

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 3, No. 4

August 17, 2011

### GAYATRI MANTRA—SOME REFLECTIONS

GAYATRI mantra is considered to be the most sacred verse of the *Rig-veda*, which it is the duty of every Brahman to repeat mentally in his morning and evening devotions. It is addressed to the Sun as *Savitri*, and hence also known as *Savitri* mantra. The mantra personified as goddess *Savitri*, is the wife of *Brahma*, mother of the four Vedas, and also of the *twice-born*, or three superior castes, writes John Dowson. *Encyclopedia Britannica* mentions that the Hindu ritual of *upanayanam* or thread-ceremony is restricted to three upper *varnas* or social classes, viz., *Brahmans* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriyas* (warriors and rulers), and *Vaishyas* (merchants and tradesmen). The *upanayanam* ceremony marks the entrance of a male child upon the life of a student (*brahmacharin*) and his acceptance as a full member of his religious community. During the ceremony the guru invests the boy with the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*), and imparts to him “Gayatri” mantra, marking his second birth. The wearer is identified as *dwija* or twice-born. The imparting of the Gayatri mantra is considered an important part, even essence of *upanayanam* ceremony, and is sometimes called “*Gayatri diksha*,” i.e., initiation into the Gayatri Mantra. “Every Brahman at his initiation is further instructed in this verse (Gayatri),” says Mr. Judge. In Hindu tradition, mantras are thought to be truly efficacious only when they are received verbally from one’s guru or other spiritual preceptor.

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In Vaidic parlance “sukta” is a hymn or collection of mantras. A Vaidic Sukta has, first, a deity or the subject matter of which it treats; second, the *metre* in which it is written; third, the *Rishi* by whom it was first seen; and fourth, *Viniyoga*, or its use in a particular religious ceremony, says H.P.B. Regarding Gayatri mantra we are told that it is addressed to Surya or Sun, written in Gayatri metre and attributed to Rishi Visvamitra.

Vach is the daughter of Brahma and is named *Sata-Rupa*, “the hundred-formed,” and *Savitri*, “*generatrix*,” the mother of the gods and of all living (*S.D.*, II, 128). Thus Gayatri is correlated with Vach or sacred speech. H.P.B. points out that the Brahmana who acted as the Hotri-priest at the Soma-sacrifice, possessed and had the full knowledge of the use of the sacred speech or Vach. Goddess Saraswati is personification of Vach or mystic speech. She is the wife of Brahma and also the goddess of the sacred or “Secret Knowledge.” She is usually depicted as riding upon a peacock with its tail all spread. The eyes upon the feathers of the bird’s tail symbolize the sleepless eyes that see all things. One who has the ambition of becoming an Adept of the “Secret doctrines,” is reminded that he must have the hundred eyes of Argus to see and comprehend all things. The power of sacred speech depends upon the form that is given to the mantra by the officiating priest. The form consists in the numbers and syllables of the sacred metre. The effect of the *mantram* is also determined by the rhythm. If pronounced slowly and in a certain rhythm, one effect is produced; if quickly and with another rhythm, there is a different result. The great significance of the metrical speech is derived from the number of syllables of which it consists. (*Isis*, II, 409-10)

The Gayatri Mantra consists of twenty-four syllables—three lines of eight syllables each. In the Tenth Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, while describing his *vibhutis* or universal divine perfections, shri Krishna says that “Among the metres, I am the Gayatri.” H.P.B. explains that the Gayatri metre consists of *thrice eight* syllables, and is considered the most sacred of metres. It is the metre of Agni,

the fire-god, and becomes at times the emblem of Brahma himself, the chief creator, and “fashioner of man” in his own image. (*Isis*, II, 410)

H.P.B. writes that the primeval mode of obtaining fire by friction has its scientific explanation in the Vedas, and is pregnant with meaning for him who reads between the lines. The *Tretagni* (sacred triad of fires) is obtained by the attrition of sticks made of the wood of the *Aswattha* tree (the Bo-tree, of Wisdom and Knowledge). These sticks are said to be “as many finger-breadths long as there are syllables in the gayatri.” H.P.B. remarks that it must have a secret meaning, or else the writers of the Vedas and Puranas were no sacred writers but only mystificators. (*S.D.*, I, 523)

Some commentators explain that the word *Gayatri* is a combination of two Sanskrit words: *Ganat*, meaning “that which is sung,” and *trayate* means “that which gives deliverance.” Thus, Gayatri is that mantra which leads to salvation or liberation. Its recitation is traditionally preceded by *OM* and the formula *Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah*, known as the *maha-vyahrti* (“great utterance”). *Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah* are three of the seven (or even fourteen) lokas or spheres. These fourteen lokas or spheres form the extent of the whole *Brahmanda* or World. Generally, *Bhur* loka is taken to represent earth, *Bhuvah* or *Bhuvar* loka to represent space between the earth and sun, and *Svah* or *Swarloka* represents the space between the sun and the pole-star. However, these lokas also represent planes of consciousness on this earth, through some of which all men must pass. A Chela or disciple has to pass through all of them on his way to Adeptship.

The text of the Gayatri mantra, in Sanskrit, is as follows:

*Aum Bhur Bhuvah Swah, Tat Savitur Varenyam  
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat*

This *mantram* has been variously translated by various teachers and scholars. One of the simple translations of this *mantram* is: “The God, who manifests himself in the form of the light of Sun, is worthy of worship. Let us meditate on the light of the deity, so that

he may guide our intellect in the right direction.”

Some commentators consider the Gayatri mantra to be universal prayer addressed to the immanent and transcendental aspect of the One Reality, which has been given the name *Savituh*, meaning “the Bringer forth of all that exists.” Savita or Savitri is the Divine Creator of the earthly, atmospheric, and celestial spheres. In the first part of Gayatri mantra, the Divine is praised; in the second part, there is a determination to meditate upon the Divine; in the third part, an appeal is made to the Divine, to awaken and strengthen the intellect, the discriminative faculty of man.

In his article, “A Commentary on the Gayatri,” W. Q. Judge, interprets Gayatri mantra, thus:

Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, that face of the True Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light, that we may see the truth and do our whole duty on our journey to thy sacred seat.

Surya as the sun was worshipped by Indians from the Vedic period onward for his help in destroying sins and bestowing blessings. Theosophy teaches that behind the physical sun is the True Sun, *i.e.*, the Central Spiritual Sun. Sun symbolizes the very Atman in man, the divine presence latent within the hearts of men and may be looked upon as the Seventh Kosmic principle. Mr. Judge comments that the whole verse is an aspiration in the highest sense. “Unveil” is the cry of the person who is determined to know the truth; the cry is made to the Higher Self. Just as the True Sun is hidden behind the physical sun, so also, the Higher Self is hidden by the passions and desires, the personal self and the thirst for life. The sun we see is not the true sun, and so also the light of intellect or intelligence is not the true sun of our moral being.

“So long as desire and the personality remain strong, just so long will the light be blurred, so long will we mistake words for knowledge and knowledge for the thing we wish to know and realize.” *The Voice of the Silence* suggests that unless the flesh is

passive, the head cool and the soul as firm and pure as a flaming diamond, the sunlight will not reach the inner chamber and do its work of illumination. Inner preparation is necessary before we can partake of the guidance and communication with that Sun or Christos within.

In the Upanishad we have the invocation: “Reveal, O Pushan, that face of the true sun, which is now hidden by a golden lid.” The visible Sun is merely a reflection, a focus, a lens, a window through which the rays of the *primordial light* become materialized, are concentrated upon our Solar System and produce all the correlations of forces. Our visible Sun is the heart of our Solar System. Its rhythmic beating pumps vital fluids throughout our system. The invisible Sun being self-generating storehouse of our Kosmos, ever receiving as much as it gives out. It is this contraction of heart (Sun) of our Kosmos which causes 11 year cycle of Sun spots.

There is an interesting story in the *Puranas* relating to this subject. The *Devas*, it is said, asked the great Rishi Vasishtha to bring the Sun into Satya Loka. The Rishi then went and requested the Sun-god to do so. The Sun-god replied that all the worlds would be destroyed if he were to leave his place. The Rishi then offered to place his red-coloured cloth (*Kashaya vastra*) in the place of the Sun’s disk and did so. The visible body of the Sun is this robe of Vasishtha, it would seem, writes T. Subba Row. “Undoubtedly, were the ‘robes,’ the dazzling drapery which now envelopes the whole of the sun’s globe withdrawn, or even ‘the shining atmosphere *which permits us to see the sun*’ (as Sir William Herschel thought) removed so as to allow one trifling rent—our whole universe would be reduced to ashes,” writes a Master of Wisdom.

Though we ask for the light of the true sun or Higher Self to shine down and illuminate, it is also true that this light is so intensely powerful that if a struggling disciple were to be suddenly introduced to its presence unprepared, he would be consumed both body and soul. The ancients knew how to draw forth the forces from the True Sun, through the visible sun. The Chaldeans and the old Chinese

astronomers had certain instruments for concentrating particular rays of the sunlight, of which modern science knows nothing. A mystic can draw forth the power or influence in the sun and use it for beneficent purposes. However, this power is obscured or hidden by a cover or umbrella, for the protection of ordinary humanity. It is an allegorical umbrella placed beneath true Sun. The ribs of this umbrella are the Rishis, or Adepts or Mahatmas. The handle of this umbrella is in every man's hand. Through the cover, entire humanity experiences the beneficent influence of the true Sun, in terms of light, life, knowledge and power, without the risk of being consumed. However, when one aspires to be a disciple and lives the higher life in real earnest, he begins to separate himself from the mass of humanity and connects himself, in a more or less definite manner with the ribs, *i.e.*, with one of the Adepts. Like water trickles down in a small or big stream from the points of the ribs of the umbrella, so also, spiritual influences pour out from the Adepts who form the frame of the protecting cover. However, each one also holds the handle of the umbrella through which he can directly receive the influence coming from the *true Sun*.

Generally, Gayatri is believed to be the reliever of all diseases, remover of all miseries, fulfiller of all desires, bestower of all that is beneficial. Mr. Judge explains that the object of this prayer is that we may carry out our whole duty, after becoming acquainted with the truth, as we journey to the Sacred Seat, which represents union with the Divine.

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WHAT does the Lord Krishna teach in holding a flute in his hands? What is the symbolic meaning of the flute? It is the symbol OM. It says: "Empty thyself of all egoism, and I will play on the flute of thy body. Let thy will become one with My will. Take refuge in OM, thou wilt enter into My being. Listen to the moving interior music of the soul and rest in eternal Peace!"

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

## WHY AM I HERE?

THERE COME occasions in the life of each person when discontent creeps into his life. He cannot escape it. Circumstances so develop that even in the midst of ease and plenty, with no apparent disquieting element intruding, the rhythm of life seems to halt for an instant of time. It has the power to shake him from his moorings. It sets up a commotion which, if interpreted correctly, warns that a rethinking on fundamentals has become necessary. Such a warning comes to each, especially during a period of convalescence which follows upon a long illness, but is oftentimes ignored or brushed aside as an idle thought arising out of upsets of mind and body. Thus are opportunities lost.

A large part of the waking hours of the man is spent in attending to the duties of home and employment. The rest of the time he rushes about to work on his hobby, to play, to read or to while away his time in pursuits legitimate or illegitimate. He says that he thus keeps himself busy. He is really fooling himself. He is shying away from the prospect of facing himself alone in the silence. It is in the few moments when he stands face to face with himself, silencing his thoughts the while, that Nature speaks—and speaking, instructs.

Those who have gone through the experience aver that Nature does have a voice, and this in no figurative manner. Before these whisperings can become intelligible, a grounding of the mind in certain basic principles becomes an absolute necessity. Without this preliminary knowledge, no help can be received from the inner planes of being. This is not an arbitrary fiat. Even in ordinary life, the alphabet and the grammar have to be learnt. Even then, the perusal of philosophical and scientific works would require quite a large expansion of one's vocabulary. So too with the language that Nature speaks. The concepts of God, Karma, Reincarnation, Brotherhood have to be rid of the superstitions and overtones heaped upon them through the crass ignorance of those who styled themselves learned.

Beset by worries, hemmed in by deficiencies in morals, intellectual capacities and bodily functions, one often stops in one's drudgery for an instant and asks the question—WHY? But all too often, he limits his question to the why of *his* suffering while others enjoy; the why of *his* own lack of talent while others have it in abundant measure. He rarely takes time to ask himself the other and more basic question: Why did I take birth? The priest is of course ready with his answer, the scientist with his. According to the priest, God in his infinite Wisdom and Mercy so ordained it. The scientist says that man came through a chance conglomeration of atoms; the entity lasts as long as the combination lasts. Death disperses the atoms and that is the end of man—his aspirations, sacrifices, progress in rectitude notwithstanding. When the doctrine of Reincarnation is presented to the awakening mind, the question which is often put is: Where was I before I took on this birth? Who am I really if I existed before this present form and name got attached to me? What is it that seemingly against my desire makes me shuttle endlessly between the two planes of subjective and objective existence? Pertinent questions these, and perchance this and several future incarnations may be moulded into desirable or undesirable patterns according to the answers accepted by the mind.

While considering the subject of man's entry into earth life, it is important to keep ever in mind that his birth comes as the culmination of the vast and concerted efforts of kingdoms below his own. To prepare a body for the Soul's future incarnation is no light or insignificant matter. Lives that are trained to carry out specialized functions have to be kept in readiness. Lives that will superintend and perform the functions of the brain, heart, liver, spleen and lungs will have to fall in place at the appropriate time. From the birth, they will take up their own assigned duties and will continue to perform them independently unless meddled with by either the will or the escapades of the person. These same lives were used by the soul in previous incarnations during which his actions, words, thoughts and feelings weakened or strengthened them in their moral

eminence or turpitude. It is thus that man comes to inherit the exact measure of his former thoughts and deeds. Within the embryo, the lives under the guidance of Karmic law carry the potency of still birth or of a longer or a shorter life. The sowings of previous incarnations can bring crop in abundance or make the soul so parched that hardly any valuable crop can result. This converging of the material forces (needed for the incoming soul) displays the work of intelligence which co-ordinates the gathering of forces at the exact moment when their presence is required.

The period between birth and death may be said to be analogous to the act of ingesting food. The period between death and rebirth is occupied in digesting and then assimilating that food. These latter processes are automatic. That part of the ingested food which was of the earth earthy and therefore uncongenial to the Soul is thrown away just as in earthly existence the undigestible food is segregated and thrown away as waste matter. The fragrance of deeds well done, the essence of the good harvest that was grown in the mortal fields of the last incarnation and all other food-experiences which have the potentiality of being assimilated by the Soul—these accompany it in its ideal condition of the Heaven-world. Once this assimilation—an absorption into the very fabric of the Soul—has been completed, the Soul becomes ready for further experiences. It is refreshed.

For each man, there is an aim—a goal to life. There is also the purpose—the reason why he wants to achieve that aim; and lastly there is the teaching or the philosophy or the tenet under the guidance of which he expects to achieve his aim. In most persons, the aim of life is not clearly defined, nor is it exclusively one. It is divided into two rather antagonistic divisions of the temporal and the spiritual, and there are subdivisions which further divide his attention. The mind thus divided becomes unstable and the struggle continues until the man finally decides which aim shall dominate his life. Theosophy recommends the saner approach and the choosing of an aim for the present incarnation which would be in harmony with the great aim of evolution and which further would remain constant through

successive incarnations. The ultimate aim for any human Soul would be to gain full control of his powers, and emplaced in the impersonal part of his nature give himself up voluntarily and bind himself to merge his all—aims, high aspirations, liberation from strife and sorrow—in the efforts being put in by others who have graduated before him for the lifting of humanity to the stature of conscious godhood. Why should a man choose such a goal, especially when he stands to get no recognition or fame for the sacrifice and the torture that he has undergone? What would be the purpose of abjuring the joys of this world and of taking on such a task where his only merit may be of being like a stone among countless other stones in a wall that shields humanity?

He does this because he realizes that he was sent out into this cold and thankless world to carry out a mission of mercy. He takes birth among the ignorant and the superstitious to lift out from among them a soul here, a soul there who thirsts for Wisdom and who dares to ask the question—Why? He, the inheritor of the Kingdom of Light, voluntarily exiles himself in the realms of darkness and gloom, ready to minister to the needs of anyone who struggles to reach the Light. He has no halo round his head, he wears no saintly robes, has no visible insignia of his high estate. Yet, if he is true to his Self, he becomes a Redeemer. He may not shine with the brilliance of the noonday Sun, but he can still shed starlight to guide the way. It is no doubt true that several such have forgotten their high mission and have fallen prey to the lures of sense-life. The adhesives that wrong contacts with matter produce, corrode the channels of communication between the incarnated Soul and its divine overbrooding counterpart. The guidance and instructions from within are cut off. In such cases, the only sure guidance remains in the Teaching. This body of Knowledge and Wisdom is always ONE. It is changeless over times and eras and envisages all circumstances, events and gradations of consciousness. It has Instructions for the high and holy; it has encouragement and advice for the fallen sinner and the battered of fate. It shows not only the

reasons for birth and death; it shows that in both these are involved aspects of mercy. Death comes as a deliverer from the almost unbreakable stranglehold of vice. It wipes off memories that plague the person and tempt him to go deeper into the morass. It affords a period of rest for the harassed and tired soul.

Would you profit by the Wisdom? Then take time to re-examine at frequent intervals your Aim, Purpose and Teaching.

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## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

## THE ENLIGHTENED ONES—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Buddhavaggo* or “The Enlightened Ones.” It is also called “The Awakened Ones.” The term Buddha is not confined to Gautama, but refers to all the Buddhas of the past and of the future. The *Jainas* might refer to them as *Tirthankaras*. The materialistic science speaks of evolution guided by blind forces of nature, survival of the fittest and struggle for existence; producing more and more complex and perfect organisms, apparently without having any plan or guiding intelligence. They have explored only one line of evolution, *viz.* physical. Having produced perfect physical form of man, the evolution appears to have reached a plateau. For millions of years, there has not been any appreciable change or improvement reported by science in the human frame. As against this, religions point out to us the grander purpose of life and existence, and of guiding intelligences working behind the evolutionary processes. Apart from the physical, religions also speak of spiritual evolution. Buddhism speaks of goal of enlightenment or Nirvana, which the Hindus call as liberation or *Moksha*, and Christians call as salvation. “Universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul,” says Patanjali. It is not easy to attain it, but the potential and possibility exists for each one of us. *The Voice of the Silence* tells us: “Look inward, thou art Buddha.” This chapter tells us of the indescribable nature of the Enlightened Ones and shows us how we can also reach that ultimate goal.

1. *By what track can you allure One who is enlightened? Trackless indeed is He. His victory nought can undo. None of this world can touch that victory. He is a Seer of limitless range. (179)*

2. *By what track can you allure One who is enlightened? Trackless indeed is He. No net of desire can catch Him. No craving can entangle Him. He is a Seer of limitless range. (180)*

The Enlightened One is called *apadam* or trackless. *Pada* or legs support the body. Likewise, for an ordinary man, his attachments form the basis of life. Every human being has what Mr. Judge calls a “line of life’s meditation,” that upon which his “heart is set.” Once you know what it is, it is easy to allure him.

If a man follows any sort of “track,” he is the victim of propaganda. Promised rewards by doctrine and ceremonial, he is like a donkey with a carrot suspended in front of his nose—led wherever his psychologizer wants him to go. When men are responsive to petty desires and egotistical ambitions, their thought is plainly grooved—and therefore it is a matter of scientific prediction to determine what they will do in any given circumstance (*Theosophy*, December 1956). But the Buddha who has attained to enlightenment cannot be allured by anything in this world. He is trackless; his path is free as the flight of the birds in the sky. No mark or characteristics can describe him. It is the conquest of personal self by the spiritual Self—the ultimate and the highest conquest—which cannot be turned into defeat by anyone.

The end of the Path leads to Buddhahood or Enlightenment. Buddha is the one who is awakened. There is a human form but there is no ordinary conditioned mind with all its prejudices, preconceptions and limitations. A Brahmin called Dona once tried to categorize Buddha by asking if he was a *deva*, a *gandharva* or a *yaksha*, to which Buddha replied that he transcended them all. There is a great temptation to categorize people in terms of their caste, income, social status, etc. But it is not possible to do that with Buddha. When Angulimala, the bandit, tried to catch up with Buddha, he noticed that though he moved quickly and even ran, the distance between him and the Buddha did not decrease. So he told Buddha to stand still. Buddha said, “I am standing still, it is you who are moving. I am standing in *Nirvana*, you are moving because you are going round and round in the *samsara*.” Angulimala could not catch up with Buddha because Buddha was moving in a different dimension. Angulimala, representing time, could not catch

up with Buddha, representing Eternity, writes Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher.

The Enlightened One is called a “seer of limitless range.” To his flashing gaze, nothing remains hidden. Nature regards them as her co-workers and throws wide open the portals of her secret chambers. Their vision is penetrating and *faultless*. “Where an ordinary profane, however learned would perceive but the external work of form, he is able to penetrate into the very kernel of matter and know the soul of things there.”

3. *Even the Devas, Shining Gods, aspire to emulate the Enlightened Wise who are great contemplators, who are the Peaceful Ones, who are steadfast and tranquil. (181)*

The term *Deva* is derived from the root *div*—to shine. A *Deva* is a celestial being, whether good, bad, or indifferent. Here, the “*Deva*” or shining “God” may be taken to simply refer to the Elementals which are inferior to man in the scale of evolution. They can be subjected to the will of even the sorcerer. To this class belong the gnomes, sylphs, fairies, djins, etc. There are thirty-three crores, or 330 millions, of gods in India. But, they are by no means all “gods,” in the high spiritual sense one attributes to the term and hence not necessarily worthy of our worship. (*S.D.*, I, 90)

In the article “Thoughts on Elementals,” H.P.B. points out that these Gods are said to be “superior to man in some respects,” because their faculties are more expanded than those of ordinary man. However, expansion of their faculties has prescribed limits. Since the latent potencies of the human spirits are not subjected to such limits, it is possible for a human being to establish his supremacy over them. This is well symbolized in the *Mahabharata* by the single-handed victory of Arjuna, under the name of *Nara* (a man) over the whole host of *Devas* and *Deva-yonis* (the lower Elementals). The reference to the same power is also made by St. Paul in the Bible when he says to his audience “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” (I *Corinthians.*, vi, 3). Indra, the king of Gods is said to

rule over heaven for hundred divine years, after which he may be superseded by another god or even by a human being. Earthly King Raji achieved this feat by fighting for gods and winning the war against demons. However, he was content to remain a king on the earth and appointed Indra to be his representative and continue to rule over heaven.

There is one more class of *devas*. In the *Epitome of Theosophy*, Mr. Judge points out that having reached a very high point of development, it is possible for an Adept to become a *Deva*. Thus:

When the Adept has reached a certain very high point in his evolution he may by a mere wish, become what the Hindus call a “*Deva*”—or lesser god. If he does this, then, although he will enjoy the bliss and power of that state for a vast length of time, he will not at the next Pralaya partake of the conscious life “in the bosom of the Father,” but has to pass down into matter at the next new “creation,” performing certain functions that could not now be made clear, and has to come up again through the elemental world; but this fate is not like that of the Black Magician who falls into Avitchi. (*An Epitome of Theosophy*, pp. 27-28)

When an Adept wishes to become a *Deva*, he chooses to remain fixed in the quality of *Sattva* or truth. He has no desire to struggle further to “rise above the three qualities.” He is like the mountaineer who had set out to scale Mount Everest, but who having reached some high peak, even if it is not the Everest, quits. He is happy and content to have reached this peak. Having reached high stage of development, he becomes one of the bright host of beings, of whose pleasure, glory and power we can have no idea. Then he enjoys that condition for a period of time which in its extent is incalculable, but which is not eternal. After that period he has to begin again, lower down in the scale.

In the *deva* state, he is no longer subjected to the trials and temptations that torment the human soul. He is firmly established in the *Sattva* and cannot be but pure. That is why the perfected being

is held to be superior to the *Devas* or celestial Gods. The reason is obvious. As *Through the Gates of Gold* points out, “Not only is man more than an animal because there is the god in him, but he is more than a god because there is the animal in him. The god as servant adds a thousand-fold to the pleasures of the animal; the animal as servant adds a thousand-fold to the powers of the god. And it is upon the union, the right relation of these two forces in himself that man stands as a strong king, and is enabled to raise his hand and lift the bar of the Golden Gate.” The purity of a *Deva* is, so to speak, automatic. But in case of humans, it is *acquired* through effort. Man faces trials and temptations and gradually tames his animal nature and makes it subservient to his higher or divine nature, thereby constituting himself superior to the *Devas*. *The Voice of the Silence* speaks of the Enlightened Buddha giving his teachings to *devas*, men and gods. *The Secret Doctrine* mentions that those who are illumined (the high Initiates and Adepts) are few in number, and from them the genii abstain: for neither genii nor Gods have any power in the presence of a single ray of God—one Universal unrelated and unconditioned Deity. (I, p. 295)

(To be continued)

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A MAN after fourteen years’ penance in a solitary forest obtained at last the power of walking on the water. Overjoyed at this, he went to his Guru and said, “Master, Master, I have acquired the power of walking on the water.” The master rebukingly replied, “Fie, O child! is this the result of thy fourteen years’ labours? Verily thou hast obtained only that which is worth a penny; for what thou hast accomplished after fourteen years’ arduous labour ordinary men do by paying a penny to the boatman.”

—SWAMI RAMAKRISHNA

## ON OUR FIVE SENSES

### II

“THE WHOLE scale of senses is susceptible of correlations,” writes H.P.B. Vedic Aryans were quite familiar with mental correlations of “sight” and “hearing.” In the *Vedas*, the words “sound” and “light,” or “to hear” and “to see,” *are always associated*. The Hymn X, 71, verse 7 mentions a party of friends who are trying to emulate each other in singing, and in that one group is described as *Akshavanta*, or “one furnished with eyes,” while the other group is characterized as *Karnavanta*, or “one furnished with ears.” Now it is easy to understand that the singer has *a good ear for music*. But how does one understand “good sight for music”? H.P.B. explains that probably the hymn refers to days when *sight* and *hearing* were synonymous terms, so that sound could be *seen* and *heard*. (*H.P.B. Series No. 19*, p. 12)

Many years ago, *Harper’s Magazine* mentioned the tribe on an island in the South Seas which had virtually lost the art and habit of speaking and conversing. They could understand one another, and see plainly what each other thought. Since they were able to see each other’s thoughts, there was no scope for deception or dissembling. If we were able to see each other’s thoughts objectively as did the people of the said tribe, everybody concerned would simply know the truth and would not be deceived. In earlier races, there was, as it were, a telepathic transfer taking place. It is as if the whole humanity consisted of clairvoyants and sensitives. Explaining how the astral light becomes the medium of thought transference, Mr. Judge writes that “the moment the thought takes shape in the brain it is pictured in this light [astral light], and from there is taken out again by any other brain sensitive enough to receive it intact.” Telepathy is the communicating of thought or idea from mind to mind. Telepathy is closely related to clairvoyance, which is the ability to see with the inner senses, pictures and images in the astral light or in the mind of another. It is with the aid of this power of clairvoyance

that we are able to convey to another any idea whatsoever, says Mr. Judge. Dr. Hans Ehrenwald, in his article, “Psychopathological Aspects of Telepathy” in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research for November 1940, mentions the case of a feeble-minded Lithuanian child of ten years, who possessed the power of thought-reading to a remarkable degree. She was unable to read even the simplest text, but if the teacher were standing near her, reading a book gently or even without making a sound, then the child “read” the text without mistake. Even more surprising, she could read any text read by another person not just in Lithuanian but even in German, French, English or Latin.

H.P.B. remarks that what is now considered abnormal phenomenon was, in every probability, the normal state of antediluvian humanity of the Third and the Fourth Root Race. A sensitive (clairvoyant) can *see* sounds and detect every note and modulation far more distinctly than they would by hearing. Just as sounds can be seen clairvoyantly, so also, sound can be translated into taste. There are sounds which taste exceedingly acid in the mouths of sensitives. H.P.B. mentions a case of a gentleman in Paris for whom sound generated the impression of colour. Thus, vowel “A” appeared to him dark red; “E” white; “I” black; “O” yellow; “U” blue. The consonants appeared in dark grey hues. Thus, for this person, the colour of the word depended on the colour of the letters composing the word. To him human speech appeared in the shape of many coloured, or variegated ribbons coming out of the persons’ mouths. Depending upon the predominance of vowels or consonants in a language, French appeared to him as grey, strongly mixed with white; English seemed nearly black; Italian yellow, merging into carmine and black, and so on.

Inversely, there are sensitives in whom the sight of colours evokes the sensation of sound, and in some others, a triple phenomenon is produced, by one sense generating two others. Thus, a certain sensitive reported that whenever he heard a brass band, he saw dark golden clouds, and experienced a taste “like copper in the mouth.”

(*H.P.B. Series No. 19*, pp. 9-11)

Scientists now accept the phenomenon that one type of sensory input (such as hearing music) evokes an additional one (such as seeing colours). The phenomenon is termed *synesthesia*, from the Greek roots *syn* (together) and *aesthesis* (perception). Scientists try to explain this on the basis of neural connections, which we seem to be using regularly, though unconsciously. For instance, we describe extreme cold weather as “bitter” cold, or a garish pink or red colour as “loud,” writes Anne Underwood. (*Newsweek*, December 2003)

Once we accept the correlation of senses, we are able to appreciate that all our senses are, to a certain extent, interchangeable. For instance, in a trance, a clairvoyant can read a letter, sometimes placed on the forehead, at the soles of the feet, or on the stomach-pit. Interchanging of senses would enable the clairvoyant to *see* sounds. H.P.B. points out that if a clairvoyant were to see a person playing a piano, he would *see* the sound as plainly as you would hear it. And if he blocks his ears and thereby inhibits normal hearing, he would still be able to detect every note and modulation far more distinctly than he would by the ordinary sense of sound. He will be able to *see* it at distance even though he is unable to hear it. To be able to hear an artist singing on the stage, you have to be within the hearing limits of the stage, and there has to be good acoustics and no disturbance. But if you have a clairvoyant sight, you can be far away from the stage and still hear every note and modulation distinctly. You are able to hear it with your sight better than you will see with ears, says H.P.B. Interestingly, the deaf poet, David Wright, wrote that his world though it has little sound in it, “seldom *appears* silent,” because his brain translated movements into a gratifying sense of sound. “I take it that the flight of most birds, at least at a distance, must be silent... Yet it *appears* audible, each species creating a different ‘eye music.’” (*A Natural History of the Senses*, p. 192)

In the magazine *Theosophy* (September 1923), the case of one Ms. Huggins is printed. At the age of ten, she began losing the

sense of sight and hearing, and completely lost them within a year. Having reached the age of reason before the disabilities set in, she could hear others by using auditory apparatus by touching the diaphragm with her finger tips or by her fingers touching the throat of the speaker. She said that she could not hear the sounds but could *feel* them. Similarly she could determine as many as thirty different colours by her sense of smell. The article concludes by saying that all the senses are *astral*, distinct from the physical *organs*, and are *interchangeable*.

Likewise, Helen Keller was blind, deaf and mute, but her remaining senses were finely attuned. “When she put her hands on the radio to enjoy music, she could tell the difference between cornets and the strings. She listened to colourful down-home stories of life surging along the Mississippi from the lips of her friend Mark Twain....Despite her handicaps, she was more robustly alive than many people of her generation,” writes Diane Ackerman. Her sense of smell was especially acute. Through her sense of smell she used to become aware of a coming storm, hours before any sign of it was visible. She found that babies did not have unique odours, like the adults. She described masculine exhalations to be stronger, more vivid than those of women. “In the odour of young men there is something elemental, as of fire, storm, and salt sea,” said Keller. H.P.B. remarks that when a person is deprived of one or more senses, then it is compensated by greater development of other senses. A blind person recovers his sense of sight through touch and hearing. So also, a deaf person seems to hear through eyes, by looking at the lips and mouth of a speaker. (*S.D.*, I, 534)

Paul Bach-y-Rita, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin, has been carrying out research to show that our senses are interchangeable. He feels that our brain is adaptable, and hence, it is possible to “rewire” any of the five senses. He fitted an electrode and a camera on the tongue of a person, who was blindfolded. That person reported that he could see with his tongue. Bach-y-Rita feels that sight and touch are interchangeable and so also hearing and

touch. We can swap any two senses. He has been devising a system which can help Navy people who work under water, to find their way in murky water through their tongues, while their eyes are free to perform other tasks.

Occultism explains these phenomena by saying that physical sense organs are not the real organs of perception. The perceptive faculty proper belongs to astral plane, and real centres of perception are in the astral body. All the senses are but differentiation of the One Sense Consciousness. Every sense pervades every other, there being only one sense acting through different organs of sensation. We are told that fishes living in dark subterranean waters are blind. However, although they do not have any organs of physical sight, they have sense of sight, otherwise how could they find their prey in darkness and move around avoiding obstacles. If they are taken out and put into a pond, after a few generations they will develop eyes.

Normally any perception that is beyond the five physical senses is described as the sixth sense. Often phenomena occurring due to interchangeability of senses are erroneously attributed to the functioning of the sixth sense, as for instance, when a clairvoyant is able to read a letter blindfolded. But even in this, it is only the astral senses, which are behind the physical, that come into operation. Hence, the clairvoyant may be able to read the letter blindfolded, but he will not be able to read the letter which has not been written or received; but the awakened sixth sense can. Strictly speaking the sixth sense pertains to a higher plane of intuitive perception and premonition.

*(To be concluded)*

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I HAVE been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened.

—MARK TWAIN

## THE INSTITUTION OF CASTES

## II

IT IS important for us to inquire into the true meaning of *Varna*. The literal meaning of it is colour. Colour of what? It is certainly not the colour of any external features like skin, etc. The true meaning of *Varna* is *spiritual* colour which depicts the inner character of a person; which is the sum of the qualities of his mental, moral, vital and physical nature fashioned by himself by the force of his own thoughts, desires and deeds in his past incarnations. These go to form his subtle body (Astral Body or *Linga Sarira*), on the invisible model of which his visible physical body is formed in the womb. The inner propensities of man, called *Vasanas*, or tendencies, together with the relative development of his spiritual and material principles, which are seven in number, assume a combination of specific colours and shades of colours defining the character of a man. This is called *Varna* (*Brihadaranyaka Upnishad*, 4:2-20, and *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3:1-9, and Sri Shankaracharya's commentary thereon). It is not visible to the physical sight but to the perfect Seers it is plainly visible, who can thus judge the true character of a man. Every action, whether of mind, feeling, speech or body movement, produces a distinct *colour, sound* and *figure* on the hidden plane of our being, according to the intent and motive which prompted the action. Everything, as also every organ in every creature, has hidden in its aura its characteristic colour and sound. Says Mr. Crosbie :

Every centre in man—that is, every organ—has been evolved under the operation of the laws that govern the solar system. These laws may be known. Every centre has its own distinctive colour and its own distinctive sound; it also presents a distinctive symbol and form. If, then, one knew the laws of sounds, colours, symbols and form, he could tell...what caused the nature of any motion and the motive that underlay it. From him, deception could not be hid, evil could not be hid; motives could not be hid.

(*Universal Theosophy*, pp. 117-8)

One cannot know the real character and motives of an individual, and even the individual himself will be unaware of his own hidden qualities, unless he has developed spiritual perception. To the one who is advanced in Yoga Vidya the true character, or the real *inner* condition, of anyone is like an open book, and outer pretensions and claims go for nothing.

That is why in any person's motion—even so simple an action as in moving from one chair to another—the quality of the thought, the very nature of the person, is clearly shown by the assemblage of colours and shades of colours produced by the action. The same with any uttered sounds or speech, no matter what—the centres in the body are set in motion, each having its own particular telltale colours and rates of vibrations. (*ibid.*, p. 133)

This description will give us some idea of the true meaning of *Varna*, which, as shown, is the real *inner* quality and character of a person, which cannot be judged by his visible outer appearance. It is then according to the *Varna*, which everyone develops in himself by his own actions, that the “caste” of each individual, and the duties and responsibilities attached to each caste, was determined in the past, and not by parentage or lineage. *Nowhere in the Vedas, or in the teachings of Sri Krishna, or of the Buddha, or of any great Teacher is there sanction for the caste system which prevails in India today, based on birth and parentage, without reference to actual character.* In fact, the Buddha was forthright in his criticism of people of higher castes in his time who, lacking the requisite qualities, were unfitted to the office they held, and which they abused, merely by claims of heredity, as many do so now at the present time. So are the *Dharma Shastras* in their disapproval of assumption of caste by people without merit, and negligent in performance of duties. There were no rigid barriers in times of old, as one could rise from lower state to nobler virtues and capacities through personal effort, and thus become fitted to perform duties appropriate to that state; and,

on the other hand, one could well slide down from a higher status and responsibilities to a lower order through negligence. It was character alone that determined the *Varna* or caste, not external factors, such as birth or parentage, though many families maintained their purity for long periods through right living and right performance of duties such that Egos of similar character and nature were attracted to them for rebirth, for the good of mankind. Social status of individuals and duties they performed were in conformity to their true character through harmonizing of the inner character and outer environment. Many examples could be cited from the Epics and the Puranas in this regard. Community life was based on mutual help, in which all laboured towards the great World Ideal of perfection and emancipation of all through devotion to their natural duties. “Men being contented and devoted to their own proper duties attain perfection.” (*Gita*, XVIII)

Contrasting the true caste system from its corrupted form at the present time, Mr. Crosbie wrote in *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*:

In earlier days, before the ancient teaching had become materialized, marriage was a sacred and religious contract; family life was so understood and conducted as to provide proper environment for egos of the same nature as the family on spiritual, psychical, and other lines. Then there existed natural castes where all lines of heredity conjoined; in these degenerate days the castes are mixed and there are those born in castes whose nature does not conform to the original caste whose name and privileges they take and abuse. Nevertheless, the castes exist everywhere; but no longer does social position or physical environment distinguish them. In all countries at the present time, there are those in high place and power who by nature are Sudras, and many who are Brahmans by nature are lower in our social scale, for this is Kali Yuga when the powers of darkness are in ascendancy. (pp. 233-34)

Yudhishtira, in his response to a question posed by the great

serpent, in the *Aranya Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, speaks of the corruption of castes, *Varna sankara* that had set in then which made it virtually impossible to distinguish true castes. It is plain, therefore, that revival of true spiritual living and practices is possible only through spread of Theosophical education. Customs and practices of castes based on dead-letter interpretation of the *Shastras*, as prevalent today, have to be abandoned. “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’ ... Theosophy is the vehicle of the spirit that giveth life” (*Lucifer*, October 1887). Clear eyed Indian Theosophists who have drunk deep from the life-giving stream of perennial Theosophy have a great duty to do by their country. No true student who has intuitively sensed the true spirit of *Varna Dharma*, and, in contrast, seen the perversion of the same, and the injustice and evils it has entailed, can continue his relation with the caste customs and practices he is born into. His effort will ever be to try to live by the dictates of his Higher Self and the truth of Universal Brotherhood without distinctions of caste, creed or class, and thus, through self-regeneration, help in creating conditions congenial for revival of the past glory of the ancient venerable Aryavarta.

(Concluded)

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IT IS fitting that the workman should use the tool, and not the tool the workman; that the rider should guide and spur the horse, and not the horse the rider; and that the sovereign should direct and govern the people, and not the people the sovereign. If in such things as these the natural order is maintained, the result is harmony and beauty; but if the relations are reversed, the result is confusion, ugliness and distortion.

—HERMES

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

**Question:** It is said in our literature that Adepts have overcome the illusion of *devachan* or *swarga* and hence after death, they are not compelled to enter the *devachanic* state. If a sincere student of theosophy intensely desires a quick rebirth in order to help humanity, is it possible for him to skip the rest and peace of *devachan*?

**Answer:** In our literature we have a definite statement by H. P. Blavatsky, who says that “all workers of the Lodge, no matter of what degree, are helped out of *Devachan*, if they themselves permit it.” However, we must not take this statement in isolation. In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, writing to Jasper Niemand, a sincere student and co-worker, Mr. Judge says that death is inevitable and that no one knows when it will come. While it is good to be prepared for death, we must make the most of life, as also, of the time on hand. “Immediate rebirth is for those who are always working with their hearts on Master’s work and free from self-interest.” But as we live we must strive to do our very best for the work. We may be assured that we will be helped out of *Devachan*, if we deserve and desire. But do we really belong to that category? Writing to this sincere co-worker, Jasper Niemand, Mr. Judge points out that she was not yet at the stage where such extraordinary help could be given, and hence, chances were that she would die and remain in *Devachan* for a long time. She was ill and suffering. Yet, Mr. Judge advises her that all that can be done in the body must be done, because life is a great cyclic opportunity which comes after many hundred years, and that nothing can be done in death. “Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self.” By living as long as one can, one gives

the Self that longer chance.

In “Extracts from Unpublished Letters,” that appeared in *The Theosophical Movement* (January 1963), we are told that H.P.B.’s words are apt to be taken lightly by all and sundry. There are conditions to be fulfilled by one aspiring to secure such extraordinary help. On the side of the Masters the condition for helping to skip *Devachan* or for being pulled out early from *Devachanic* rest is that one must be a worker for the Great Lodge of Masters, and that one gives permission to the Masters to be helped out. What is it to be a *worker*? There must be in the person one-pointed devotion and aspiration to serve humanity, and to work towards Universal Brotherhood. There must be faith in the Masters and willingness to labour strenuously. The phrase, “worker for the Lodge” is not to be taken lightly. One has to formulate the desire to serve the Masters, and to work for Humanity, while alive, and must also be willing to let go of the rest, joy and peace of *Devachan*. The sincere and deep feeling must arise, “I want to serve.”

One cannot renounce *Devachan* just by wishing, because to be able to renounce one must have cultivated the virtue of adaptability, which in turn depends upon cultivation of *vairagya* or detachment. Adaptability implies ability to adjust with all kinds of people, and that is possible only when there is love that understands—love that expands and unfolds compassion. It is also the ability to work in any type of body and environment. Adaptability means we must be detached enough to work where we are required. We must have developed the capacity to grapple with the new environment in which not only life is to be lived but service to human souls is to be rendered. Quick rebirth implies the same astral which has become accustomed to certain conditions; a new environment makes it not only uncomfortable but useless. Therefore, adaptability is most valuable and becomes necessary.

Doing without *devachan* is a difficult thing, because one has to stay in self-consciousness till Masters use our Karma to arrange the suitable environment. This staying in objective waking condition

without falling into the sleep of *Devachan* is not only difficult but has its perils. Besides rest and peace for the soul, it is in *devachan* that there is exhaustion of unspent psychic energies and unfulfilled aspirations. Now, when we desire to skip *devachan*, “unfulfilled aspirations” must be fulfilled in waking life by “self-induced and self-devised ways and means” of discipline and service. There is also the question of exhaustion, renovation and renewal of spiritual stamina. We have to be able to so live the life that we can do without *devachanic* rest. Motive, ideation and imagination change the quality of *Prana*, so that with right motive and ideation we may be able to make a superior quality of *Prana* to flow through us. If our devotion to the guru is deep and complete we will say, “Do what you like with me.” Through devotion we may keep renewing, day by day, our spiritual stamina, by right endeavour.

**Question:** If a man dies killing another, would he in a future life suffer as a murderer would suffer? Would the state after death of a soldier killed in war be the same as that of executed criminal?

**Answer:** Karma is the law of action and reaction; cause and effect. The law of Karma adjusts every effect to its cause and restores the disturbed equilibrium in the physical world, and broken harmony in the moral world. It is not possible for an ordinary person to know the *manner* in which the law of compensation exacts the due. We must also know that the law does not work mechanically in a fixed, cut-and-dried manner. Mullah Nasaruddin, a sufi teacher, humorously drove home this point through an incident in his life. He said that once a man fell from the third floor balcony of a building. Anyone would say that if he fell from third floor balcony, he must have either died or fractured some of his bones. But that did not happen. He says, “I was passing by and the man fell on me. As a result, he was saved and I broke my ribs and was hospitalized!”

In fact, we are told that during Karmic adjustment, as we repay the debts, the Law of Karma takes into account many factors. The Law takes into account the motive behind the action, the inner state of the person and the weight of his past Karma. We do not incur

very heavy debt, when we act wrongly *but with a good motive*, or because we were disturbed inwardly.

In the *Gita*, Shri Krishna encourages Arjuna to engage in battle by saying that a soldier of *Kshtriya* tribe has no duty superior to lawful war. If he gets killed in war, he will attain to heaven. He invites Arjuna to fulfill his obligatory duty as a warrior and destroy unrighteousness, and become a mere instrument for the manifestation of the law. To be an “immediate agent,” or an apparent cause, is to act without the feeling of doership. Thus, Arjuna will have to face the consequences of killing the warriors, on the physical plane, but since he did not *initiate* the act of killing, we may say that he will not face the consequences on the moral plane. The same might be true of a soldier who fights and kills the men in the opposite army, only with the intention of protecting his nation and not out of vengeance or with a feeling of animosity.

Motive with which the action was performed becomes of paramount importance in determining the consequences of an action. A soldier believing it his duty, as a patriot to kill, would die for his principle—not to defend himself as a person. He suffers with his nation in a future life, and has his share in the punishment due to his nation for that killing. As a person, he would not have the punishment of a murderer, unless his heart were filled with feeling of hatred and revenge such as a murderer’s would hold. (“*Because*”—*For the Children Who Ask Why*, p. 93)

A Master of Wisdom suggests that the state after death of an executed criminal, a suicide, a murderer, an accident victim is different. Much depends upon the state of mind of the person and his last thoughts when he was killed. Men destroyed in battle are engaged in the moving of troops, firing of volleys and using swords or guns. Their attention is thus wholly occupied with the ideas of attack and defence when they are suddenly killed. If they linger in the astral plane (*kamaloka*) till natural death, then they will continue the same actions of planning attack and defence with which their mind was occupied at the time of death. A soldier is overmastered

by a single strong idea. Such is not the case of an executed criminal who is full of evil passions, and hence he steps into the other world full of thoughts of revenge, filled with unsatisfied desires. He seeks to satisfy his revenge and bad instincts in general, explains Mr. Judge. (“*Forum*” *Answers*, p. 21)

Mr. Judge says that we must take into account the nature, passions, state of mind and bitterness of the criminal. We can divide the criminals into at least two classes: those persons who are hardened, vicious, murderous in nature, and those who are not so, but committed the crime in the moment of passion, fear or anger. The last may be again divided into those who are sorry for what they have done, and those who are not. All these criminals, if they are executed, will have before their execution, feelings of anger, resentment, desire for revenge, against the Society which persecuted them, and against those who directly took part in their trial and execution. At first they are not able to do much, but very soon such disembodied entities are able to influence weak and sensitive minds to commit crimes. It is obvious that anyone who believes in these theosophical and occult doctrines will never approve of capital punishment.

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YOU are a principal work, a fragment of God Himself, you have in yourself a part of Him. Why then are you ignorant of your high birth?...You bear God about with you, poor wretch, and know it not. Do you think I speak of some external god of silver or gold? No, you bear Him about within you and are unaware that you are defiling Him with unclean thoughts and foul actions. If an image of God were present, you would not dare to do any of the things you do; yet when God Himself is present within you and sees and hears all things, you are not ashamed of thinking and acting thus: O slow to understand your nature, and estranged from God!

—EPICTETUS

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Is it okay to eat food prepared by criminals? Packets of savouries, prepared by Tihar Jail inmates are being sold at several outlets in Delhi, the capital of India. Most people are reluctant to buy such food because they believe that when a criminal cooks food, some of his *vasanas* or tendencies, get transferred to the food, and the person eating that food would be affected by them. But we may well ask: What about the food we eat at restaurants or the snack we buy at the confectioners? We are not always aware of the state of mind of the people who prepare such food. We do not know if they were angry or depressed, while cooking food. *Ahar tat tvam asi*—“You are what you eat,” says Ayurveda and ancient Chinese tradition. What we eat gets reflected in our personality. Some faiths believe that we must eat the food that is good for the self, in proper quantity and the food that is *sattvic*, so that some people avoid eating onion and garlic, because they are considered *tamasic* food. It is important that food is cooked with positive feelings. The *Gita* speaks of *Amedhya* or impure food. It is the food stored in dirty place, cooked by an unclean person in an unhygienic manner and with impure mind, with emotions of unhappiness, anger, tension and dislike. Such food carries negative energy which affects the person eating that food. There is the tradition of offering the food to the Divine before eating. It helps to purify the food of negativities. Chanting while cooking the food is another way of getting rid of negative energy from the food. Instead of rejecting the food prepared by prisoners, they may be encouraged to sing devotional songs, so that positive vibrations get infused into the food being prepared. We have the example of a restaurant run by the High Down Prison in Surrey, UK, where all meals are cooked and served by inmates, and which is almost always over-crowded, writes Ranjeni Singh. (*The Speaking Tree* [*The Times of India*], July 17, 2011)

In the *Gita*, foods are classified into three divisions: *Tamasic* or impure food is described as stale, tasteless and rotting. *Rajasic*

food is bitter, sour, saline, pungent, dry, burning and excessively hot. *Sattvic* food is pure and savoury, and tends to enhance age, vitality, strength, health and cheerfulness.

It is true that the inner attitude and magnetism of the person who cooks and handles food makes it healthful or not, and affects the magnetism of one who eats that food. Thus, when a mother puts her heart and soul into the food she cooks, the food so cooked, with love and care, is more nourishing, in its own way, than any other vitamin-rich food. That mother, for a moment, becomes the Mother Nature, “*Mata Annapurneshwari*,” nourishing her family. When Buddha was nearly fainting—after indulging in wrong ascetic practices—he was given food by Sujata, a simple and pious housewife. It is said that so wonderful was the virtue of that meal that Buddha experienced strength and life returning to him instantly. At our level, however, we need not unduly worry about defiling our magnetism through food, because we do contaminate our magnetism through unhealthy thoughts and feelings. H.P.B. puts it thus:

Remember once for all that in all such questions we take a rational, and never a fanatical, view of things....For after all is said and done, the purely bodily actions and functions are of far less importance than what a man *thinks* and *feels*, what desires he encourages in his mind, and allows to take root and grow there. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 259)

It would appear that wicked and gross thoughts are more harmful than the eating of a ton of flesh, or for that matter even eating food cooked by criminals.

There is also the other fact to be borne in mind and that is, suitability or fitness of the food for each person. Each body extracts from any kind of food only that which conforms to the nature of the possessor of the body, and that nature is subject to change from within. Ultimately, food is necessary to keep the body fit for the soul to inhabit.

A dog was sentenced to death by stoning in a queer judgment passed by a Jerusalem rabbinical court. As reported by Ynet website in the month of June this year, a large dog made its way into the Monetary Affairs Court in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem, frightening judges and plaintiffs. Despite all attempts when the dog refused to leave the premises, one of the sitting judges recalled that some twenty years back a secular lawyer was cursed for having insulted the judges. They believed firmly that by way of divine retribution the spirit of the lawyer had entered the body of a dog—an animal considered impure by traditional Judaism. Certain schools of thought within Judaism believe in the transmigration of souls, or reincarnation. One of the court’s managers confirmed the report of the lapidation sentence to Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot. However, Rabbi Avraham Dov Levin, denied that the judges had called for the dog’s stoning. The animal managed to escape, even as an animal welfare organization filed a complaint with the police against the head of the court. (*Sunday Times of India*, June 19, 2011)

In the article, “Reincarnation in Judaism and the Bible,” Mr. Judge says that under the name of “*Dia Gilgol Neshomes*” the doctrine of reincarnation is constantly spoken of in the Talmud. The term means “the judgment of the revolutions [rebirths] of the souls.” However, as among the Hindus, the belief in the transmigration into animal bodies seems to be the result of wrong interpretation of the doctrine.

Theosophy teaches that “once a man always a man.” Though some men are so inhuman, brutal and selfish, as Mr. Judge puts it, that it would not be too much punishment for such men, if it were possible to condemn them to rebirth in animal bodies. However, Nature does not go by sentiments, but by law. Moreover, the brutal man is not “brute” in all aspects of his nature. Mainly, theosophy rejects the reincarnation in animal bodies because man is the crown piece of evolution and is endowed with *Manas*, while the animal has no *Manas*. Just as the blood in the body is prevented by the valves from rushing back into the heart, so in the system of evolution

the door is shut behind the Thinker and prevents him from being born into lower kingdoms, writes Mr. Judge.

In India, the belief in the transmigration into animal bodies is based on the literal interpretation of the *Laws of Manu* concerning this subject. In the article “Transmigration of Life Atoms,” H.P.B. shows that the *Laws of Manu* literally interpreted, have been misunderstood. She says that the statement, “A Brahman-killer enters the body of a dog, bear, ass, camel, goat, sheep, bird, etc.,” does not mean that the human Ego is born into these brute bodies, but refers to atoms of human body, the lower triad and the fluidic emanations. The “Brahman-killer” is “he who kills or extinguishes in himself the light of Parabrahm.” We continuously impress the atoms that we use, with either lower, psychic or higher, spiritual impressions—depending upon our thoughts. When these atoms are impressed by evil thoughts and actions, they get attracted to lower kingdoms, by magnetic affinity, and go in the formation of lower animals or brutes. This is the real meaning of the doctrine of Metempsychosis (*H.P.B. Series No. 25*). It is in this sense that man is said to be reborn as an animal.

Mr. Judge points out that if today, tiger is more vicious or if serpents are more poisonous, it is because they are influenced by the thoughts of men. Man’s soul is not born into animal body again but the atoms of his body do find lodgment in the animal bodies.

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It takes guts to give negative feedback and even more guts to take it in. Yet, without it we would be stuck in the Stone Age, unable to learn or succeed, says Karen Wright, a writer in Kirkland, Washington. No one wants to hear criticism, because it is annoying, it threatens our identity and even our survival. Is there any right way to say it or hear it? So much of our learning, loving and living depends upon negative feedback and yet we have not yet learnt to handle it properly. Parents, Teachers, Coaches, Spouses are meant to point out mistakes which one has to learn to recognize, analyze

and fix. Negative feedback could be given skillfully, by targeting the behaviour and not the person, and by softening the language. Often, our hypersensitivity to criticism may lead us to see it where none exists. Criticism is much better received when invited. Another common problem with negative feedback is that it often comes from people we do not consider eligible to give it in the first place, says William Doherty, a family therapist at the University of Minnesota. When we ask someone for feedback we explicitly assign that person the role of critic. When a teacher grades a student, a coach gives a pep talk, or a parent guides a young child’s efforts, there is tacit agreement that praise and correction will be part of the exchange. Children do not see step-parents as eligible to give feedback on their homework, manners, etc. Some of the rules for effective feedback are: 1. Always lead with questions: How do you think you are doing? It gives the recipient joint ownership of the problem and helps him feel included, not excluded. 2. Never give feedback when you are angry; anger alienates the listener. Expressing disappointment is more productive. 3. Know who you are talking to. Narcissists take any criticism as a personal attack; the insecure lose all self-esteem. 4. Expect defensiveness as a first response to criticism; a change in performance may come later. Likewise, when you receive negative feedback, take a deep breath. It is probably going to hurt. Try not to talk too much. Instead, lean back and learn. “Feedback exposes you to yourself, which is why it is both tremendously unsettling and exceptionally valuable,” writes management consultant Peter Bergman. When you receive negative feedback, be prepared to admit that it just might be accurate, writes Karen Wright. (*Psychology Today*, March-April 2011)

In both mundane and spiritual matters we become aware of our weaknesses and mistakes, either during self-examination or when our attention is drawn to them by others. It is very difficult to become aware of one’s own faults, and even if we do discover our faults, we are more likely to ignore them and avoid taking any remedial measures. Recognizing this fact, Saint Tukaram used to say, it is

good to have a fault-finder as your neighbour. Lord Buddha says: “If you see an intelligent man who detects faults and blames what is blameworthy, follow that wise man. Value him as a revealer of hidden treasure. . . . Let such a man admonish, let him instruct, let him forbid what is improper.”

As per the Buddhist precept, if one is forced to reprove a person, one must do so on his face, but gently, and in words full of charity and compassion, because the human heart is like the Kusuli plant that opens its cup to the sweet morning dew but closes it before a heavy shower. The wise man is able to separate the sin from the sinner and has subtle ways of instructing and correcting mistaken notions.

“Severe denunciation is duty to truth,” on condition that we denounce and fight against the *root* of evil and not the evildoer, who is, most often, the victim and product of his environment. If a person happens to be “a public officer, a judge or magistrate, a barrister or even a preacher, it is then, of course his duty to his country, his conscience and those who put their trust in him, to ‘denounce severely’ every case of ‘treachery, falsehood and rascality’” (*H.P.B. Series No. 33*). It is the duty of Theosophy to expose falsehood and to redress wrong.

When we are at the receiving end of criticism or negative feedback, we must try to receive it *impersonally*, and see the merit or demerit of the remarks. If what is pointed out is correct, let us try to change ourselves accordingly. Often we are biased and hence miss out on being guided by certain people.

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TALK not of wasted affection, affection was never wasted: If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters returning back to their springs, like the rain, shall fill them full of refreshment.

—LONGFELLOW