

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY

Let us, then, free from anxiety, live happily among those who are careworn; among the anxious, let us dwell free from anxiety. Let us, then, live happily, we who possess nothing. (Verses 199-200)

The fool worries himself thinking—"Sons have I; wealth have I." He himself does not belong to himself. How then sons? How then wealth? (Verse 62)

—*The Dhammapada*

PATIENTS are often advised by their physicians to "avoid hurry, worry and curry." The message is plain: besides "curry"—spicy food—"hurry," haste or impatience, and "worry" or anxiety are the root cause of most diseases.

Modern man lives in a state of perpetual anxiety. It has become an inseparable part of our existence. We are anxious about trivialities: "Will I miss my 9:20 train? Will I reach the office in time?" Very often we are anxious about things that have not yet happened. Why cross the bridge even before we have arrived at it? We worry about the circumstances which are beyond our control. Having consulted the doctor, the mother worries no end about her sick child. Having prepared for the examination, the student worries: "Will I pass the examination or not?" In the article, "Spiritual Progress," H.P.B. advises:

Evil is often the result of over-anxiety, and men are always trying to do too much, they are not content to leave well alone,

to do always just what the occasion demands and no more; they exaggerate every action and so produce karma to be worked out in a future birth....One of the subtlest forms of this evil is the hope and desire of reward. Many there are who, albeit often unconsciously, are yet spoiling their efforts by entertaining this idea of reward, and allowing it to become an active factor in their lives and so leaving the door open to anxiety, doubt, fear, despondency—failure.

When the surgeon performs an operation, he naturally wishes for the recovery of his patient. But, if he were anxious as to the success of the operation, he would only waste a lot of his emotional and psychic energy—unable to put in his best efforts. Krishna advises Arjuna in the *Gita* to “make....gain and loss, victory and defeat, the same to thee.” We must seek the thing for its own sake. Some of the best works are done when we do not do them self-consciously. Anxiety shows our lack of faith in the law of Karma. We are required to do the best that the circumstances demand and leave the results to the law. Can we change the course of the law by being anxious? Neither our entreaties nor our anxieties can move the Karmic balance by even a hair’s breadth. Some people ask: “Is it not natural to feel anxious, at least, regarding certain matters?” Mr. Judge’s advice in *Letters That Have Helped Me* is very useful:

Don’t be anxious. Don’t get “maddened.” Because in the fact that you are “maddened” (of course in the metaphoric sense) is found the proof that you are anxious. In a worldly sense it is perhaps well to be anxious about a highly important matter, but in occultism it is different, for the Law takes no account of our projects and objects, or our desire to be ahead or behind. So, if we are anxious, we raise a barrier against progress, by perturbation, and straining harshly.

Mr. Judge observes that our anxiety works as an occult obstacle, hindering the course of action under Karma. His advice is to trust the law and accept the results—favourable or unfavourable. Thus:

There is never any need to worry. The good law looks out for all things, and all we have to do is our duty as it comes

along from day to day. Nothing is gained by worrying...by being anxious as to things, you put an occult obstacle in the way of what you want done. It is better to acquire a lot of what is called carelessness by the world, but is in reality a calm reliance on the law, and a doing of one’s own duty, satisfied that the results must be right, no matter what they may be. Think that over, and try to make it a part of your inner mind that it is no use to worry; that things will be all right, no matter what comes, and that you are resolved to do what you see before you, and trust to Karma for all the rest.

The “occult obstacle” might mean the barrier caused by our own thoughts. A mother, who worries about her sick child saying to herself, “What if my child does not recover?” may find that her thoughts have not only hindered the recovery but that the child actually does not recover. As Mr. Judge points out, “What we think of always happens.” Or, as Mr. Crosbie explains in *The Friendly Philosopher*, when a student wavers in his spiritual discipline, he decides that next time he will not waver so much. That shows that he expects to waver a little. The position to be assumed is: “I will not waver *at all*.” Mr. Crosbie suggests: “It is better to expect to hit the mark, rather than expecting to miss it. There is a great difference in the psychological position and the quality of energy aroused.” This equally applies to anxiety. When we are anxious as to the result, we are not able to put in our best efforts.

When we are anxious we seem to assert, in a subtle way, our own will. We want things to happen as we desired. Mr. Judge says, “By anxiety we exert the constrictive power of egoism, which densifies and perturbs our magnetic sphere, rendering us less permeable to the efflux from above” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 12). In other words, by being anxious, we mar our chances of receiving help from our divine nature. Instead, if we learn to accept that whatever happens is for the best, we will never have any need to be anxious. Sometimes, apparently adverse looking circumstances or happenings work to our advantage or at least prove educative for the soul.

Patience and anxiety often go hand in hand. We are anxious,

because we expect instant results. Some of us get anxious as to our progress in spiritual life. A good gardener does not dig out the plant by the roots to see how it is growing. We cannot force the growth of the soul-plant. It may not be large or strong enough to bear fruit when we wish it to, but some day it will, if only we are not anxious and nurture it well. "What is to learn, is to be content, or, rather, resigned to ourselves and our limitations even while striving to get above them....We cannot all at once live up to these high ideals as some others live up to theirs." (*Ibid.*, p. 162)

Often, we are saved a lot of unnecessary emotional torture if we learn to be flexible. For instance, we may make the plan to clean the city, but we must be prepared that it may or may not work out. Mr. Judge advises a student:

Why not take up an easy and fluidic position in the matter? An occultist is never fixed on any particular mortal plan....So decide nothing hastily. Wait; make no set plan. Wait for the hour to make the decision, for if you decide in advance of the time you tend to raise a confusion. So have patience, courage, hope, faith and cheerfulness. (*Ibid.*, p. 124)

Instead of feeling anxious about the troubles to come, we can utilize the time in preparing ourselves to deal with the future calamities—should they arise. Mr. Crosbie writes:

I used to look calmly and dispassionately at the very worst picture I could conjure up as happening to myself, and found it helpful in getting rid of "fear of consequences." I mentally took account of the very worst, saw myself in it with all that it entailed, went through it in all its parts leaving myself *alone*, dishonoured, stripped of everything. Those very things have happened to me, but I knew them, had outlived them, and went on undismayed. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 85)

Lastly, we can succeed in overcoming anxiety by developing detachment. The more attached we are, to things and people, the more we are likely to feel anxious about them. After all, we seldom worry if our neighbour's child neglects his studies! We must cultivate "detached attachment." True detachment helps us develop

*concern*. Peace Pilgrim suggests that relinquishment of negative feelings is essential for acquiring peace. She writes: "One negative feeling which the nicest people still experience...is *worry*. Worry is not concern which would motivate you to do everything possible in a situation. Worry is a useless mulling over of things we cannot change." She mentions that instead of agonizing over the past or being apprehensive over the future, we must learn to live in the present.

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## SPIRITUAL BASIS OF MANAGERIAL SUCCESS

IN business houses and corporate world, it is quite common to train the management staff into various areas of personal effectiveness and groom them to become successful leaders. It is considered essential to send the staff for seminars, conferences and training courses to acquire managerial effectiveness. Very often, these men and women come back “charged,” ready to put to use their “class-room” learning to become successful managers. Others around often notice a perceptible change in them. This transformation takes place only in some individuals who are open and willing to put into practice what they have learnt. But what are these managerial courses trying to inculcate? Why is it that their advice, if followed faithfully, often brings the desired results? Do they really have a formula for success? More importantly, do their teachings enable a person to become a better human being, a true leader? While their aim is the development of an individual at the personal level, often these “management gurus” are found to recommend the age-old formulae suggested by the “spiritual gurus.”

A beginner in the managerial life is first taught to acquire “effective communication skills.” A workshop on effective communication teaches him to first “listen,” *i.e.*, to learn to pay careful attention to others’ views before expressing his own. It is believed that listening with genuine interest encourages participation and creates a sense of belonging. Consensus-building is a catchword—a superior must enable his staff to express themselves fully. Be open to new ideas, keeping the “ifs” and “buts” for later time. Let the subordinates or the audience, feel that there is someone who cares and that their ideas are worthwhile.

One of the foremost requirements of spiritual discipline is to be a good listener, a *Shravaka*. A new entrant to Pythagoras’s school was called *Akoustikoi* and had first to learn to listen, even before he was permitted to ask questions. Anxiety to speak and air our views shows vanity, egoism and self-importance. Restraint in outward speech will gradually help to restrain inner chatter. Our

divine nature is always trying to speak to us, but to be aware of it, we must stop this inner chatter. The deeper and occult implications of the necessity to refrain from putting oneself forward in a conversation, have been explained by Mr. Judge in *Letters That Have Helped Me*:

Begin by trying to conquer the habit, almost universal, of pushing yourself forward. This arises from personality. Do not monopolise the conversation. Keep in the background. If someone begins to tell you about himself and his doings, do not take first chance to tell him about yourself, but listen to him and talk solely to bring him out. And when he has finished, suppress in yourself the desire to tell about yourself, your opinions and experiences. Do not ask a question unless you intend to listen to the answer and inquire into its value. Try to recollect that you are a very small affair in the world, and that the people around do not value you at all and grieve not when you are absent. Your only true greatness lies in your inner true self and it is not desirous of obtaining the applause of others. If you will follow these directions for one week you will find they will take considerable effort, and you will begin to discover a part of the meaning of the saying, “Man, know thyself.”

“Sense of belonging” is another important ingredient for success. It is this feeling of belonging to our organization, family, society, community, etc., that motivates an individual to give his contribution to the welfare of the group. Each one of us must not only cultivate this feeling with respect to one’s own group but also take every opportunity to arouse the same in other individuals we happen to interact with. For instance, it is our duty to make our subordinate or any humble labourer feel that he occupies an important place and that his contribution to the human family is important. Each human being is infinitely precious, irrespective of his station in life.

Is it any surprise that when a person practises these hints even in his business life, success follows! How much more can one achieve if his motive is genuine, his desire pure and unadulterated with ambition? But why keep this discipline restricted to business

life? As they say, “Charity *begins* at home, but it does not stop there.” If only we would expand and apply it to other human relations as well!

To be a successful manager, it is important to learn to communicate—first, to know what the other person is interested in. They say that a person only listens to find out “What is there in it for me?” If he finds something of interest, you have him, else you have more often than not lost him, even before you get deeper into the subject. Replace “I” and “me” by “we,” “us,” or “our” to have your audience with you till the end—say these managerial gurus.

They also teach you to prepare yourself well in your subject and related matters. The training must proceed smoothly and logically. Use tact, diplomacy and gentle words, never lose your calm and good manners, no matter how offensive and oppressive the situation. An interesting speaker gives examples and gives out lofty truths in simple terms. He does not overwhelm the learner’s simple mind. Each person in the audience ought to gain something from what you have to say.

Are these “teachings” of effective communication something unique? Have we not heard it expressed in various scriptures and in the words of great beings who teach us how to live the spiritual life? Respect for every human being and genuine concern and care for others are fundamental to co-existence and interdependence. Compare what is taught by the management gurus with what is taught in the scriptures or with what is given out by Spiritual Gurus—saints and sages—perfected beings, who are termed as Adepts, *Mahatmas* or Masters by Theosophy. Similarity in the teachings is striking—only the motivation differs.

To control speech, regular and persistent efforts are required. In the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha, “Right Resolve” precedes “Right speech.” If right determination guides our speech, then the result would be speech which is free from anger, lie or unpleasantness. In the *Gita* we are told, “Gentle speech which causes no anxiety, which is truthful and friendly, and diligence in

the reading of the Scriptures, are said to be austerities of speech,” which implies constant companionship of the Scriptures. One of the implications of *Dana*, the key of charity, is, not to provoke anyone to react badly. To “give in” in an argument is not a mark of weakness, as one is doing it to improve human relationship.

We are reminded of Mr. Judge’s advice as regards promulgation of Theosophy. He observes in one of his articles that students must have good grasp of the fundamentals of Theosophy and learn to apply them to any and every question. The next important thing is being able to illustrate the doctrines, laying emphasis on practical aspects of Theosophy. As Mr. Judge points out, the mass of men and women are more eager to have solutions to great problems of life: “Why are we here, why we suffer, and where may justice be found...It is life and its sorrows that destroy our peace, and every human heart wants to know the reason for it.” (*The Heart Doctrine*, pp. 78-79)

It is only when we forget ourselves in helping others that there will be genuine concern for their well being, genuine interest in what they may have to say, and in their problems and difficulties. It is only when we expand our horizon and come out of our narrow, limited field of operation that we find ourselves well informed—learned in the true sense to be able to converse on any subject that may be of interest to another person.

When the sages and great beings give out truths and practical lessons of life, they do not use high words and difficult terms to confuse and confound. To the masses they speak in parables, which even a child can understand. Have we not all experienced the deep appeal the Sermon on the Mount has on us? Do not the words of the Buddha, full of practical advice on living the life, touch the core of our heart? It is true of all the holy scriptures that have the power to move the man—if only he will listen.

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## BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON MIND

THE Mind-Doctrine, or Buddha's teaching on Mind, is the heart of his message. It is the sum of human wisdom. It does not deal with something foreign, far, or antiquated. It deals with that which is common to all humanity, ever young, and nearer to man than hands and feet.

The message of the Buddha comes to the world as an effective way of help in present-day problems. It is a radical cure for the ever-present ills. Some of us may doubt, How could words spoken 2500 years ago have any relevance to our modern world? Time and distance in space cannot alter the Eternal Truths or render them ineffective. Has not the teaching from Nazareth reached many nations far from Nazareth and become an important part of their life and thought? Are not the mathematical laws of Greece relevant today in Britain or elsewhere?

The objectors should consider the numerous basic facts of life that are common to all humanity. It is about them the Buddha prominently speaks. True wisdom is always young and always within the grasp of an open mind.

In the Buddhist doctrine, mind is the starting point, the focal point and also the culminating point in the liberated and purified saint. *The Dhammapada*, the popular Buddhist scripture, opens with the words: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts." These momentous words lead straight home, into man's very heart. Mind is the nearest to us, as through mind alone we become aware of the external world—including our own body. If mind is comprehended, all other things are comprehended. Mind is the source of all good and evil that arises within and befalls us from without. The words of the Buddha in the first two verses of *The Dhammapada* bring home this fact:

...If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain pursues him, as the wheel of the wagon follows the hoof of the ox that draws it. (Verse 1)

...If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness pursues him like his own shadow that never leaves him. (Verse 2)

Turning into the recesses of one's own mind from disastrous paths will result in saving the world from its present crisis. Only through a change within, will there be a change without. If there is a well-ordered and strong inner centre in our mind, any confusion at the periphery will gradually disappear. Discipline or confusion of the society corresponds to and follows the discipline or confusion of individual minds. But the amelioration of the suffering of humanity will not have to wait for the Dawn of a Golden Age when all men are good. We know from history that a single truly saintly man could form the focal point for "good," around whom will rally those who have not the courage to take the lead but are willing to follow. Better nature always prevails and "good" has a strong infectious power over "evil." One should have the courage to put it to the test.

One should surely appreciate the great curative and theoretical results achieved by modern analytical psychology, particularly of C. G. Jung who has taken a definite turn towards the appreciation of Eastern Wisdom. The modern science of the mind may well supplement the Mind-Doctrine of the Buddha. It may translate it into the conceptual language of the modern age, facilitate its curative and the critical application to a particular individual or to the social problems of the present time. But the decisive fundamentals of the Buddha's Mind-Doctrine have retained their full validity and potency unimpaired by any change of time. This is because the typical events in human life and our physical and mental make-up remain unaltered—pain and pleasure reacting on the body—the same as happened as of old. The Buddha's Mind-Doctrine is based on an exceptionally clear grasp of these two factors. This bestows on it its timeless character, its undiminished modernity and validity.

The Buddha's message as a time-honoured Doctrine of the Mind, teaches three things: (1) To know the mind—so near to us, yet so

unknown. (2) To shape the mind—so unwieldy and obstinate, yet may turn so pliant. (3) To free the mind—in bondage all over, yet may win freedom here and now.

*Dhamma-Vandana* (as given in *Discourse Summaries* by S.N. Goenka, p. 101) says:

Clearly expounded is the Teaching of the Exalted One  
[Buddha]:

To be seen [practised] for oneself.  
Giving results here and now  
Inviting one to come and see [try and know]  
Leading straight to the goal  
Capable of being realized for oneself  
By any intelligent person.

The Mahayana Buddhist text, *The Voice of the Silence*, says: “Mind is the great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer.” The “Real” is beyond mind. But only the mind of the disciple slays the Real. It becomes the slayer. It is interesting to note that again mind is the instrument to slay the “slayer”—just as a diamond is cut into pieces by another diamond.

Only “mindfulness” can know, shape and free the mind and experience the Real beyond mind. A knife in the hands of a murderer kills life and the same in the hands of a surgeon saves life. Man should know the enormous power of the mind and use it “mindfully” to redeem the sorrow and suffering in the world and “make the earth an Eden, like the Heaven above,” and not turn it into a Pandora’s box.

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THE cause of all the blunders committed by man arises from excessive self-love. He who intends to be a great man ought to love neither himself nor his own things, but only what is just, whether it happens to be done by himself or another.

—PLATO

## MAN’S GOAL IN LIFE

### I.

Difficult it is to obtain birth as a human being. Difficult it is to live the life of a man. Difficult it is to get to hear the True Law. Difficult it is to attain to Enlightenment.

—*Dhammapada*, Verse 182

THE Enlightened One—the Buddha, who walked this earth in *Kali Yuga*, a little over 2500 year ago, uttered the above words. It is indeed difficult to be born as a human being. Even in terms of evolution, it has taken man many millions of years to appear on earth. Theosophy teaches that man has neither risen from savagery to civilization nor descended from the ape. Man is a “fallen angel”—an unfolding god. Man became man in form but not in mind, *i.e.*, *Amanasa*, only at the end of three-and-a-half Rounds. Then it was that *Manasaputras* or the “Mind-born Sons of Brahma,” lit up the *Manas*, making man a thinker. This happened a little over 18 million years ago. During the infancy of mankind, man was so close to the Divine that he felt in himself a sense of solidarity and oneness with the rest. As man became more and more animalized and materialistic, the “Eternal Verities” burnt into the mind of infant humanity by the *Manasaputras*, faded away. Today, only a few of these truths remain as innate ideas.

Therefore, even after becoming man, he behaves like a beast, as his thinking is warped with selfishness. Hence, it is said that it is difficult to live the life of a man. This is especially so in *Kali Yuga*. We use our free will only for self-aggrandizement.

The great difference between man and animal is that animals act according to their nature or *Svabhava*. For instance, a dove is always dovelike and cannot behave like a tiger. On the other hand, man, endowed with self-consciousness and apperception can look both within and without and use his free will, overriding the natural instinct. He has taken evolution in his own hands, checked by his Karma. He can either go forward or regress.

He is an unfolding god and has the potentiality of becoming

greater than the highest Dhyān Chohan. Man is a god in an animal body. As he strives onwards in his evolutionary path, after many lives he contacts the True Law. Of those who thus strive to live the Law, perhaps one becomes enlightened.

Whatever is sought after by every human being in life, is called “*Purushartha*” in Sanskrit. Whatever one may seek, there are four things that everyone desires. They are, as given by the ancients and explained by the Tamil saint Valluvar—some 2000 years ago—*Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha*.

*Dharma* has many meanings but is usually taken to mean duty, *i.e.*, duty to parents, to the Teacher, to the guests, to the family, to the community, to the country, to the race and to humanity. “*Dharma*” is derived from the root *Dhru*, meaning to hold, to sustain harmony. What is it that sustains harmony in the universe? It is *Satyam*, Truth. This harmony is derived from realizing that there is no such thing as separateness and that unity of everything in the universe is a fact. From the idea of unity, comes the desire to treat all as friends and help fellowmen to relieve their suffering. It manifests as universal love and compassion to all that lives and breathes and total eradication of selfishness. As we grow in understanding, our *Dharma* also grows.

The best stage to learn and understand the full implications of *Dharma* is the “*Brahmacharya*” stage, the first of the four stages or *Ashramas* in one’s life. The other three are: *Grihastha*—Householder; *Vanaprastha*—preparation for Renunciation; and *Sanyasa*—Renunciation. Having understood what real *Dharma* means, one can exemplify it in the householder stage. That is why the ancients gave great importance and value to the Ideal of the *Grihastha*—“Home-Builder.” By applying the principles of *Dharma*, he keeps aloft the dignity and sacredness of home and marriage. It is the stage where one has to fulfil one’s family duties to parents, to teachers, to spouse and children, to nation and race.

The article “Living the Higher Life” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 34*, p. 4) points out:

Family duty consists not in sensuality or pleasure-hunting,

but in cultivating and in elevating the emotional nature (the fourth principle), of ourselves and of our family; in being equally “kind,” not only to the members of the family, but also to all creatures, and in enjoying all such pleasures of the family life as are consistent with the acquirement of “wealth” (all the means necessary for the performance of *Dharma* or whole duty) according to the teachings of Valluvar, and in utilizing such pleasures and means for the performance of our duty to our nation.

In this process, we inherit both the good and bad characteristics—of family, nation and race. By exemplifying *Dharma* in one’s life and by cultivating nobler qualities we not only get rid of the defects—family, national and racial—in us, but also elevate the character of the nation and race.

All these can be used as a means for the performance of *Dharma*. The philosophy involved will also enable us to understand the great importance attached to the householder’s life.

*Artha* is a Sanskrit word, meaning *possessions*. Sri Krishna says:

Four classes of men who work righteousness worship me,  
O Arjuna; those who are afflicted, the searchers for truth, those  
who desire possessions, and the wise, O son of Bharata.  
(*Bhagavad-Gita*, Chapter 7)

One of the four classes of men who worship Krishna is the “*Artharthi*”—those who desire possessions. Why does one desire possessions? Some say it gives one a kind of security—emotional, economic and social. Possessions take different forms: liquid assets, stocks, real estate, relationships, a home, name, fame, position and power. All such things inflate one’s ego and therefore may seem to provide some “ego-security.” Each one may seek various forms of security. Thus, desire for possessions is common to all.

(*To be concluded*)

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## FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE

THE urge for freedom is inherent in every being, for it results from the inner impetus to unite oneself with the One Self, and this is the object of evolution. It shows itself in the human being through the power to choose, which is both a burden and a joy. Yet when we come to the position when we want to escape from some of the bonds that are binding us, we do not know how to act.

When we think on this problem we find that there are three courses open to us: either we can do nothing about the conditions in which we find ourselves; or we can burst the bonds, or we can act within the bonds. This last course is the only one which succeeds and is of help to us in the long run: We have to learn to be free *within* the bonds.

In a world of duality, there are two methods of approach to this kind of freedom—one, that of the arrogant who do what they want in spite of the bonds, and often succumb under the strain; the other, the recognition of the bonds as an opportunity Karma affords us to pay off past debts and improve our character. For example, if we want to practise patience, the best opportunity to do so comes when we are bound by others and prevented from acting as we wish. This method is the only one that will give us true freedom. It is analogous to accepting a law of the material universe; once we know it, we can employ it to our own advantage.

Another advantage of this method is that we begin to see the difference between ourselves as perceiver and sufferer and the environment in which we live and perceive and suffer. Once this difference is seen, we begin to realize that it is our duty, not to alter the environment, but to get whatever benefit we can from it. It is better to think of it as something from which we can learn rather than as the paying off of a debt from the past. If we just pay our debts, we are beginning on the Path of Liberation; if we learn while paying them, we are on the Path of Sacrifice.

But the path of the student is one of paradox, we are told. We often hug the old environment even when Karma brings us the

opportunity to get out of it. The path of duty is difficult to find, for we are enmeshed in traditions of what is right to do. There come times in our life when our environment has to be left, but in most cases this is only the material environment. All great Teachers have told us to “come out from among them and be separate.” We can see an example of this when we consider religious ceremonies and traditions that we have outgrown *mentally*. Is it not hypocritical to obey the old traditions or perform the old ceremonies when we have seen their uselessness? Ought we to be hypocrites in order to please our family and friends?

These difficulties come to us because we are halfway between the old conditions and the new way of life; we have not yet reached the point of “no-return.” We have not absorbed *why* we ought not to conform. We have not realized the effect on others for good if we do not conform. We only try to avoid what would be troublesome, emotionally, for us. Few of us wish to be pioneers in a line of action that will bring us unpopularity!

Freedom in, and not freedom from, such conditions will depend on us, and on our inner conviction and humility and sympathy. The scornful, pugilistic attitude only brings trouble and suffering to ourselves and others. Such attitude results when we are *not sure* of ourselves.

Sometimes we feel bound by family duties and are unable to free ourselves from them. What is a family duty? The relationship between parent and child alters completely after the child reaches the full age of responsibility. The most difficult task for parents is to give up their sense of responsibility at this stage. Advice is all that can, and should, be given. Parents should not make demands upon their grown-up sons and daughters, or burden them with duties and responsibilities. The relationship should have been throughout one of friendship and helpfulness. If this has been achieved, then the sons and daughters will willingly take on the responsibility of doing all they can for those who have done all they could for them in the past. The young should learn to be grateful; the parents should learn to be grateful. But the “demand idea” of youth to age and age

to youth should stop. It breeds unhappiness and becomes the steel bonds that bind both parents and sons and daughters. True bonds are those of love and sympathy, of sacrifice and helpfulness.

But, whatever happens, the one who is bound has to act. The only really wrong method of trying to gain freedom is to “put up” with the bonds and grumble all the time, to fight against them, or to work grudgingly within them with hatred in the heart. To grumble at conditions will not change them but will warp our emotional nature and degrade the mind. One can have no attachment to that on which one does not think. To think about any condition in order to change it for the better is one thing; to brood and grumble over it is quite another. To work grudgingly within the bonds is to destroy the whole basis of right action. The thought-feeling behind action has to be clean and pure if the action is to bear good fruit. If not, the fruit will be poisonous, and hatred will spring up, not only in our own hearts, but in those who are making our bonds.

Let us stop blaming our environment. Let us alter it, or use it, or leave it, without complaint, but with sympathy, basing our actions on love.

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DESIRING, grieving, etc., are the modifications of the *chitta*, the mind-stuff, which may be likened respectively to a lake and its ripples. The depths of the lake are, as it were, our own true Self. We can only catch a glimpse of the depths when the water is calm and clear and there are no waves. If the water is muddy or agitated, the depths will not be seen. Likewise, as long as there are mental modifications, which are possible only so long as we identify ourselves with them, we cannot see the Self and are in ignorance and bondage. But when the mind is calm and free from such modifications, we realize our true nature and thus attain liberation.

—SWAMI NITYASWARUPANANDA

## THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

THE eighth day in the second fortnight of the Hindu month of *Shravan*, which falls this year on September 6, is according to tradition the birthday of Lord Krishna. Students of Theosophy venerate the Teacher and his priceless Teaching embodied in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Song Celestial. Therefore it is but appropriate to consider some of the important teachings contained in this Scripture of the Soul. Krishna came under the Law of Cycles to usher in the *Kali Yuga*—the dark age hard as iron. Being the shortest of the four *yugas*, its momentum is so swift and changes are brought about so rapidly on all planes and in all spheres of life and labour that opportunities for treading the spiritual path in one’s daily life and for bringing about a spiritual reformation and regeneration within oneself are greater at the present time than at any other. Krishna came for the specific purpose of the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked and the establishment of righteousness. The teachings given out by him are not new but are age-old, as he himself points out at the beginning of the Fourth Discourse of the *Gita*, where he gives his divine pedigree.

The *Gita* is the Scripture of the Soul; not only is it a dialogue between the great teacher Krishna and his disciple Arjuna, but from another point of view it is a dialogue between the human soul, *Manas*, the thinker, and the Divine Soul, *Atma-Buddhi*, in each of us, for we are all Arjunas, and Krishna is seated in the hearts of all. Krishna is not only the teacher but also the principle of Divine Life, or the Supreme Self. The *Gita* teachings primarily concern the inner man, for a change needs to be brought about in our *inner* attitude, in our mental grooves and heart qualities. Our personal life needs to be adjusted on the basis of the spiritual principles given in the book.

Being the Scripture of the Soul, it is not meant for Hindus only but is universal in scope and character and can be practised and lived up to by anyone irrespective of his caste or creed, social status or educational achievements. As Krishna himself states in the

## Eighteenth Discourse:

There dwelleth in the heart of every creature, O Arjuna, the Master—*Ishwara*—who by his magic power causeth all things and creatures to revolve mounted upon the universal wheel of time. Take sanctuary with him alone, O son of Bharata, with all thy soul; by his grace thou shalt obtain supreme happiness, the eternal place.

So every individual, if he so wishes, can take up the study of this Scripture of the Soul. It is gratifying to note that because of the impact of the present Theosophical Movement launched by Madame Blavatsky in 1875 in the city of New York, the *Bhagavad-Gita* has become more and more popular in the West, among the great thinkers of the age as also the common men. Many are not merely interested in its study but look upon it as a valuable practical guide to an integrated life.

The beauty of this Scripture of the Soul is that within the span of eighteen short chapters the whole philosophy of life is summed up. All subjects are treated in a general manner and have a meaning and a message for all people and for all times. The universality of the Supreme Self, the immortality of Spirit and Soul, the twin doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation, the control of the senses, of the passions and of the wandering mind, the divine discipline, the constitution of man and the mystery of death, the kingly science, the three *gunas*, the divine and the demoniac nature of man, different kinds of faith, and above all, the right performance of duty without thinking of personal benefit, are all dealt with, with profound simplicity. Arjuna was led from the stage of doubt and despondency to convinced faith, slowly and gradually, step by step. He was always left free to choose for himself, and even at the end he is told: “Act as seemeth best unto thee.”

Krishna’s instructions are given in no hard-and-fast way, nor does he exclude anyone, not even a sinner. He gives hope and courage to all souls. In the Fourth Discourse he states: “Even if thou wert the greatest of all sinners, thou shalt be able to cross over all sins in the bark of spiritual knowledge.” And again in the

Ninth Discourse: “Even if the man of most evil ways worship me with exclusive devotion, he is to be considered as righteous, for he hath judged aright.” The expression “*exclusive* devotion” should be noted. It needs fearlessness, the first of the divine qualities. The impersonality of the Teacher is indicated in the preceding verse:

I am the same to all creatures; I know not hatred nor favour;  
but those who serve me with love dwell in me and I in them.

*Whosoever serves with love*; the only qualification that is needed is pure love. What a beautiful relationship!

People look upon the common things of life as trivial and they go in search of God to secluded places, to forests or mountain tops; at times they even torture their limbs and starve themselves. In the Seventh Discourse Krishna says:

I am the taste in water...the light in the sun and moon...  
sound in space...the sweet smell in the earth, and the brightness  
in the fire.

These things are familiar to each and all. The Supreme Self is omnipresent, and yet it becomes difficult for people to recognize it as such because it remains veiled, and that which is near at hand cannot be perceived. Recognition of the omnipresence of God teaches us the sanctity of life, makes us consider all things and creatures as sacred and incites us to live in harmony with the whole of Nature.

The divine discipline of moderation is not meant for special occasions or for special people, to be observed in some special way. It is meant to be observed in daily functions. Everyone wakes up and puts the body to sleep; everyone takes food and drink; everyone works and rests; it is our daily routine, but moderation in everything has to be observed and extremes avoided, so as to lead a regulated and disciplined life.

In the matter of food also the *Gita* gives practical advice. In these days when vitamins are so much talked about, when all sorts of tonics are advertised, when people show more and more interest in dietetics, it is worth considering the simple method of selection

of food according to one's *gunas* or qualities, that Krishna describes. One is attracted to particular types of food in terms of one's predominant *guna*.

The food which increases the length of days, vigour and strength, which keeps one free from sickness, of tranquil mind, and contented, and which is savoury, nourishing, of permanent benefit and congenial to the body, is that which is attractive to those in whom the *sattva* quality prevaieth.

And then are described the types of food preferred by those in whom *rajas* and *tamas* are predominant. Each one has first to change his own tendencies; that is of primary importance. When *tamas* and *rajas* are overcome, one will be attracted to *sattvic* food. When the wrong cause is removed, a permanent cure is brought about. It is again an inner adjustment.

The Scripture of the Soul traces the fundamental cause of all troubles to the inclinations of the senses, leading to passion, anger, delusion, loss of memory, loss of discrimination, and finally, the loss of all. It is a prolonged malady, and unless and until the sense inclinations are curbed, it is no use seeking other remedies. When Arjuna complains about the restless, turbulent, wandering mind, what is the prescription given? Detachment and constant practice. As soon as the mind flies to any object or subject, it has to be brought back to the spiritual centre of our being, and then only can one be concentrated and become a man of meditation.

Today, when there is such a craze for yogic exercises, postures, standing on the head, etc., it is worth while noting the three definitions of yoga as given in the Scripture of the Soul: (1) equal-mindedness; (2) skill in the performance of actions; (3) disconnection from union with pain. True yoga has nothing to do with physical exercises, nothing to do with hatha-yogic practices. A balanced mind is an asset in all circumstances, joyful or sorrowful; skill has to be shown in any and every action, small or big, high or low, so-called; and freedom achieved from all kinds of pain, physical or mental.

Perhaps the most important lesson taught in the Scripture of

the Soul is the doing of one's own duty without looking for its fruit, or result of any kind. One does not have to abstain from duties but has to renounce the personal benefit resulting from their performance. That is true renunciation. Even in giving gifts this principle is to be always remembered. Purity of motive is very important, and this is lost sight of in our modern civilization. Nowadays gifts are usually given with a view to the benefit they will bring to oneself. The spirit accompanying the gift is much more important. What kind of gifts are acceptable to Krishna?

I accept and enjoy the offerings of the humble soul who in his worship with a pure heart offereth a leaf, a flower, or fruit, or water unto me.

What is offered need not be precious or expensive, but it is to be offered with a *pure heart*. That is important.

Whatever thou doest, O son of Kunti, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou sacrificest, whatever thou givest, whatever mortification thou performest, commit each unto me.

The thought behind every single act should be the Supreme Self.

The Scripture of the Soul deals not only with the living of the life but also with the mystery of death. A grand sermon is given about the immortal Spirit which cannot be burnt by fire, corrupted by water, dried by air or killed by any weapon. At death, the physical body is merely thrown away like an old garment, but the immortal Spirit is eternal, beginningless and endless, and will take birth in a new body in course of time, to resume the threads of the past life once again. "Whoever at the hour of death abandoneth the body, fixed in meditation upon me, without doubt goeth to me," says Krishna. What a solemn promise! No ceremonies, no rituals, no priests to act as intermediaries to lead one to heaven! If during life one has been in constant communion with Krishna, the Ego seated in the heart, then naturally at the hour of death one's thoughts will be fixed on that inner Divinity.

How to acquire the wisdom contained in the Scripture of the

Soul?

Seek this wisdom by doing service, by strong search, by questions, and by humility; the wise who see the truth will communicate it unto thee, and knowing which thou shalt never again fall into error.

The first qualification is service and the last humility—an entirely different method from the one by which head-learning is obtained in schools and colleges. Again an inner change is needed. If this fourfold method is adopted, then wisdom will be given by the wise.

Krishna even takes upon himself the burden of the responsibility of the happiness of those who constantly worship him. People in the world want happiness, seek happiness, but they do not want to discipline themselves; they do not even see the necessity for treading the spiritual path, the only way to attain to the Supreme and to use the Light acquired for the benefit of other human beings.

This great Scripture of the Soul is summed up by Sanjaya in the following significant words at the end of the Eighteenth Discourse:

Wherever Krishna, the supreme Master of devotion, and wherever the son of Pritha, the mighty archer, may be, there with certainty are fortune, victory, wealth, and wise action; this is my belief.

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A FIRE can be extinguished; but the flame of desire is never extinguished. Pains affect the body for a while, then cease, and leave you at rest; but from the pain of desire you never get rest, unless you cure it by the medicine of true intelligence, and put desire away from you and learn to abstain; for desire grows in strength if you follow it, but dies away if you turn from it and abstain.

—HERMES

## THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER

ALL manifestation is pervaded not only by life but also by intelligence and consciousness, though in the lower kingdoms there is no self-consciousness. Man alone possesses self-consciousness—the knowledge of oneself as distinct from other selves. Just as there are numerous grades of matter, *e.g.*, solid, liquid and gaseous, so there is a wide range of expression of consciousness.

In the animal kingdom there is instinct which shows a semblance of intelligence. What is the difference between animal and human intelligence? We can see it by considering the nature of the intelligence and consciousness in the living organs of our body. The beating of our heart is not self-consciously directed but shows instinctive intelligence in the organism, as do other vital processes. Digestion and assimilation, for instance, do not require our conscious direction; we should eat self-consciously, with some basis of reasoned choice, but once the food is eaten we have no concern with it unless something goes wrong. The “mind” in the dog or cat is similar to the “mind” which regulates these bodily processes in ourselves.

In the vegetable kingdom there is sensation, as science has shown, though the plant can do nothing to help itself to get food, water, etc., unless these are made available from outside. Even the mineral kingdom shows life and intelligence, as witness the formation of crystals and the combination of chemical elements. Theosophy says that below the mineral kingdom there are three kingdoms of elemental beings—still unrecognized by science, though found in various religious philosophies—whether they are called *devatas* or angels.

The universe is a congeries of units of consciousness, either human, sub-human (those which have not yet reached the human stage of self-consciousness), or super-human (those who have transcended the limitations of ordinary humanity). Life in its pristine state is Spirit, instinct with divine intelligence. It is made up of units of intelligence, the Eternal pilgrims. Each has to make

a long pilgrimage to reach human self-consciousness, to acquire the principle known as Manas or mind.

The pilgrimage throughout the period of manifestation may be pictured as a great circle, one arc descending from the world of Spirit to that of gross matter, the other ascending to the world of Spirit once more. We start in innocence but in ignorance, and have to go through all the kingdoms of Nature before the great change can occur and we can enter the human kingdom. Then, by our own efforts we can enter the superhuman stage, which is the purpose of the whole pilgrimage. The descent in terms of self-consciousness is unconscious; the ascent, conscious and deliberate. The process for the descent is *natural impulse*; for the ascent, *self-induction*. Choice in the lower kingdoms is in terms of instinct of the particular species and type. No lower animal can deliberately change its nature.

We as human beings have the power of free will, though natural impulse is still in us—in some, unfortunately, to a great extent. Carbon and oxygen in a certain proportion make a poisonous gas and cannot choose to make anything else, but we can make every contact with another soul a good or an evil experience. Man has to energize himself.

“The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations,” says *The Secret Doctrine*. People brought up in the false notion that privileges and advancement can be bestowed in answer to prayer are disappointed with the idea that they must earn everything themselves and that privileges are in terms of duties faithfully performed. The greatest Teacher, however, can only point to the reality of the Path of Spirit, which each must find in his own Soul. The Buddha said, “Be ye lamps unto yourselves.” It is only by self-effort that human souls can transcend their limitations.

Many do not choose deliberately their thoughts, desires and acts, but are carried away by natural impulse. Essentially, however,

we are thinkers and the mind can determine what we shall think and desire, what we shall say and do. For that, concentration is necessary; without it, we cannot hold great ideas in the mind or make it possible for the Soul to act through that mind. At present most of our ideas come from natural impulse, from sensation, emotion, etc. As human beings we should refuse to accept any picture, sensation or impression unless it approves itself to us. Let us watch our impulsive reactions and take time to think. As an old Chinese saying puts it, “Turn your tongue seven times in your mouth before you utter a word.”

Not only must the lower ebullitions be checked, but high thoughts must be gradually introduced into the mind to serve as a pattern for our thinking. Such truths can be found in all religious philosophies. The test of their truth is their universal validity. What can be applied by all Souls at all times, irrespective of climate, sex, financial status, etc., is part of Truth. Theosophy has culled the great fundamental truths from the religious philosophies of the ages.

Theosophy presents three great ideas which can help to free our minds from misconceptions and enable us to breathe the free air of spiritual heights. These may be stated thus:

- (1) The Soul of man is immortal.
- (2) The principle which gives life, dwells in us and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent.
- (3) Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself.

It is sometimes claimed that we can learn to concentrate by fixing the mind on some trivial object. Theosophy says, try to steady the mind on as high an ideal as you can reach. Take, for instance, the first of these three truths, which is often admitted without understanding and without acting in accordance with it. We must try to hold the concept throughout the day and in the subjective state of sleep. Because the Soul is immortal, wrong impressions from senses and desires may last for ages. Realizing that the Soul is immortal, we recognize others as Souls, as fellow pilgrims in

the Cycle of Necessity.

The idea that the principle of Life is within us shows us the necessity of developing a centre of consciousness within ourselves, to serve as a true refuge. Only when we have established relations with the God within ourselves can we express divinity in all the affairs of life and see God in all things and beings.

The proposition that man is his own absolute lawgiver is difficult to understand, but without grasping this central truth we cannot transcend our limitations and enter the kingdom of Those who have become more than men. That is the goal of our obligatory pilgrimage.

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THE recognition and careful observation of non-personal psychical factors entails and leads to a sacrifice of the ego—not in the form of an abolition, but in the form of a renunciation of its supremacy. It is no longer possible always to say: I want, I decide, I do, and so on, because it is evident that things happen to me, which are decided for me, and that factors other than the conscious “I” do or think in me. The ego is the vehicle for these other factors and it is responsible for them; but their roots are not in it but in the larger psyche. This is an attitude comparable to that of St. Paul when he says (Gal., ii, 20): “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”; and it is certainly an attitude which can be called religious. It is, in a way, a kind of death of the ego and is often represented in dreams. This entails a deliberate renunciation of the hitherto dominating position of the ego, the conscious person as I know myself to be.

—TONI WOLFF

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Anger marks absence of love, no matter how justified or well disguised. Anger takes many forms. The mild irritation we feel when we are bothered, made to wait or denied something, is a tiny rage in disguise. Is it all right to allow angry thoughts as long as we do not express them or act on them? Is anger or hatred ever justified? Is it necessary to get rid of even traces of anger for our moral well-being? Carol D’souza answers (*Dignity Dialogue*, June 2004):

Most of us indulge our angry thoughts. We dwell on them...And then finally, we express them—in a wide range of ways. This is why it’s so very useful to think of any form of anger as murder. Who hasn’t thought “I’m going to kill you” when vexed by people who don’t do what they’re supposed to do?...These mindless and seemingly harmless idiomatic expressions are confusing because they lead us to accept the notion that figurative killing is okay.

It’s okay to indulge hateful thoughts in your own mind so long as you do not act on them. You can indulge in hateful thoughts whenever you want. And you can keep your hateful thoughts for as long as you like, even an entire lifetime. No legal action will be taken against you....

The rules of our legal system, the morals of our social and religious systems, and the lessons we learn about expressing our emotions are not always in sync with the code of our Higher Self. Our Higher Christ Self would have us know that all hate is the same, and that no matter what form it takes, it’s all equally destructive....

There’s only one conclusion...the presence of hate in your mind blocks awareness of your Higher Self...Every time you make the choice to be angry, you simultaneously make the choice to be unhappy.

What causes anger? It arises, mainly, out of too much identification with the personality. Thoughts are the basis of our actions. “Sow a thought, reap an act.” Thoughts are like seeds,

which sprout when conditions are conducive. Thoughts seem to be more potent than acts. “Esoterically, thought is more responsible and punishable than act. But exoterically it is the reverse. Therefore, in ordinary human law, an assault is more severely punished than the thought or intention, *i.e.*, the threat, whereas *Karmically* it is the contrary,” writes H.P.B. (*Transactions*, p. 142)

Mr. Judge warns us that anger is one of the greatest hindrances in the attainment of concentration and that it damages the astral form. He observes that it is immaterial what the cause for the anger may be. There is no such thing as having what is called “righteous anger.” It does not matter if one’s rights were unjustly and flagrantly violated or not, the anger is bound to cause damage. “Therefore anger must be strictly avoided, and it cannot be avoided unless charity and love—absolute toleration—are cultivated.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No.18*, p. 12)

Mr. Judge advises that whenever our rights are infringed upon, we must forgive the offender. By condemning the offender we disturb the harmony. “Each punitive attitude assumed by me acts both on my brother and myself, producing in him a tendency to repeat the act condemned and increasing in me whatever seeds of evil I may have.” “Do not judge in anger, for though the anger passes the judgement remains.”

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Philosophically, the *ras leela* or the dance of the *gopis* with Krishna can never be regarded as an orgy. “The dance symbolizes the soul’s unceasing struggle to break clear of the constraints of the body, to make contact with the supra-reality it sees out there...The whole struggle of the soul’s reaching out to the One, is a story of longing and yearning, leading to a state of total surrender,” writes Raji Narasimhan. (*The Times of India*, June 11)

At one level, we may regard the *ras leela* as “real ecstasy” or “the ardent turning of the soul toward the divine.” However, H.P.B. explains in a Note to “The Future Occultist” (*The Theosophist*,

August 1884) that the union of Krishna with the *gopis* represents the expression of the powers of spirit through matter or the “female principle.” Thus :

It will be seen that the marriage of the occultist...is a “holy union,” devoid of sin, in the same manner as Krishna’s union with thousands of *Gopis*. Sensual-minded men have taken this fact up too literally; and, out of a wrong interpretation of the text, has arisen a sect which indulges in the most degrading practices. But, in fact, *Krishna* represents the seventh principle, while the *Gopis* indicate the innumerable powers of that principle manifested through its “vehicle.” Its union “without sin,” or rather the action or manifestation of each of these powers through the “female principle” gives rise to the phenomenal appearances.

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Celibacy or *Brahmacharya* has been highly praised by all religious scriptures. Apart from the Vedas and the Old Testament, we find that the Aztecs and the early Mexicans held celibacy in high esteem. Like the Vestal Virgins in Rome, there was an order of the Sunbrides among the Incas of Peru. Though Buddha praised celibacy, “in Buddhism, only the highest ranked priests, the Bhikshu and the Yellow-capped Lamas of Tibet are actually required to be celibate,” writes Sean O’Shea (*Purity*, June 2004). Physical celibacy counts little if one has not attained to mental celibacy as well. When one is able to remain a celibate at the mental level, one is able to keep one’s attention “on the most elevated levels of thought and knowledge.” True celibacy purifies consciousness and leads to peace and happiness. “It has been known for many centuries that sex has a draining effect on both the mind and body—an overall loss of energy to the system,” writes O’Shea. Pure, ennobling thoughts and spiritual love help an individual to renounce all weaknesses and prevent him from being continually drawn towards sexual matters.

In *The Key to Theosophy* (pp. 260-261), H.P.B. suggests that

celibacy is not essential for a wordly person. There is no reason why an individual should not marry, till he reaches a state when his *only desire* is to know the truth and help others. Marriage is often the only remedy against immorality. However, it is absolutely necessary to practise celibacy for the person aspiring to go in for Practical Occultism. She writes: “Can a man serve two masters? No! Then it is equally impossible for him to divide his attention between the pursuit of Occultism and a wife.”

What is the use of physical celibacy, when the mind continues to dwell on sex? Such a person is described in the *Gita* as a “false pietist of bewildered soul.” Krishna says, “He who remains inert, restraining the senses and organs, yet pondering with his heart upon objects of sense, is called a false pietist of bewildered soul.” Sex and unwholesome speech are the two avenues through which we waste the creative power. Celibacy helps conserve the energy used up in sexual activities, which can then be used for spiritual purposes.

In his *Yoga Aphorisms*, Patanjali recommends, among other things, continence or *Brahmacharya* as conducive to the practice of meditation.

While writing to a student-aspirant, Mr. Judge puts celibacy and marriage in the right perspective:

Men and women are complementary in character, and therefore adapted to each other. It is natural that each sex should enjoy the company of the other, and what is natural cannot be wrong. Moreover, it is perfectly proper that when a suitable mate is found, a man should marry and settle down as a householder, bringing up a family with right views and high purposes. He contributes a service to humanity, who puts [leaves] children to take his place after his death, and to reproduce his true and altruistic life. Consequently, if you find a suitable match and desire matrimony, there can be no possible reason why you should not carry out such a purpose. Like the abstention from meat, celibacy is essential to [spiritual] advance after a certain stage....There can be no one rule laid down for all human beings, inasmuch as the temperaments and desires are so different. Each must work out the problem of life in his

own way. If your aspirations are so set on higher things that you find the lower a hindrance, it is evident that you should not indulge in the latter; but if you are not so hindered, then no less a duty is yours. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*)

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It appears that heartbreaks, trials and disasters are essential for spiritual growth. “Pain and suffering are relative. How life’s challenges affect you depends on your understanding, state of mind, and previous experience; it also depends on the arms of divine beneficence that come to carry you above the hottest sands,” writes Sharon Janis (*Sunday Times of India*, June 20). Life’s challenges are meant to wake us up from our complacency and limited self-concepts. Suffering teaches us compassion, helps us cultivate detachment and makes us appreciate and feel grateful for what we have. Often, a person turns to Spirituality, God or Religion as a result of some traumatic experience. All suffering, which comes under Karma, must be looked upon as an opportunity to learn. Sharon Janis writes:

Life always brings challenges to deal with....When those difficult moments come, you have a choice; Instead of being swept away into an emotional flurry or numb depression, you can see such times with some objectivity....

Then, even if part of you goes into some agitation or sadness here or there, you can still be aware of the part of you that’s witnessing all the play of your life—the still point of the turning world that exists inside of you. From that place, you can remind yourself that after every storm, there is a chance to awaken into a new golden sky and find colourful new rainbows to delight your heart, nourish your soul, and rouse your spirit.

What is the significance of pain? When we learn to see pain in the right perspective, we would not want to shun it. Every unfavourable situation is an opportunity to learn and grow. Growth involves change and every change is accompanied by pain. 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? (*S.D.*, II, 475)

*Pain arouses.* It is only when we experience pain that we wake up and begin to ask questions of life: “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” Often pain makes us realize that we need to surrender our personal will to the Divine Will. In fact, it is only when all the earthly possibilities of finding happiness are frustrated, do we turn to God, as a sort of last resort. *Pain also softens.* Pain arouses sympathy in us. Life is a school. We are put into a certain painful or unfavourable situation, again and again, till we learn the necessary lesson.

In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, we are advised to become aware of the changing and unchanging aspects in us and stop identifying with the personality and the passing shows of life. There is an aspect of us, which passes through all the changes, but itself remains unchanged. It is like a centre or a hub of a rotating wheel. When we repose in this unchanging aspect, we are able to take the position of an “observer.”

It is a fact that we do identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, and with its conditions and relations, which are also ever-changing. We say, “I am happy, or I am sad,” “I am sick or I am well,” “I am contented or I am dissatisfied,” all of these expressions being due to some form or condition which is changeable. We should observe that the self-identifying attachment is chiefly concerned with the *present* form and conditions, although we are aware that other forms and conditions have existed in the past, to which we were attached by like or dislike, and that still others will exist in the future. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 189-90)

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National debates spring up, from time to time, concerning the influence of religious beliefs upon the enactment of the laws of

the land or the framing of the nation’s Constitution. The word “secular,” meaning non-religious, if not anti-religion, is used by some as a term of abuse—even in progressive countries like the U.S.A. On the other hand, in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, words like “secular” and “socialist” democracy are used to seek neutrality in the affairs of the state *vis-a-vis* religious views.

At present there is hardly any state or nation which is truly free from the undue influences of church authorities or powerful religious groups, in their nation-building policy decisions. Nations like U.S.A.—originally independent and secular enough to separate the church from the State—had avoided, scrupulously, even the use of the word “God” in public functions or institutions. Yet in 1954, the phrase, “under God” was introduced, while reciting the U.S. pledge of Allegiance. Surprisingly, in the original pledge, written by Francis Bellamy for the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1892, this phrase was missing, writes T. V. R. Shenoy (*Indian Express*, June 19). On the other hand, in India, some “secularists,” as also orthodox Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses joined hands in disapproval of singing the National Anthem because it is alleged to “deify” the Motherland!

Is it not paradoxical in this country where religion and its stripes are exhibited on the sleeves, that it can rightly boast of neutrality of its constitution as regards religions? But it is more surprising that a great nation like the U.S.A.—praised as it was by H.P.B. for its openness and freedom—is leaning towards religious influences.

As H.P.B. says, no one can destroy man’s need for Religion. Religious beliefs, which deeply influence man’s psyche, cannot be wished away by legislation and enforced social measures. But this overbearing and irrational influence in conduct of the statecraft and decision-making needs to be checked.

Some socially benevolent purposes behind any social change that leads to progress and social order must be allowed a free hand so long as they do not upset the true moral principles enshrined in all religions. A balance must be struck taking in view the time,

place, tradition and cultural and social needs of the populace. Moral issues like family-planning, abortion, biological research, religious conversions, euthanasia, gay marriage, etc., are to be rationally approached, based on the eternal guiding principles behind moral decisions, irrespective of the popular uproar or narrow religious beliefs and practices.

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THE truth is that what the best poets, the greatest writers, bring back from their travels in the realm of fancy is as nothing beside the treasures accumulated by their predecessors. Many others have reaped the same field, it is they who bind the sheaves. When one feels with intensity, intelligence is unnecessary: one has more influence than the cleverest logicians. Even the logicians do nothing more perhaps than express in well-balanced syllogisms the flights of the prophets who are supposed to be lacking in intelligence. Genius owes ninety-nine hundredths to others. Does it, for instance, invent its language? The alphabet it uses? What would its thoughts be without words? What would words be without the letters which enable us to represent them easily? We do not think enough, my dear friends, about the men of genius who conceived the idea of representing sounds by signs. Yet it was they who rendered possible the dizzy mental gymnastics of the Western World. And those who gradually created speech? Did they not furnish us with the very tissue of our arguments? Grammatical constructions govern the habits of the mind. I was wrong in saying ninety-nine hundredths Genius owes to others—I should have said nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths.

—ANATOLE FRANCE