thereby the highest world. Mr. Judge, likewise, teaches that even the perfect sage has to endure in his bodily frame that which belongs to it by Karma, and in his wise counsel, which follows, is to be found the ideal framework for World Health Policy which nations could adopt: “The world could get along with what disease there is, if it only turned attention to high ethics and altruistic endeavour. For after a few centuries of right living the nations would have purged themselves and built up a right moral building well founded on the rocks of true philosophy, charity, and love.” (*W.Q.J. Series No. 22*, p. 20)

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 clean our physical body by taking bath with soap and water. How can we clean our subtle, invisible bodies?

Answer: Primarily, we might say, man is composed of two bodies, the *internal* and the *external*. The internal body is astral body. H.P.B. mentions three kinds of astral bodies in *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*. One is the *Linga Sarira* or design body, or model body on which physical body is built. The model for the growing child in the womb is astral body, on which molecules arrange themselves until the child is complete. In order to project and then travel in this astral body, we must be able to extract it, fibre by fibre, from the surrounding blood, bones, mucous, bile, skin and flesh, and make it coherent, else it would be no better than quivering jelly. In the article, “Culture of Concentration,” Mr. Judge mentions mental and moral discipline necessary for bringing about coherence of the astral body, which gives us an indirect hint as regards cleansing of this inner body. For instance, he says that it takes years of training, and perfection in the power of concentration to make it coherent. Every emotion has an impact on the astral body and prevents it from becoming coherent. If one gives vent to anger, then there is violent shaking and pulling apart of the coherent particles of astral. Likewise, fear tends to shrivel up, coagulate and contract the body. The ethereal body may have assumed coherence and definiteness, but instead of being pure, clear and fresh, it begins to take cloudy and disagreeable colour, when there is envy. This stage is precursor of putrefaction and debar the student from making any further spiritual progress, and it reacts on the student so that anger again manifests itself.

The second body is called “Thought body” or “Dream body,” which is the vehicle of thoughts as well as animal passions and desires. The third body is the true Ego or Karmic body, which is often described as *Karana Sarira* or Causal body. After death, the aspect of the “Thought body” impressed with higher thoughts, feelings and aspirations, merges with Karmic body or Causal body, while the aspect impressed with animal and personal thoughts and desires becomes ghost, *bhoot* or *kamarupa*. In truth, there is but one subtle or inner body with three aspects or phases, of which *Linga Sarira* is the most material portion disappearing with the body. The “Thought body” or “Dream body” survives as *kamarupa* or astral shell in the astral region called *kama loka*. The disintegration of *kamarupa* depends upon its density. If the life led was full of selfishness and materialism then this astral shell will be coherent and may take many years to disintegrate, but if the life lived was morally pure, the shell disintegrates quickly. The Karmic body is immortal throughout *manvantara*. From the description of these three subtle bodies it is evident that purity or impurity of these inner bodies depends upon the quality of thoughts, feelings and desires indulged in during life.

In *Vernal Blooms*, Mr. Judge mentions that every person has about him a fluid, or sphere, in which are constantly found elementals which partake of his nature. By some, the astral substance around every one is called *aura*. H.P.B. describes the difference in aura of a medium and an adept. The aura of the medium is generally dense, cloudy, noisome, mephitic, nauseating to the pure spirit, and attracts only foul beings. All depends upon the moral character of the medium, writes H.P.B. A medium’s moral state determines the kind of spirits that are attracted to his/her aura, and reciprocally, the spirits that come influence the medium, intellectually, physically and morally (*Isis*, I, 487 and 490). Adepts, on the other hand, by living a life of superhuman morality and sanctity, gather about themselves heavenly nimbus, a pure and radiant aura (halo). They radiate around them an atmosphere of such divine beneficence, as to attract to their aura only pure spirits, and repel evil spirits, as happened in the case

of holy beings such as, Jesus, and Apollonius who could exorcize, and drive away bad spirits from the people who were possessed.

Question: This world is working purely on the “survival of the fittest” principle. To what extent can we apply Theosophical principles in such a situation?

Answer: It was British philosopher Herbert Spencer who coined the term, “survival of the fittest,” after reading Charles Darwin’s *On Origin of the Species*. Darwin used Spencer’s phrase “survival of the fittest,” as a synonym for Natural Selection. In the struggle for existence, the organism undergoes useful variations which are propagated to future generations, if it enhances their chances of survival by the law of Natural Selection. These traits get ingrained in their genes. Thus, by “fittest,” Spencer and Darwin did not have in mind the commonly used meaning of the word, namely, the most highly trained and physically energetic. Today, the phrase is also used in the sense of unrestrained competition. The wrong connotation of the theory has been widely debated and it has been pointed out that the phrase must not be understood to mean violent struggle for survival, and that the “fittest” need not mean the strongest and the most aggressive. Those who interpret the phrase thus, and therefore live the life of selfishness, wanting things even at the expense of others, will sooner or later be made to realize that co-operation and interdependence is the law of happy life.

It is not difficult to live in this competitive world if we have developed contentment. We need to go back to the basics. “Contentment is the greatest wealth.” There is the beautiful story by Leo Tolstoy, *How much land does a man need?* It is about a man who had insatiable desire for possessing larger and larger areas of land. His greed leads him to a village where the elder tells him that as much land as he can cover by walking, from morning till sunset, will be his, with the condition that he should return to the original spot by sunset. The greedy man tries to cover a very large area, with the result that he is breathless by sunset and dies of exhaustion

as he reaches the original spot. Ironically, the villagers bury him by digging a patch of land, just long enough to hold his body, *i.e.*, seven feet! Some of the ambitious “achievers” of our day fall in the same category. Often, those who have achieved desired objects too quick in life, at a very young age, experience existential vacuum.

In the section on “Theosophy and Education,” H.P.B. points out that efforts must be made to eliminate competitive spirit right from childhood. Our schools and colleges need to be reformed, because instead of cultivating thinking and reasoning power in children, we judge their fitness through competitive examinations. It is during school training that our character is built. The seeds of competition and selfishness are sown right from childhood when the child is taught to take care of his own interest, and to always try to remain ahead of others. All the training is towards emphasizing personality. Instead of self-centredness, children could be taught love, mutual charity and altruism. Theosophical principles say that instead of competing with others, we should compete with our own previous performance. Having done our best let us leave the results to the law. Among other laws, the most important one is the *law of Least Effort*. Not only are we expected to continually strive towards our ideal and “work as those work who are ambitious,” but also to learn to surrender personal will to the Divine Will. When we surrender personal will, we offer minimum resistance and find that much is accomplished with just enough effort and by giving our best.

H.P.B. points out that we are like cells in the body. One unhealthy cell may affect the whole body. There is no such thing as separateness. 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 Key to Theosophy*, p. 201). What is needed is an inner conversion, change in people’s minds and hearts. By applying theosophical principles we may set an example, and help to bring about the change.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Why do people kill animals for sport? Is it because they derive from it some sort of perverted pleasure? *Or*, does it add to their sense of self-worth? *Or*, is it a reflection of man’s increasing callousness and indifference towards animals? There are laws, governed by international treaties and domestic legislation, which prohibit the killing of certain species said to be endangered. The reason being that elimination of such species causes irretrievable imbalance in the planet’s ecosystems and imperils our existence. However, poaching continues to be a menace because detection and enforcement of these laws are very real problems. There is a market for the rhino’s horn, the elephant’s tusk, the tiger’s skin, bone, tooth and claw, and which pays handsomely. In this context, it is debatable if the recent suggestion for the licensed hunting of the African lions (not including them in the list of endangered species), because it is supposed to generate large revenue which can be used for further protection, is advisable. Sometimes this hunting “sport” is euphemistically called “culling,” which is like deciding to discard books by certain author from one’s overcrowded bookshelves. For instance, there have been suggestions for culling of African elephants. This suggestion does not go well with the fact that there have been over half a dozen reports showing African elephants, rhinos and lions to be endangered species. The suggestion is to kill some animals, make money and then use it to breed the animals, and again kill some more animals. It is very similar to farming animals in inhuman conditions like it is done with bears in China for their bile.

To call hunting a sport is as irresponsible as it is immoral. What is the moral legitimacy of killing an animal that has done you no harm? Why should such a thing be encouraged? Killing animals for sport is bloodlust, and we need no more of it, writes Gautam Patel, a lawyer by profession. (*Mumbai Mirror*, March 22, 2013)

The ancients instinctively felt oneness, harmony and reverence

for Nature. They were satisfied with what Mother Nature gave. But *our* wants have become unlimited. How can we rely on the vagaries of Nature? So, we must conquer Nature. Man is causing indescribable pain to animals when they are killed for medicine, and worst of all, for sport. Most “poaching” is killing for money or for mere sport. And the methods used by the poachers are extremely cruel. H.P.B. writes:

Too many forget that the sympathies of those who rule the animate world should extend beyond the limits of their own kind....It is bad to kill any sentient creature for the sake of the savage pleasure of the chase. It is perhaps worse to cause their destruction for the sake of coldly profiting by their slaughter. (*Lucifer*, November 1887)

If there is no demand for leather boots, leather jackets, mink coats, silk dresses or ivory show-pieces, there will be no supply. We may not be guilty of ourselves hunting, but if we make use of these animal products we are party to it and are giving an indirect consent to killing of animals. Hence, Buddha says, “One should neither slay nor *cause to slay*.” Karmically, of course, we are sowing seeds or causes that may be reaped by us, in subsequent incarnation, in the form of similar *helpless suffering*.

Ultimately, it is the question of our feelings and attitude towards animals. Do we recognize that animals too have souls, consciousness and emotions? Man is responsible for the evolution of the lower kingdoms. As man progresses he has the responsibility of raising the entire mass of manifested matter up to the stature, nature and dignity of conscious god-hood. When we kill even a small insect, we interrupt its progress. Hence the injunction: “Kill not—for pity’s sake—and lest ye slay the meanest [of created] thing upon its upward way.” (*The Light of Asia*)

Researchers are discovering that touch is the most potent non-

verbal mode of communication. Through a series of studies, Matthew Hertenstein, the DePauw University psychologist demonstrated that we have an innate ability to communicate and decode emotions via touch alone. In these studies, the participants communicated eight distinct emotions—anger, fear, disgust, love, gratitude, sympathy, happiness and sadness—with accuracy rates as high as 78 per cent. Touch plays an important role in parent-child relationship, probably because even before birth, the foetus in the womb receives vibrations of mother’s heartbeat, amplified by amniotic fluid. A mother’s touch enhances attachment between mother and child; it can signify security—“You are safe, I am here”—and depending on the type of touch, it can generate positive or negative emotions. For instance, a sudden squeeze from mother is often a warning to the child not to interact with a new object.

Animals strengthen their social bonds by grooming each other, and so also, in humans, touch strengthens relationships and is a marker of closeness. Warm touch stimulates release of the “cuddle hormone” oxytocin, which enhances a sense of trust and attachment. DePauw’s Hertenstein expresses reciprocal nature of touch by saying that “you can’t touch without being touched.” And Tiffany Field, director of the Touch Research Institute, corroborates it by saying, “Studies have shown that a person giving a hug gets just as much benefits as a person being hugged.” The most important thing we reveal through touch is “probably our degree of dominance and our degree of intimacy. A limp handshake signifies uncertainty, low enthusiasm, introversion,” while a viselike grip can be taken as a sign that you are trying to dominate, says Peter Andersen, author of *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions*. It appears that the most appropriate time to communicate via touch is when someone needs consoling. However, outside of close relationships, by touching another we run the risk of sending wrong signals. Context matters, which is why we have rules about whom we can touch, where and when. Different cultures and individuals have different tolerance levels for touch, writes Rick Chillot, a writer and an editor

for Quirk Books. (*Psychology Today*, March-April 2013)

According to embryological research the sense of touch is the first and primary sense, and that all the other senses are evolved from it. All the senses are differentiated forms of touch. Perhaps one way of understanding it is that every physical sense functions primarily on the basis of vibrations coming in contact with the sense organ and producing some sensation; “touch,” in that sense may be considered first and primary sense.

In primitive cultures, infants are in touch with others about 90 per cent of the time. Maternity Hospital in Cambridge, England, discovered that if a premature baby were placed on a lamb’s wool blanket for a day, it would gain an average of fifteen grams more than usual, because it was something akin to swaddling, and provided the comfort of touch, writes Diane Ackerman (*A Natural History of the Senses*, pp. 77-78).

H.P.B. remarks that when a person is deprived of one or more senses, then it is compensated by greater development of other senses. A blind person recovers his sense of sight through touch and hearing. So also, a deaf person seems to hear through eyes, by looking at the lips and mouth of a speaker (*S.D.*, I, 534). For instance, Helen Keller was blind, deaf and mute, but her remaining senses were finely attuned. “When she put her hands on the radio to enjoy music, she could tell the difference between cornets and the strings,” writes Diane Ackerman.

However, when one earnestly begins to walk the path of occultism, he is asked to avoid bodily contact (*i.e.*, being touched or touch) with human, as with animal beings. We impart our magnetism to whatever we touch or wear. In India, people are reluctant to shake hands. This is not an idle fancy or superstition, because every person has a magnetic exhalation. A person may be in perfect physical health, but his exhalation may be harmful for others who are sensitive to such subtle influences. These magnetic exhalations are more intense from the eyes, palms, fingers, soles of the feet, etc. Careful physicians wash their hands before leaving

each patient. Just like physical disease, impure magnetism can be communicated by touch.

The Greek myths are stories with lessons of life wrapped into them. One such myth is regarding Procrustes, a black-smith-turned-bandit. In ancient Greece, it is said, when one started on the road to Athens, one was sure to encounter Procrustes. At his inn he offered hospitality to tired travellers, and then invited them for a good night’s rest in his special iron bed, saying that it was so wonderful, as its length exactly matched whoever lay down upon it. But how was this to happen? The poor traveller would discover with some horror that as soon as he lay down on the *special bed*, Procrustes would hack off the part of the person that did not fit the bed, if he was tall; and if he was short, then he would be pulled, yanked and stretched to fit the bed! Today, the term “Procrustean bed,” has come to mean “an arbitrary standard to which exact conformity is forced.” Thus, for instance, when we display some traits and qualities during childhood which are not acceptable or admired by people around, then in the course of time these are brutally “hacked off.” On the other hand, the qualities that are accepted and admired by others, especially by the people we respect, then we “stretch” and push ourselves to develop those qualities. However, often this could be extremely stressful when we are trying to be pleasing, obedient, truthful, calm, helpful, *all the time*. Often we attempt to hide the undesirable, or cover our family background or history, simply to fit in or be accepted.

“Often others—parents, teachers, society itself—stand in for Procrustes; but equally, we take on his role towards ourselves. And sadly, too often we can act as Procrustes towards others,” writes Marguerite Theophil. As we grow in awareness, we would do well to ask what aspects of ourselves we forcibly changed in order to be accepted by our friends, parents, relatives or colleagues. We can

begin the process of reclaiming the lost parts which will help us live fuller lives,” writes Theophil. (*The Times of India*, March 14, 2013)

What shall we accept as our “standard” to grow intellectually and morally? H.P.B. says that we seem to drift down, from the cradle to grave, nailed to the *Procrustean bed of custom and conventionality*. Conventionality, she says, is a “*simulation* of feelings according to a received standard.” We are all guilty of simulation or dissembling at some time or other. We do not dare to express what we *really* feel. As Erich Fromm points out, more often than not, if the painting is by a famous painter like Picasso or Van Gogh, we judge it to be extremely beautiful, and we judged it beautiful because we are *supposed* to find it so—because we have heard from our childhood that certain authors and artists are great and that it is a mark of “good taste” to like and admire their work.

It is by developing the noble qualities or transcendental virtues and eliminating our vices and weaknesses through pain that we reach spiritual perfection. This was symbolized by tying the disciple or candidate to a cross during the mysteries of initiation that depicted spiritual rebirth, in which, the man of flesh and his passions were crucified on the *Procrustean bed of torture*, and he was reborn as an Immortal. (*S.D.*, II, 561-62)

Some of the materialistic thinkers and scientists take divine ideas and dwarf them on the Procrustean bed of their own intellectual narrow-mindedness. Our men of materialistic science try to fit facts to their theories, instead of trying to fit their theories to facts, leading to absurdities. For instance, mind is simply the name for the action of the brain in evolving thought. Hence, if there is no brain, there can be no mind, as far as they are concerned. During H.P.B.’s time materialistic science tried to fit every phenomenon—even of a mental and spiritual character—within the Procrustean bed of their own preconceived notions and their pet theories.