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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

NO ONE likes suffering; yet everybody has it. It is a universal experience. Let us seek causation from this. Pain and sorrow trouble us all and like every other phenomenon, it is solvable, both by knowing the cause and by seeking the method of its cure. It is a well-known fact that those who have suffered have greater sympathy for the sufferings of others.

All great teachers answer the same way to this crucial problem, crucial because it vitally touches our whole being—from the body to the Spiritual Soul. There is physical suffering, emotional and mental suffering. In the *Katha* and *Mundaka* Upanishads the problem receives a metaphysical and spiritual treatment. In the Bible, in the *Book of Job*, the problem of pain is threshed out. In the Zoroastrian *Gathas*, the prophet himself details his own personal problem. The prophet of Arabia and the Sufi poets also have cogitated about the question.

But perhaps nowhere, in the whole extant literature has the problem received such thorough and exhaustive treatment as in the Buddhist philosophy. The whole philosophy of Gautama rotates on the axis of Pleasure-Pain, because he started out to solve the problem. What he taught is especially Theosophical, but so are the propositions of Zoroaster and Job, and all the rest of them.

The fundamental law that we must understand to solve the problem of pain and to decipher the meaning of suffering is the Law of Ethical Causation. Man produces causes and these causes

cannot be eliminated until and unless he compensates them by experiencing their adequate and legitimate effects. Thus, we ourselves are responsible for the suffering that befalls us. Thus, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (*Galatians*, vi-7). And again “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (*Matthew*: vii-2)

“Nothing can sprout forth without a seed. No one can obtain happiness without having accomplished acts capable of leading to happiness.” (*The Mahabharata, Santi Parva*, Chapter 291)

“O men, learn ye these laws of happiness and misery which Ahura Mazda has ordained. They are Suffering and pain...for the wicked, and blessings for the righteous...” (*Ahunavad Gatha*, xxx.11)

When we think for a few moments about the working of this law—as you sow, so shall you reap—we are face to face with the problem of past lives. The suffering of the congenitally diseased, the pain of innocent infants, the blunders of ignorant youth, and a hundred other cases stare us in the face. This Law cannot be understood without taking into account the Law of Reincarnation or Rebirth.

We might say that the Law operates without an error, in every department of life. When we do not see the actual cause of our own pain and suffering it is because it is an effect from causes generated in previous lives. But let there be no mistake—nothing comes to us, which we have not deserved. There is no “chance” or “accident.” The universe is governed by infallible Law, and every one of us, young or old, rich or poor, comes under its operation, influence and guidance. Thus, we do not suffer from the mistakes of our parents, though our parents may be instruments or channels for our anguish. A mother suffers from the ills of her children, but the evil is in the children who become instruments of pain for the poor mother. The justice lies in this that we pay our own debts, and we suffer for our own mistakes. How terrible if we were at the mercy of someone!

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No, the Law is merciful, because in paying our own debts we own, in suffering for our own mistakes, we know better and thus grow.

We learn much more from pain than from pleasure. Whoever asked the question, why am I well? Why am I happy? Or, at the birth of a child how many ask where the Soul came from? But we sit up and take notice when we are ill or unhappy. Also, death prompts us to ask the question, where does the Soul go? It is not that we cannot learn through pleasurable experiences—but we do not—and so our sorrow proves of greater value to the soul than our joys.

There is another point we should note—people think that when they go through a sorrowful experience they *learn*. Yes, we understand the Law. *We do not always necessarily learn the lesson*, and so we repeat the same error and go through the same experience again and again. We learn through our experiences, all of them, in two ways: (1) Directly and (2) Indirectly. For example: (1) I eat something and have pain, I am able to trace my pain to its cause, wrong eating. I learn not to eat such food again. (2) I eat and pain is produced; I am not able to establish the connection between pain and food; I eat again and have pain again, till I find out, but in the meantime through my suffering my body has learned some lessons not clear to me. I have had the opportunity to face bodily pain and show forth courage, patience and fortitude. Every experience, good or bad, teaches in two ways—directly and indirectly, and so all the time we are growing and advancing. However, we are not aware of this, just like the growing child is unable to notice his growth day by day.

But to know that our suffering comes from past lives, or that we are learning and growing through it is no consolation or it is only a poor consolation. Real consolation comes from knowledge as to how to cease making sorrow for ourselves and for others. So, let us ask—what is the root cause of suffering? Why and how does it come? Where lies the remedy? The Buddha taught Four Noble Truths: (1) Sorrow exists, (2) Cause of sorrow, (3) Cure of sorrow, and (4) The Noble Eightfold Path.

Sorrow exists and hence the *Gita* advises meditation on sorrow, decay and death. The Buddha teaches that the Cause of Sorrow is Desire, *Tanha* or *Trishna*, typically translated as craving; *Kama* and *Moha*, says the *Gita*. Desire or passion is the one root cause of all pain and suffering. Desire rooted in selfishness and personality; desire which goes against the very Law of Nature which is that of Unity and Compassion. There are physical and mental desires. In Buddhism there are three types of desires or *tanha*. *Kama-tanha* is primarily craving for sensory pleasures, which also includes an attachment to ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories and beliefs. *Bhava-tanha* is craving to be something. Some like to become famous, earn a title, get a high-profile job, etc. *Bhava-tanha* also includes a desire for praise and success. In its subtle form, a monk could nurture the feeling that all people should understand the teachings and appreciate the *Dhamma*. *Vibhav-tanha* means craving for non-existence. It is the desire to avoid unpleasant things in the current or future life, such as unpleasant people or situations. This sort of craving may include attempts at suicide and self-annihilation, which results in further rebirth in a worse realm of existence. Normally, this type of craving arises from the wrong view that there is no rebirth. There could be *Vibhav-tanha* in spiritual life which can be very self-righteous, such as, “I want to get rid of desire. I want to get rid of anger and jealousy,” etc. All these desires are in each one of us and we move heaven and earth to satisfy them.

These desires cause us pain—for example, desires of the body, when satisfied, bring bodily diseases, and gluttony; the pleasure of taste and palate is the cause of a hundred diseases. The sexual instinct is the strongest of all. Our society seems to be following the philosophy of hedonism, believing that the acquisition of pleasures is the principal good, considering the control of passions as unnatural. Mr. Huxley explains how sex addiction is like unto habit-forming drugs, such as alcohol, morphine, or cocaine, leading to torment of body and mind. The *Gita* says: “He who attendeth to the inclinations of the senses, in them hath a concern; from this concern is created

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passion, from passion anger, from anger is produced delusion, from delusion a loss of the memory, from the loss of memory loss of discrimination, and from loss of discrimination loss of all!”

When the Buddha says, “Sorrow is,” it does not mean that there are no pleasant experiences in the world. It means that at the bottom of even pleasant experiences, there is pain. There is *concealed* suffering. As Shelley says: “We look before and after, And pine for what is not: Our sincerest laughter, With some pain is fraught.” Something may be a source of pleasure but it may be tied up with anxiety, as we are afraid of losing it. It could be a person, a thing, or position, or power. The predicament of the person who enjoys position or power is described in Buddhism by giving the illustration of a hawk. Suppose there is a hawk that takes a piece of meat and flies away, holding it in his beak. Soon, hundreds of other hawks will be seen flying after him. Some peck at his body, some at his eyes, trying to take away that piece. In the same way, possessing so many pleasures in this highly competitive world is like holding a piece of meat. To look at, a person may be happy, surrounded by all the comforts of life, but there may be an underlying anxiety and suffering. There is always *potential suffering* attached to everything in this world. Something that is a source of joy at a given moment, may have to be given up, sooner or later.

This may be linked to the impermanent nature of things also. Our body, our ideas and emotions, all keep changing. We try to derive pleasure out of sensations. *Light on the Path* says: “In sensation no permanent home can be found, because change is the law of this vibratory existence. That fact is the first one that must be learned by the disciple. It is useless to pause and weep for a scene in a kaleidoscope which has passed.” Things and pleasures of the world are as fleeting as the scene or pattern formed in a kaleidoscope. In fact, the law of diminishing returns seems to govern the realm of pleasures. We do not derive the same pleasure the second time and still less the third time, and so on.

The Cure of Sorrow lies in purifying desires, *i.e.*, purifying our

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tastes and appetites and soul life; by the power of knowledge, we can overcome sorrow. This will take time but is a sure way. The Noble Eightfold Path gives us details of how we may learn to live. Let us recognize that our pains have come to us because of our ignorance and our desires. Each pain has a lesson to teach. It will greatly help us if we remember that man is a maker of his destiny, and therefore it is possible for us to create a better destiny. We must seek to acquire knowledge concerning the Soul, cause-effect, and pain-bliss. For that purpose, we must abstain from indulging in fancy and daydreams, and instead allow the mind to dwell on universal and impersonal truths.

Let us seek to mortify the personal man by the practice of desirelessness. We may begin by trying to give up one or two desires and also cultivate one or two qualities, such as Patience and Contentment. It is very difficult but let us learn to say, in the midst of all our difficulties and sorrow, that “Everything is not only as we deserved but also as we desired.” Perhaps, today man suffers more from uncontrolled speech than anything else. In this, as in many other things, East is right. Let us not “ape” the West. We must stop acting impulsively, and think before we act and ask for a reason for action. It is necessary to acquire knowledge, in order that we are not guided merely by our desires. It is easy to see that a thing is not right because we like it; a person is not bad because we dislike him. Knowledge provides deeper insight.

“Pain arouses, softens, breaks and destroys. . . . It is an implement, a thing, which is used, evidently,” says *Through the Gates of Gold*. Pain arouses. It is only when pain comes that we sit up and ask questions of life. We come to a realization that we need to learn to surrender *our* will to *divine* will. Pain shows that all is not well with us. It shatters our illusion and shows that whatever we have, is not our own and is not sufficient. Something vital is missing in our lives. We do not care to know if God exists or not, so long as there is even a slight possibility of obtaining happiness in some other way. When all earthly doors are closed to us, then, as a last resort, we turn to God.

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Light on the Path says, “No man desires to see that light which illumines the spaceless soul until pain and sorrow and despair have driven him away from the life of ordinary humanity.” In other words, so long as life flows by smoothly, we do not ask those knotty questions of life, which we ask only when pain pursues us. The terrible void that is felt at the loss of a loved one indicates the need to develop an interest in impersonal activities like playing chess, playing a musical instrument, or even gardening, instead of putting all the eggs in one basket. Even when we are unable to escape from unpleasant or painful circumstances, we still have one thing, namely, the freedom to choose our attitude, and our response to them. Dostoevsky said: “There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings.”

The Rishis, the Masters, have fully and formally solved the problem of pain. What is their example? They are engaged in Holy Contemplation all the time. They are free from all desires, and all their desires have centred on the one Supreme desire—impersonal love of the whole of the Human Race. They speak only to teach and to bless and to help. They are constantly engaged in the unselfish service of Humanity. Let us copy their example. Let us say to ourselves “I will tread the Aryan Path, the Path of the Noble Masters,” who have conquered by knowledge all pain, all anguish, all suffering.

Successful control over one’s thoughts, words or deeds along moral lines will verily take one to the kingdom of heaven while lack of such control will throw him into the darkness of hell itself.

Even though you may not succeed in controlling your other faculties fully, you owe it to yourself to control at least your tongue; failure to do so will assuredly entail suffering born out of its misuse.

Beware of your words while giving utterance to them by being uniformly graceful, for, one wrong word might, by hurting the other’s feeling, completely undo the wholesome effect created by all other right words put together.

—TIRUVALLUVAR

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
LETTER TO A CHILD NEVER BORN—I

LETTER TO A CHILD NEVER BORN, is a novel by Italian author and journalist Oriana Fallaci, published in 1975. The English translation was published in 1976. The book, described as “an extraordinary novel” by some reviewers, sold four billion copies worldwide. It is written as a letter by a young professional woman, presumably the author herself, to the foetus she carries in her womb. In that letter we find expressed the woman’s struggle to choose between a career she loves and an unexpected pregnancy, outside of marriage. It is a unique concept of a mother talking to her child that she carried in her womb. The child in the womb is being told how life works and is warned about the unfairness of the world, and that a woman faces many problems adjusting to society. The letter covers themes such as, motherhood, womanhood, abortion, and the meaning of life.

The woman feels that she is pregnant, initially, even without any medical check-up, which is later affirmed by a medical doctor. When she tells others about her pregnancy, most people view it negatively, as she was a woman who had become pregnant out of wedlock. The father of the child does not hesitate in suggesting that she should “get rid of it” as fast as possible, and her gynaecologist suggests the same. However, she remains firm in her decision to “keep it,” holding on to the bond with her child. She begins to talk to her child in the womb by sharing with it her philosophy of life. She talks to him about love, his father, and the inequality between male and female; rich and poor. She believes that it is important that the child should be prepared at that early stage so that he can defend himself and survive in a world where no one can be trusted or believed.

Initially, she is upset when she feels the presence of another life within her body. She knows nothing about the child except that he depends totally on her own choices. Some disturbing questions arise: What if the child does not want to be a part of this world? If the

child could choose, would he prefer to be born, to grow up, and to suffer, or would he wish to return to the joyful state from which he had come? Is it fair to impose life even if it means suffering? Would it be better not to be born at all? But, at the same time, she realizes that what she fears most is “nothingness” or never having existence. Therefore, it is better to be born than return to nothingness. That is the reason why she decides to give birth to the child. Also, she says, “It all happened because it could happen... with the only arrogance that is legitimate... I take the responsibility of choice.” However, the father of the child wants her to get rid of the child because he is not her husband. The mother remains firm about her decision to give birth to the child. She follows the photographs of a model foetus from week to week,

When she talks to her child, initially, she wants her child to be a woman because she feels that being a woman is a challenge because women have to face many difficulties and solve many problems. Women have to explain thousands of times that they are innocent. Additionally, she tells her child that if he steps into this world as a woman, life will be unfair to her, and she has to suffer a lot in this patriarchal society where a man has superiority over a woman. As a woman she would be chained to customs and traditions, and will not have the choice of saying “No,” because a woman is asked to compromise in every aspect of life. She has to compromise with her family, her husband, and her career.

At the same time, she tells the unborn child that it is fascinating to be a woman. It is an adventure that takes courage. “You will have so many things to engage you if you are born a woman... You will have to struggle to explain that it was not sin that was born on the day when Eve picked an apple, what was born that day was a splendid virtue called disobedience.”

On the other hand, a man enjoys everything and is able to live life as he desires. There are no restrictions for a man, as he is able to enjoy all sense pleasures and can stay out till late at night. Just when she concludes that if her child was born as a man he would have to

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suffer less, she realizes that the life of a man is also not without its problems and challenges. She reflects that the men are asked to participate in wars and people make fun of them if they cry or show that they are in need of sympathy or tenderness. She concludes that it is more important to be a person or a human, only. A person or a human is an astonishing word because it sets no limits for man or woman.

She shares her thoughts on “love” with her child and tells him that everyone seems to talk about it, and in offering it as a panacea for every tragedy, “they wound and betray and kill both body and soul....There are no straps or chains or bars that can hold you in a blinder slavery, a more desperate sense of helplessness. Beware of giving yourself to someone in the name of that rapture: it only means forgetting yourself, your rights, your dignity, and thus your freedom.” And yet she admits that she has such a hunger and need for it, and therefore, there must be a way that would show her the meaning of that word, Love. She recalls her mother’s words: “Love is what a woman feels for her child when she takes it in her arms and feels how alone, helpless, and defenceless it is.” In a way she has been experiencing, and therefore like other mothers she has been following the growth of the child in her womb with excitement, by reading books and clipping pictures of embryos and foetuses. “Today you have completed six weeks....How cute you have become! No longer a fish, no longer a larva, no longer something formless, you already look like a human being: with that big bald pink head.”

She experiences a great difference in the treatment given by people to a woman who is legally pregnant and the one who is not. No one advised her to take rest, or not lift heavy things but only made speeches about abortion. There are different opinions as to at what point in its development the foetus becomes a human being, which comes through during her conversation with her friend. According to Dr. Munson, a scientist, “even the foetus is practically inert matter, little more than a vegetable that can be extirpated with a spoon.” On the other hand, according to some biologists, “the

human being begins at the time of conception since the fertilized egg contains DNA: deoxyribonucleic acid composed of the proteins that form an individual.” For some doctors “a human being becomes a human being after twenty-eight weeks,” the point at which it can survive outside the uterus even though gestation has not been completed.

Another important change in her thinking comes when she says, “I was wrong to think I was imposing a choice on you. After all, you are the one who has taken the initiative. By keeping you, I am only bowing down to the command you gave me when your drop of life was ignited. I have chosen nothing.”

However, at one point she suffers from symptoms of a difficult pregnancy. She experiences cramps and pain in her belly, spotting, nausea, etc., and was asked to take bed rest for two months. At this point she expresses her resentment towards the child, accusing him of controlling her world, her emotions and her own being. Despite taking complete rest for two months, when the doctor finds that the growth of the foetus is not satisfactory, he tells her, “Sometimes worries, anxieties, shocks are more dangerous than physical fatigue, since they lead to cramps, uterine contractions, and seriously threaten the life of the embryo,” and advises her to strictly avoid all emotion, all dark moods, and try to acquire serenity. He asks her to visit him if a drop of blood appears. She is exasperated and argues that how could she be placid when her nature is just the contrary. At that point she is angry with the child in the womb, saying: “I am a person...I have my own reactions, sometimes astonishment, sometimes dismay. Even if I could suppress myself, I would not want to be reduced to the state of a vegetable or a physiological machine good for nothing but procreation.” She tells him that first her bodily movements were restricted and now he seemed to control her heart and mind, robbing them of their capacity to feel, think, and live!

It was at this time when the doctor wanted her to have a complete rest, that her boss assigned her a job that required travelling. He tells her that commitments have to be respected and gives a veiled

threat to shift the assignment to a man because they are less vulnerable to “accidents.” Just then she spots a drop of blood and rushes to the doctor, as advised. The doctor tells her that absolute rest would take care of everything, and for that, she must be hospitalized. Alone in the hospital when she reflects, she feels that the life she had made for herself was threatened by a major change. She rebels against the idea of being tied up to the curse of becoming a mother. Addressing her child in the womb she says “What is this respect for you that removes respect for me? What is this right of yours to exist that takes no account of my right to exist? There is no humanity in you.... You are nothing but a little flesh doll that can’t think, can’t speak, can’t laugh, can’t cry, and can act only to build itself.” She argues that if they justify the stand of an impoverished woman who does not want more children or a girl who is raped and does not want the child, then even she should be justified if she leaves the hospital and takes up the assignment in the office. The doctor told her that even leaving the hospital would be a crime, and to undertake a trip would be premeditated homicide, when “you measured at least six and a quarter inches and weighed seven ounces.”

Amid her mood swings and wavering resolve to keep the child, she shares four fairy tales that express her ideals, frustrations and general views of the world and life. The fairy tales explain to the child how unfair the world is to a woman who has to struggle more, prove herself more and work at getting accepted by her society. The world is also unfair to the poor who are deprived of their dreams and the basic right to dream of freedom. It is strange that the whole of mankind has nothing to look forward to after being born except for a definite and certain end.

Those very friends and colleagues who had expressed their disapproval when she had decided to keep the child when she discovered that she was pregnant, were now expressing their doubts and criticism when they found her throwing tantrums and showing unwillingness to pay attention to the advice of taking precautions for her condition. The father of the child shows concern and is willing

to take the responsibility of taking care of the child and her, while she is confined to bed. She receives it all with resentment. She meets another doctor. This time it is a female doctor who shares her views concerning pregnancy and explains things rationally. In her opinion, staying in bed is against nature and that would mean carrying precautions too far. She cautioned her not to drive the car too much. A woman must not lose herself to be able to bear a new life. This new life must take its own course as designed by nature. After meeting this new doctor, she is at peace with her child. She is determined to keep the child with her and resume her old life. She accepts the job assignment which involves many hours of driving a car. All her friends and her first doctor protested as they were worried about her condition. She is confident after her conversation with the second doctor. However, in the middle of that trip there was a crisis. She begins to experience cramps, belly muscle pains, nausea, shortness of breath, and bleeding while driving on a bumpy road. She panics. Just as she was sure of the existence of life within her, at the beginning, now she knew that the same life had ended.

She is forced to interrupt her trip and return back to the city. She immediately goes to meet her second doctor. After examining her she concludes that the child had stopped growing in the last two weeks and that he is dead. On reaching home she is shattered and she faints. "Perhaps it was while I slept, or perhaps it was during the delirium," she finds herself in a spotless white room, with seven benches, occupied by her two doctors, her husband, her parents, her boss, and her friends. She finds herself inside a cage. She realises that a trial is being conducted in which these seven people are assessing her liability for the loss of the child.

One of the doctors argues that "the life of a person is a continuum from the moment it is conceived to the moment it dies." He accuses the woman of causing the death of the child by not following the advice of taking bed rest, and in fact choosing to travel for many hours all by herself. The lady doctor counters it by saying that pregnancy is not a punishment inflicted by nature and it is unfair to

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ask a woman to lie flat on her back in bed for months and give up her activities and her freedom. Her parents are of the opinion that it is not for them or others to judge her actions because “we are not inside her heart or mind.” According to them, there was only one witness who could explain what happened and that was the child in her womb.

The child in the womb tells the mother that she killed him without killing him. He says that he had not asked to be born, as he came from nothingness, and in nothingness, there is no will or choice. It was she who convinced him that to be born is to escape from nothingness, and that nothing is worse than “nothingness.” But then after a while, he says that he discovered that his mother believed in love, but she did not believe in life. So, she had to make an effort to live and also make an effort to bring him to live. And she went on to reproach him, blaming him for making her suffer and describing life as a trap devoid of freedom, of happiness, of love. It was then that he made his first and last choice, that of refusing to be born. The child says that while in the womb he knew that the purpose was to be born. But once born the only purpose is to die and go back to nothingness. Then why should one emerge from nothingness? However, the child tells the mother that he has forgiven her and that he will be born some other time.

The woman wonders as to whose purpose is served when a child dies and a mother gives up being a mother? She is listening to people around her discussing and some conclude that she has offended God, or that she has offended women. Did she understand that life was sacred? She reflects that the dilemma, to be or not to be, cannot be resolved by a law or some court sentence but every creature resolves it by and for himself. Her child has died and she may be dying too. Somewhere a hundred thousand children are being born. “Life does not need you or me....Because life does not die.”

(To be concluded)

H. P. BLAVATSKY

(Read at the Convention of the European Section of the T.S., by the Spanish delegate.)

THE Foundress of the Theosophical Society; the Initiate in Divine Wisdom; the noble woman, who with incomparable self-sacrifice and courage, gave up her position, her fortune, her comfort, and even her country, in her love for humanity, for the sake of spreading the Eternal Truth—is dead. The Theosophical Society, which sorrows over this irreparable loss, has just received a terrible blow, and it is not within my power to measure, at present, the consequences entailed by the death of its Teacher on the Society.

My desire is more modest. I wish only to speak of the links which united me to H. P. B., and of the mighty influence which her high-souled individuality exercised upon me, on my method of thought, of feeling, and also on my views of moral, intellectual and material things—in fact on my whole life. I regret indeed being obliged to write from such a personal standpoint, but I think that, perhaps, an analysis of my present moral condition may be useful and analogous to that of many of my brothers here present, who like myself were honoured by the personal acquaintance of H.P.B. It will have, at any rate, one great advantage: that is, my words and experiences are based on personal knowledge, and not on hearsay, and when we are considering moral and even spiritual questions, there is, I think, only one sure criterion—personal experience. In the remarkable article published on the 15th June, in the *Review of Reviews*, Mr. A. P. Sinnett well says: “She dominated every situation in which she was placed, and she had to be either greatly loved or greatly hated by those she came in contact with. She could never be an object of indifference.”

Now in my opinion this statement is very correct, and I have no doubt that my brothers here present will agree with me. When first I came to London with the sole aim of meeting and knowing H.P.B., whose gifts had made a profound impression on me, I realized that I was going to make the acquaintance of the most remarkable person of this age: remarkable alike for the depth of her knowledge and for her vast wisdom. It was no mere curiosity, but a feeling of all-powerful

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attraction which drew me to her, a feeling *sui generis*, which can only be explained on an occult basis. The reality was beyond my utmost expectation; I felt that the glance of H. P. B. had penetrated and destroyed the personality that I had been up to that moment: a process, new, strange, inexplicable, but most real, effectual and undeniable, was accomplished in the innermost recess of my moral and spiritual nature. The transformation took place, and from that moment the old personality, with its ideas, tendencies, and prejudices more or less ingrained, disappeared. I shall not try to explain this seemingly startling fact, which like all others is based on the great law of Karma; but never will it be erased from my memory. Every time I saw H.P.B., my affection loyalty and admiration for her increased. To her I owe all that I know, for both mental tranquillity and moral equilibrium were attained on making her acquaintance. She gave me hope for the future; she inspired me with her own noble and devoted principles, and transformed my everyday existence by holding up a high ideal of life for attainment; the ideal being the chief object of the Theosophical Society, *i.e.*, to work for the good and well-being of humanity.

Her death was a bitter grief to me, as to all those who are working for the common cause, Theosophy, and who having known her personally, have contracted a debt of undying gratitude toward her. I have lost my Friend and Teacher, who purified my life, who gave me back my faith in Humanity, and in her admirable example of courage, self-sacrifice, and disinterestedness, and virtue, I shall find the strength and courage necessary for working for that cause which we are all bound to defend.

May her memory be blessed! These, dear brethren and friends, are the few words which I wished to say to you, greatly desiring to declare before you all that I shall never forget what I owe to H. P. Blavatsky. Let enemies and materialists explain, if they can, the power and attraction of H.P.B., and if they cannot, let them be silent. The tree will be known by its fruits, as actions will be judged and valued by their results.

JOSE XIFRE.

(Translated from the Spanish. Reprinted from “In Memory of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky” by Some of her Pupils, Death Centenary Edition, 1991.)

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS THE PARAMITAS—II

PATIENCE is a sublime virtue. This *Paramita*, on the downward arc, is the highest for men and women who have not yet any conception of the higher life. But the patience which cultivates *Virya*—for *Kshanti* and *Virya* form a pair—is the higher patience and both are the progeny (they are known as the daughter and the son) of dispassion—*Vairagya*.

Patience itself is a healing-power and very much indeed can be gained both spiritually and psychically through patience. Active and positive benefit accrues from the practice of this virtue when during its expression and observance the mind is kept fecundated by spiritual verities and ideas. *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *Light on the Path* and *The Light of Asia* are not time-killers as so many books are; they are purifiers, builders, strengtheners and polishers of human nature; potent is their action, when properly used, on the blood and, through it, on the nerves and muscles. Difficult and hard to perceive as it may be for you, a quiet reflection on the fact that we get not only what we deserve but also that which we desire and that which is the very best for us—that will help you. There are special times for each of us when the teachings learnt can be more strenuously practised.

The second virtue of *Shila* needs to be studied and understood; have you looked at it from the viewpoint of personal application to yourself? Note the kinship between word and act, and note Karmic action. What is Karmic action? Action done under the force of your own destiny? And what about the intelligent Action of the Great Law which restores the harmony we break? What do we mean when we say that we face our own Karma? Our students do not take into account the Omniscience of the Law which is not only Exact Justice but also Infinite Mercy.

The *Dhyana Paramita* should not be confused with the exercises in meditation. This virtue of Ceaseless Contemplation of *Metta*-

Compassion-Mercy is the result of *Vairagya* and *Shanti-Virya*. *Dhyana* is one of the pair, the other being *Shila*. Study *Dhyana* and *Shila* as a pair, one supporting and improving the other in us.

Shila-harmony develops as *Dhyana*, attentive contemplation, progresses, and *Dhyana* grows in intensity as *Shila* establishes itself and reveals its power of binding word and deed on the plane of effects as thought and feeling on the plane of causes. It is true that harmony in word and act sounds and seems easier; also note that *shila* is on the arc of descent. The *Dhyana Paramita* means “ceaseless contemplation” as a virtue-feeling. It is the *Narjol* state, *i.e.*, that of a saintly Adept. Now this contemplation is the result of *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. You must study Patanjali to place *Dhyana*. There are *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. Also compare the four states of fourfold *Dhyana Marga*.

As to *Dana* and *Prajna*: All human beings have a seed of love and charity, but how few make that seed useful in the right way! Thought bestowed on charity and love purifies and elevates and then *Dana-Prajna* is conceived—seeing with the Eye of *Dana*. That conception has its subjective period—an antenatal, embryonic existence; then it is born and *acts* of charity and love are done. But, all through, the intellectual process has to be kept up. To love is to understand all and to forgive all non-lovableness. But there is also yoga with love-expressions which are pure and so lovable. To become lovable is a step in the development of *Dana-Prajna*.

Real *Prajna* is Compassion Absolute. There are seven states of *Prajna* and correspondingly seven of Compassion Absolute. Reread pp. 75-76 of *The Voice of the Silence* and note what creates Compassion Absolute. It stands at the Gate of the Inner Path of Renunciation. *Dana* corresponds to Globe A in evolution. It starts there, but the important real starter is Globe D. In the middle of the Fourth Round and on the Fourth Globe real human evolution commences.

Prajna is the power or the capacity that gives rise to perception. The Parabrahman of the Vedantic metaphysicians is the Unconscious

of the Advaites who name it *Chidakasam* and *Chinmatra*. This contains within itself the potentiality of every condition of *Prajna* and results as consciousness on the one hand and as the objective universe on the other (the Motion and Space, Spirit and Matter of the First Fundamental) by the operation of its latent *shakti*, the power which generates thought (the *Fohat* of *The Secret Doctrine*). There are seven states of *Prajna*; consciousness perceives matter at seven levels, the highest of which is the above-mentioned Unconscious, *i.e.*, the Universal Consciousness which is non-self-conscious. These cosmic ultimates are good to dwell upon when *Vairagya* is to be unfolded.

The practice of *Prajna* at our level means, does it not, improving and elevating our present power of perception? The highest perception is the development of the seventh *Paramita*, which implies the sight of *Paramarthasatya*—Altruistic Truth or Compassionate Wisdom. Make clean and clear your sight, we are told. This is the common exercise, whatever our perception. We have a sight of knowledge, and another of love. To coalesce them is to become single-eyed. Our feelings are personal and selfish, and our thoughts follow them, and so we act as human animals. There is a coming together that is accomplished ignorantly or by false knowledge. *Prajna's* development begins with the unfoldment of *Dana*; and also *Dhyana's* development shows in our harmony in words and works—*Shila*, *Vairagya* provides the key; are we dispassionate and desireless? It is hourly watching of ourselves, and the lower nature is powerful in its demands and imperious to boot!

(*To be concluded*)

THERE is a kind of ancestral wisdom in man and we can, if we turn inward, drink of that old wine of heaven.

—JOHN KEATS

ON HEAVEN AND HELL

II

IN the first part of the article it was mentioned that there are those extremely evil beings, who still have a spark of divinity in them, who are punished in hell called *Avitchi*. However, in each succeeding birth, they tend to get more and more deluded and at last go to the lowest region, termed by the occultists the *eighth* sphere. We read in *Isis Unveiled* (I, 352) that through vice, fearful crimes, and animal passions, a disembodied spirit falls to the eighth sphere—the allegorical Hades, and the *Gehenna* of the Bible—which is nearest to our earth. In other words, when the lower mind repeatedly ignores the guidance of the Higher Self, one gradually stops hearing the voice of conscience. Then after several lifetimes, after being given chance after chance by nature to turn the corner, if a person deliberately chooses evil and continues to do so, finally, the lower mind or personal Ego, breaks its connection with the divine Self. Only such people are “beyond hope of redemption.” But such “hopeless” cases are rare. They are candidates for the eighth sphere, which is described as the “furnace of Nature.” It is the true fire of hell. When man fails to mould his soul in the image of Buddha, Krishna or Christ, and, in fact, lives and acts in the contrary direction, he becomes a “failure of nature.” The personal Ego of such a man passes through successive stages to final annihilation, of which some stages are undergone on this earth.

Thus, barring such rare and exceptional cases, the punishment of our sins is on this earth, says H.P.B. Both *Srimad Bhagavatam* and Vishnu Purana mention twenty-eight forms of hell, which may well refer to various painful mental states on our earth, as we experience various kinds of punishment for different kinds of sins. In the Twenty-sixth Chapter of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, we are being told how a sinful person goes to different hells, where he is punished in various ways by the assistants of Yama, the god of death. The sin or evil actions are committed by foolish people who think that there

is no Law and no God, nothing that regulates, and therefore one is free to do whatever one likes. Hence, life after life, he commits sins, by going against the law of unity and harmony, and therefore punished in varied ways in different degrees of hell. All human beings act under the influence of the three qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*, and their punishments differ accordingly. There is a difference made between the sins of a religious person and those of a materialist and atheist. The “hells” are on this earth, and therefore these punishments come to the person in one or the other life. We human beings commit a variety of sins and wrong actions for which the punishment is suitably chosen. Thus, for instance, it states that the person who steals another’s money, wife, or possessions is put into the hell known as *Tamisra* or darkness. A man who deceives another and has a relationship with his wife suffers in a hell called *andha-tamisra* which means blinding darkness. It shows different degrees of severity of punishment and pain. A person who kills different animals and birds and cooks them and eats them goes to hell called *Kumbhipaka*, where he is boiled in oil. A person who kills a brahmana is put into hell known as *Kalasutra*, where he is made to lie on a copper sheet which is made hot like an oven and there he burns for many years. This reminds us of the chapter entitled “The Rod of Punishment” in *The Dhammapada*, wherein the Buddha specifically mentions ten different kinds of punishment or suffering for a person who harms an innocent and harmless person. He will suffer sharp pain, disease, bodily decay, loss of mind, loss of wealth, loss of relations, destruction of house by fire or lightning and his next life will be full of suffering.

Our earth is considered to be a hell. Mr. Judge says that we create our hell and heaven by our thoughts. If our thoughts were wholesome then in the state after death, which will be like heaven, the soul dwells on and expands those good thoughts, and when their power is exhausted the soul is born again, and then, in comparison, the earth is like hell. But there are those souls who have indulged in far-reaching evil thoughts and actions then their

punishment is in *Kamaloka*, and compared to that earth is like heaven. He says that the very lowest and the worst hell must be a condition of the mind, out of a body, and therefore it must correspond to some stage or degree of *Kamaloka*. And that is how we can understand various descriptions of hell. Mr. Judge gives an excellent analogy of a nightmare or a bad dream, where a person suffers mentally, independent of the body, and we realize after waking up, that it was only mental.

Mr. Judge writes “I tell you the heart, the soul, and the bowels of compassion are of more consequence than intellectuality. The latter [intellectuality] will take us all sure to hell if we let it govern only” (*Letters That Have Helped Me, (American Ed.)*, p. 117). At another place he makes a statement that intellect will lead a man straight to hell because it is so cold, heartless, and selfish. Mr. Crosbie says that we can use our intellect in working out how to save someone’s life, as also, how to destroy a life. Thus, for instance, if we hold a pole on top of a drowning man’s head for ten minutes, he will drown. However, we can think constructively about ways and means of saving his life. The power of intellect, and so also every other power that we possess, could be used from a humanitarian and unselfish basis, or from a personal and selfish basis. It is easy to see that good or humanitarian use of one’s powers and faculties make for good karma, which in turn will produce good results, and lead to heavenly happiness on the earth. The opposite of it or “hellish pain” would be experienced by one who acts from a selfish basis.

The Buddha, the greatest Psychologist, connects suffering with evil deeds, thus: “The evil doer suffers in this world and he grieves in the next; he mourns in both. Afflicted he grieves in the visualization of his sinful deeds....The evil doer laments here, he laments hereafter. ‘Evil have I done,’ he soliloquizes. Greater his torment when he is in the place of evil.” (*The Dhammapada*, Ch. 1, verses 15 and 17)

In these verses, we find a clear expression of the belief in the working of the law of Karma. “As you sow, so shall you reap.”

Doing good you are in harmony with others and at peace with yourself. Doing evil, there is self-assertion and infringement of harmony, which must, by reaction, bring unhappiness. Every time a person ignores the voice of his conscience, he dies a small death. He produces a rupture in his nature. He is no longer in a wholesome state. His guilt makes him restless. If he persists, if he succeeds in silencing his inner voice, he corrupts his character. There is no escape from punishment and suffering for our evil actions. In occultism, grave are the consequences, when evil is done with knowledge, and greater is moral responsibility. Death does not end the torment. He reaps the effects in after-death states and future incarnations. Hell, *Naraka* or Hades is the sojourn of evil doers. The state is a terrible one and has many shades, particularly for the executed criminals and cruel, downright materialists.

However, it is also true that we find ourselves in heaven or hell due to our *attitude* towards our circumstances. “Our ‘hell’ is the way we feel; our ‘heaven’ is the way we feel.” Mr. Judge tells us that “the power of any and all circumstances is a fixed, unvarying quality.” It is we who are the variants. Where is the variation? It is in our reception of what comes to us. Mr. Crosbie remarks: “Would it be possible for a man to burn alive and smile? Why, you have but to read American history to find numbers of Indians and of white men who were burned at the stake and who jested and laughed at their tormentors for their inability to make them suffer.”

It is important to learn to recognize that we create our own “heaven” or “hell” by setting into motion good or bad causes. To be identified with the suffering is to be immersed in hell. We need to respond. When we are up against a difficult situation or a difficult person, instead of our usual reaction of frustration and despair, we could always ask, “Why is it that no one else but *I* am put into this situation? Do I perhaps have to learn something from this?” This is the mark of a creative mind. We must learn to act from within and not just *react* to stimuli from without. The creative mind responds instead of reacting. The creative mind loves unconditionally. The

creative mind is always willing to see the brighter side of life, which enables a person to say, “With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams it is still a beautiful world.” The creative mind makes for an emotionally positive person. As Hugh Downs observes, “A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.”

“The gates of hell are three—desire, anger, covetousness, which destroy the soul; therefore one should abandon them. Being free from these three gates of hell, O son of Kunti, a man worketh for the salvation of his soul, and thus proceeds to the highest path” (*Gita*, XVI). “The animal knows no hell. Only the human being who is engaged in the mere fulfilling of the animal wants of his physical nature can know the hell of misery—wretchedness due to unfulfilled desire, or distress of physical discomfort. The intensely personal man experiences a number and variety of hells as he runs the gamut of personal desires.... Seeking success, fame, wealth and glory, as well as other passing things of life, he meets more often with their opposites—failure, ignominy, poverty, and disillusionment on every hand.” But it is not as if it is only a person who pursues worldly and personal desires and goals that experiences hell. “The hells of the man with face turned in the right direction are of a different nature. He has chosen a straight and dangerously narrow pathway.... He suffers, yes, more keenly than ever before; but it is a process of purification” (*Theosophy*, January 1934). H.P.B. writes, “Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage?”

“A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion,” by John Dowson, mentions that in the Vedas, Yama is the *god of the dead*. He is comparable to Pluto who rules over Hades, and with whom shades of the departed dwell. Thus, he presides over *Kamaloka*, the astral region. In the epic poems, he is described as judge of the dead. When the soul quits the body, it enters the lower

regions, and there the recorder *Chitra-gupta*, reads out his account from the great register called *Agra-sandhini*, which refers to astral light. According to the karma of the life just ended, the Ego or Real Man, after remaining for a longer or shorter time in the *kamaloka*, falls into a state of pre-*devachanic* unconsciousness. When this stage is over, the Real Man enters the *Devachan*. It is like re-entering a conscious state after sleep.

The Sanskrit equivalent of the word *Devachan* is *Devasthan* or the place where Devas or Gods reside. It is a state of consciousness where the Reincarnating Ego or the Real Man, called *Sutratma* enjoys unalloyed bliss and happiness. This is the *swarga* of the Hindus, and the paradise or heaven of the Christians. It is said that the *devas* (or demi-gods) do not have a body like us. So too, the Ego does not have our kind of body in *Devachan* but is wrapped in a clothing or vesture, which is very ethereal, suitable to that state of consciousness. It is called the Causal body or *Karana Sarira*.

The state of *Devachan* is subjective and mental. The state of *Devachan* is described as the subjective continuation of the last personality on earth since the personal idea persists, and the person continues to think that he is still Mr. X or Miss Y, he/she was on earth. Thus, if a mother has died, leaving behind her children and husband, then in *Devachan*, she will find herself surrounded by her children, and living a happy life. A person in *Devachan* lives out his high aspirations and high ideals, living a life of complete happiness and bliss. In a way, the state of *Devachan* is an illusion but this illusion is not meaningless. In fact, it is necessary for the rest of the soul. As the body needs rest after the day's work, so the Ego needs the *Devachanic* rest.

In the *Key to Theosophy (Indian Ed.)* H.P.B. describes *Devachan* as the "idealized continuation of the terrestrial life just left behind...and a reward for unmerited wrongs and sufferings undergone in that special life." She says that man suffers so much unmerited misery during his life, through the fault of others with whom he is associated, or because of his environment, that he is

surely entitled to perfect rest and quiet, if not bliss, before taking up the body again. (p. 130 and p. 35)

It is true that the law of Karma is just and impartial; therefore, every mental or physical suffering in a person's life could be traced back to some cause or sin in that same life or in one of the previous lives. However, since most of us do not preserve the memory of all that we did in our prior lives, we feel that we do not deserve the punishment and consequent suffering that we experience in a given life. Hence, the state of unalloyed bliss enjoyed by the Ego in *Devachan* is compensation for this very feeling that the punishment and suffering on earth were unjust.

H.P.B. says, "The essential idea was that men often suffer from effects of the actions done by others, effects which thus do not strictly belong to their own Karma—and for these sufferings they of course deserve compensation" (*ibid.*, p. 159). Perhaps it implies that unmerited suffering includes suffering on account of collective Karma. We may not have contributed to the invention of the latest gadgets like mobile phones, washing machines, computers, and whatnot, which makes human life easy, and yet we enjoy the benefit. Likewise, there is suffering that comes to us by virtue of our being part of the whole. There are pandemics, earthquakes, tsunamis, wars, etc. If we have not contributed directly, then we suffer indirectly the consequences of such calamities in terms of price rise, unavailability of certain commodities, etc. Likewise, there is unmerited suffering also on account of what is done by other human beings, and that is not strictly according to one's own karma. It may happen at an individual level. For instance, having come in contact with a certain person karmically, it is quite possible that the other person can at some point in time ill-treat the other, or kill that person, or torture that person, and thus may create new bad or unwholesome karma because man is a free-willed being.

(*To be continued*)

ON USING WORDS WITH CARE

MR. JUDGE advised us to use words with care, and this advice is very necessary if we would leave no room for “avoidable” misconceptions. The unavoidable misconceptions are due to the limitations of the readers or of the listeners, their preconceived notions and experience. Three words, especially, need to be used with great care; Ego, conscience, Tradition.

When we use the word “Ego” what do we mean? There is the spiritual, divine Ego, the inner, higher Ego or the reincarnating Ego; and the lower, personal Ego. So, when we use the term, let us be wary and try to see that the reader or the listener understands in what sense we are using it.

When we say, “Follow your conscience,” what do we mean? What *is* conscience? If we analyze what we mean, we learn that there are three kinds of conscience: (1) the Voice of Past Experiences; (2) the inner promptings as to what is right, which comes from the Higher Ego and is more properly known as the still, small voice or the Voice of the Silence; (3) the false conscience, which is the voice of the taboos and beliefs pertaining to any particular religion, race or civilization. It can easily be seen that the first and the third are changeable, while the second is permanent, the only variability being in our personal receptivity to it.

When, therefore, we hear such a phrase as “Follow your conscience but take care that it is not the conscience of a fool,” we can understand it as pertaining to the third type of conscience, the impress on us of the habits and customs of the environment in which we are placed during a particular rebirth. A notable example concerns marriage laws: in one period it was lawful for a man to have many wives; in another period he could have only one wife. Or, it was against conscience to have shops open on Sundays; now many are doing so.

But with regard to those deeply impacted twinges of conscience that have to do with the fundamental laws of Nature, we see two

aspects in them: (1) what we have learnt in the past, such as, it is wrong to steal, to lie, etc., and (2) some innate moral sense that keeps us all as straight as we are.

Whenever we have a doubt as to which conscience is speaking to us the matter should be analyzed and experimented with—always up to a point.

The same is true of the word “Tradition.” There is true Tradition and there is false tradition. True tradition is the memory of the things impressed on infant humanity by its Great Teachers and Helpers, and of those great Teachings that have come down to us through the Buddhas and the Christs down the ages. They all showed a way of life and because it is the same way it is “traditional.” It will be the same millions of years hence also. It may be forgotten from time to time, but the memory of it will come back.

False tradition is like false conscience, a keeping up of ideas and forms suitable at one stage and unsuitable at another. Such a false tradition as the supremacy of the white over the coloured races must go with changing circumstances; the tradition of the “chosen” people, of the superiority of one caste over another, all must go. The tradition that money makes for rights and privileges, lack of money for servitude, must go. Autocracy in every form must go; the priesthoods must go. We could go on enumerating the things that must go!

But how shall we separate true from false tradition? If we do not do that we shall destroy much that is of value and materialism will reign supreme.

We find today almost a wholesale overthrow of tradition, not only among the youth in their home life, school life, etc., but also among men like the poets and the artists. But it is in the world of action and of education that we are suffering the most. What, for example, is home life a reflection of? What is education a reflection of? When the idea of life as the great educator is forgotten, when parents forget their role, namely, to help the incoming soul to manage its vehicles, and take its part in the new life, when teachers no longer

draw out the knowledge inherent in the indwelling soul or help the child to true self-expression—when this happens then civilization is at a low ebb. But it will rise again because of the innate spiritual nature of man.

There is no substitute for home life and its real traditions. The false conception that children *had* to obey their parents, that the parents were the owners of the children, has already gone. But what is in its place? And why?

The idea of a Universal Brotherhood is true tradition, for there was a time when all men realized this; false brotherhood is partial, limited in place and time.

Beyond materialism with its new “traditions” and religious dogmatism lies the true Tradition to be found at the heart of all great religions and philosophies.

So when we speak of tradition let us be sure that our listener knows which tradition we are referring to.

Here it is useful to consider Mr. Judge’s observation concerning lying. He says, “Some psalmist or other said that ‘all men are liars,’ in which I agree. We are all makers of lies from the fact that we are never able to show our correct selves to others, or to gain from their words a correct estimate of them or what they are trying to say. This leads to trouble, and hence the other gospel said our communications should be yea, yea and nay, nay, for more than these cometh of evil. These are not intentional lies of ours, but they often have as much ill effects as the real article.”

TO ME the *Gita* became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials.

—M. K. GANDHI

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Are Doppelgängers real? What is a doppelgänger, and how has the idea transformed over time? The term “Doppelgänger” was initially used for lookalikes in German folklore and literature. Now it means duplicates and doubles. It is a double, or lookalike, of a living person. In German legends doppelgängers were spirits and spectres of the living. In English and Irish folklore, they were lookalike apparitions. They are spirits, spectres and apparitions of individuals that appear to their family and friends. In Scandinavia, they were called *vardøger*, and had a habit of appearing in places prior to a person’s actual arrival. These traditions are not supported by science, and yet, research is going on concerning the science of seeing, or being, double, as well as the science of similarity. Traditionally, seeing one’s doppelgänger was taken as a bad omen which foretold future tragedies.

Each one of us possesses unique facial features on which our distinctive identity depends. When a person meets someone who looks a lot like him then that individual would be considered his “Doppelgänger” or “twin stranger.” The answer to the question: What does it mean to have a doppelgänger, a distinct duplicate of oneself? For long, it was left to folklore and literature to answer this question, but now scientists are working towards obtaining their own scientifically supported answers.

There are psychological lookalikes and there are genetic lookalikes. As far as psychology is concerned “Delusional misidentification syndromes, including delusions of doubles and subjective doubles are closely associated with doppelgängers and can cause people to think they have seen duplicates of themselves or others.” In some cases, the suspected double is thought to share a person’s appearance, while in other cases, it is thought to share a person’s appearance as well as inner identity, and with such severe similarity, that duplicate is not just lookalike but is itself that particular person.

Apart from psychological basis, doppelgänger could be explained on the basis of genetics. It is possible for two unrelated people to share similar traits. When a study was conducted with thirty-two pairs of lookalikes, it was found that those with more similar features shared more genes as compared to those with fewer similar features. These researchers concluded of the lookalikes that “these individuals share similar genotypes.” Although systematic studies demand doppelgänger pairs to be precisely the same, scientists are not sure whether we all have a double to call our own, writes Sam Walters. (*Discover*, March 19, 2024)

If we take doppelgänger to mean a spirit, spectre or apparition of an individual, living or dead, then each one of us has a doppelgänger. Theosophy teaches that there is a subtle body or *sukshma sarira*, also known as astral body, or model body on which the physical body is built. The *Linga Sharira* is the invisible double of the human body, and serves as a model or matrix of the physical body. The second kind of astral body is called the “Thought” body, or Dream body or *Mayavi-rupa*. During life the *mayavi-rupa* or “Illusion-body,” is the vehicle on which thoughts as also the passions and desires of a person get impressed. The third kind of astral body is called the Causal body or “Karmic body.” The impressions of higher thoughts of the person on *Mayavi rupa* merge after death entirely into the causal body. An aspect of *mayavi-rupa* with the impression of lower material thoughts and acts of the person, as also, lower desires forms *Bhoot* or *Ghost* or *Kama-rupa*, after death. H.P.B. hastens to explain that in reality there is only one astral body, with three aspects or phases: the most material portion disappears with the body; the middle portion survives as a temporary entity in the astral region; and third is the immortal aspect, which survives throughout the *manvantara*.

H.P.B. mentions that a person’s phantom, apparition or astral body can appear before his dearest friend at the instant of death or moments after his death. Such an apparition could be produced by the conscious or unconscious intense thought of the dying person and is known as *mayavi rupa*.

Sometimes, the desire to reach a familiar place can overpower the capacity or physical power of the body to be at that place. In such a case one's double gets projected and reaches the destination even before the physical body.

One way to explain how the "lookalikes" come into existence is on the basis of Atavism. However, it could also be the result of the mother's imagination affecting the child in the womb. H.P.B. explains that during pregnancy, the women become particularly receptive to influences of the astral light, which assists them in the formation of the child and constantly presents to them the images of the forms with which it is filled. It is thus that very virtuous women have offspring bearing unmistakable resemblance to someone other than her own husband. The creative faculty of imagination can fashion the coming child into whatever form she likes. The image of the object or a person, making a strong impression on the mother's mind, is instantly projected into the astral light. Her magnetic emanations then attract and unite themselves with the descending current that bears the image upon it. It rebounds, and re-percussing more or less violently, impresses itself upon the foetus. This might explain the Germanic face of a child born to Asian parents settled in Germany or a black offspring born to white parents. The image of the person who impresses the would-be mother in some way is likely to impress the astral of the developing foetus and shape it accordingly.

We find that in the world today there are several different religions and scriptures. In each of them one can find teachings of great value. It appears that religion was meant to enhance spirituality by uniting a group of people who shared the same values and principles, and to enable them to communicate with a Higher Power. However, "it is entirely possible to be a very religious person yet be totally out of touch with spirituality and its essential connection to an authentic Self. On the other hand, true spirituality unites a person with his or her authentic Self," writes Andrea Mathews. It is entirely possible

to be both religious and spiritual. When one is receptive to the spiritual element in the religion it can help to enhance mental health.

Religion that encourages judgment of oneself and of others is often disturbing to the psyche, as it tends to diminish self-esteem and often makes one repress aspects of self that one considers unworthy of approval. When we judge others, we begin to see them as less worthy and it tends to deteriorate our relationship with them. On the other hand, in some religious communities there is always the fear of being judged on the basis of some religious principle. For instance, a woman who has expressed her desire to take divorce from her emotionally abusive husband, to other members of the church, fears that she may be judged sinful for thinking of divorce.

When religion teaches us to rely completely on an external authority that may be a book, a person, or a religion, for all that we think, say or do, instead of listening to the urging of one's own soul, it proves destructive to mental health. The teachings of sacred texts are valuable but they should be processed and interpreted through the mind, heart and soul of each individual. "We must learn to find our own internal authority and come to trust its guidance—that is true spirituality."

A person may indulge in various religious practises and seek advice of certain spiritual leaders, but ultimately, "spirituality is a very personal and individual journey into the inner terrain of one's own soul...It allows one to process through difficult experiences and become stronger and wiser," writes Andrea Mathews, a cognitive and transpersonal therapist. (*Psychology Today Post*: December 11, 2019)

Mr. Crosbie gives us two definitions of a true religion. True religion must give us a basis for thinking and acting; it must give us an understanding of nature, of our own and of other beings. "Religion is a *bond* uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas or beliefs—binding not only all Men, but also all Beings and all things in the entire Universe, into one grand whole." Knowledge *is* religion. True religion is knowledge of one's own

Self and living the life in accordance with that knowledge, and realizing that the powers of the Godhead, *i.e.*, the power to create, preserve and destroy, are within each one of us. We can say that true Religion is based on *true* ideas of God, Man and Nature. Religion can help us to differentiate between permanent and impermanent. The significance of life consists in realizing the relationship between the fleeting and the permanent aspects of us. Only then are we able to see that there is a meaning to all that happens.

True spirituality is the accurate knowledge that everything is divine in its essential nature and to act for and as the Self of all creatures—practising sincere altruism. All growth, for it to be permanent, must be from within, and must be the result of one's own effort. In the process of growth, we do not add anything new from outside. There is only *unfolding* of what is locked up within, as potential. Spirituality demands progressive detachment and even equanimity, but it is not cold indifference or stoicism. We are asked to be *in* the world, but not be *of* the world. True spirituality involves travelling on the path of true impersonality. True religion can become a stepping stone to true spirituality.

There are good reasons to think that AIs (Artificial Intelligence) will never be capable of genuine sympathy. However, since millions of people are today turning to chatbots for emotional support, and which offers inexpensive mental health support, it has raised profound questions concerning the role of AIs in our society. Some look upon it as a boon. Some doctors take help of AI to prepare more empathetic notes for their patients. There are those who worry about the consequences of taking emotional support from a machine that can only pretend to care. Could an AI be ever capable of empathy? Is it possible that the so-called empathetic AI will one day change our understanding of empathy and therefore also the way we interact with each other?

The researchers believe that the feeling of empathy must have

evolved side by side with social interaction, wherein the empathiser must first become aware of another person's feelings and be affected by it, to some extent. Yet he is able to grasp that the feelings of that person are not his own while still being able to imagine what the other person experiences. "In recent years, AI-powered chatbots have made strides in their ability to read human emotions," as most chatbots are powered by large language models (LLMs). Yet AI seems to miss the mark in many ways, as for instance, empathy is interpersonal and requires some degree of intuitive awareness of the individual and their situation. Current AIs are incapable of feeling for the person they are interacting with. "We have no reason to think AI can experience empathy. It can produce a product—the language that mimics the actual empathy humans have. But it does not have empathy," says bioethicist Jodi Halpern at the University of California. "Making machines that are more adept at reading emotions is still unlikely to create genuine empathy.... You need to have emotions to experience empathy." One needs to have experienced sadness to know what sadness is.

In a particular study it was found that when a team of researchers separated responses from AI, from those which were from humans, they found that people preferred AI, even over responses by Crisis Line Workers, who were expert deliverers of empathy. The possibility that we will increasingly turn to, and perhaps even come to favour AI empathy over human empathy, is a cause of concern because it may change the way we view "empathy." We may expect humans to express empathy that is tireless like that of a machine, although less genuine and connected. "We may end up turning to machines, rather than looking for ways to foster genuine connection," writes Amanda Ruggeri. (*New Scientist*, March 9, 2024)

Today, we increasingly suffer from strained relationships. Hours of watching television or surfing the Internet cannot take the place of heart-to-heart conversation with a friend, wife or son. A perfect relationship is based on deep love and understanding, and in it there is a blending of opposing and complementary characteristics of two

people involved. What is alarming is that we are becoming ever more dependent on technology which will soon extend to include Artificial Intelligence, even for our happiness and emotional well-being.

Empathy is identifying oneself for a while with another person or situation without altering one's own perspective. Today, lack of "Empathy," is described by a psychiatric term called "Empathy Deficit Disorder (E.D.D.)," that needs recognition and treatment. According to one view, E.D.D. develops when people focus too much on acquiring power status and money for themselves at the expense of developing healthy relationships. They have become alienated from their own hearts and equate what they have with who they are. Empathy, we must note, is a natural outgrowth of the feeling of belongingness to one another, which must be nurtured from childhood by example and precepts.

Spiritual life requires that we learn to work with our head, heart and hands. We seem to be mostly developing and working with our head and neglecting hands and heart. Heart is a seat of spiritual consciousness. Head-learning or knowledge must be blended with compassion, philanthropy and self-sacrifice. "I tell you the heart, the soul, and the bowels of compassion are of more consequence than intellectuality. The latter will take us all sure to hell if we let it govern only," writes Mr. Judge. More and more young people are seen to opt for study and careers which involve exercise of a purely rational mind. Often this intellectual development is achieved at the expense of emotional development, combined with the inability to meet challenges of life. An emotionally intelligent person has emotional self-awareness, is self-motivated and resilient, is able to connect with other people at an emotional level, and is able to deal with setbacks and failures. Shri. B. P. Wadia suggests that we have to learn to love or be devoted, even to a few or a single individual. It will break the shell of your heart in which you lived in a world of your own so far.