

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?	3
FOOD FOR THOUGHT	9
THE LITTLE PRINCE—I	
EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS	15
SELF-EXAMINATION AND MEDITATION—I	
THOUGHTS ON CURSES AND BLESSINGS—IV	19
EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS	25
THE LINEAGE OF THE SOUL	30
IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY	33

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

WE ARE all too aware of our rights, but seldom ask, do we also have our responsibilities? If yes, then what are they? Are we, for instance, responsible for our thoughts, for our desires, for our actions, for our nation, for the world we live in, for the sins of our ancestors and for our happiness? Every scripture of the world shows that from time to time, great teachers come to guide humanity and leave behind them the teachings which when studied and applied, would enable us to be self-reliant and responsible human beings. Are we living responsible lives? We live for ourselves, without consideration for others. We live a materialistic life, running after name, fame, power, position and possessions. We live, think and act irresponsibly. That is because we are unable to differentiate between real and unreal; permanent and impermanent. Our perceptions are coloured by our conceptions about God, Man and Nature. We cannot say that we possess the right concepts. Otherwise, would there be so much dishonesty, hatred, violence and greed? Would we witness man's inhumanity to man, and cruelty to animals, if we understood the law of interdependence? The philosophy of Theosophy enables in awakening man's intuition and making him aware of his responsibilities to himself, to his fellow beings and to the whole of Nature.

We are reluctant to accept that *we* are responsible for all the adversities and pain that comes into our lives. The general tendency

is to hold another person or our environment responsible for our character or failure or sorrow. The environment, inner and outer, is the result of our own past karma. We alone have the power to change both. The outer environment is our family, society, community, nation, workplace, etc. The inner environment consists of our mind, passions and desires, emotions, tendencies, likes and dislikes, ideas, etc., which are called our *skandhas*, *vasanas* or *samskaras*. These we have brought over from the past lives.

If we believe that every human being is a new creation, a new soul passing through life's journey, then how could he be held responsible for his vices, weaknesses and sins, which are transmitted to him hereditarily? If there is a murderer, who comes from the race or family of murderers, then we cannot hold him responsible for the murder, because he cannot help committing murder, under heredity. Thus, once we accept that our character is transmitted to us hereditarily, we cannot attach responsibility or punish people for murder, robbery, prostitution, etc. We may have to pass laws that make an exception in cases of people who are guilty of murder or theft because they come from the family of murderers or thieves, says Mr. Judge. We do not deny the fact that likes and dislikes, as also, peculiarities are transmitted from one generation to the other, down the line of descent. However, the point to grasp is that heredity should not be looked upon as the cause of crime or virtue. It is not the cause but only an instrument or means for the production of the effect. The Ego is attracted to the family which can furnish it the necessary instruments, the body and the brain, through which the knowledge and the skill can be manifested.

Likewise, we are born in a family, society, country due to past karmic affinity, and also because, to some extent, we must have contributed to making them what they are today. We are responsible, directly or indirectly, if we find uncleanness, corruption, pollution, violence or poverty in our country. The extent to which we are affected is linked to the extent to which we have contributed in making them what they are, by neglect of our responsibility, or by

active participation. A son may decide to walk out of a house where the father earns money by unfair means. Nevertheless, he must know that it is not so simple to disconnect himself from the family because he would not have been born into that family if he had not contributed to making the family as he finds it today.

We are all united on inner and invisible planes, and are continually affecting each other through our thoughts, feelings and actions. It is difficult to say what portion of another's karma is *strictly of his own making*. As Mr. Judge suggests, "The indissoluble unity of the race demands that we should consider every man's troubles as partly due to ourselves, because we have been always units in the race and helped to make the conditions which cause suffering" (*"Forum" Answers*, p. 55). We have contributed in making the humanity as we find it today. While explaining the meaning of the verse in the Bible that says that the sins of the father will be visited on the children to the third and fourth generation, Mr. Judge narrates a story told by a mystic. It is the story of an Eastern king who had a son, and this son committed a deed, the penalty of which was that he should be killed by a great stone thrown upon him. However, it was seen that such a punishment would not repair the wrong nor give to the offender the chance to become a better man, hence the counsellors of the king advised that the stone should be broken into small pieces; some of which should be thrown upon him in the quantity that would hurt but not kill him, and remaining pieces should be thrown at his children and grand-children, as they were able to bear it. The explanation given is that the children and grandchildren could not have been born in the family of the prince if they had not had some hand in the past, in other lives, in the formation of his character. For that reason, they should share, to some extent, in his punishment.

None of us acts in isolation. We are continually helping or hindering others in building their character, not only by our actions, but also by our thoughts—for good or ill. By not resisting the temptation to take a bribe or tell a lie, or by allowing a material or sensual thought to enter the mind, we are giving an impulse to some

weak person with a similar tendency to indulge in sin. The converse is also true. Every attempt to overcome vices in us sends out an impulse for good that strengthens another individual who may be fighting similar weaknesses. “Each nation suffers, on the moral as well as the physical plane, from the faults of all other nations, and receives benefit from the others also even against its will,” writes Mr. Judge.

Some people seem to intuitively recognize this collective responsibility for all the good and evil in society, as can be seen in the example of a Judge in America, narrated by Swami Shri Savitanand. The Judge, as it were, is living up to the words in *Light on the Path*, “The sin and shame of the world are your sin and shame, for you are a part of it; your Karma is inextricably interwoven with the great Karma.” A Judge in New York pronounced a judgment after World War I, based on collective responsibility. After World War I, people in America, faced acute poverty. During that period, a man was caught stealing bread. He was brought to the court, and made to stand before the Chief Justice with a panel of judges. He was asked if he had stolen bread. He quietly admitted that he had done that, and not stolen anything else. When asked why he had to steal a bread, the man answered with tears in his eyes that after searching for a job for three to four days, when he could not find any job, he was forced to steal a bread, because his hungry children were crying. Since he had admitted his crime, the jury pronounced a fine of eleven shillings as punishment. The Judge, however, said that if this man had eleven shillings in his pocket, he would not have stolen a bread. However, since he has been fined eleven shillings by the court, that amount must be deposited in the government account. Hence, he decided that each jury member would pay one shilling, while he himself would pay two shillings as a fine, and that he believed was fair, considering that they were living in such a society where a father had to steal a loaf of bread to feed his hungry children! The Judge and the jury paid their share of the fine. After that the Judge gave some money to the poor man and left the court, trying to hide the tears that welled up in his eyes.

The explanation of how we affect each other is based, firstly, on the unity of humanity. All human beings are as a scientific and dynamic fact united. Science tells us that if you pluck a flower or a fruit or a branch of a tree, then it will adversely affect the future or further growth of that tree. Likewise, if one person in a family is depressed it goes a long way in making others also depressed. If one person is happy and hopeful then it goes a long way in lifting-up the emotions of others in the family. *Light on the Path* asks us to consider a rope made up of innumerable fine threads. If at some place, one or two threads are stained then that stain or colour will run along the length of the rope and also affect other threads along the thickness of the rope. If one thread is pulled, then the drag awry will be communicated to other threads, and all will be in a tangle, instead of being straight and parallel to each other. These threads may be thought of as so many individuals.

Secondly, there exists a subtle medium, called the astral light, which acts as a register, on which are impressed all the acts, thoughts and desires of every human being, and these are reflected back on humanity. It all works on the law of similarity. Like attracts like. Hence, it all depends upon what thoughts or desires we allow to arise in our minds. Ordinarily, a bad thought of taking revenge or telling a lie, attracts another thought of the same nature and gives us a push in doing that. However, there is also the conscience, which begins to prick. We also have the power of will. Normally, we strive to push aside an unwholesome thought and settle on a better course. Nevertheless, when we are in our weaker moments, or as Mr. Judge puts it, when our nervous vitality is exhausted, then the force of the thoughts that come from outside have a greater power than the power of thoughts produced by us. We are then impelled by outside thoughts. This happens most easily with people, who are like sponges, porous and bibulous, ready to absorb every thought coming from outside. We call them sensitives and mediums, and they are drawing these thoughts and are hypnotized by astral light. Mr. Judge says that it is not for nothing that we are asked to keep a close watch

over our thoughts. It is equally true that if we aspire higher, then those very thoughts of goodness and morality will be drawn to us and boost up our moral energy to enable us to keep our resolve to become better human beings.

We describe our age as an “age of progress,” which although it has brought material comforts through technological advancement, has been responsible for selfishness, crime, immorality and a host of evils, because sorely lacking in ethical and spiritual values. Responsibility has to be seen as twofold: in relation to material necessities and spiritual and moral welfare. For both of these, people have to be educated in the true sense. No doubt, there are those who know, and there are those who need help in understanding this. Someone needs to play the role of an adjuster of these two classes or sections, so that each one of them becomes aware of their own responsibility. In the highest sense, those who know are the Masters of Wisdom, and those who need help and knowledge is the whole of humanity. The connecting link is formed by student-aspirants of the philosophy of Theosophy, who can study, exemplify and spread the teachings.

If we believe in the Law of Karma, the just law of cause and effect, action and reaction, and try to understand its working, it is easy to see that everything happens under the law. Let us realise that such knowledge also brings with it moral responsibility to the knower. The responsibility of the individual who knows and understands the Law of Karma is to so think and act, as to be of service to all, which aids in the progress of all. Such an individual should endeavour to purify himself, so as to be in a fit condition to discharge his duties, which flow from his self-assumed responsibilities towards humanity. These duties are, over and above, the duties we owe to our society, family, or race. “If you have obtained true knowledge...it urges you to plunge into the misery and sorrow of the world, and with your cheering word, if you have no more...strive to lighten the burden for some struggling soul,” writes Mr. Judge.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE LITTLE PRINCE—I

THE LITTLE PRINCE is a deeply philosophical novella for children and adults, regarded by some as a fable, written by French aviator and writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery. It was first published in both English and French in April 1943. It was published in French as *Le Petit Prince*. It has been translated into nearly three hundred languages and has sold some two hundred million copies worldwide. The narrator of the story is a pilot, and is at the same time the voice of the author. The narrator of the story introduces himself as a man who learned when he was a child that adults lack imagination and understanding. He comes to such a conclusion because he recollects that when as a child, he showed them his drawing, depicting a boa constrictor that has eaten an elephant, the grown-ups always said that it was a picture of a hat. He senses lack of enthusiasm on their part. As a result, he is so disappointed that he stops drawing altogether. He is now a pilot who has crash-landed in a desert. Ironically, while he is struggling to repair his aeroplane engine a little boy appears from nowhere and requests him to draw a sheep. But before drawing a sheep the narrator shows the boy, the picture of the elephant inside the boa constrictor, and to his surprise, the boy interprets it correctly. After that he draws a sheep for the boy, and they become friends. The narrator calls the child “the little prince,” and learns that he comes from a very small planet, which the little prince calls Asteroid 325, but the narrator believes it to be Asteroid B-612. The boy represents the voice of children in the adult world. The boy is loveable, curious, philosophical, and asks questions, which he repeats till they are answered. Over the course of next few days, the little prince tells the narrator about his life. On his asteroid-planet, which is no bigger than a house, there are three volcanoes, two active and one dormant, and a variety of plants. He spent his time cleaning the volcanoes and weeding unwanted seeds and sprigs, and pulling out baobab trees. If the baobabs are not

rooted out the moment they are recognised, their roots can have a catastrophic effect on the asteroid-planet. Therefore, he wants a sheep to eat all undesirable plants.

The prince tells him of his love for a vain and silly rose plant that began to grow on the asteroid's surface, but that she was given to pretensions and exaggerations, to gain attention. He made a glass globe to protect her from cold wind and kept off the caterpillars. Although the prince fell in love with the rose, he also began to feel that she was taking advantage of him and he resolved to leave the asteroid-planet to explore the rest of the universe.

Before visiting the earth, the prince has visited six other asteroid-planets. On each of them, he finds that there lives a single person, an irrational and narrow-minded adult, symbolising various characteristics or elements of society. Thus, on the first planet, he comes across a king without any subjects, who describes himself as an absolute monarch, and insists that his authority must be universally respected. He claims that the Sun and the stars obey him, but adds that his authority is based upon reason, and he commands each one to do what they can perform. Thus, he commands the sun to set at sunset!

On the second planet, he comes across a "very vain man." He is a narcissistic man, who is always looking for admiration, though he is the only person living on that planet. When the prince visits him, the vain man asks him to clap his hands, and when the prince obeys, the vain man tips his hat as a gesture of acknowledgement. The prince finds it funny, and so continues clapping, and the man continues tipping his hat in acknowledgement. The constant clapping was interpreted by the vain man to imply that he was greatly admired, as being the richest, the handsomest, and the most intelligent man on the planet. Even though he is the only man on that planet he wished to be admired as the best!

On the third planet, the prince comes across a drunkard who has been drinking to forget the shame of drinking! The little prince is very puzzled. He moves on, murmuring to himself, "Grown-ups are very, very strange!"

On the fourth planet, he meets a very busy businessman, who does not wish to be disturbed, as he is busy counting the stars. He says that he is a serious man, not interested in the trifles. Instead of admiring the beauty of the stars, he is endlessly counting them in order to "own" them. Can one own the stars? He has a simple logic. If you find a diamond or discover an island that belongs to no one in particular, then it belongs to you. The prince is again puzzled, because he is not able to see in what way owning the stars is likely to help the businessman. The businessman says that he counts them again and again, and writes the number on a slip of paper, and then puts that paper safely in the bank locker! At one level, he exemplifies the extreme materialism of our world.

The fifth planet is the smallest of all, with just enough space for a street lamp and a lamplighter. This planet is so small that the full day lasts for one minute. Hence, every thirty second, the lamplighter lights the lamp and extinguishes the same, after the next thirty seconds. The lamplighter feels that he is performing a terrible job as it does not allow him to sleep. The prince, however, feels that the lamplighter is at least thinking of something else besides himself.

On the sixth planet, which is ten times bigger than the fifth, the little prince meets a geographer—a scholar who knows where the seas, the mountains, the deserts, the cities and the rivers are. When asked, if there were any rivers, mountains or oceans on his planet, he says that he does not know, because he is a geographer and not an explorer. A geographer does not wander about but gets his information from the explorer. He also says that geography is concerned with and keeps a record of only those things—rivers, mountains, oceans—which are not *ephemeral*, i.e., likely to disappear quickly. The little prince learns from the geographer that flowers do not last forever, and he begins to miss the rose he has left behind. The geographer is seen as providing a caricature of *specialisation* in the contemporary world.

At the geographer's suggestion, the seventh planet that the little prince visits, is the Earth. According to the narrator, here there are

hundreds of kings, and thousands and millions of vain men, drunkards, geographers and businessmen. There are several thousand lamplighters; those of New Zealand and Australia lit their street lamps first, then it was the turn of those in China and Siberia, ending with those in South and North America.

However, since the prince lands in a desert he does not see anyone and believes that the Earth was uninhabited. He then meets a snake who claims to have the power to return him to his home, if he ever wishes to return. The prince next meets a desert flower who tells him that she has only seen a handful of men in this part of the world, who live hard lives, and that they are always on the move. The prince climbs the tallest mountain he had ever seen, in the hope of seeing the whole of the Earth, and thus find people. But he sees only the enormous, desolate landscape. When he calls out, he hears his echo, but he interprets that as the voice of a boring person who only repeats what another says.

Then, the prince comes across a whole row of rosebushes. It surprises and depresses him, to find that his rose had told him a lie that she was unique. He also begins to feel that he was not a great prince, as his planet contained only three tiny volcanoes, and a rose, which he now finds to be common. He lay down on the grass and begins to weep, until a fox comes along.

The fox expresses his desire to be tamed and teaches the prince how to tame him. The fox tells him that he was for him only a little boy, like thousands of other boys, and likewise, he was for the prince only a fox, like thousands of other foxes. They had no need of each other. But once that the prince tames him, he will be the only boy in the world for the fox, and for him, this fox will be the only fox in the whole world. He goes on to explain that taming makes a person or the animal special or unique. Once you tame someone the otherwise monotonous world becomes exciting. You wait for that person, and other things remind you of that person. When the prince says that he has not much time, as he has still many things to learn, the fox replies that if the prince wanted a friend, he should tame

him, because one can buy ready-made things in stores, but not friends. “The only things you learn are the things you tame,” says the fox. It is true that such a connection can lead to sadness and longing when apart. Thus, from the fox, the prince learns that his rose was indeed unique and special because she was the object of the prince’s love and time. He had “tamed” her, and now she was more precious than all the roses he had seen in the garden. Upon their sad departing, the fox imparts a secret: *Anything essential can only be seen with the heart, it remains invisible to the eyes.*

The prince meets two people from the Earth. The first one is a railway switchman who tells him that passengers constantly travelled by train, rushing from one place to another, as if not satisfied with where they were and not knowing what they were after. Only the children among them ever looked out of the windows. Next, he meets a merchant who has invented a pill that eliminated the need to drink water for a week. He says that it will save people fifty-three minutes a week. But he has not given a thought to the crucial question: what does one do with the fifty-three minutes that one has saved?

The narrator brings the reader back to the present moment by reminding us that it is the eighth day after his plane had crashed in the desert. The narrator and the prince are dying of thirst. The prince finds a well and they drink water which feeds their bodies and their hearts. They share a moment of bliss. This water had a different value. When it was drawn out of the well, it felt as if the well was awakened and was singing. The happiness that one is looking for can be found in a single rose or a little water.

The prince desires to return home to see his rose. He begins to make plans with the snake for going back to his planet. He bids an emotional farewell to the narrator and states that if it looks as though he has died, it is only because his body was too heavy to take with him to his planet. The prince warns the narrator not to watch him leave, as it will upset him. The narrator, however, refuses to leave the prince’s side. When the prince is asleep, he holds him in his

arms and walks, slipping into profound reflection. He begins to think that what makes a thing beautiful is invisible, and reminds himself that what he is looking at is only a *shell*, the most important is invisible.

The prince consoles the narrator by saying that he only has to look at the stars and remember his (prince's) lovable laughter, and it will seem as if all the stars were laughing. The prince then walks away from the narrator and allows the snake to bite him, so that he falls soundlessly on the sand. The next morning, the narrator is not able to find the prince's body. He finally manages to repair his aeroplane and leave the desert. He is confident that the little prince has returned to his planet. He takes comfort in looking at the stars and imagining that he is able to hear the laughter of the prince, and hopes that he returns. But there are times when he is sad and wonders if the sheep he drew, has eaten the prince's rose. The story ends with a drawing of the landscape where the prince and the narrator had met. The narrator makes a request that if we are ever in that area, we should stop under the stars, and if we encounter a little boy with golden curls, who refuses to answer any questions, then we must contact the narrator immediately.

In the comments given on this book, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, we read that it was not clear whether the book was meant for children or adults. According to the British writer P. L. Travers, it had all the necessary ingredients for a children's book, as "it is true in the most inward sense, it offers no explanations and it has a moral." Many critics have drawn parallels between the characters and events of the book and the life of the author. He was a pilot who had experienced a plane crash in a desert, like the narrator. The rose in the story symbolizes his wife, Consuelo, who is said to have had erratic behaviour similar to the little prince's rose. The narrator and the little prince represent but two different aspects of the author, Saint-Exupéry.

(To be concluded)

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS SELF-EXAMINATION AND MEDITATION—I

MEDITATION falls into two compartments: (a) self-examination—the lower self surveyed by the light of the Higher and (this is important) of the Divine Science. Calm judgment tells us what is wrong and evil, what right and good; but judgment in the light of the Divine Science reveals what we lack of spirituality, of the sage-light. A periodic review-survey is very necessary. Then, (b) a memorizing of a great heart-idea, a silent repetition of it, a reflection on it. This brings to us indirectly the influence of our Higher Triad. The remembrance of both these, hour by hour, as we are busy in the routine of duties and recreations, reveals the power of meditation. Thus, your understanding and interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* verse about putting the mind upon the Spirit are correct. As you will agree, the process is easy to understand but very difficult to put into practice deliberately and actively, and yet it has to be done if we want to fulfil our purpose and mission as thinkers.

To make daily meditation more thorough you need to devote to it a longer period. The lengthening of the period is right and genuine when we have not to watch—"Now is my period over," or, "Five minutes still to go." When such thoughts obtrude we are still under the influence of the lower. That from the point of view of the thinker. What proper objects or subjects are there? A concrete image like that of the Guru H.P.B. or of her colleague W.Q.J.? Or an abstract subject-verse like "All is impermanent in man except the pure bright essence of Alaya," etc.? In either case the instruction is: "Withhold thy mind from all external objects, all external sights" other than the image or the verse. Further, "Withhold internal images" (feelings mainly). Why? "Lest on thy Soul-light a dark shadow they should cast." When the thinker (*Antahkarana*) can keep himself untarnished by desires of the selfish self, when he is not influenced by the lower "light," the Light of the Higher begins to come to him and gradually, slowly, the *Antahkaranic* thinker begins to act as Higher Manas

and impresses the image or the verse with Its Higher Light. So, persist in Self-centredness. Close sense activity and also fancy. Concentrate on the divinity of Higher Manas and *aspire* to Buddhi. Result—become devoted in altruism during all the waking hours. A steady watchfulness is necessary. Spontaneity is the test.

It is this process which is the positive pole, the review or self-examination being the negative pole.

Self-examination does often have a depressing effect. But, when we see ourselves as full of weaknesses, who is the seer? Now that very word “seer” is so casually used that its real connotation often escapes us. The Sanskrit term “Rishi” means, literally, “Seer”—He who sees, who has attained to the spiritual and Buddhi-sight. Now self-examination must be both conscious and cautious. Self is the Seer, *i.e.*, Buddhi-Manas, the Spiritual Soul, the Thinker with the light of the moral power. His object of sight is the lower self. After self-examination who gets fearful and depressed? Once again, freed from the benign influence of the Buddhi-Manas it is the expressions of Kama-Manas that, so to speak, talk among themselves—“What are we going to do with this attempt to separate us?” Now, what is the remedy? No self-examination should end with the noting and noticing of the foibles and frailties of the lower. One last act in the ritual of self-examination should be performed: the higher, Buddhi-Manas, must be gentle to the lower, like a mother who has chided the son or the daughter after which she must be soothing and encouraging to the son or the daughter to do better. The lower Manas, likewise, *can* do better. That aspect of the lower must be emphasized, *viz.*, the learner. Kama-Manas is the pupil and the learner; one aspect of it—*Antahkarana*—is to become the chela of the great Guru. So do not fear or be depressed after a good self-examination. We have to raise the self by the Self, says the *Bhagavad-Gita*. And whose thoughts are 100 per cent pure? Does not the same *Bhagavad-Gita* say that every act is charged with faultiness?

There are always dual forces at work: the personal and the Manasic. Detecting our error is one thing; seeking the remedy is the

second. The lower mind’s brooding and speculating upon its foibles and frailties is easy to it in an hour of its separation from Kama. But for it true reflection is difficult—reflection implies the reflecting Manas’s impress and influence. This is exhilarating, not depressing. The link between depression and exhilaration is the study of that particular teaching which deals with the nature of our error and tells us how to get over it. Not only too much anxiety but any anxiety about self-progress is harmful.

As to self-examination in reference to the past and the present, it always is truly a gain to act rightly now, in the day-to-day duties, work and recreations. Application is in the present and gives us a touch of the Eternal Now. More, it cleanses the past and brightens up the future. Memory is always there, like food when the waste matter is eliminated. Ordinary men and women suffer from indigestion and constipation of the psychic nature. Elimination is poor. Why? No self-examination, no recognition of what is wrong and how to eliminate it. So, “Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences” is a real psychological exercise. “From Me come memory and also the loss of memory,” says Krishna. Memory is a vital subject and there are mysterious aspects connected with it. In *Isis* some good hints are to be found.

Memory is dual. There is the Astral Light memory and there is the Akashic memory. Memory is our foe and our friend. It is the common weapon of the two selves in man. The higher memory must attack the lower, *i.e.*, our higher tendencies and knowledge must improve the *skandhas* till the higher impresses itself on the personal man who then regains the memory of the past lives as Mr. Judge recommends.

Mental attention intensifies itself as our heart brings to our tasks our affection for them. Which disciple has not the difficulty of Arjuna? But it will not take lives for you to be centred in the Divine Discipline. In a few years you will find substantial improvement. Keep the company of the Inner Ruler, now and again. Lean on great ideas every time you finish one job and take up another. A

couple of minutes of remembering and repeating a single verse of *The Voice of the Silence* or the *Bhagavad-Gita* strengthens and renovates the whole constitution.

On the subject of concentration something was said to you before and I do not think that much can be added till you have begun in right earnest to get your own lower mind steady enough to catch the light of your soul. The brain has to be made porous to the influences of the higher mind. Attentive working at everything that comes to us in the shape of duty is one kind of concentration. But to come together to a focal point the brain has to become quiet, the desires, either of the body or of the mind, have to subside and the mind has to be opened to receive the light of the inner nature. This has to be attempted if you want to get beyond the finite. The exoteric approach to which you refer will not give you satisfaction, I am afraid. People go to Church and try to approach “Our Father which art in heaven,” but they do not succeed because the psychology about the person who utters the prayer and the nature of the Father in heaven are not properly understood.

(To be concluded)

PEACE of heart is disturbed by passions; so, if you do not allow passions to approach the heart, it will always remain at peace. In the unseen warfare, the warrior stands fully armed at the gates of the heart and repulses all those who attempt to enter and disturb it. While the heart is at peace, victory over the attackers is not difficult. Peace of heart is both the aim of spiritual warfare, and the most powerful means to achieve victory in it. So, when passionate turmoil steals into the heart, do not jump to attack the passion in an effort to overcome it, but descend speedily into your heart and strive to restore quiet there. As soon as the heart is quietened, the struggle is over.

—Unseen Warfare, II. XIV

THOUGHTS ON CURSES AND BLESSINGS

IV

A BLESSING may be regarded as a conferring of good wishes, favour, protection or benefit from one to the other. It is very common for elders and parents to bless the young. There are also blessings received from saintly beings and even from gods. *Ayushman bhava* or “May you live a long life,” *Yashasvi bhava*, or “May you attain success with no obstacles in the way of achievement,” are some of the blessings given by the elders. In some cases, though not always, the one who blesses may have accumulated great merit through good works, and through the blessings they can channel their accumulated merit to the person seeking blessings.

There are blessings received from God, through prayers and penances, wherein one may ask for God’s protection, or for some favour or gift. A blessing could be in the form of granting of a wish or a boon. There are stories that show that we do not know what is good for us or what true blessedness is, and hence, often what we consider as a blessing, turns out to be a curse in disguise. There is the well-known story of King Midas, who wanted more gold because he was greedy. Once when he was praying a holy man was passing by. The King asked him to grant a boon that all he touched might turn to gold. His wish was granted. The King was very happy. When he touched food, it turned into gold and he nearly starved to death. When he put his arms around his little daughter, she was turned into a gold statue. He asked the holy man to take back the boon. The holy man gave him some water to sprinkle on all things that were turned into gold to bring them back to their original form. King Midas was now truly happy, as he had learned a lesson, “Gold does not bring permanent happiness.”

A verse in *Katha Upanishad* says that there is a choice to be made between *Shreyas* or that which is good for the soul, and *Preyas*, or that which is pleasing to the senses. In this *Upanishad*, the boy Nachiketas exercises his spiritual discrimination and resolves to rise

above the worldly, short-lived pleasures. Seeing his exceptional courage to face death, Yama, the god of death, grants him three boons. As his third boon, Nachiketas asks Yama to reveal to him knowledge of the Self (*Atmajnana*) and secrets of death. Yama dissuades him from seeking this knowledge and tempts him by offering various pleasures of life, such as, wealth, cattle, the kingship of the whole world, a long life, etc. The boy's answer to the God of Death is that things look beautiful, and worthwhile, so long as the sense organs are vigorous, but there can be no enjoyment for a person whose sense organs have been worn out. "Even the whole of life is short; thine are the chariots and dance and song. Shall we choose wealth if we have seen thee?"

In the story of Prahlada, the son of demon King Hiranyakashipu, which appears in Canto 7, Chapter 10 of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, we read that even though Prahlada was a small boy he considered every blessing that came as a result of his devotion, as an obstacle on the spiritual path. He tells the Lord that anyone who desires material benefits from Him will obtain the same, but then he ceases to be his servant, he becomes a merchant. Probably, Prahlada is trying to convey that when a devotee asks for a certain blessing, or wish fulfilment, in exchange for worship, austerity, etc., it becomes a barter. Therefore, as far as he was concerned, he only sought for the benediction that no desire for any form of material happiness should grow in his heart. That is because, the moment these desires arise in one's heart from that moment, they defeat the function of one's senses, mind, life, patience, intelligence, strength, memory, and truthfulness.

We always seem to overlook the blessings that are bestowed on us, *unasked*. We are too aware of our difficulties, imagined or real, but seldom pause to count our blessings. Is it not a blessing to have knowledge of the laws of Karma and Reincarnation, the twin doctrines of Hope and Responsibility? They give us hope that no matter what you are in the present moment you can change for the better. Nothing prevents us from making our lives sublime. No effort

towards right living is ever wasted. Death is not the end and we will meet again those we have loved and lost, in some subsequent lives, when Karma permits. The greatest blessing of our lives is that we have contacted the right philosophy and right teachers, in this world which is full of pseudo-philosophies and pseudo-messiahs. We have heard of the Masters of Wisdom, the perfected beings, and are blessed to be part of Their work. Each student-aspirant of Theosophy cannot fail to be grateful for the "blessing" of having contacted genuine Theosophical teachings and the part it has played in moulding his or her personality and life.

"Every breath we draw is a gift of God's love; every moment of existence is a grace," says Thomas Merton. There is an element of grace in almost all that we do. "Grace" means getting over and above what we deserve for our efforts. We sow seeds, water the soil, use manure, and see to it that it gets adequate sunlight, but in return we get manifold fruits, rice, wheat, pulses, which nourish the body. There is an element of grace in reaping crops from the seeds sown. We can discern an element of grace in the way karma precipitates. Thus, some of us are able to appreciate that though the events that befall us are determined by karma, their timing and the circumstances may be termed as pure grace.

The Buddha reminds us of the four blessings, of which humanity is blissfully unaware. "Blessed is the birth of a Buddha," because whenever a Buddha, an enlightened being, with great Insight and great Compassion is among us, not only men but the whole of Nature is helped by his beneficent presence. "Blessed is the teaching of the Good Law," which could well be teachings of Karma and Rebirth, the perfectibility of man and Oneness of Life. These great teachers and the messengers of the Masters of Wisdom come cyclically among human beings, and reiterate the same teachings, which get obscured in time. But for their efforts, human minds would have plunged into mental darkness. Life and its purpose would remain a mystery. "Blessed is concord in the order." It is very evident that "concord" or harmony and agreement among Theosophical students is very

essential, for only then they would be able to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood, “round which other people will gather, forming a centre from which information and spiritual influence radiate, and towards which higher influences are directed.” But for the “concord in order” the fourth blessing is essential and that is: “Blessed is the austerity of those who live in concord.” When student-aspirants practice the austerity of speech, of feelings, of actions, there would be no back-biting or slandering, but handing down of original teachings, with accuracy, and then nothing can stop the spread of life-giving teachings of the philosophy of Theosophy.

The Beatitudes are sayings attributed to Jesus. The word “beatitudes” is derived from *beatitudo*, a Latin word, meaning “blessedness.” They are a series of blessings, which include eight blessings recounted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Fifth Chapter of the *Gospel of Matthew*, among others. The Beatitudes describe the characteristics of the ideal follower of Christ and the blessings he or she will receive, while on Earth and in Heaven. Each blessing offers a future reward to the person possessing a certain quality. The Beatitudes echo the highest ideals of Jesus’ teachings on spirituality and compassion. The eight Beatitudes in *Matthew* are: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The first beatitude refers to “the poor in spirit,” which implies those who are truly humble, who do not try to draw attention to themselves or their achievements, and are impersonal. If we wish to become such, we should undertake regular self-examination, in which we note our weaknesses and also our strong points, without

being cast down by the former or elated by the latter, and constantly endeavouring for self-improvement. If we are proud and ambitious, we are certainly not “poor in spirit.” *Light on the Path* says, “Ambition is the first curse; the great tempter of the man who is rising above his fellows.” It is evident that men of power and intelligence are continually led away from higher possibilities by ambition. Ambition is closely related to personal pride and the one who aspires to become a disciple must be free from it. A “holier than thou attitude” is the greatest impediment to spiritual progress. “Again, there arises the thought, ‘I am a student, a holder of a portion of the mystic lore.’ Insidiously there steals in the thought ‘Behold I am a little more than other men, who have not penetrated so far.’ Know then, oh man, that you are not as great even as they. He who thinks he is wise is the most ignorant of men, and he who begins to *believe* he is wise is in greater danger than any other man who lives,” writes Mr. Judge. The “Kingdom of heaven” refers to the divinity within. “Kingdom of Heaven” is the state of spiritual bliss and perfection. It is that peace and bliss which leaves no desire for any worldly thing. It is that knowledge, knowing which, nothing else remains to be known. Our real Self finds channel of expression through our thoughts. Hence, it is at the *thought level* that we must first seek the Divine. There must first be a determination at the thought level to leave behind the mundane life and search for the truth. Likewise, cultivation of some of the indispensable qualities, such as forgiveness, kindness, purity, peace and harmony, readiness to suffer in defending a moral principle, are blessings for one who wishes to live a spiritual life, and is desirous of experiencing the bliss, which arises from one’s nearness to the Christ within.

All the circumstances of life, our inner and outer environment, in terms of health or disease, sharp or dull intellect, kind or vicious nature, riches or poverty, are under Karma and chosen by our Ego, as the Ego requires and desires that which makes for upward evolution or Spiritual progress. What is desired by the ego may not be desired by the personality. However, any karma can be a blessing,

when a personality learns to accept and use the environment as means to learn and progress. When one uses his money or any of the favourable circumstances with care then certainly it is a blessing, as he is learning *viveka-vairagya* or detached discrimination. However, when the favourable circumstances are not used properly, they prove to be enervating for the character. On the other hand, when we learn to use adversities, calamities and pain as raw materials, they become purifiers and uplifters.

A true devotee realizes the deeper aspect of pain and adversities. We read in the *Mahabharata* that Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas and the aunt of Shri Krishna, was considered to have great devotion for Krishna. At the end of the *Mahabharata* war, when Krishna was leaving the Pandavas, he asks Kunti to wish for anything she wants. Kunti asks Krishna for perpetual suffering and adversities. The obvious reason being that it is only in pain and sufferings that one remembers God. Thus, in one sense, by asking for perpetual suffering, Kunti desired to constantly remember Krishna. At a deeper level, as Swami Shri Savitanand suggests, we are more attached to our body during pleasurable times, because the body is the instrument through which we experience pleasurable sensations. During pain, our attachment to the body tends to lessen. As a result, there is a greater chance of realizing that “I am not my body,” and thereby overcoming identification with the body.

Every effort that we make to live the life of purity and altruism, working for the upliftment of humanity, carries within it the potentiality of future bliss for us and humanity, imperceptible to us. “Ah! If your eyes were opened, you might see such a vista of potential blessings to *yourselves* and mankind lying in the germ of the present hour’s effort, as would fire with joy and zeal your souls!” writes a Master of Wisdom to every sincere student-aspirant.

(Concluded)

EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS

CHRONICLES of infectious diseases sweeping across a country, sometimes over a continent or the whole world, causing death and misery *en masse*, is a well-known fact. It is termed epidemic when it occurs within a community or a province (*epi-* upon, *demos* - people), and pandemic when it sweeps over a whole country or several countries at a certain time period (*pan-* all). The earliest records of epidemics go back to the Bubonic plague, called the Black Death, which is said to have killed an estimated 200 million people in the 14th century CE, which, earlier in Greece, almost depopulated Athens in the 4th century BCE. Epidemics of smallpox, cholera, influenza, etc., in later centuries in many parts of the world, claiming millions of lives have been chronicled. Ancient Indian Sanskrit texts on health and medicine attributed to Susruta contain descriptions of epidemics that answer to the dreaded diseases now known as cholera, plague, tuberculosis, influenza, etc. Epidemiologists have made a study of the historical records of the epidemics from ancient times to the contemporary period with a view to discover the causes of epidemics, the pattern of their occurrence, and possible remedies to contain them. There seems to be no consensus among them that epidemics occur in regular predictable cycles, except for infectious diseases which exhibit seasonal variations in cycles of one to four years. Historical records however show that epidemics and pandemics are persistent in their recurrence through the centuries to the present time, in every part of the world.

The 1918-20 pandemic of influenza which infected a third of the world population, taking a toll of an estimated fifty million people, is said to have an avian origin. It originated in China. Various theories are offered to explain the cause of the spread of the infection in pandemic proportion. Exactly one hundred years later, in 2019, the viral infection, known as coronavirus, again originating in China, rapidly spread westward infecting almost the whole world, killing millions, and seriously impacting the world economy. There has

been no consensus among scientists as to the exact cause of the disease, whether it is a zoonotic or genetically modified viral organism leaking out from a laboratory in China. Historical records show that from 1510 to 1850 more than three hundred epidemics of influenza raged in all parts of the world claiming millions of lives. (*H.P.B. Series No. 18*, p. 20)

Various causes of epidemics and pandemics are identified by the epidemiologists, such as, changes in the host susceptibility to the infectious agent, infected food supply, water contamination, the migrant population of certain animals and insects, such as, rats, mosquitos which act as disease vectors, and so on. Insanitary conditions and contagion are believed by experts to be the two chief causes of origin and spread of diseases far and wide. This is not entirely incontrovertible as pointed out by other experts. For example, in the article referred to in the foregoing, namely, “The Last Song of the Swan,” Dr. Parkin’s research work has been cited in which he has shown that cholera has been known to travel hundreds of miles against strong monsoon wind, and even work its way upstream of a river. There are also epidemics which sweep over large tracts of a country, often of intercontinental reach, as much in sanitary localities as in insanitary ones, with the swiftness of a seasonal wind. This is true especially of the influenza epidemic.

The cause and the cure of the influenza epidemic have baffled epidemiologists, particularly in respect of the coronavirus pandemic, though scientists have unravelled complete genetic information of the latter and developed vaccines to contain its proliferation. Theosophy points out the reason why the real cause of the pandemic is evading the researchers. That reason is that they believe the pathogens to be the sole cause of the disease but overlook—because they disbelieve in—the moral cause generated by the dynamic power of human thought which brings about disturbance in the atmosphere of the earth. A pathogen is the visible material cause of the invisible anthropogenic moral cause of an epidemic. Some intuitive scientists think that climatic and meteorological changes induced by human

activity have to be investigated to ascertain whether that has a bearing on epidemics, especially in respect of epidemics of plant and animal diseases. Theosophy avers that disturbance in meteorological and climatic cycles induced by destructive human activity on the physical plane, as is the case in an industrial economy, and, principally, by the power of the human mind and thought, are the chief causes of epidemics of diseases and other natural calamities. This is indeed suspected by deeply ethical minded intuitive thinking people. Not a few scientists suspect that atmospheric disturbance has a bearing on such epidemics as influenza. Theosophy points out that the abnormal increase of ozone in the atmosphere is the cosmic cause of such viral diseases as influenza. “It is not asserted for the first time now that all such mysterious epidemics as the present influenza are due to an abnormal exuberance of ozone in the air.” (*H.P.B. Series No. 18*, p. 21)

It is a well-known fact that ozone, which is triatomic, is a powerful allotrope of diatomic oxygen, found in the upper atmosphere, protects living organisms by preventing ultraviolet light from reaching the earth’s surface but is a pollutant and injurious when found on the earth’s surface. Exposure to ozone causes chest pain, shortness of breath, throat irritation, and damages the lungs. It is admitted by scientists that at times oxygen, the life supporter of all that lives and breathes on earth, is transformed into its allotrope, ozone, which accounts probably for the symptoms of influenza. The quantity of ozone in the atmosphere varies with changes in meteorological conditions. It is a well-known scientific fact that in the natural course the ultraviolet rays split oxygen molecules into two single oxygen atoms, called atomic oxygen, which recombine to form molecules of ozone. Theosophy points out that the proportion and balance in the ratio of oxygen and ozone in the atmosphere may be upset resulting in an increase in the ozone—oxygen becoming ozone. “Descending, and spreading with an extraordinary rapidity, oxygen would, of course, produce a still greater combustion: hence the terrible heat in the patient’s body and the paralysis of rather weak

lungs....‘too much of ozone irritates the respiratory organs, and an excess of more than 1% of it in the air kills him who breathes it.’ This is proceeding on rather occult lines.”(*H.P.B. Series No. 18*, p. 21)

The physiologists know quite well the effect of thoughts and emotions on the health of mind and body. If negative thoughts and emotions, such as anxiety, jealousy, anger, etc., induce hormonal imbalance in the body causing disease, it is not difficult to surmise the immense power of thoughts of the people in the mass—which in general is of crude and baser quality—in producing disturbances in the exquisitely harmonious order of cosmic forces on the occult plane which should result in natural calamities, epidemics, and social disturbances.

Thought is the plane of action as thought underlies every act. Lives of infinite grades and stages of development are varied expressions of One Life, evincing a progressive march towards a higher life, all interconnected and interdependent, constituting a harmonious progressive order. Man being at the head of the progressive order has the special responsibility to so think and act as to aid the universal progression by becoming a co-worker with Nature. Action contrary to the great purpose of life owing to ignorance and the concomitant selfishness, is the cause of every calamity that afflicts man. “In the energy we put into self-interest we are generating maleficent influence, which finally, in the cyclic course, will culminate in some disaster,” says Robert Crosbie (*Answers to Questions on The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 184). Nations seek to remedy disasters, which afflict mankind in endless recurrent cycles, by trying to manage the effects on the physical plane leaving out the moral cause produced in the minds of men. Man is an enemy to himself and to the whole of Nature, due to ignorance. Nature gives back to man in exactly the same manner and measure as he acted towards her. The Elemental world on the Astral plane, immediately next to the physical plane, is like a mirror. Elementals reflect back on mankind whatever impressions man makes on them

by his thoughts and acts. The real cause of misfortunes which afflict mankind lies in this fact.

The one true and permanent remedy to the ills of epidemics and pandemics and every other calamity lies in mankind acquiring the knowledge of the true nature of man and the universe, and of the great purpose of life, and thus become co-worker with Nature in thought and act. “It is the power of Consciousness when freed from self-interest; it is Spirit, freed from self-interest” (*ibid*). Then the whole of Nature will become friendly to man and reveal the path of higher evolution to his purified consciousness leading to human perfection.

IN THE case of the irrational animals, intellect (*nous*) co-operates with the special form of instinct which belongs to each several kind of beast; but in men, intellect works against the natural instincts. Every soul, as soon as it has been embodied, is depraved by pain and pleasure....Those souls then of which intellect takes command are illuminated by its light, and it counteracts their possessions; for as a good physician inflicts pain on the body, burning or cutting it, when disease has taken possession of it, even so intellect inflicts pain on the soul, ridding it of pleasure, from which spring all the soul's disease. And godlessness is a great disease of the soul; for the beliefs of the godless bring in their train all kinds of evils, and nothing that is good. Clearly then, intellect, inasmuch as it counteracts this disease, confers good on the soul, just as the physician confers health on the body. But those human souls which have not got intellect to guide them are in the same case as the souls of the irrational animals. For intellect co-operates with them, and gives free course to their desires; and such souls are swept along by the rush of appetite to the gratification of their desires, and strive towards irrational ends; and like the irrational animals, they cease not from irrational anger and irrational desire, and are insatiable in their craving for evils.

—HERMES

THE LINEAGE OF THE SOUL

THE KNOWLEDGE about our physical pedigree is difficult to obtain and modern science knows too little to give us any satisfactory explanation. But man is more than his body. Karma and evolution have “....centred in our make such strange extremes! From different Natures marvellously mixed.”

Who among us knows all the links of heredity, astral, psychic, spiritual? And without possessing some knowledge of the subject how can we fulfil the injunction of the Oracle—Man, know thyself? If our body and personality have their own families, so our spiritual individuality has its own. Self Knowledge is knowledge about this spiritual individuality. But that is possible to obtain only when we have known the self of matter, the personality with which we are almost completely identified, even when we are successful in separating ourselves for a while from it when in contemplation.

If we had to wait to know the pedigree of the Individuality till the lower personal self was fully conquered, we should be frustrated in our Theosophical undertaking in the process of time. Like so many other functions of Nature, the conquest of the lower and recognition of the higher go hand in hand. As the lower is denied, the higher reveals itself. And the correct method is to try to realize the higher and make it act, an effort which weakens the lower.

Similarly, to free ourselves from the web of family Karma which mainly pertains to the personality, it is better to begin, not by fighting it, but by ignoring it, while centring all our thought and attention on the visible soul-family at hand. Just as, through a physical-plane Guru, the aspirant comes to the spiritual Great Guru, so also through the proper and adequate recognition of our spiritual family on this visible and objective plane we come to realize the true spiritual pedigree to which our Buddhi-Manas belongs.

What is that visible spiritual family of the student of genuine Theosophy?

Often the U.L.T. has been called our spiritual home: it constitutes

our soul-family. Within the ranks of the U.L.T. are to be found the true friends and kin of the student-soul. Each ardent and sincere Associate has to learn to identify himself more and more with the functions and the life of the spiritual family. This is primarily a mental activity: our thoughts, our feelings and our whole attention change their focus. Before coming to Theosophy our attention was focused on this thing or that. But Theosophy, when taken seriously, changes the focus of attention and reveals, if the student is truly devoted, that the line of life-meditation is the service of Theosophy. The student feels within himself that the roots of his being are in the soil of the Lodge, not in that of his family.

It is to such students that the advice is given in the words of the Initiate Paul: “*Come out from among them and be ye separate.*”

More striking are the words of Jesus: “I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.”

Christ or Christos is our own Spirit, one with Deity, and we cannot know that Divinity within until and unless we abjure the ways and habits of the personal self, the mode and method of life acquired by that self from its own family. This does not mean that we shall fail to perform our congenital duties, or run away from the family. But it does mean that we shall not be personally attached to father or son, which attachment blinds us to their non-spiritual defects as to their spiritual qualities. It is not fully recognized that personal affection and attachment shut out the world of spirit from our vision in just the same way as personal dislike and personal hatred.

The first necessary step is to recognize that life in Spirit is *trans*-manasic, not *cis*-manasic. It is in the mind that the starting point of

soul-life inheres. It is the mind that has to be freed from attachment to the lower principles and it is in and with the mind that we have first to overcome personal attractions and aversions. The family of the personality is an excellent gymnasium to develop the *Vairagya*-muscle. But how many students miss their opportunity, either by removing themselves from the family or by mistaking human personal affection for divine impersonal love!

Love belongs to the principle of Buddhi and is born in human consciousness only when personal affections-aversions, *raga-dvesha*, are overcome. That is what is most clearly and emphatically implied in the closing words of Jesus quoted above. Exactly the same teaching in almost identical words is given in *The Voice of the Silence*: “Give up thy life, if thou would’st live.” A foot-note explains that the life of physical personality has to be given up.

When mentally and within ourselves the knots of personal affection-aversion are cut, then the bonds of outer Karma become loose and ultimately fall away. To achieve this, not only should we acquire knowledge at the Lodge, but also gather soul-force sufficiently to live as student-practitioners when we are away from it.

The old custom of changing the name of the personality when the Hindu enters the life of the *sannyasi* is a true and graphic symbol. When we resolve to dedicate ourselves to the higher life, and to serve the Cause of the Masters of Life, we undertake to weaken the life of the personal form (*rupa*) to which a name (*nama*) is given. Our Name and Form are personal: it is easy to change the name, not so easy to change the form. The order of procedure is to change the form and then the name will change itself! One does not become a *sannyasi* by wearing the yellow robe, nor a *swami* by taking a new name.

It is at our spiritual home and in our soul-family that we undergo the transformation and acquire a new *rupa*. The process is long but the beginning must be made and it can be made today.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Why do many of us forget key plot lines, or even endings, of movies or books we loved? We differ in our memory ability, as some are good at remembering faces, while others may be good at remembering facts and events. Our ability to remember is affected by many factors. One of them is called interference, whereby, the memory of the first movie seen by us, is interfered with the memory of many other movies seen, subsequently. Also, watching many movies and reading many books tend to make our memories generic. For instance, if we have visited a beach a hundred times, we do not remember details of every visit, but tend to develop a blended memory of significant or different events. The question then arises, why do some people manage to remember all the details?

Our ability to remember well, as we read a book or watch a movie, depends upon our attentiveness. A wandering or distracted mind, tends to be a hindrance. A lot depends upon the frequent retrieval of information after the experience. Thus, for instance, one remembers better if one is in the habit of discussing with others, the plot or significant points in a book or a movie one has seen. Calling on a memory again and again helps consolidate that memory. In today’s world, retrieval has become unnecessary because instead of searching their memory, most people rely on Google search when they are unable to readily recall something.

What should be done to improve one’s memory? Some researchers say that mindfulness can help the process of recalling. It helps one to remember specific events. Mindfulness training consists of focusing one’s mind on one’s breath for a few minutes daily, or being aware of one’s thoughts, feelings and sensations, few times each day. Besides giving undivided attention to the task on hand, how much one can relate to what one sees or reads, improves the likelihood of remembering. To improve learning, there should be a time gap between reading or studying and then reviewing the same. In an experiment, it was observed that as compared to

weekly viewers of a serial or a show, binge watchers scored highest on the quiz, held one day after the show, but after 140 days, they scored lower than the weekly viewers.

It appears that memory does not mean merely remembering explicit facts and events, as “the majority of our memories and how we encode experiences are actually subconscious. So, if you were attacked by a dog as a kid, your heart may race when you are near a dog, though you may not remember the attack,” writes Abigail Cukier. (*Discover*, July-August 2021)

Broadly speaking, memory is an innate power in thinking beings, and even in animals, of reproducing past impressions. The brain cells are *receivers* and *conveyors* of memory, but not their preservers or *retainers*. Memory loss or weakened memory is partly because the memory cells have become enfeebled. However, poor memory may have something to do with lack of careful observation and *notation*. Mr. Crosbie defines memory as the faculty of perceiving the registration. We allow things to impress us without careful notation. But when we repeatedly read or view something, it creates a clear and definite impression. Impressions that are deeply imprinted, because of the special attention given to them, when they are formed, can be easily recollected.

However, what hinders our concentration and attention is also phantasy. We may say that phantasy is the power to re-arrange elements already existing in the lower mind. Whatever we see, read, hear, from newspapers, books or through gossip, these impressions accumulate and tend to have self-reproductive power. We must minimize the collection of useless impressions.

Physical memory, which includes remembrance and recollection, is the record of passing events, but is not the preserver of *experience*. Experience relates to feeling and consciousness; memory, to time and sense. Hence, *memory* belongs to the personality, while *reminiscence* (soul-memory) belongs to the permanent individual (*The Path*, Vol. IV). We may say that reminiscence is the aroma or nectar of the spiritual qualities of past personalities. For soul-memory

to become available in our waking consciousness, the brain must be made porous and receptive so that it could be impressed with this memory of the past. For this, it is essential to think and act along the right lines during waking life.

The study of gambling and the harm caused by it has shown that it is time to intervene. Gadgets have brought about a sea-change in ways and means of gambling. Using mobile apps one can have unlimited access to the global betting market, at the touch of a button, from anywhere in the world. Over the years, gamblers have increased. For instance, the number of active online gambling accounts in the United Kingdom has risen from around 16 million in 2008 to nearly 30 million in 2019. According to the Gambling Commission around three hundred thousand people in England, Scotland and Wales, and the same applies to other countries also, may be problem gamblers, who gamble in a way that is damaging to their lives. The Gambling Commission has been thinking of banning any kind of gambling advertisements on sports shirts.

However, there is not much clarity as to the exact impact of gambling, because the existing research is mainly relying on surveying only the most extreme gamblers, that are hard to reach, and interviewing gamblers is costly and time consuming. One thing is sure, the problems connected with gambling affect both low level gamblers as well as the most extreme gamblers.

In a recent study based on anonymised data from a United Kingdom bank it was found that the negative impact of gambling is not just financial. “By looking at the time of day that people spend money, we can tell that those who gamble are more likely to be awake in the middle of the night, a marker associated with poorer mental health.” They are more likely to lose their jobs in the future. None of these correlations indeed prove that gambling is the cause of these negative outcomes. It is felt that measures such as “allowing people to enable gambling blocks on current accounts or limiting

the amount that can be gambled,” may prove beneficial, write Naomi Muggleton at the University of Oxford and Neil Stewart at Warwick Business School. (*New Scientist*, February 13, 2021)

The vice of gambling is not new. We read about the evils of gambling in books like *Shrimad Bhagavatam* and the *Mahabharata*. In the *Mahabharata* we read that the eldest Pandava prince, Yudhisthira, lost his kingdom and his wife in gambling. Gandhiji wrote in his newspaper *Harijan*: “To wean away the gambler from his vice is like weaning the drunkard from the drink habit. This war against gambling is therefore an uphill task. But it must be tackled.” At the base of gambling, there is a desire to be rich without working. He suggests that to root out the evil of gambling, there should be a law to ban it, but most importantly, we should also try to arouse public opinion in that direction.

In his various other articles, he condemns the vice of gambling stating that betting at races forms part of gambling and that it could not last long if people refuse to go to race courses. Betting is difficult of eradication because it is not regarded as a vice, but in fact, has become fashionable. He considers lotteries also as a form of gambling and regards speculation in shares as a kind of lottery. Gambling in one form or another will go on, so long as humanity has not learnt to overcome greed.

Gambling may be looked upon as a form of temptation which ends in addiction to amass more and more wealth. In the article, “Rig-Veda on Gambling,” that appeared in *The Path* (July 1893) we find excellent remarks on the vice of gambling taken from *Rig Veda* (x.34). These are remarks on the plight of the gambler and on gambling itself. The gambler laments that addicted to the game of dice, he has spurned his wife, who now detests him, and so does his mother-in-law. He is abandoned by his friends, and yet at the sound of the dice he is drawn to them, asking, “Shall I win?” “The dice inflame his desire by making over his winnings to his opponent. Hooking, piercing, deceitful, vexatious, delighting to torment, the dice dispense transient gifts and again ruin the winner....In debt

and seeking after money the gambler approaches with trepidation the houses of other people at night.” The advice given is: “Never play with dice; practise husbandry; rejoice in thy prosperity, esteeming it sufficient. Be satisfied with thy cattle and thy wife, the god advises.”

Since the publication of Darwin’s work on the natural selection we have understood that we are animals. But do we really believe it? In subtle ways, humans are set apart from animals. A laboratory in China succeeded in creating cloned monkeys. But interestingly, United Nations Declaration on Human Cloning stated that cloning people is “incompatible with human dignity.” The author, Melanie Challenger, a writer, who focuses on the philosophy of science and bioethics, questions why only humans have “dignity” but the intelligent and aware primates, such as macaques do not. Just because a macaque does not think or talk about it does not mean that it does not possess it. “‘Dignity’ originates in Enlightenment dualist ideas separating cognition from physicality and instinct.” According to dualism, “humans are made of two substances, the body and the soul.” After that when rationalism was given importance, it gave rise to the duality of the human mind and body, with the view that the mind is all that matters, and that it is a separable thing from the body. This view may be partly traced back to French philosopher Rene Descartes, who declared that animals are mindless while man is made of two parts: a body and a special mind that is unique to humans, and thus creating a divide, with humans on one side and all else on the other.

Based on the superior mentality of humans, a water-tight compartment between humans and other animals is made, so that “we demote experience of fear and promote the idea that knowing fear—recognizing it, naming it—is what matters morally.” The author argues that though babies experience fear, they cannot conceptualize it, but that does not change their moral status.

In her book, *How to Be Animal: A New History of What It Means to Be Human*, the author shows that based on history of science and psychology research we are induced to say that we are not animals, but it is about time that we go beyond the dualism. This is because it is becoming increasingly difficult “to separate out what is mental from what is sensual, physical, and experiential, and harder still to separate human from animal. . . . If that means we need to rethink our relationship to other animals, so be it,” writes Challenger. (*The Scientist*, April 2021)

Man is a crown-piece of evolution, and there are three lines of evolution—physical, mental and spiritual. Man’s brain is of a far deeper and better capacity than that of any other animal. Human brains are more folded or convoluted than brains of any other animal. It is thought that having more gyrification is a measure of intelligence. Small mammals generally have smooth brains, and large mammals, *e.g.*, whales, elephants, dolphins, have highly convoluted ones.

Though animals display intelligence, the ability to use tools, the power of discrimination, and at times appear to possess self-consciousness, the human mind is far superior to the animal mind. Though animals have a mind, it is still in the latent state. It is only in the human kingdom that the monad (*Atma-Buddhi*) is *individualised*. In other words, when the mind was lighted up, or activated in man, it linked the Spirit of God above (Divine nature) with the personal man. As a result, man is endowed with the power to think, choose and reason and also with self-consciousness and apperception. In animals, this process of individualisation of the monad is gradual. However, in the higher animals monad almost comes to the point of being individualised. Hence, some of the animals *seem* to exhibit self-reflective consciousness.

Animals are not soulless. However, they do not possess the kind of soul that is in man, a conscious surviving *Ego-soul*, or that principle which survives after a man and reincarnates in a like man. An animal has the seeds of all the human principles in itself but they are latent. (*S.D.*, II, 196)