

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 10, No. 4

August 17, 2018

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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ON PROHIBITION AND COMPULSION

THE FORCE of temptation to go counter to what is enforced from outside is very strong, and it must be taken into account by the authorities that prohibit. As children we all took subtle pleasure in breaking rules, which prohibited talking aloud, unpunctuality, rude behaviour, as also in eating a stolen apple or mango by entering a neighbour's garden, unseen. During adolescence, we experienced subtle delight in bypassing the red light of traffic signal, or in coming home late, ignoring the deadline of 10 p.m. set by the elders for returning home. This streak of disobedience and resistance is carried forward, and reflects itself in resistance shown to more serious prohibitions and compulsions.

We, today, think of prohibition only in terms of the buying or drinking of alcoholic beverages, or prostitution, but it can apply to many things. Side by side with the idea of prohibition, we must also consider its opposite, compulsion. We do not seem to mind compulsion, as much as we mind prohibition. We dislike to be prohibited from doing what we like, but we do not resist as much when we are compelled to do something, against our wish and will. But some of us hate both prohibition and compulsion, and so we fight both.

Man is free to *think* what he likes, but he is not free to *do* what he likes. In the *Key to Theosophy* H.P.B. asks us to take *restrictive measures* for the criminals, so that they are prevented, at least for a

time, from coming in contact with others and harming them. Thus, the justification for prohibition lies in whether what is prohibited is bad for the person. On the other hand, compulsion is something that is good for a person. But great discrimination and knowledge are necessary for the exercise of either prohibition or compulsion. Individually, at least, we should *compel* ourselves to do all that is good for ourselves and others, and *prohibit* ourselves from doing all that is harmful to ourselves and others. In dealing with both prohibition and compulsion, we come up against the idea of “free will” and “pull of desires.” Each person has to voluntarily accept or reject. It thus becomes extremely important for every person to take trouble and find out whether the prohibition or the compulsion is good or bad, and not rely merely on the views of the majority or the propaganda.

We all have strong herd-instinct and are only too ready to conform. Emerson, emphasized *self-reliance* saying, “It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” Jesus’ advice to spiritual aspirants is: “Come ye out from among them and be ye separate.”

Methods of prohibition and compulsion are equally important to consider. Prohibition by law, without adequate education as to the dangers of the thing prohibited, is bound to end in failure. For instance, when we evaluate the prohibition of alcoholic drinks, it is very evident that a person who is drunk loses his judgement and also his *viveka*—ability to differentiate between good and bad. A number of accidents caused by drinking, quarrels caused by drinking, etc., show that prohibition of alcoholic drinks is worthwhile. People will have to be educated and attractive alternatives should be offered. In the beginning there might be a certain amount of smuggling. Also, illicit distillation might go on for some time. But it would not be difficult to detect and punish such law-breakers, if prohibition had the support of public opinion and were put in the hands of able

and honest executive officers. But above all, individuals can be educated and awakened to the evils of drinking. If every man curbed his desire to drink, and refused to buy illicit liquor, then the supply will stop when there is no demand. When something is prohibited, we should give enough time for that prohibition to take effect.

However, it is not enough to impose laws, in order to improve any social, economic or political system. It has been noticed, for instance, that so long as men are dishonest, bullies and twisters, they always find out some new way of cheating and evading tax. No matter how stringent the laws may be, people succeed in finding loopholes. It is true that we cannot have good society without good men, but we cannot have good men merely by imposing laws. The emphasis must be on individual morality.

When we seek to make people good by legislation, we only succeed in repressing what is considered “bad,” or “unwholesome.” Mr. Crosbie expresses a profound psychological truth, when he says, “Prohibitions of all kinds serve only to exasperate the evil nature in men. We need not to prohibit. We need to educate, and first of all, we need to educate ourselves.” This is especially relevant to *taboos* or implicit prohibitions in any given society. There are strong prohibitions based on moral judgements, religious beliefs or cultural norms, which at times are rooted in narrow-minded and orthodox views of the majority. A few years back there were severe restrictions put on a girl-child and females in general. She was prohibited from talking to a person of the opposite sex, from exposing any part of her body, from talking or laughing loudly, from going to school, and so on. These taboos lead to repressing of desires and emotions, often even legitimate desires. In the course of time, such prohibitions give rise to bottled up anger and frustrations, which find an outlet in demonstrations, uprisings and revolutions.

When we put down certain desires by a strong effort of will instead of struggling to slay or transmute them, it is like allowing the fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ashes. A small whiff of wind can cause big flames to leap out. We are then behaving like

that Spartan boy who hid the baby fox under his coat, when he was caught stealing it, and while he valiantly kept answering the questions put to him, the baby fox was eating away his entrails. H.P.B. points out that similarly our suppressed desires tend to corrupt better part of our nature, when we refuse to kill out or transform them. Some of these desires are unconsciously pushed into the subconscious.

The true inner change can never come when a person follows ethical behaviour out of fear of punishment. A child, who is afraid of being punished if he did not wash his hands before lunch and dinner, would only wash his hands so long as the parents are watching. But the moment he is sure that the parents are not likely to know, he will skip washing his hands. It is said that nobody would care to follow the Ten Commandments if there was an eleventh commandment that said: “Thou shalt not be found out.” No lasting change can be brought without changing the inner nature of individuals.

...he [the disciple] smiles at the socialist and the reformer who endeavour by sheer force to re-arrange circumstances which arise out of the forces of human nature itself. This is but kicking against the pricks; a waste of life and energy. (*Light on the Path*, p. 77)

Prohibition, compulsion and laws are all external authorities. Theosophy says that the *final authority is man himself*. The “Declaration” of the United Lodge of Theosophists is a unique document which states that the work of every centre of U.L.T. will be carried on based solely on the sincerity of the students, and their appreciation of the values. Hence, there are no bye-laws or officers. When asked, “Have you any prohibitory laws or clauses for Theosophists in your society?” H.P.B. answers that there are many such laws *but none of them are enforced*. To follow those injunctions or not, is left to the discretion of the students themselves (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 247). We have these thought-provoking words from Mr. Crosbie:

The “Authority” you speak of is not what men term authority, which comes from outside and which demands obedience of mind and body, but *an internal recognition of the value of that which flows through any given point, focus, or individual* (italics ours). That is the authority of one’s Self-discrimination; intuition; the highest intellection: that kind we all hold to, and if we follow what we recognize in that way and still find it good, we naturally keep our faces in that direction, in the source found to be pure and right. But this means no slavish following of a person—a distinction which some are unable to appreciate.

Thus, when a person recognizes and accepts certain values, of his own free will, he is likely to follow them *spontaneously*. The first step is to recognize that we have free-will, or the power to make choices. Many people go through life, without doing their own thinking or making their own choices. They are happy if someone else will tell them what to do and what not to do in matters moral or otherwise. Thus, we are free, but we have used that freedom to choose those things which have approval of the majority around us. We are afraid of swimming against the stream and being isolated.

The second step is to inculcate right values, in a nation and the world at large; we might arouse public opinion by spreading right ideas, which give rational explanation. Another way of achieving inner conversion is by setting an example for others to emulate; by living a life so as to radiate elevating and beneficent influences around us. “In every conceivable case he himself must be a centre of spiritual action, and from him and his own daily individual life must radiate those higher spiritual forces which alone can regenerate his fellow-men,” writes H.P.B. (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 233-34). “You must be the change you wish to see in the world,” said Gandhiji. This quote is based on a well-known incident in his life wherein he advised a child to give up eating too many sweets, only after he himself was able to overcome addiction to sweets. When we *apply* what we believe in, we are able to show ways and means of effecting the change.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT ORDER

ALL THE RELIGIOUS books of mankind, by means of the most varied images, teach...law of order. The Hebrew book of Genesis, in its own way, also tells a story of order. In the beginning there was chaos, that is disorder and darkness. And the first act of God was to throw light upon this disorder, just as a man shines the light of his lamp into the gloom of the dark and dirty cellar he wants to enter. After that the Bible tells how, day by day, things emerged from the chaos in an orderly way until at last the human race appeared.

It is the glory of man to create order and to discover it everywhere. The astronomer looks up towards the stars and makes a map of the heavens; he studies the regular paths of the heavenly bodies and names them, he calculates the motions of the planets around the sun and forecasts the moment when the moon, passing between the earth and sun, will cause what we call an eclipse. The whole science of astronomy depends on a knowledge of order.

Arithmetic is also a science of order. Even a very small child takes delight in repeating numbers in the right order. He soon discovers that there is no meaning in saying: one, five, three, ten, two, as he counts his fingers or his marbles. He counts: one, two, three, four; and all mathematics comes from that.

And without order, what would become of that lovely thing, music? There are seven notes in the scale: do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si. If you play these notes one after another, it is all right, but if you strike them all together, and mix their sounds, it will make a frightful noise. They can produce a harmonious sound together only when they are played in a certain order. Do, mi, sol, do, for example, sounded together, form what is known as a "chord." The whole science of music is based on that order.

And it can be shown that order is also the basis of every other science and of all the arts that man can invent.

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But is it not equally indispensable in everything? If you went into a house and found the furniture and ornaments all topsy-turvy and scattered about, and covered with a thick layer of dust, you would exclaim, "What dirt and disorder!" For dirt itself is nothing but disorder. There is a place for dust in the world, but not on the furniture.

Similarly, the place for ink is in the ink-pot and not on your fingers or on the carpet. Everything is clean when each thing is in its place. And your books at school, your clothes and toys at home should each have a place which is really its own and which no other thing can claim. Otherwise, battles will follow and your books will get torn, your clothes stained and your toys lost. Then it will cost you much trouble and patience to find your way in this muddle and put everything right. Whereas it is so convenient when things are kept in order.

The life and work of men, and even the wealth and prosperity of nations, all depend on this same principle of order. And that is why one of the main occupations of the government of a country is to maintain good order. From the emperor, king or president, down to the ordinary policeman, each one must contribute to this task as best he can. And all the citizens, whatever their occupations may be, should also take part in this work of maintaining order; for in this way each one can contribute to the organization of a strong and prosperous nation.

Think of the serious consequences that the slightest disorder can sometimes have. What regularity and precision there must be among the multitude of railway-men, gate-keepers, engine-drivers and points-men so that the numerous trains which run in all countries can leave and arrive on time, at the exact minute calculated to avoid all congestion. And if by accident or negligence this order is disrupted even for a moment, what unfortunate incidents can happen! How many things can be upset by a simple delay: friends miss each other, employees and businessmen arrive late at their offices or for their appointments, passengers miss their boats. And you cannot imagine

all the other troubles that will follow.

Think of the sad state things would be in if order and regularity suddenly ceased to exist in the world. See how the whole routine of the house is disturbed simply when a clock stops giving its charming example of regularity and begins to go slow or else to go madly fast. If it cannot be put right, then the best thing to do is to get rid of it.

In the parlour of an old farmhouse there was an antique grandfather clock which for more than a hundred and fifty years had never ceased ticking faithfully. Every morning at daybreak when the farmer came down, the first thing he would do was to visit the clock to be sure that it was right. Now it happened one morning that as he went into the parlour as usual, the clock began to speak:

“For more than a century and a half,” it said, “I have been working without a stop and keeping perfect time. Now I am tired; don’t I deserve to take a rest and stop ticking?”

“Your complaint is unjustified, my good clock,” the shrewd farmer replied, “for you are forgetting that between each tick you have a second’s rest.” After a moment’s thought, the clock began to work again as usual.

Children, what does this story show? That in orderly work fatigue and rest balance each other, and that regularity avoids much pain and effort.

* * * * *

How greatly orderliness increases the power in each thing! Are not the most powerful machines the ones in which each part, each cog, each lever fulfils its function with order and precision? And in a machine like that, even the smallest screw, when it keeps to its proper place, can claim to be as useful as the majestic flywheel.

Similarly, a little child who carefully carries out his task makes a useful contribution to the order of his school, of his home, of his own small world within the greater world.

At first it may take some pains to acquire order. Nothing can be learnt without an effort; nor is it easy to learn to swim, to row, to do gymnastics; but success comes little by little. In the same way, after

a certain time, we can learn to do things in an orderly way without the least difficulty. And more and more, we find disorder painful and disagreeable.

When you first learnt to walk, you often stumbled, you fell, you bumped yourself, you cried. Now you walk without giving it a thought and you run skilfully. Well, the movements of walking and running are a splendid example of the orderly functioning of your nerves, your muscles and all your organs. The order always in the end becomes a habit.

And above all, do not imagine that being orderly, regular, punctual, must prevent you from being happy and smiling. It is not necessary to pull a long face when carrying out a task exactly. And to prove it to you, we shall end this lesson on order with a little laughter. Listen to this example of punctuality, which should not be copied.

An Arab lady had a servant. She sent him to a neighbour’s house to fetch some embers to light her fire. The servant met a caravan going toward Egypt. He began talking with the men and decided to go with them. And he stayed away a whole year. On his return, he went into the neighbour’s house to fetch the embers. But as he was carrying them, he tripped and fell. The burning coals dropped and went out. Then he cried: “What a nuisance to be in a hurry!”

[Extracted from *Tales of All Times*, by The Mother, and published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.]

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Theosophy teaches that we live in an orderly universe of law. H.P.B. quotes Mr. W. Archer Butler, who says, “The world is, then, through all its departments, a living arithmetic in its development, a realized geometry in its repose.” The Pythagoreans regarded numbers as the best representations of the laws of harmony which pervade the cosmos. “The universe is a combination of thousand elements, and yet the expression of a single spirit—a chaos to the senses, a cosmos to the reason.” (*Isis Unveiled*, p. xvi)

In the Vedic religion *Rta* is the principle of *natural order* which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it. *Rta* is described as that which is ultimately responsible for the proper functioning of the natural, moral and sacrificial orders. *Rta* is generally translated to mean “Universal Law,” and “Cosmic Order.” In the human sphere, *Rta* was understood to manifest itself as the force behind the moral order of the society. An individual who follows the ordinances of nature can be described as one who acts according to the “*Dharma of Rta*.” Thus, *Dharma* was regarded as a subordinate component of the metaphysical concept of *Rta*.

Dharma means Law, and is generally translated to mean duty. But in deeper aspect, it means an inherent property of the faculties or of the whole of man, or even of anything in the cosmos. Thus, it is the duty or *Dharma*, of the fire to burn, and that of water, to flow or to wet. The fire will always burn and thus do its whole duty, having no consciousness. The universe is kept going because except man, who can refuse to perform his *Dharma* as a human being, all other kingdoms below man fulfil their *Dharma*. It would be terrible living in a universe where one day water felt cool to the touch, but another day burnt one’s fingers.

Human progress can well be measured by man’s capacity to perceive that all manifestation takes place in design and rhythm. Perfected Men copy Nature in all They do, and so too, every spiritual aspirant must try to follow them and bring about order in their restricted sphere of activity. Every aspirant must try to see that the inner rhythm of his consciousness is not disturbed and that it helps him to remove every type of disorder in his outer environment. “Physical nourishment created in an enlightened kitchen will not produce real good health unless mental rhythm and moral order are made to guide the home. For this purpose, men and women of the world should be taught the necessity of individual study and of the observation of silence,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA SONG OF LIFE—III

IN THE LAST part of this article we saw that it is essential to cultivate detachment from the very activities. For instance, the student who is delivering a series of lectures, and who has not become detached from the very work he is performing, in his case, there would be a long, very long meditative condition, after the death of a physical body, in the heaven world, turned within himself. That student would probably go over the whole series of lectures again, and would be able to do it in a much better manner because there would be no limitation of time, incapacity of voice or speech, or any other limitations we encounter in the physical body in connection with time and space. That work then, would be a successful one, for through that meditation and reiteration of those ideal lectures, the student would build up the strength and capacity to speak and teach better in his next life. Yet, any earnest student would be sorry to have to enjoy that blissful condition of quiet and introspective work while humanity would go on suffering because of its ignorance of the great truths. Any student would want to come back quickly into the objective condition of existence so that he might once again have real audience who could profit by the ancient wisdom.

But in order to achieve and overcome that particular meditation, it is necessary that we should be able to have that meditation now, while we are carrying on our own objective existence. That is, we ought to aim at gathering, as much wisdom and knowledge from the task that we are engaged in. How can we do this? We can achieve it through inner quiet, inner serenity, and contemplation in the inner planes of being, while we are engaged in the actual performance of tasks. This also implies the subduing of all those things in the personal nature which try to interfere with the life of the soul. All desires, all attractions of the lower world must be entirely controlled. Then we are able to assimilate the full fruition from all our experiences while we are having these experiences, and we need not have a special

portion of time set apart for that absorption in meditation. That is a very important, practical point conveyed to us in this particular verse.

People often ask: How can we assimilate all our experiences through life in the physical body? It is a simple question of adaptability, and its direct result is produced by impersonality. When we say that we can adapt ourselves to the place and people in the midst of whom we live, we simply mean that our personality cannot affect us any longer, that the things that touch the personality in the objective world have no effect upon ourselves as inner spiritual beings. When we have reached that stage, we may perform our duties with absolute accuracy and concentration, and yet we never get so identified with these duties that we forget even for a moment, that we are not the personality, that we are not even the individual soul, but that both the personality as well as the individuality have simply become channels for the impersonal forces for the Masters of Wisdom, and that is the necessary requirement. Then only our actions have no results from the personal point of view. When the body is dropped, and since we have not identified ourselves with that body, or the personal man, during the life, it does not affect our state of consciousness, and makes no difference to the real life, for we are living a really spiritual, therefore, permanent life that brings a continuity, while we continue to live the objective existence and to fulfil all our duties and obligations.

We have taken these verses in detail because they are the ones in this discourse which give us the new points to add to all the advice that has already been given in earlier discourses. All the other verses, from verse 13 to 72, are simply the reiteration and explanation of all the teachings that have already been presented in the previous discourse. We shall not therefore, go into them again, but for those of us who are not only trying to understand the *Gita* with our minds but to understand those teachings with the heart energy, *i.e.*, to apply them in our daily lives, we must note certain “clue verses” which give us specific hints for practical application. Those verses are, 20, 23, 26, 30, 33 and 36. Just as the whole of the Eighteenth Discourse

revises, combines, and sums up all the eighteen discourses, so too, the *Gita* itself as a poem, as a book, combines in itself all the various teachings which have been given to mankind before the appearance of that particular teacher Krishna.

Those teachings are given by the Bearers of the Torch of Truth throughout the Ages, by the Great Masters of Wisdom. That is why we saw that the *Gita* is an eclectic, an impersonal presentation of the Great Message of Truth. Therein lies its tremendous value for all people. Whatever may be their own traditions or their own religious ideas, or even their own characteristics, distinctions, and peculiarities, they may find, in studying the *Gita*, a specific message to meet their own specific requirements, and the same applies to all students. Whatever their capacity to understand might be, if they persevere in the study of the *Gita*, day after day, they will find the capacity to understand unfolding itself in a natural, gradual way, and also the capacity to begin to apply from the ethical point of view those teachings given by Krishna.

The message of Krishna was given five thousand years ago, still it rings true today, as it did then. As one of the ancient sayings expressed it, “All the Upanishads are cows, Krishna is the milkman, Arjuna is the calf, wise teachers are they who drink this milk which is ambrosia indeed.” What we must try to become are these wise teachers, who would be able to read the very essence of the book, and message, and to find that holy ambrosia which is the religion of immortality, for this message is given to the soul in man, and the personal man cannot attain that religion of immortality. Again we find in the Vishnu Purana, in verse 3, “Where the book of the *Gita* is, where its reading is performed, there, of all holy places, is indeed Prayag and the rest.” Prayag is the name for the city which we call today Allahabad, a sacred city, because it is at the conjunction of the two sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Jamuna. Wherever we study the *Gita*, wherever we make this poem our intimate friend and adviser, wherever we are trying to live the teachings of the *Gita*, there indeed we make of our homes and cities holy places, as

sacred and holy as the cities of old, as Prayag itself, and this same idea Shri Krishna gives in verses 68 to 71:

He who expoundeth this supreme mystery to my worshippers shall come to me if he performs the highest worship of me; and there shall not be among men anyone who will better serve me than he, and he shall be dearest unto me of all on earth. If anyone shall study these sacred dialogues held between us two, I shall consider that I am worshipped by him with the sacrifice of knowledge; this is my resolve. And even the man who shall listen to it with faith and not reviling shall, being freed from evil, attain to the regions of happiness provided for those whose deeds are righteous.

And finally in verse 78 we find:

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.

The mighty archer has become bent on his own destruction, the destruction of the personality. To begin to kill out the personality is our task, because thus only do we find Krishna, the Master, or Teacher, and then we find also, virtue, family, wealth, and wise action, from the spiritual point of view. In closing, we must say that we feel very thankful to the long generations of Indian Devotees, who have made it possible for us to have the record of Krishna's message intact today. We owe a very great debt to India, for if it were not for India, we would not be able to study the *Gita*, in the western world; we owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have made it possible to study it in the English language, and all those who have kept the message in its pristine pure state, unadulterated, and to those who have spread the *Gita* throughout the world, both in the East and in the West.

(Concluded)

SKANDHAS AND VASANAS—SOME REFLECTIONS

I

SKANDHA is a Sanskrit word, and its Pali equivalent is *Khandha*. *Skandha* is one of the untranslatable terms. It is usually translated as “aggregate,” “collection,” or “heap.” The teaching of the five *Skandhas* is closely related to the teaching of *trilakshana*, or the three characteristics of the conditioned existence. The first characteristic is *sabbe sankhara anicca* (Sk. *anitya*). Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, explains that by *sankhara* is meant, in this context, “put together,” “formed,” or “compounded.” Thus, the first characteristic of conditioned existence is, “compounds” or “formations” are impermanent, because whatever has been put together must one day be taken apart. Things are transitory because they are compounded. But how are they compounded? What, for instance, are the elements of personality? Buddhism speaks of Five *Skandhas* or attributes that form our personality. The Five *Skandhas* are regarded as including our entire psychophysical existence, at all levels, such that there is nothing—no feeling, no thought, no aspect of our physical existence—which is not included under one or the other of the Five *Skandhas*. In fact, these five aggregates make up the whole of conditioned existence. At the beginning of the *Heart Sutra* the text says that when the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara, looked down on the world, the conditioned existence, all that he saw was Five Heaps, or Five *Skandhas*, showing that nothing occurs and nothing exists on the conditioned level of existence which cannot be included under one of the Five *Skandhas*.

The Five *Skandhas* or attributes in the Buddhist teachings are: “*Rupa* (form or body), material qualities; *Vedana*, sensation; *Sanna*, perception (abstract ideas); *Samkhara*, tendencies—both physical and mental; *Vijnana*, mental powers or consciousness. Of these we are formed by them we are conscious of existence; and through them communicate with the world about us.” Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, explains that *skandha* means heap. Our personality

is composed of *skandhas* or heaps. They are like labels in a grocer's shop—"Rice," "Maize," "Millet," and so on. These are not entities but are themselves composed of millions of grains. The *Rupa-skandha* comprises of primary material phenomena, cohesion, undulation, radiation and vibration; and 24 secondary material phenomena like masculinity, femininity, bodily and verbal expressions, physical vitality and physical buoyancy, plasticity, adaptability, decay, impermanence, and so on. *Rupa*, "represents what Western philosophers call the objective content of the perceptual situation," writes Sangharakshita. For instance, when we see a flower or hear a melody, there is a perceptual experience, which consists of two elements. Firstly, there is what we ourselves contribute to it. Thus, a sensation of colour, red or white, and the sensation of sweetness or harshness of sound, is something we contribute to it. We also contribute to it the feeling of pleasure, which may arise in this perception. But there is something which we do not contribute to the perceptual situation, technically called the *objective content* of the perceptual situation, and that is what Buddhism calls *rupa*.

Vedana (sensation) consists of our bodily and mentally pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings. It may be *Sattvic*, *Rajasic* or *Tamasic*. Therefore, what is pleasant to one may be absolutely distasteful to another.

Sanna skandha consists of perception of forms. Sound, smell, taste, bodily impressions, and mental impressions are all objects of perception or forms. It is the recognition of something as "that particular thing." When we say, "that is a clock," that is *sanna*. Our perception consists of an idea of an object to which we give some name—a tree, a house, a village, etc. Thus, perception enables us to distinguish one object from the other.

The next *skandha* is *Samkhara* and its Sanskrit equivalent is *samskara*. The term *Samkhara* is translated as "volitional activities" or "acts of will," in the context of the *skandhas*. Essentially the *Samkharas* are acts of will connected with different states of mind. These states of mind or tendencies of mind are of three types:

Kushala, *Akushala* and *Avyakrut*. *Kushala* tendencies include love, helpfulness, truthfulness, etc. *Akushala* tendencies include greediness, envy, cunning, contempt, etc. *Avyakrut* tendencies include our innate skills, aptitude, abilities, or leanings. This is what makes each person unique and makes him feel that he is separate from other people.

Vijnana skandha refers to consciousness. It is simply the collective term for all our evanescent mental states. It does not refer to the permanent, unchanging element or ultimate principle of consciousness. This is consciousness through the five physical senses and through the mind at various levels. We do not "see" when the physical factors of experience, namely, the eyes and visible object come in contact. It is only when consciousness or *awareness* becomes associated with these physical elements that *visual consciousness* arises. So consciousness refers to becoming aware of something, while perception determines what it is. Consciousness refers to the consciousness of impressions from the five senses, and also of the mental objects, such as, thoughts and ideas.

Thus, the *samkhara skandha* or mental formations has a moral dimension; perception or *sanna skandha* has a conceptual dimension; *vedana skandha* or feelings has an emotional dimension. All volitional actions, good and bad, are included in the aggregate of mental formations, and the volitional mental formations direct the mind to good, bad or neutral activities. Some writers have pointed out that in all our daily activities the personal experience is produced by the working together of all the five aggregates or *skandhas*. For instance, when a person is taking a walk in the garden, his eyes come in contact with a visible object, and he becomes aware of that object by means of his consciousness. Then with *Sanna skandha* or the aggregate of perception he identifies that object as, let us say, a snake. After that *Vedana skandha* or the aggregate of feeling, will enable him to respond to that object with the feeling of surprise, or displeasure or fear. The *Samkhara skandha* or the aggregate of mental formation will enable him to react in a definite manner and

perform the intentional action of throwing a stone at the snake or running away from the spot.

In other words, the five *Skandhas* include the ordinary mind and the body, but they are not the *real* us. Hence, in the *Anatta Lakkhana Sutta*, the Buddha says that the five *Skandhas* are just guests that we have mistaken to be the host. They are but temporary visitors or guests, that come and go, but they are not the host or the real master of the house. It is easy to see that our body, our thoughts, sensations, mental states and our actions, which are part of the five *skandhas*, constantly change, and are impermanent.

The Buddha says, “*What time, with perfect recollection, he [Bhikkhu] recognizes the rise and fall of skandhas (origin and destruction of the personal self) joy and happiness are his. This is life eternal*” (*The Dhammapada*, verse 374). In other words, whenever the *Bhikkhu* reflects upon and recognizes the true nature of the *Skandhas*, he experiences joy and happiness. When we say “I,” we mean our brain and body, thoughts and emotions, our physical and mental tendencies, capacities, powers, and so on. While the life of the ordinary man revolves around his personality, the *Bhikkhu* reminds himself of the great words of the Buddha: “Impermanent are all conditioned beings; full of pain are all conditioned beings; unsubstantial are all conditioned beings.” Because, *samkhara* means “conditioned beings” or “that which has been set up,” put together, formed or compounded or created and therefore it has a beginning or birth and also death.

Our ideas and emotions change. Our mind does not persist in the same state for even two consecutive moments. Bhikshu Sangharakshita writes that insight consists in seeing, wherever one looks, within or without, not a “self” but simply five “heaps” of ever changing psycho-physiological phenomena. A graphic simile from the Pali text points out:

Suppose a man, not blind, were to observe the multitudinous bubbles being borne rapidly along on the surface of the river Ganges, and should watch and carefully

examine them. After he has carefully examined them they will appear to him empty, unreal, and unsubstantial. In exactly the same way does the monk behold all corporeal phenomena...all feelings...all perceptions...all mental formations...and all states of consciousness, whether they be of the past, the present, or the future...far or near. He watches and carefully examines them, and after he has carefully examined them, they appear to him empty, unreal and unsubstantial. (*A Survey of Buddhism*, p. 200)

The subject of *samkhara* can become the subject of meditation. Thus, one can look at every pleasant or unpleasant thing about oneself, and objectively analyze it to discover that it is conditioned and evanescent. It could be one’s beauty, brain, refined manners, pleasant disposition or even virtues. Can we say with certainty that these things will remain as they are forever? No. An accident can disfigure the body which we admire so much, and render the brain incapable of doing even simple tasks; ruffled pride or a stressful situation can make us forget our manners and pleasantness. Put in a tight spot, one may even be willing to make compromise with one’s virtues and principles, cleverly working out justification for such lapses. All these things are part of our personality and have no permanent existence. So, when we are elated at our success or feel cast down by our failure, we can step aside from that emotion and see it as a sensation—mere rise and fall of *samkhara*. When we learn to look at ourselves and our experiences in this manner, we stop oscillating for the moment and rise above vibratory existence to experience the joy of eternal life. The *Bhikkhu* has to increase such moments in his life. The *Bhikkhu* is able to achieve this by cultivating perfect recollection. Perfect recollection does not refer to memory but to perfect awareness. With perfect awareness, the *Bhikkhu* is able to trace even the cause of every dream to his waking consciousness. It is by practicing reflection and detachment that we come to the realization that the “personal existence,” which is nothing but the assemblage of five *skandhas*, is full of sorrow.

Skandhas are connected with the doctrine of conditioned co-production. The law of conditioned co-production shows how birth, old age, disease and death are inherent in phenomenal existence, which arise in dependence upon conditions, and cease in the absence of those conditions. It shows us a way of obtaining freedom from the bondage of *samsara*, into the stage of Nirvana. The law of conditioned co-production or dependent origination consists of twelve links (or *nidanas*) in a chain. Each of these links arises dependent on, or conditioned by, the preceding link. The five aggregates or *skandhas* form some of these links, which are responsible for birth, death and rebirth. The first link in the chain is *Avidya* or spiritual unawareness, which makes a person view the conditioned as unconditioned, and the impermanent as permanent. Depending upon *avidya*, arises the second link, termed *Samkhara* or Karma-formations, or the aggregate of mental conditions which, under the law of Karma, are responsible for the production of the first moment of consciousness in a “new” life. Sangharakshita describes this as “re-linking consciousness,” or the last moment of consciousness belonging to previous existence. Dependent upon this consciousness arises *nama-rupa*. It includes the physical body (*rupa skandha*), and the remaining three mental (*nama*) heaps or *skandhas*, namely, feeling or sensation (*vedana skandha*); perception (*sanna skandha*); and volitional activities (*samkhara skandha*). Dependent upon *nama-rupa* arises five physical sense organs and the mind, which is considered as the organ for the perception of mental objects, and it represents different types of consciousness represented by the *vijñana-skandha*. In dependence of five senses and the mind arise contact with the outside world, sensation and then craving, giving rise, in its turn, to clinging and attachment, which ultimately leads to decay, death and re-birth.

(To be continued)

IS IMMORTALITY ATTAINABLE?

THE ANCIENT and mediaeval literatures are replete with ideas of immortality. Ancient myths and legend abound with accounts of personages who knew the secret of immortality, overcame death—the lot of mortals—and became gods. The world’s oldest literature, Rig Veda, sings of sacred beverage called *Amrita* and Soma, partaking of which Indra and Agni are said to have attained immortality. One whole *Mandala* of the Rig Veda is devoted to its praise and uses. With the ancient Persians it was Haoma, an extract from a plant which conferred immortality on men. With the Greeks it was Ambrosia which conferred immortality. In ancient mythologies around the world are accounts of mortals achieving immortality and becoming possessed of god-like qualities. Elixir of life (Arabic *Al iksir*), sometimes equated with so-called Philosopher’s Stone, and Water of Life, is believed to be a potion that confers on the partaker of it eternal youth, and it is also said to cure all diseases. There are numerous historical accounts of Alchemists in various ages and cultures seeking the means of formulating the elixir, which conferred eternal youth, but meeting with little success.

Like all ancient myths and legends, which appear to be mere phantasies to skeptical minds, the legends about elixir of life too has a basis in truth. Failure of explorers to discover the actual process of preparation of the Elixir of life in all ages is accounted for by the fact that they have been misled by the literal interpretation of the symbols used in the allegories in ancient scriptures depicting the great science of the “Water of Life” which confers immortality. It is a great secret impenetrable by any save the one who is pure in heart and possessed of indomitable will.

The notion held by many that it is possible to obtain immortality, or eternal youth, of the physical form and personality, is groundless. However, say the teachers of the great science, that it is possible to prolong life of the physical man for an indefinite number of years, so long as to appear miraculous, but, it is asserted, that even such a

prolongation of youthful life in body has its limits. This is because the manifested universe is subject to constant change. It is impermanent in its conditions. The best that is possible of achievement in prolongation of healthy and vigorous life in body is retardation of the pace of natural disintegration in the course of time of the molecular constitution of the body for a more or less period beyond the average life span of the race. “Hermetic axiom maintains that only the First Cause and its direct emanations, our spirits (scintillas from the eternal central sun which will be reabsorbed by it at the end of time) are incorruptible and eternal” (*Isis*, I, 502). Only Higher Self is unconditionally immortal, but the terrestrial man does not share in the immortality of his Divine consciousness unless, during life, he links his lower self with and merges into his Divine Parent. Hence, the possibility of obtaining permanency to physical body is impossible, though its life may be extended beyond the normal life span, but it must finally succumb to the inexorable law of change. It is, however, well within the theoretical possibility of modern science to indefinitely prolong man’s terrestrial life, though it has not yet discovered the means for accomplishing it. The rationale of it is explained by the Teachers, thus:

Now, since it is a doctrine as old as time, that nature is continually renewing her wasted energies by absorption from the source of energy, why should the child differ from the parent? Why not man, by discovering the source and nature of this recuperative energy, extract from the earth herself the juice or quintessence with which to replenish his own forces? This *may* have been the great secret of the alchemists. Stop the circulation of the terrestrial fluids and we have stagnation, putrefaction, death; stop the circulation of the fluids in man, and stagnation, absorption, calcification from old age, and death ensue. If the alchemists had simply discovered some chemical compound capable of keeping the channels of our circulation unclogged, would not all the rest easily follow? (*Isis*, I, 503)

Therefore, there is nothing unscientific in the ancient belief in

Elixir of Life. Theosophy points out that there is in the bowels of the earth its source of recuperative energy. If some of the natural mineral springs have the virtue of curing diseases and restore physical vigour, somewhere in the bowels of the earth there must be nature’s secret chemical laboratory wherein the source of recuperative life energy exists. This is believed in by people from ancient times and there are adepts of secret science who know it.

Occult teaching corroborates the popular tradition which asserts the existence of a fountain of life in the bowels of the earth and in the North Pole. It is the blood of the earth, the electro-magnetic current, which circulates through all the arteries; and which is said to be found stored in the “navel” of the earth. (*S.D.*, II, 400 fn.)

What and where the “navel” of the earth is, is a subject of Esoteric geography well known to the Adepts. There is, therefore, nothing incredible in the ancient world-traditions about the Elixir of Life and of the accounts of people who have lived far beyond the average life span of the mortals of the times. There are accounts of Yogis in India who have lived for centuries. Count St. Germain, the mysterious legendary personage of eighteenth century Europe, is said to be still living. Yogis of old India know of secrets of medicinal herbs with which they are able to heal any disease. But they will never reveal the secret to people who would not hesitate one moment to put it to selfish use and for commercial purposes.

The ancient secret science of the Elixir of Life is not limited to merely prolonging the life of the physical body, which is the least important aspect of it. Great Yogis care little to live in the physical body, in the world, one moment longer than it is necessary, and would drop it instantly once their mission in the world is accomplished. It is not the prolongation of the life in the physical body which is the chief concern of the science of the Elixir of Life, but of securing the immortality of the soul of man. It is the lofty sacred science of the great Sages of the world, which Sri Krishna teaches in the *Bhagavad-gita* as the “Sacred ambrosia—the religion

of immortality” (Chapter XII). It is the science of immortality of the soul of man, not of the perishable body.

The subject being subtle and abstruse it is not easily understood and, therefore, it has given rise to misconceptions. Sri Krishna begins his instruction in the second chapter of the *Gita* that soul (*Atma*) never perishes when the body perishes at death, and that, it being immortal, obtains another body in the recurring cycle of reincarnation. A question that is often asked is: If the soul is immortal, it must be eternal. “And what matters it in such a case, whether man leads an animal or a pure life, if, do what he may, he can never lose his individuality?” (*Isis*, I, 316). This misconception, Teachers point out, is as pernicious in its consequences as the questionable Christian theological dogma of vicarious atonement—that our sins are washed away by the suffering of another vicariously for us. Crime and sin would be spontaneously avoided by people if the real meaning of the dogma is known and the true science of immortality is understood.

The universal teaching is that there are two kinds of conscious existence: the terrestrial and the spiritual; the former is earthly personality, an aggregate of physical, mental, and moral qualities—character, in short—of a man or woman, which are the direct Karmic resultant of the thoughts and deeds of the personality in the previous incarnation, which perished as a composite terrestrial form then; whereas the latter, the spiritual, is the Divine Individuality, which is immortal and eternal, and which broods over the terrestrial personality. Even this Divine Ego is immortal, as Individuality, for the duration of the great cycle of *Mahamanvantara*, after which it is indrawn and absorbed into the Universal Spirit. During this great cycle of the *Mahamanvantara* the Ego goes through innumerable smaller cycles of reincarnations, impelled by its own Karma, in quest of perfection. It is the incarnating Ego which dresses itself up in the new terrestrial vesture—personality—after the death of the one it had animated in its previous incarnation. Nothing of the terrestrial personality survives death of the body except such of its higher thoughts and aspirations of the spiritual kind, which become

assimilated to the Divine Individuality in a post-mortem spiritual state of consciousness, called *Swarga*, *Devachan*, etc. Thus:

The idea of the personal “I” of the last incarnation—this lasts, as a separate distinct recollection, only throughout the Devachanic period; after which time it is added to the series of other innumerable incarnations of the Ego... (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 106)

Therefore, as far as the earthly mortal man is concerned, the immortal survival of its consciousness is conditional. Only nobler aspects of his life and thought can become assimilated to the Divine Ego, and added to sum of such essential experiences gathered from a series of previous incarnations. If the life of man is bereft of any nobler thoughts and deeds, but immersed in material life of selfishness and materialism, nothing of that personality would survive but perish entirely. The terrestrial qualities and attributes of that personality which are dispersed at death would in time reassemble to form another earthly personality under Karmic Law as the new earthly vesture for the Higher Ego. No immortality is guaranteed to the man of the world, but he has to obtain it with knowledge and right effort while still living in the mortal body.

Immortality is to be striven after and won by the lower mind-self, which is reflection on earth of its divine parent, the Divine Ego, by conquering his animal passions and following the dictates of his “Father in Heaven” and become one with Him before the death of the body. The whole mental, moral and spiritual discipline by which the baser lower self is purified and transmuted into the Immortal Divine Self is the true lofty science of the Elixir of Life. This is the philosopher’s stone, the true Water of Life, which is to be found in the well of the Heart, the living water Jesus spoke of in *John* (4:14): “Whosoever drinketh of this water [from the man-made well] shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

OUR GOD AND OTHER GODS

I

“IS THERE only one God or are there many Gods?” is the question, which must arise in every honest enquirer’s mind, especially in India, where there is a plethora of gods and goddesses. The answer to both these questions is in the affirmative. Humanity has always been divided into two camps: believers and nonbelievers. The atheists argue that if an omnipotent and benevolent God exists, why should there be so much suffering and evil? The theists counter this with the free-will argument, saying that the human beings, endowed with free will, are responsible for the good and evil in the world. Moreover, belief in God’s existence rests on the anthropic principle. The anthropic principle seems to emphasize the existence of intelligence behind the orderliness of the universe. There is evidence of law and order from all branches of science.

The modern Intelligent Design theory is the revival of an argument made by the British philosopher William Paley, in 1802, that unlike the stone, a watch appears purposely assembled and would not function without its precise combination of parts. Hence, “the watch must have a maker.” Paley argued that along similar lines, the complexity of certain biological structures implies *design*. The evolutionary theory put forward by Theosophy admits of both intelligence and pattern.

Einstein rejected the idea of an anthropomorphic God, but however, he did marvel at the design of the universe and was in awe of the cosmic order. He referred to his conception of a supreme power as an omniscient, super-intelligent controlling set of forces that shaped the universe. He said that it was very difficult to answer the question about god with simple yes or no, and sought to explain with a parable. Thus:

The human mind, no matter how highly trained, cannot grasp the universe. We are in the position of a little child, entering a huge library whose walls are covered to the ceiling

with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written those books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child notes definite plan in the arrangement of the books, a mysterious order, which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of the human mind, even the greatest and most cultured, toward God.

God, in Theosophy, is an Impersonal, Eternal, Boundless, Omnipresent and Unchanging Principle. To assign to It any attributes is to dwarf It. The Upanishads describe It as, “*Neti, Neti,*” or “not this, not this.” It is difficult for us to conceive of God as all-inclusive. It is Absolute Light and Absolute Darkness, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Non-consciousness, Absolute Being and Absolute Non-Being. It is BENESS.

The Absolute is the Causeless Cause and the Rootless Root, which is not involved in the cause-effect chain. Shankara distinguishes between two different points of view—*Vyavaharika*, practical or ordinary viewpoint that regards the world as real and God as its omnipotent and omniscient creator, sustainer and destroyer. God in this aspect appears to have qualities and is termed *Saguna Brahman*, (with attributes) or *Ishwara*. The second is the real or *Paramarthika* viewpoint, which is that of the wise who have realized that only God is real and that the world is an appearance. Here, God is *Nirgunbrahman* or Transcendental Reality. Shankara taught that *Jivatma* is not separate from *Paramatma* or One Reality. The Higher Self or *Atman* is like a ray of the sun.

The *Saguna Brahman* or *Ishwara* is considered the creative power, or Creative Logos and variously designated as Brahma, Ahura Mazda, Adam Kadmon, Verbum and the Third or Manifested Logos. H.P.B. describes the Logos as a collective “Creator” of the Universe, comparable to an architect of a building. An architect provides a plan or blueprint for a building, but is not himself involved in the construction work of the building. In fact, based on the abstract

diagram in the blueprint, a model of cardboard or wood is prepared, which in turn is followed by construction of the house with sand, cement, etc. Likewise, there is the “Archetypal World.” The expression “Archetypal World” is from Platonic Philosophy and it means, “the world as it existed in the mind of the Deity.” The Deity conceives in Its mind a world by reflecting Itself therein. The world in the mind of the Deity is cosmic substance, which is energized by cosmic ideation, and that is the world of noumena, and in which lives the world of phenomena.

In the Archetypal World of Plato, there exist abstract ideas of things to be. We can say that on that plane there is idea of “triangularity,” based on which different types of triangles—right-angle triangle, equilateral triangle etc., may be formed subsequently. The Creative Logos or Demiurgos has to first perceive the plan and the ideal forms which lie concealed within Eternal Ideation, and then builders build the model world based on these ideal forms. It is then that the Elementals or Nature Spirits work on those models to build the physical forms. The first model is improved upon by the worlds which succeed it physically, each of which is grosser than the one on the higher plane, and in that sense less pure. These are astral prototypes which are like developed pictures. We can understand this by an analogy: The drawing or blue-print of a house prepared by an architect may be taken to represent spiritual prototypes, while the miniature model made of wood or cardboard may represent the astral models, based on which actual house is built.

Thus, the Creative Logos is not a personal deity, some sort of extra-cosmic god, but an aggregate of the Dhyani-Chohans or Dhyanis, and other forces, writes H.P.B. Dhyani Chohan or Dhyani is a generic term which means celestial beings or gods. There are seven hierarchies of these celestial beings, of various grades, classes, and on various planes. These gods are designated as *Aeons* or Angels in different philosophies. It appears that the gods or beings at the highest level are the Dhyani-Buddhas of the Buddhists, Archangels of the Christians, Amesha-spentas of the Zoroastrians, and so on.

“The higher Dhyanis evolve lower and lower hierarchies of Dhyanis, more and more consolidated and more material until we arrive at this chain of Planets, some of the latter being the Manus, Pitris and Lunar Ancestors” (*Transactions*, pp. 100-101). These celestial beings on various planes interpret and execute the plan, at various levels, performing function appropriate to the plane. We might say that the power, energy and wisdom of the Deity is expressed through these gods, which may well be regarded as so many expressions and manifestations of the Divinity. Thus:

This hierarchy of spiritual Beings, through which the Universal Mind comes into action, is like an army—a “Host,” truly—by means of which the fighting power of a nation manifests itself, and which is composed of army corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, and so forth, each with its separate individuality or life, and its limited freedom of action and limited responsibilities. (*S.D.*, I, 38)

We may also compare the hierarchy of gods, with an office with a hierarchy of officers, with general Manager, deputy manager, assistant manager, followed by departmental heads, clerks and peons, each performing his specific duties. Thus, in *Transactions*, concerning the highest beings, or Dhyani Buddhas, H.P.B. writes that they are concerned with the higher three principles in man. If we take an example of a house, then a Dhyani Buddha may be compared to a ruler of the house, who has nothing to do with the dirty work of a kitchen-maid (p. 100). But it is the class of beings called “builders” or *Cosmocratores*, who are actively involved in the building of the cosmos. They are “the invisible but intelligent Masons, who fashion matter according to the ideal plan ready for them in that which we call Divine and Cosmic Ideation.” (p. 49)

Just like there is the *astrological star* associated with each personality, so also, there is the Star associated with the INDIVIDUALITY or rather the monad of every human being. The “Angel,” of that Star or Dhyani-Buddha guides or presides over every new rebirth of the monad, *which is part of his own essence*. Each adept has his

Dhyani-Buddha, and he knows it, and calls it “Father-Soul.” Jesus said: “I and my Father are one.” Also, “I ascend to *my* Father and your Father.” It simply means that the group of his disciples, and followers attracted to Him, belonged to the same Dhyani Buddha. (*S.D.*, II, 572-74)

A class of beings called *Chitra-gupta* or *Lipikas* are the agents in karmic dispensation. The word *Lipi-ka* is derived from the word *lipi*, meaning “writing.” They are the Divine Beings, connected with Karma, for they are the Recorders or Scribes. They impress on the “invisible tablets of the Astral Light, ‘the great picture-gallery of eternity’ a faithful record of every act, and even thought, of man, of all that was, is, or ever will be, in the phenomenal Universe.” The Egyptian tradition mentions forty “Assessors” who read out the account of every soul’s life from the heart of the dead, which becomes an open book before Osiris, the Egyptian equivalent of Yama or Karma. Similarly, the Hindu *Chitra-Gupta*, reads out the account of every soul’s life from his register, called *Agra-sandhini*, which refers to Astral records. (*S.D.*, I, 105-6)

The Secret Doctrine (pp. 122-124) mentions the Cosmic Forces of North, South, East and West, having each a distinct occult property. There are the four *Maharajas*, described as Regents or Angels, who preside each over one of the four cardinal points and rule over these Cosmic forces. These Beings are also connected with Karma. Karma needs physical and material agents to carry out her decrees, such as the four kinds of winds. H.P.B. explains that we produce the cause, which awakens the corresponding powers in the sidereal world. These powers are magnetically attracted to those who produced the causes, by thoughts or actions. The cosmic forces on the invisible plane, and winds on the material plane, become agents of karma, and bring the effects of causes sown by us.

(*To be continued*)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Recently twelve young boys, aged between eleven and sixteen years, along with their 25-year- old soccer coach, Ekapol Chantawong, got trapped in a dark, underground cave in Thailand, during an excursion. Unexpected flash floods had left the boys and their coach-guide stranded for nearly two weeks. But after a successful diving operation, they were rescued by diving experts. “That there were no hysterics or breakdowns took rescuers by surprise when they came face to face with the twelve boys....The ‘secret’ of their equipoise was guided meditation and breathing—that their soccer coach taught them.” This is a remarkable example of the power and effectiveness of meditation.

Kristin Clark Taylor writes in *The Washington Post*: “Ekapol, a former novice Buddhist monk who still meditates daily...helped keep the boys breathing and emotionally balanced during the crisis, and also readied them for their hours-long treacherous escape guided by expert cave divers. In the process, he also gave them vital tools they needed—specifically, teaching them how to tap into their own tranquillity and inner stillness. He taught them how to keep themselves calm....” Sharing her own experience with meditation practice, she writes: “Today, I like to call it (meditation) my *transportable tranquillity*, because it goes with me wherever I go. I do not need to go outside or down the street or up the block to search for it. It is already within me, waiting for me to knock and enter.”

Indian sages, gurus and practitioners, as also the western practitioners, have always spoken about the benefits of meditation, describing it as a tool to overcome stress and to become calm and centred. In his book, *The Handbook of Meditation: Discovery of Internal Happiness*, Richard Tunis elucidates the physical and psychological benefits of meditation, which contribute to genuine happiness. In the state of meditation, one experiences a state of ease, which is internal happiness that arises when there is an absence of

reliance on external circumstances to bring about the feeling of happiness. The internal happiness that one is able to access through meditation enables one to maintain happiness and equanimity in daily life, while facing all sorts of eventualities. “With the increased internal happiness, one’s perspective widens and what is for the greater good is more clearly seen and wished for.” (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, July 15, 2018)

Some of us cannot remain alone for more than ten to fifteen minutes, without reaching out for a phone, or switching on the television set or music system. Every day we must observe silence for a few minutes, and set apart half-an-hour for meditation. Most of all we need to cultivate companionship with that *Silent Spectator* within. A Shah of Persia, when asked, why he meditated all through the night, answered, “At night I pursue God, and during the day God follows me.” Thus, regular practice of meditation must get reflected in one’s day to day life, with the experience of being guided by the divine within.

We often ask, “What are the signs of a successful meditation?” The answer generally given is that among other things, one should feel more cheerful, calm and happy inside. Meditation helps to divert the attention from its natural outward-going tendency, and turn within. That in turn helps in the expansion, elevation and intensification of consciousness, beyond the limits of the personal. Regular practice of meditation helps to build an island of pure thoughts, to which one can retire at will. One becomes more and more receptive to the inner, divine voice. It helps to unfold one’s intuitive faculty to know the truth in all things, and experience superhuman bliss which is not dependent upon anything external.

A regular practitioner of meditation finds that it is far easier for him to concentrate his mind, and as a result, there is a deeper understanding of what one reads, and an increased ability to see different facets of the subject. Meditation practice tends to refine one’s psychic nature, so that one may find oneself dropping grosser desires, and looking out for refinement and substance in the psychic

pleasures. There is an easier acceptance of pain, adversity, loss, and also, less and less dependence on external pleasures.

In a world that is growing more divided and atomized, it is felt that it may be the feeling of guilt and not empathy that can bring people together. In the popular imagination, the feeling of guilt is not viewed positively, but considered an emotional equivalent of wearing a jacket weighted with stones. Who would inflict it upon a child? It appears that this understanding is outdated. “There has been a kind of revival or a rethinking about what guilt is and what role guilt can serve,” says Amrisha Vaish, the University of Virginia Psychology researcher, who is one of a number of scholars studying how, when and why guilt emerges in children. It appears that unlike the so-called basic emotions such as sadness, fear and anger, guilt emerges a little later, in conjunction with the child’s growing grasp of social and moral norms. Only over a period of time children learn to say “sorry” as they discover that it appeases their parents, friends and their own conscience. A feeling of guilt can encourage humans to atone for errors and fix relationships, and is therefore regarded as a kind of social glue. “This is why researchers generally regard so-called moral guilt, in the right amount, to be a good thing,” writes Libby Copeland, a writer in New York and a former *Washington Post* reporter.

This is provocative idea at a moment when parents and educators have come to almost fetishize empathy—when a child’s ability to put herself in another’s shoes seems like the apex of goodness. Tina Malti, a psychology professor at the University of Toronto, observes that while it is very important to nurture empathy, it is equally important to promote guilt. Work by Tina Malti suggests that “guilt may compensate for an emotional deficiency. In a number of studies, Malti and others have shown that guilt and sympathy (and its close cousin empathy) may represent different pathways to co-operation and sharing. Some kids who are low in sympathy may make up for that shortfall by experiencing more guilt, which can rein in their

nastier impulses. And *vice versa*: High sympathy can substitute for low guilt. . . . Malti describes guilt as a self-directed emotion, elicited when you act in a way that's out of keeping with your conscience. Sympathy and empathy are other-directed. A child who is not inclined to feel bad for a classmate whose toy car she stole might nevertheless feel uncomfortable with the idea of herself as a thief—and return the toy. Guilt can include sympathy, Malti says, but it does not have to.” A proper feeling of guilt can induce a child to repair the harm he or she has caused. “Knowing when to feel bad and what to do about it are things we could all benefit from. Malti’s research may focus on kids, but guilt is a core human emotion—an inevitability for people of every age,” writes Libby Copeland. (*The Atlantic*, April 2018)

The feeling of guilt is often described as pricking of conscience or qualms of conscience. It is the feeling that stems from heart, which is considered to be a seat of spiritual consciousness. We may look upon feeling of guilt as one of the modes by which the divine within is making us aware that something is not right, that we have erred. It is voice of conscience speaking to us through the feeling of guilt. True conscience, called the Voice of *Antahkarna* or the “internal organ” is the bridge between our external consciousness and the action of the “higher regions of the Mind.” It is through this channel or organ, present in every one of us, that we receive an influence, a hint, a faint whisper, voice—more or less clear, depending on the regularity with which we faithfully *consult* and *respond* to the higher part of our Being.

Apart from the voice of our higher nature, conscience is also built up of the bitter-sweet “lessons” of life, extricated from our experiences. The memory of these lessons becomes part of our nature and warns us against repeating the former mistakes and folly, if we respond to this “warning faculty” in us.

Conscience seems to be a faculty which may be stilled or made active. Its expression could be partially or totally blocked depending upon the ideas, habits of thought and ideologies followed by a

person. A savage who killed, or the religionist who indulged in religious persecution for the sake of God and Christ, are both acting according to what they call their *conscience*, but in these cases conscience is limited and tainted by education or lack of it, and by right or wrong beliefs. In such cases, there may not be the feeling of guilt in the person, because the voice of conscience has become warped by wrong ideas.

In the recent past there have been too many incidents of lynching across India, in which groups of people have pounced on and killed unwitting individuals, for alleged cow slaughter, or even over random suspicions of child-lifting. These “hate crimes” have been widely blamed on WhatsApp, where rumours circulate. “But technology is only an easy medium, there is a deeper story here about anxiety, polarization, a besieged rule of law, and the social production of hate.” Interestingly, according to Mahua Bandopadhyay, a social anthropologist at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, “there is a certain moral framework that drives this violence, which makes the perpetrators think their brutality is justified. They want to teach a lesson, or take revenge.” While many were killed during communal riots, there was a beginning and an end to them, but in this spate of lynchings, minorities are disproportionately targeted. “If you belong to a targeted community, you never feel safe, in your home, on a train, walking down the road,” says Social activist Harsh Mander, who has led an initiative called Karwan-e-Mohabbat across India to show solidarity with families of those killed by mobs.

“In our research, we see that the only thing that has made a difference is the police at lower levels, all over India, who have identified and stopped the circulation of rumours at certain points,” says Ravi Sundaram, at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. He observes that though WhatsApp has installed new features to prevent the spread of malicious hoaxes and triggers, there is a need to involve civil society, police, the government and tech

platforms, also. These rumours and violence cannot be fought by attacking the technological infrastructure alone, “it needs social interventions by panchayats, by local politicians, on the ethical and public speech,” says Sundaram. (*Sunday Times of India*, July 22, 2018)

Violence and conflicts have their roots in the minds of men. Perception of oneself and one’s community as victims leads to anger. Sudhir Kakar, celebrated psycho-analyst, rightly points out that the two biggest causes of violence are: high self-esteem and moral idealism. Once a person believes that his violence is a means to a moral end, the floodgates of brutality are opened, and such a person displays no feeling of guilt or shame for his murderous actions. H.P.B. writes: “To condemn and dishonour a man instead of pitying and trying to help him, because, being born in a community of lepers he is a leper himself, is like cursing a room because it is dark, instead of quietly lighting a candle to disperse the gloom....One should denounce and fight against the root of evil....” The outer wars are but elongated shadows of the war within. The cancerous disease of thoughtlessness is eating away the eye of spirit, writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

A few years back, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, also the tireless advocate of non-violence, said in his peace message to the world, that we must prevent anger from becoming a collective energy. The only antidote for anger and violence is compassion. “Every reader has seeds of fear, anger, violence and despair, and also seeds of hope, compassion, love and forgiveness. As journalists you must not water the wrong seeds.” Moreover, those who believe themselves to be the victims of violence and injustice should be invited for a dialogue with spiritual people and these sessions must be televised nationally. The war on terror will not succeed because you cannot bomb *perceptions*. Let each one take away “non-me” elements, such as, the family and educational background, one’s ideas, etc., then there is no “me” left. Once we eliminate the false sense of “I,” what remains is only universal self.