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The Living of the Higher Life**

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THE ATTITUDE OF MIND

WHAT is attitude? Attitude may be defined as a settled opinion or way of thinking and also the behaviour reflecting it. Attitude is the way we look at life. Dennis S. Brown, a motivational speaker, rightly remarks, “The only difference between a good day and a bad day is your attitude.”

Our attitudes are based on the way we perceive things and our perceptions are coloured by our conceptions. We have grown up with the feeling of a sense of separateness, and consequently with tendencies of intolerance, selfishness, and so on. Let us identify our prejudices, biases and wrong viewpoints and try to correct them. Our thoughts, feelings, beliefs as also past and present experiences may be regarded as the basic building-blocks of our attitudes.

Therefore, positive thoughts foster positive attitudes, while negative thoughts foster negative attitudes. A positive attitude is expecting or believing something to happen, but it also means accepting that whatever happens is the best for that moment. Such an attitude allows a person to see the situation more accurately and enables one to find the solution and take necessary action. A person with a negative attitude tends to focus on the problem and anticipates doom or failure rather than exploring the possibilities of success. A positive or negative attitude leads to positive or negative expectations. If a person suffering from a disease expects to be cured by a treatment, then, “*With expectancy supplemented by faith, one can cure himself of almost any morbid condition,*” writes H.P.B. It could

be the cure brought about by the tomb of a saint; a holy relic or a talisman where the healing is solely and simply due to the patient's unconscious will. The positive attitude of expecting to be healed appears to bring into action the power of will.

A Master has gone on record saying that each member, if earnest and unselfish, can become a centre of powerful influences, gathering like-minded people around him and benefitting the whole neighbourhood. What comes in the way of each member becoming such a centre is, basically and mainly, the mental attitude. Mr. Judge points out that most students think that people around are not receptive. Who cares for Theosophy these days? But this is dangerous, because we are connected with others on the mental plane and if we think nothing can be done then we impress other minds around us with the same thought and then, of course, nothing is done. As against this, if we say to ourselves, earnestly and sincerely with the wish that just as "I have benefitted from Theosophy, let others also be benefitted," then it would be like whispering into the ears of others who are in our vicinity, "Theosophy, help and hope for thee." Such an attitude combined with sincere efforts at promulgation can have a miraculous effect.

The world is obviously in need of help. Humanity is suffering individually and collectively—from lack of food, of employment, of moral stamina, and from lack of knowledge of the way out of the manifold difficulties. However, a certain attitude of mind is necessary for those who wish to help in the right way, by recognising that the physical woes of humanity are only skin-deep, what needs to be addressed is the mental and moral suffering. Thus, hunger, wars, crime and rape, plunder and murder, are but symptoms, not the illness proper. If we treat the symptoms without care for the disease itself, then the illness will return in another form. Outer help, devoid of an inner change, is like putting a nice plaster and paint to conceal the cracks of a house. We need to work for an inner change, writes Alok Pandey. True help aims at removing the *cause* of suffering, and not just giving temporary relief by dealing with the effects. We

are called upon to become wider philanthropists by ministering to the needs of the thinking man, who must be given the right philosophy.

While rendering help to an individual, one needs to cultivate the attitude of a listener and a learner. By listening we are able to ponder on what *we* have that will help in a particular situation or a particular person. People are helped more by the example of one's character than by words. We need to learn to help by and through the heart and not through the words alone, because then we will find the field before us growing larger and larger. Also, it is then that our words will bear fruit. They may be few, but each word will be full of power to change the mind of man.

Apart from this, the one who really wishes to help, must cultivate a proper attitude towards pain, pleasure and change. Psychologist William James says: "The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind." We must cultivate a balanced attitude as far as change is concerned. There are those who dislike monotony and seek constant change in their environment, forever seeking variety in clothes, cars, computers, including friends and partners. But such people are not equally flexible when it comes to changing their own habits, outlook, viewpoints or vices. On the other hand, there are those who resist change, and are reluctant to leave their "comfort zone." In fact, everywhere in one form or another, we come across the force of conservatism. We are enveloped by customs and traditions in every walk of life—at home, in the office, in social, and religious life. Philosophically, change is the very nature of existence. No one expressed it better than the Buddha who taught, "All Conditioned existence is impermanent." It is not possible to hold onto things, people or places forever and ever. Our body, our ideas and emotions, all keep changing.

Every change must be brought about judiciously, after due deliberation and reflection. Often those desiring change are only novelty-seekers or escapists—running away from difficult people

and situations. *The Voice of the Silence* cautions: “Beware of change! For change is thy great foe.” For instance, having decided to live our life according to theosophical teachings there should be no turning back. The opinions of the people around—family, society, or office should not influence our basic decision. It is so easy to get carried away and think that we have made a mistake and that other things must get priority, and so on. Change is a way of life and yet we must see to it that it does not begin to apply to the things which we have found by experience to be true, good, and valuable. There is this lovely prayer we can keep in mind: “God, grant me the serenity to take the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and *wisdom to know the difference.*”

The heart of alchemy is transmutation, and that implies change. We resist change because it involves going from one state of consciousness to another. It involves leaving behind the familiar in order to obtain spiritual perfection, which to us is still an abstraction. The seed must die to give birth to a tree; the nonessentials must die for the spiritual regeneration. If the aspirant resists change from fear of the suffering it entails, he invites stagnation. “Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage?” (*S.D.*, II, 475)

The above quotation from H.P.B. expresses the importance of pain in our spiritual growth, calling for the right attitude towards pain. Each and every one of us is suffering from some defect, want, or difficulties, which is not a matter of chance but due to our own past karma. All that we have in our hands now is our *response* to the condition brought by ourselves. Mr. Crosbie sums it up, thus: “In the great economy of Law and Nature, each being is exactly where he needs to be to eradicate defects; all necessary conditions are present for his growth. The only question lies with him: will he take them as ‘pain’ or as opportunities? If the latter, all is well; he is bound to conquer whether the way be long or short.... The purpose

of life is to learn, and it is all made up of learning. The various conditions that confront us are opportunities and means afforded us to increase our discrimination, strength and knowledge.”

Theosophy teaches that life is intrinsically meaningful, worthwhile and valuable, and it is left to each individual to realize and sense the value and meaning of life. Every life is meaningful, provided we change our attitude towards what life brings to us. Theosophy says with sage Patanjali that the whole universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. Each one of us is a weaver of his own destiny in this world. We choose our own threads for the loom. Our thoughts and our words, our acts and our feelings, are the materials with which we weave our destiny, refined or rough, pure or impure. We often make mistakes in weaving, and then instead of repairing the wrong, we go on involving ourselves more and more in the disordered pattern. In despair and sorrow, we seek refuge in selfish prayers for forgiveness. We try to bribe the gods. But that will not repair the wrong. The only way out of the difficulty is to undo the wrong, by creating fresh good karma.

Martin Marty, the theology professor at the University of Chicago, writes: “The attitude of ‘so little time’ influences the human spirit.” Contrasted with the attitude of “so little time” at one’s disposal, there are those who act as if life were eternal and hence have the attitude of always having time to be available to others. What relief and support such people provide by being available to another and lending them a sympathetic half-hour! Each one has to strive to cultivate the attitude of having time to be available to others, by choosing to *make* time.

There is no denying that our attitude towards our fellow human beings is that of apathy and indifference. This is especially true of those living in big cities. We pass by the site of the accident to avoid trouble. This reflects the attitude of self-centredness. As years pass, we witness that this self-centredness is consistently narrowing. It is with great pain that we watch more and more children neglecting to look after their old parents. *The Voice of the Silence* advises the

disciple that “thy Soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit: as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for others’ woes, as hard as that fruit’s stone for thine own throes and sorrows,” and to attune his “heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind.” This is the attitude of empathy, brotherliness and altruism, which forms the very foundation of spiritual life.

The world we live in, we often come across people who are selfish, self-centred or even downright evil. They can incite anger, fear, resentment, and any number of other emotions and reactions that disturb our minds. Buddhist philosophy recommends that in order to maintain our inner peace we must cultivate the spiritual attitude of *Upeksha* or even-mindedness. It may be defined as “dispassionate but nonetheless empathic witnessing of mundane events.” It allows one to respond rather than react to the negative situation, helping one to hold back a negative reaction of anger, criticism, violence, revenge, etc.

In the article, “Theosophical Attitude” H.P.B. contrasts many religious, political, philanthropic bodies, as also, clubs and societies, that are social protectors of special men and nations, moved by its own party or sectarian spirit. But which of them is strictly universal, *i.e.*, good for all and prejudicial to none? Do we find any of them following the noble injunction of the Buddhist Arhats and of King Ashoka? It says, “When thou plantest trees along the roads, allow their shade to protect the wicked as the good. When thou buildest a Rest-House, let its doors be thrown open to men of all religions, to the opponents of thine own creed, and to thy personal enemies as well as to thy friends.” She seems to suggest that such an attitude can be found in the Theosophical Society, and every student-aspirant must strive to cultivate this attitude of altruism, “ever ready to help equally foe or friend, ever ready to act and not just speak.”

It is not what is done, but the spirit in which the least thing
is done that is counted.

—W. Q. JUDGE

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

ROOTS—THE SAGA OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY—I

“ROOTS,” is a 1976 historical fiction novel by Alex Haley. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* “this saga covers seven American generations, from the enslavement of Haley’s African ancestors to his own genealogical quest. The work forcefully shows relationships between generations and between races.” The novel explores brutality of the slave trade and its enduring legacy, and also shows how enslaved Africans endured suffering and fought for their place in American society.

In spring 1977 Haley was sued for plagiarism by an anthropologist who claimed that “*Roots*” was copied from his novel *The African*. The suit was settled out of court with acknowledgement from Haley that certain passages within *Roots* were copied from *The African*. There was another lawsuit by the author of the Civil War era novel, *Jubilee*, which was dismissed by the court saying, in comparing the content of *Roots* with that of *Jubilee*, it found “no actionable similarities exist between the works.”

Haley called his novel “faction,” a mix of fact and fiction, or a non-fiction novel, having non-fictional elements, such as real historical figures and actual events woven together with fictitious conversation, using storytelling techniques of fiction. Haley acknowledged that the dialogue and incidents were fictional, but he claimed to have traced his family lineage back to Kunta Kinte, a West African, taken from the village of Juffure in what is now The Gambia. Haley earned a Pulitzer Prize special award in 1977 for “*Roots*.” The novel was a *New York Times* bestseller when published in 1976, and remained in the number one slot for 22 weeks.

The novel begins with the birth of Kunta Kinte, the son of Omoro and Binta Kinte, of Mandinka tribe, and of the Muslim faith, in 1750, in a small West African village named Juffure, in The Gambia. He is named after his famous grandfather, Kairab Kunta Kinte, a well-known *marabout*, or holy man, who saved the people of Juffure

from a terrible drought. Kunta has a difficult but free childhood in his village. His village subsists on farming but they lack enough food, at times, due to harsh climate. Kunta is surrounded by love and tradition. At the age of five he began to herd goats and go to school. After completing his schooling at the age of ten he goes through his manhood training. Later, he moves into his own hut and has his own land to farm.

The village has heard of the arrival of *toubob*, *i.e.*, men with white skin or white slave traders. At one point, when Kunta sees men in hoods taking away some children, it confuses him. Kunta is excited to see the world, when he is taken by his father outside their village. Later, he learns even more about The Gambia but he fears the slave trade. He also tries to get acquainted with Juffure's court system. One day he witnesses the case of a young girl who was kidnapped by the *toubob* and came back pregnant. She gives birth to a mixed-raced child, and the case remains unresolved. As he is planning a long-distance trip to his family's birthplace in Old Mali, Kunta goes to chop wood for making a drum. He is ambushed by a group of white slave traders, knocked unconscious and taken prisoner. He wakes up to find himself gagged and blindfolded. The *toubob* humiliates him and other captives by stripping them naked, examining them in every orifice and burning them with hot irons.

The kidnappers confine him and other enslaved Africans in the hold of a ship, naked and chained. "Hold" is the storage area of a ship where goods are stored. In the hold, he survives inhuman conditions, as he is packed tightly with other men and has no ability to clean himself or move. All the captured men and women are periodically brought to the deck to be cleaned. The unsanitary condition is made worse as most of the people on board develop dysentery. Many of the captured men and crew members die during the voyage. After a nightmarish journey across the Atlantic, the ship reaches Maryland, America. Kunta and the other men are sold at auction. Kunta is purchased by John Waller of Virginia, who gives him the name Toby.

Kunta is brought to a large farm, where he is locked up and forced to perform manual labour. He works under terrible circumstances. He tries to run away four times and every time he is quickly recaptured. The fourth time he is captured by a group of professional slave catchers and they cut off half of his foot. He quickly loses his consciousness and wakes up to find himself on a new farm. Eventually, he comes to know that he has been bought by his master's brother, Dr. William Waller. He becomes a gardener and eventually his master's buggy driver.

Thus, Kunta finds himself in a totally different environment, and among very different people from his own tribesmen. He spends many years in America, working hard for his master and missing all the time any emotional connection. There is pathos and a deep sense of solitude because he has not been able to integrate himself with the people and culture of America. He experiences a crisis of identity. He wonders: "He was thirty-four rains old! What in the name of Allah had happened to his life? He had been in the white man's land as long as he had lived in Juffure. Was he still African, or had he become a 'nigger,' as the others called themselves? Was he even a man? He was the same age as his father when he had seen him last, yet he had no sons of his own, no wife, no family, no village, no people, no homeland, almost no past at all that seemed real to him anymore—and no future he could see. It was as if The Gambia had been a dream he had once long ago. Or was he still asleep? And if he was, would he ever waken?"

Kunta meets a musician slave named Fiddler and Waller's cook named Bell. They become his friends and family. Kunta struggles to assimilate into the Black American culture he sees around him, as he is disgusted by the seeming acquiescence of the enslaved people to their circumstances. Eventually, Kunta and Bell marry and they have a daughter, Kizzy. Through Bell and Kizzy, Kunta learns that the enslaved Black people around him are trying to survive their situations, and they are just as angry as he is.

As a buggy driver, Kunta takes his master to various social gatherings and parties. He has observed from far the pomp and show,

and even got to eat some of the leftover food. He could see young couples dancing, and a long table loaded with more food than slaves like them got to see in a year. The first time Kunta had taken his master to such a party, he “had been all but overwhelmed by conflicting emotions: awe, indignation, envy, contempt, fascination, revulsion—but most of all a deep loneliness and melancholy from which it took him almost a week to recover. He could not believe that such incredible wealth actually existed, that people really lived that way. It took him a long time, and a great many more parties, to realize that they *didn’t* live that way, that it was all strangely unreal, a kind of beautiful dream the white folks were having, a lie they were telling themselves: that goodness can come from badness, that it’s possible to be civilized with one another without treating as human beings those whose blood, sweat, and mother’s milk made possible the life of privilege they led.” It just shows contrast between high class white culture and the slave culture, between “haves” and the “have-nots.”

Kizzy’s childhood as a slave is as happy as her parents can make it. She is close friends with Waller’s niece, “Missy” Anne, and she rarely experiences cruelty. When the two of them are teenagers, they begin to drift apart, as their difference in status becomes too much to ignore. Kizzy has an affair with Noah, a field hand. Her life changes when she forges a travelling pass for her boyfriend Noah, to help him escape. When she is caught and confesses, she is sold away from her family at the age of 16, to a man named Tom Lea. She never sees her parents again.

Tom Lea is a farmer and chicken fighter who has risen from poor beginnings. He rapes Kizzy and impregnates her and she gives birth to a son that Lea names George. Kizzy initially rejects George but comes to love him, as do the other blacks there. George is flamboyant and popular. Tom Lea decides to apprentice him to Uncle Mingo, who cares for Lea’s fighting cocks, and is Lea’s champion gamecock trainer. As time passes, George becomes an expert trainer, replacing Mingo even before his death.

George is a philanderer known for expensive taste and for his iconic bowler hat and green scarf. He marries Matilda from the neighbouring plantation and they have six sons and two daughters, of which the fourth son is named Tom, who becomes a very good blacksmith and the leader of the family. George, Matilda and their son try to earn enough money to buy the family's freedom. However, the family loses all their money when Tom Lea bets his own and George's money at a cockfight against Lord Russell. George is sent to England with Lord Russell as part of Lea's payoff on the bet. Meanwhile, Tom Lea's money continues to decline. He sells Matilda and her children to a slave trader.

The trader moves the family to Alamance County, where they become the property of Andrew Murray. The Murrays have no previous experience with farming and are generally kind masters who treat the family well. Tom diligently works to save money to buy freedom for his family members. He marries a half-Native American woman, Irene, and they have children, the youngest one being a daughter named Cynthia.

When the American Civil War begins, Tom works for the Confederate Army, and is accused of stealing, and nearly killed. The white boy, George Johnson, who actually did the stealing, ends up begging food from slave cabins. Later, he is made the overseer by Master Murray. As time passes, George becomes friendly with the slave community and remains a part of the community even after their freedom, which they get when the Civil War ends in 1865.

When the American Civil War ends the Murrays tell Tom to convey to his family that they looked forward to "us all enjoying the rest of our lives together just as soon as we get these Yankees whipped..." Tom agrees but thinks that "it was impossible for a master to perceive that being owned by anyone could never be enjoyable." In other words, no matter how kindly his family members were treated, they would never be happy to remain slaves for their entire lives. Hence, after the Civil War ends, the slaves on Murray plantation move to Henning, Tennessee, which is looking

for new settlers. It is clear that the concept of slavery for the whites in America is that they cannot be free so long as Britain rules over them. Kunta and other slaves find this ridiculous because according to them there cannot be any comparison between being a colony of Britain and being enslaved like they were. The lack of freedom of the white Americans was nothing as compared to that of slaves.

Tom forbids his daughter Elizabeth from marrying a “high yaller,” *i.e.*, light-skinned black man. Tom’s youngest daughter Cynthia marries Will Palmer, who becomes a successful lumber businessman. Their daughter Bertha is the first in the family to go to college. There she meets Simon Haley, who becomes professor of agriculture. Their son is Alex Haley, the author of the book, *Roots*. At the end of the novel, the author explains the process that led him to write the book, as well as the research he performed in preparation.

The title of the book “Roots” is very appropriate. One meaning of “root” is, “the part of a plant normally below the ground, attaching it to the earth and conveying nourishment to it from the soil.” When the characters in the novel have begun to “put down roots,” *i.e.*, become settled or established, they were uprooted. From one generation to the other there are characters in the novel who have to helplessly watch their near and dear ones being taken away from them because they are sold and bought. The main character in the novel, Kunta, has no freedom of movement and he cannot save his daughter Kizzy from being sold. As some critics rightly observe, “Slaves who are sold away from their families never see them again, cannot attend a loved one’s funeral, hold a grandchild, or celebrate a son’s marriage.” For the author, however, “roots” means the origin, as he tries to go back to the roots of his family line and traces it back to Africa.

(To be concluded)

THOSE who will not reason, are bigots, those who cannot,
are fools, and those who dare not, are slaves.

—LORD BYRON

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

MISCELLANEOUS—III

THE Absolute or Parabrahm is not realizable in the sense that our own Higher Self is realizable. The Absolute has a relation with the manifested universe; its nature, therefore, can be “sensed,” for this is the word that H.P.B. uses. Now what is sensed by a higher spiritual organism is not expressible in words; the thought is too high and the ideation is too lofty. Our own inner Ego catches the influence through this higher sensing, but is not able to explain it to others. Let us take an example in ordinary affairs. People often understand a teaching with the help of their own mind or intuition, but they are not able to explain it to others. It is because what is sensed by instinct or intuition is not brought down to the plane of Manas where it can be explained. Self-consciousness understands and explains. Intuitive spiritual consciousness has a sense of its own and there is inner realization, but there is also the inability to give expression to that realization. Law and being are not created by the Absolute. They are the coeval and coeternal expressions in manifestation or out of manifestation of the Absolute. This is a metaphysical proposition which it is important for us to understand.

Laya Centres are a fascinating metaphysical study. *Laya* Centre is the original foundation Centre of a universe to which material forces are attracted, while from within the Centre *Alayic* forces express themselves. If you read in *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, how the Earth Chain was formed after the close of the Moon Chain, you will know. *Alaya*, the Universal Soul, is that which is not bound by *Laya*, though on the Spirit side It functions without feeling any limitation. It is the same as the closing verse of the Tenth Chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita*: Krishna manifests as the entire universe, but remains separate.

Beings arise out of Be-ness by the process of Becoming. Be-ness, Becoming, Being is the triple manifestation in evolution. Now, Being implies entity, but not in our sense of the term. *Arupa*-formless

forms are abstractions to us from this plane. They are concrete forms of their own plane. Formless forms may be understood correspondentially. A square on paper is really a formal representation of a cube in a higher dimension; a circle is a globe; and so on. Forms of elementals, gods, Dhyanis, may be conceived by the personal consciousness of man, only partially, imaginatively, and often such conceiving is grotesque. What is the *Arupa-loka* of *Devachan*? *The Secret Doctrine* (Vol. I) speaks of Lipikas and Four Maharajahs. Some of these exalted Beings are not finite, as we know it, nor infinite, metaphysically and cosmically speaking. The whole universe is finite in manifestation and within the finite cosmos there are formless forms and familiar three-dimensional forms.

The confusion in your mind in reference to the three kingdoms of elementals and the three qualities of nature must be removed. It does not mean that one kingdom of elementals is *Sattvic* another kingdom is *Rajasic*, and the third is *Tamasic*. The three qualities of nature or *Prakriti* are *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*; they are the powers belonging to *Mulaprakriti*. They do not express themselves in three different kingdoms. Thus, in our Manasic nature itself there is the expression of the *Tamasic*, the *Rajasic* and the *Sattvic* qualities. Monads themselves can be divided at the very dawn of manifestation into three groups. Just as in the human kingdom there are men full of inertia and other men full of activity and a third class of men full of rhythm and truth, so also in the elementals. Nature manifests itself in three aspects and these are the *Gunas*, the qualities or attributes of nature. Now we are embodied beings and we are environed by lives from high to low degrees of density and these lives are *Tamasic*, *Rajasic* and *Sattvic*. It is necessary for you to get the difference in your mind between identity and correspondence. The three elemental kingdoms may for the purposes of study be made to *correspond* to the three qualities, but it does not mean that each quality manifests itself only in one kingdom.

If the knower is absolved from nature then he is absolved from the three *Gunas*. He is in his pure state and the three qualities of the

Self are not the three qualities of nature. In the final analysis, metaphysically speaking, *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda* are the three aspects of the Self. *Ichchha*, *Gnyan*, *Kriya* are the psychological three aspects of consciousness; they are rendered as faith, which comes from our very existence, *Sat*; powers are from the *Chit* aspect of consciousness; and actions are the creative aspect related to pleasure or *Ananda*.

As to your question about *The Voice of the Silence* image of the Bird of Life: The Great Bird is the Universe in motion. It is the Logos in manifestation, the great or macrocosmic *Hamsa*; and so man in motion is the *yogi* who makes his own movements and motion coincide with those of the Great Cycle. Look up in *The Theosophical Glossary* under “*Hamsa*.” The two wings, at our stage of evolution, are Wisdom and Compassion or knowledge and love, and on these we rise, by motions of *Yoga*—*Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*. *Samadhi*—till we become the All. It is a fascinating symbol. Buddhas are called *Hamsas*; by Wisdom the Buddha teaches, but there is Love which enables him to forgive intelligently, and when we accept his love or compassion we truly begin to understand.

Kala Hamsa represents Eternity. It is the Time aspect; it is Duration. To live in the Eternal is to master past, present and future or to bestride *Kala Hamsa*.

The gift of the Divine Eye is not intuition; it is higher Clairvoyance. (see *The Secret Doctrine*, “Eye of Dangma.”) It is the Single Eye which beholds the whole universe at once, and understands. The memory of Nature and its results are felt and known in self-consciousness in an *Arupic*, formless way. It has been said that the formless forms have a form—the archetypal form. It is said that the Mahatmic consciousness expresses the powers of all gods and goddesses. Master, says Judge, is everywhere, all the time, and so identical with the great Law of Righteousness. It is difficult to comprehend by our three-dimensional vision. The Eye of the mind sees things one by one and then by groups; it is the Eye of the Heart that sees by one supreme feeling. On the lower human plane, deep,

unselfish love of one person for another understands, appreciates the goodness, forgives and tries to mend the blemishes and weaknesses.

I am not surprised at the enquiry arising in your mind as you read page 183 of Mr. Crosbie's *Friendly Philosopher*. You must get hold of the point of view that the memory, when transferred to a personality, even of a previous incarnation, must go through *Skandhas*. What Mr. Crosbie is trying to convey is that the *Skandhaic* memory reasserts itself in a new body. Billiards playing is not necessarily the memory of the spiritual Ego but of the personal lives that make up our lower members. The reincarnated Ego is the higher Manas, that which gets into the body as a ray or beam of that higher Manas, but that ray never remains intact or pure, but is mixed up with the *Skandhas* and therefore becomes a complex entity. The memory of the *Skandhas* is one thing, and the memory of the spiritual Ego or higher Manas is a totally different thing. What Mr. Crosbie is trying to convey is that the memory of the *Skandhas* of previous incarnations can manifest itself in the new body of this incarnation. Therefore, the assemblage of *Skandhas* of previous body must belong to a power here, very recent in time.

(To be concluded)

THOSE who make compassion an essential part of their lives find the joy of life. Kindness deepens the spirit and produces rewards that cannot be completely explained in words. It is an experience more powerful than words. To become acquainted with kindness one must be prepared to learn new things and feel new feelings. Kindness is more than a philosophy of the mind. It is a philosophy of the spirit.

—ROBERT J. FUREY

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

II

H.P.B. writes that “the ‘Struggle for Existence’ and the ‘Survival of the Fittest’ reigned supreme from the moment that Kosmos manifested into being, and could hardly escape the observant eye of the ancient Sages.” There are several “Wars in Heaven” referred to in the *Puranas*. One of them is when the planets struggled to settle down in their respective orbits. The planets were born from the body of *Aditi*, and initially, before they settled down in their orbits, there was struggle. There were battles fought by these growing planets. A whole poem is written about this struggle, which H.P.B. describes as the “poem on pregenetic battles”

Aditi, or Deva-Matri is the cosmic womb from which all heavenly bodies are born. In the *Glossary*, *Aditi* is described as *Mulaprakriti*. In *Transactions* we read that the radiant essence or luminous Egg represents Eternal Mother-Father. This radiant essence curdles and spreads through space. These curds are the first differentiation and probably they also refer to Cosmic matter which is supposed to be the origin of the Milky Way. It is like clusters and lumps, like the curds in milk, and is called world-stuff or star-stuff. The Milky Way is the storehouse of matter from which stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies are formed after several stages of differentiation. The sun and planets are only co-uterine brothers, and the sun is not the father of the planets. (*S.D.*, I, 589)

In the Vedic allegory, *Aditi*, the Mother, has eight sons, born from her body, of which the eighth or the Sun is rejected because it is the Central Star, while the remaining seven are the seven planets. The allegory says that the Mother builds for her eight sons, eight houses, four large and four small, according to their age and merits. We know, for instance, that Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury and Venus are the Sacred planets (*S.D.*, II, 575). The quality of matter of which they are formed is far more refined and superior. Compared to Jupiter and Saturn that are large in size, Mercury and Venus are relatively

small. The allegory goes on to say that the Sun's dwelling was the largest and yet, he began to suck in the vital air. He was like the great elephant which roams around in the forest as he pleases, uprooting trees, eating voraciously and drinking much. H.P.B. explains that the Sun began to draw all the Cosmic vitality that he possibly could, and thus threatened to engulf his weaker brothers, and this went on till the law of attraction and repulsion was adjusted, when the Sun was relegated to the centre of the solar system. After that, the Sun feeds on the refuse and sweat of Mother's body, which refers to a form of Ether of which modern science knows nothing.

On p. 173 (*S.D.*, I) we read that there is a perfect analogy between processes of Nature in Kosmos and in man. The monads undergoing evolution on a planetary chain rest in *Nirvana* when the planetary chain has ended, just as man's higher principles rest in *Devachan* when the life has come to an end, while the Lower principles form the *Kama-rupa*, which then disintegrates, leaving behind the *Skandhas*, or tendencies, or *Tanhaic* Elementals that go to form the lower human principles in the next life. The same process takes place in the disintegration and formation of the worlds.

H.P.B. writes that a *Laya* centre is the nucleus of primordial substance in undifferentiated state, and when it is informed or activated by the "principles" of a deceased sidereal body, *i.e.*, a planetary chain, or a solar system which has gone into *pralaya*, then that mass of matter, first becomes comets, then Suns, and then cools down to form inhabitable worlds (*S.D.*, I, 203). Thus, for instance, when the moon chain of globes died and went into dissolution, one by one, in the Seventh Round, each globe as it died, transferred its "principles" or energy to a new *laya* centre, and that after undergoing the cometary and sun stage, settled down to form our earth. Globe A of the moon chain sent out its principles to a *laya* centre to form globe "A" of the earth chain, and so on. All the worlds or sidereal bodies are born one from the other, after the primordial manifestation at the beginning of the "Great Age" is accomplished. This is further explained by an analogy. The birth of

the celestial bodies is compared to a crowd or multitude of “pilgrims” at the festival of “Fires.” Seven ascetics appear at the threshold of the temple with seven lighted sticks of incense from which the first row of pilgrims light their incense sticks. Then, every ascetic begins to whirl his stick around his head in space and furnishes the fire to the rest of pilgrims. When a *laya* centre, which is a lump of cosmic protoplasm, homogenous and latent, is animated or awakened, it rushes into space and accumulates to itself differentiated elements. This “comet” can then settle down to form an inhabitable globe.

When the centre of cosmic matter has been fired up and activated, it circles round and round between denser heavenly bodies which have settled down and have fixed place in heavens, carefully avoiding collision with these bodies, or getting absorbed by them. It is comparable to a ship sailing in the ocean, which is sometimes caught up in a channel, or a path that is full of rocks and reefs, so that there is a continuous danger of the ship dashing against one of them and sinking. When born within a system, some of these bodies in cometary stage are disintegrated and absorbed in the mass of the body of various Suns. (*S.D.*, I, 203-204)

If we start with the beginning of a *manvantara*, we have first, nuclei of primordial matter which are fired up, animated or awakened; and they pass through cometary and sun stage and then become planets or worlds. When these die, they send out energies of their principles to fresh *laya* centres, which may be regarded as children of the first generation. These in turn pass through stages of transformation and become planets and then dying out send out their energies and are reborn as grandchildren, *i.e.*, children of second generation, and so on, through innumerable generations. In successive generations, the evolutionary impulse diminishes, so the velocity with which a *laya* centre (and then a comet) starts its journey is also diminished. Those which move slower and are propelled into an elliptical orbit are likely to perish sooner or later, and are generally absorbed by suns. Only those cometary bodies that move in parabolic curves, escape destruction, as they are supposed to move with great velocity.

Another well known “War in Heaven” in the *Puranas* is the Hindu Myth of the “churning of the ocean.” The Amrita that emerged as a result of the churning, was given away by Vishnu, by deceit, to the *devas*, and so there was a war in heaven. The ocean represents the primordial *chaos* or the homogeneous, undifferentiated matter. Just as butter comes to the surface by churning the butter-milk, so also, “churning of the ocean,” represents *differentiation* of the primordial, homogenous matter, which results in formation of the universe with its Milky Way, Sun, Moon, etc. The cosmos is brought from the noumenal to the phenomenal plane by means of two contrary forces—centrifugal and centripetal.

These two forces have been explained by Mr. T. Subba Row in the article “The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tenets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man.” He observes that the ancients have compared man’s life and existence to the orbital motion of a planet around the sun, in which there is balancing of the centripetal and centrifugal forces. But when the planet in its *approach* to the sun passes over the line where the centripetal and centrifugal forces completely neutralize each other and is only acted on by the centripetal force, it rushes towards the sun with a gradually increasing velocity, and is finally mixed up with the mass of the sun’s body. Again, when the planet in its *retreat* from the sun reaches a point where the centrifugal force becomes all-powerful, it flies off in a tangential direction from its orbit, and goes into the depths of void space, and is ultimately decomposed into atoms. In human beings, the Centripetal force is *spiritual attraction*, and the Centrifugal force is *terrestrial attraction*. As the centripetal force predominates, the individual reaches a higher plane of existence and ultimately becomes one with *Paramatma*. If, on the other hand, the centrifugal force becomes greater than the centripetal force, the individual comes to a lower level of existence and is ultimately annihilated.

We find the same idea in the *Key to Theosophy*, wherein, H.P.B. tells us that Spirit (or *Buddhi*) is the centrifugal and the soul (*Manas*) the centripetal spiritual energy; and to produce one result they have

to be in perfect union and harmony. If we arrest the centripetal motion of the earthly soul tending towards the centre, by clogging it with a heavier weight of matter than it can bear, the harmony of the whole will be destroyed and we have the case of a lost soul.

Another “War in Heaven” was between Jupiter or Zeus and Prometheus. Zeus represents the Host of the primeval progenitors called lunar *pitris*. Prometheus stands for solar deities who endowed man with the light of mind. This is allegorically represented as Prometheus stealing fire from heaven and bringing it to the earth. Zeus punishes him for this act by tying him to a rock and sending a vulture every day to peck at his liver. Every time the bird tore out the organ, new organ would grow and once again the torture would be repeated. This agony lasted for thousands of years, until he was freed by Hercules. This myth refers to the “light of the mind” given to man by the solar deities, endowing him with the power to think, power to reason and choose. At incarnation, this mind becomes dual. The aspect of mind, which is entangled with *Kama* (passions), represents the eternal vulture of unsatisfied desires, despair and regret.

“This drama of the struggle of Prometheus with the sensual Zeus, one sees enacted daily within our actual mankind: the lower passions chain the higher aspirations to the rock of matter, to generate in many a case the vulture of sorrow, pain, and repentance” (*S.D.*, II, 419-422). We know that at the end of every incarnation, a portion of the mind that was entangled in *kama* is lost, and at every new incarnation, a new ray of the *manas* is launched, which is like a new liver springing up. Only that portion of the lower mind gets attached to the Higher Ego which was connected with something spiritual and noble. Ultimately, each individual has to reach the state wherein at the time of death, the entire lower or incarnated mind is worthy of becoming assimilated with the Higher Ego.

(*To be concluded*)

DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

THE SUBJECT matter is an existential issue which has been pondered over by thinkers, poets and philosophers in all ages. Is death of the body the final end of the person, or if there is a soul that survives, what is its nature and powers, and its condition and destiny in the post-mortem state? If man is a soul, can he achieve immortality?

Some theistic religions in which, in their popular versions, there is no reference to reincarnation, believe in survival of the soul after the death of the body and its continuation in a state of happiness or misery in perpetuity, according to whether its deeds on earth were good or bad. Can such a post-mortem survival be considered as immortality? Religions in which the doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation are basic tenets, teach that the human soul is mortal but it has the latent power, being an emanation from divine spirit, to conquer mortality and become consciously immortal in spirit, beyond the grave.

Modern empirical science, limiting its scope of investigation to physical nature, which it considers to be the basis of life and being, avoids responding to ontological questions. Its postulate being life and consciousness to be epiphenomena of molecular motion of physiological organisms, death of the latter, in its conception, is annihilation, and as such nothing whatever remains as conscious post-mortem survival. Science, however, speculates on the possibility of securing immortality of man as a physical being; by which scientists mean an indefinite extension of biological and cerebral functions of a human being, by means of various therapies, beyond the average limit of the span of life of man at the present time. It is termed by some as “biological immortality.” The stated principle is that entropy—meaning the general trend of the universe and everything in it constantly head towards death and disorder—is a universal law, but in the case of a human being, the rate at which the disorder proceeds may be so retarded by means of therapeutics that life of man can be extended indefinitely beyond the natural

limit. Scientists however say that though this is a theoretical possibility, with the present level of knowledge they are able to achieve extension of biological life of man by a decade or so, and may extend by many more years as they gain more knowledge and expertise. While the decaying of the aging cells, tissues and organs of the physical body can be replaced by “tissue engineering” by means of such technologies as stem cell therapy, senolytic drug therapy (Senolytics are a class of drugs that selectively clear senescent cells, *i.e.*, those that have ceased cell division) and so on, the greatest challenge, however, they say, is in the regeneration of the aging brain as a whole. Supplanting the brain itself with non-biological components is said to be a possibility as AI (Artificial Intelligence) and cyber technologies advance further in their application to neurobiology.

Assuming that “biological immortality” becomes a reality—meaning, as already said, prolonging human life beyond the average natural lifespan by decades, perhaps for centuries—mankind will have to grapple with ensuing complex ethical, psychological, and social fallout. It is not difficult to visualise that it will add a hundredfold to the weariness and misery with which human life is already burdened.

While modern science is speculating on the so-called biological immortality, ancients knew infinitely more about the occult secret of prolonging human life on earth for an indefinite period in full possession of all the natural faculties, and maintaining youthful vigour for centuries. It was the secret of Elixir of life, by which is understood physical life. Nature herself is teaching and demonstrating to us the secret of Elixir of Life in her regenerative and recuperative processes, about which, it is said in *Isis Unveiled* (I, 503):

“Elie de Beaumont has recently reasserted the old doctrine of Hermes that there is a terrestrial circulation comparable to that of the blood of man. 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 the 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 alchemists....And why, we ask, if the surface-waters of certain mineral springs have such virtue in the cure of disease and restoration of physical vigour, is it illogical to say that if we could get the first runnings from the alembic of nature in the bowels of the earth, we might, perhaps, find that the fountain of youth was no myth after all."

Besides, by means of another discipline, the aspirant could consciously ascend, after the death of the body, to higher spiritual planes and partake of the heavenly felicity and sovereignty for ages. Neither of these two feats can be called immortality, as they have an end, subject to time and change as all finite things are.

Thus, we can see that the ancients had a much more realistic and practical knowledge of the mystery of death and immortality because they comprehended man and universe in their threefold aspect of spiritual, psychic, and material principles, and the laws governing their origin, evolution and destiny. A knowledge of the seven principles of man—contained in the three-fold classification when further elucidated—gives us a clearer understanding of the meaning of death and immortality. Mortal principles of man are four: Physical body, Astral Body, Life principle, and the principle of passions and desire—*Kama*. The three immortal principles which overshadow the mortal man are: *Atma*, *Buddhi*, *Manas*—the Real Man, also known as the Reincarnating Ego. Since the divine triad cannot incarnate directly in the lower quaternary, which being still too material and imperfect, an efflux is emanated from Manas in each new incarnation into the mortal man below; which becomes the lower mortal mind and soul, or the human soul. The human mind-soul is formed anew at each rebirth of the Ego, and is entirely destroyed at death except the most spiritual essence of the higher thoughts and aspiration of the man during life, which alone survives

and continues in a spiritual existence called *Devachan* or *Swarga* for a period commensurate with the potency of the energy of the higher thoughts, at the expiration of which the Ego is reborn in another body with a new mind; to which is attached by magnetic attraction the *skandhaic* elementals consisting of the lower material attributes, tendencies and sins of the previous incarnation. Thus, the man turns the wheel of rebirth propelled by his own Karma, and it is in his power to end the involuntary cycles of rebirth and become immortal.

Hence the human soul is not immortal. It has to achieve immortality while living in the body by freeing itself from baneful attractions of passions of the lower mind, whose natural tendency is to gravitate downward towards *Kama*, and aspire to be united with the Immortal Divine Ego. If successful in its higher aspiration for union with the divine, the human soul breaks away forever from the bonds of Karma which chain it to endless cycles of birth and death, and becomes consciously *Immortal in Spirit*—Divinity. If, on the contrary, man chooses to ignore the warning voice of conscience and gives himself up to follow the dictates of animal passions and persists in wicked ways, he runs the risk of destroying *Antahkarana*, which like a bridge connects him to the Divine Ego, and human soul suffers complete severance from its Divine Parent and falls into what is called the Spiritual Death—a calamity worse than which there is none that can befall man. These are thoroughly wicked and depraved men. Such a spiritually dead soul, absorbed in material elements, there being nothing spiritual in it which the divine Ego could incorporate into itself at the end of each of its long series of rebirths, dies only to reincarnate immediately by the force of the blind reproductive power of earthly passions. Such a spiritual dead may survive for ages in this manner before its final annihilation in *Kama Loka*. This is called *Immortality in Evil*.

The term death has more than one meaning according to the perspective in which it is viewed. What is ordinarily called death is in fact a series of separation of principles, or of sheaths of the soul,

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a transference from objective material existence into the subjective spiritual existence, essence of experiences gathered in the former being assimilated in the latter, cycles after cycles—like the bee gathering honey from many flowers and storing in the hive—culminating, at last, through many cycles of such accumulation and growth, in the transformation of the Ego into a glorious Dhyan Chohan. Siva, the destroying deity, in the Indian pantheon symbolises this progression by cycles: he destroys things under one form but to recall them to life under another more perfect type.

In view of the Enlightened Ones what is ordinarily known as death is not so, but *ignorance*, they say, is verily death—delusion that envelops one who mistakes the not-self to be the self; and that freedom from it through realization of the true and the real is immortality. This tenet of what in truth is death and what immortality is taught in *Sanat Sujatiya* in the *Udyoga Parva* of the *Mahabharata*:

“The wise maintain what is called delusion to be death. I verily call heedlessness death, and likewise I call freedom from heedlessness immortality....Heedlessness develops in men as desire, and afterwards as wrath, and in the shape of delusion. And then travelling in devious paths through egoism, one does not attain to union with the Self. Those who are deluded by it, and who remain under its influence, depart from this world, and there again fall down [into generation]. Then the deities [*i.e.*, the senses] gather around them. And then they undergo death after death....He who, pondering on the Self, destroys the fugitive objects of sense, not even thinking of them through contempt for them, and who, being possessed of knowledge, destroys desires in this way, becomes, as it were, the death of Death itself and swallows it up.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 77-79)

TEACH self-denial and make its practice pleasure, and you can create for the world a destiny more sublime than ever issued from the brain of the wildest dreamer.

—SIR WALTER SCOTT

DHARMA DANDA—A PARABLE

NARENDRA was one small fish in an ocean full of IT (Information Technology) professionals living with his wife and two kids. Like every other of his ilk, he worked ten hours a day and was wedded to his work. However, on weekends he found a modicum of solace in calling into a local Theosophy study class. But when not at work, Narendra found mundane duties incessantly demanding his time and attention. One such was a sapling in the garden that was drooping and needed to be propped up. But Narendra had procrastinated this task for months on end, much to his wife's chagrin. Secretly, Narendra commiserated with this poor sapling that like himself had borne so many fruits that its own trunk was unable to withstand its weight. This sapling was to him the tree of Samsara with its many burdens. Life to him seemed profoundly empty, although seemingly full. And yet he had no time to breathe, let alone tend to this inconsequential sapling in the garden!

Narendra went to bed one ordinary night in deep dejection and immediately fell asleep. Later that night, he was rudely awakened by a friend who said he was flying to Uzbekistan and would take him along if he dared to leave that very minute. Narendra could not tell if he was dreaming but dejected as he was with life, he decided to take a leap of faith and left instantly. He could not remember if he slept on the flight or not but his next recollection was of him standing on an island in the middle of a lake, high up in the mountains.

The lake overflowed in four cardinal directions into four major rivers. An old man accosted him and drew five circles on the sand with his staff. First was empty, the second had a dot, the third a line and the last had a cross. He pointed at the fourth, as if to ask what ought to go there? Narendra thoughtfully drew a Tau. The old man simply smiled, handed him a Rudraksh Mala (a rosary made of Rudraksha beads—a plant of genus *Elaeocarpus*) and left. Narendra wore it and immediately found his scattered mind zooming into a single pointed focus as scattered iron filings would when a strong

magnet is placed amidst them. He sat on a flat rock, not too high nor too low, and immediately fell into a trance like meditation.

He saw his body dissipate and merge into the cosmic center of *Vaishwanara*, his subtle body merge into *Hiranyagarbha* and himself into *Sutratma*. [Note: T. Subba Row in his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* (p. 27) explains that *Vaishvanara* is not to be looked upon merely as a manifested objective world, but as the one physical basis from which the whole objective world starts into existence. Beyond this is *Hiranyagarbha*, which must be looked upon as the basis of the astral world. Beyond it is *Eswara*, which may alternatively be called *Sutratma* and may be looked upon as *Karan sarira* of the Cosmos. Beyond these three is *Parabrahmam*]. He saw how every speck in the universe was connected to every other and how the whole of the universe was represented in himself. He could not say who he was, other than SAT, CHIT and ANANDA. With this inner vision, he saw the old man, as it were, situated in his heart, conveying the light of *Ishwara* from his own heart, over to him. Narendra felt himself linking into this divine chain of *Daiviprakritic transmission*. [Note: *Daiviprakriti* is called *Fohat* in several Buddhist Books. It is the link between objective matter and the subjective thought of *Eswara*, writes T. Subba Row. It is the intelligent medium, the guiding power of manifestation, the “Thought Divine” transmitted and made manifest through Dhyan Chohans, the Architects of the visible world, writes H.P.B.]. He felt solidarity with the whole *Guru-Parampara* and their collective purpose leapt as hungry flames in his heart—serve and save the great orphan, humanity!

This rapturous vision was interrupted by the old man as he took the Rudraksh Mala back from him. Narendra opened his eyes. He could see for the first time. See things as they really are. He looked to the old man as if to enquire, what next? The old man simply handed him his staff. Narendra instantly knew that this is the journey he had to undertake, to help the countless others who were lost and despondent like he was. This staff was his *Dharma Danda* that

would lend him support in this arduous journey where so many are apt to get lost. He set off with his staff, determination and hope in his heart, and descended the mountains.

The pure air of snowy heights slowly gave way to the miasma of human effluence even as he approached the tiny villages at the base of the mountain. As he breathed in this air, the vision dimmed in his memory and the song of life sounded fainter in his heart. He boarded the flight back home and as the plane descended into the din of the metropolis, a heady mixture of human psychic influences hit him like a wall. He could not help but breathe it in. His purpose required him to.

His body that had started off with the vigour of a warrior in the pure air of the mountain top, lost its vitality with every beat of the heart. His mind that was collected as to the point of a needle, was dissipating and scattering with every breath. As he staggered out of the taxi to his front door, he could barely walk, barely think straight. It was as if he had not slept in a month. He placed his staff near the front door, entered his house and collapsed into the bed.

Narendra was started into consciousness by the din of his children getting ready for school and the screams of their mother goading them to complete their morning chores. For a minute, Narendra paused and dimly recollected the dreamy escapade he had last night. But even this moment of reflection was impudently interrupted by an alarm that went off on his phone indicating that he was already late for a meeting with his manager.

He jumped out of bed, quickly got ready as his wife pointedly reminded him that his propensity for late night study of Theosophy was the cause of his tardiness. Without stopping a moment to think, he dashed out of the door and into the streets where the sea of traffic opened up to swallow him as if to welcome the return of a prodigal son.

Meanwhile, back home, the maid called out excitedly to the wife—“Amma! I finally found the perfect staff near the front door with which to prop up the sapling in the garden.” A melancholic

DHARMA DANDA—A PARABLE

hum filled the air with these ethereal words, but alas, none had ears to hear:

Oh self, if thou be still
And vanity if thou could kill
If concern for self be stilled
And that for Humanity kindled
Thou will see beyond sight
Those variegated colours of light
And hear beyond sound
That which in heaven be found
Savour the tasteless
And smell the breathless
When thou shalt have touched that void
Look inside
Of a separate self thou art devoid

LAUGH, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone;
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air;
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.
Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go....
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall....
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die....
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.

—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX
“SOLITUDE”

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Viveka may be described as the spiritual gift of discernment. *Viveka* is that wisdom which helps to differentiate between right and wrong, between the real and the unreal, between the self and the non-self, between the permanent and the impermanent. In Vedanta, *Viveka* means the power of separating the invisible Brahman from the visible world, spirit from matter, truth from untruth, and reality from illusion. For the one who aspires to lead a spiritual life it is essential to cultivate the quality of *Viveka* and constantly engage in discernment all through the life, which helps to remove ignorance or *Avidya*. The quality of discernment, which arises from deep thinking and constant questioning, helps us appreciate the fleeting nature of things. “*Paramahansa*, the mythical swan is credited with the highest degree of *viveka*, because of which it can separate milk from water.” It just goes to show that while it is easy to separate sugar granules from sand as the same are visible to our eyes, it is extremely difficult to separate ignorance from wisdom and reality from *Maya*, or the illusory nature of our physical world.

It is by using the power of *Viveka* that we learn to differentiate between what is pleasurable and what is spiritually beneficial. Shri Shankaracharya in his work *Vivekachudamani* tells his disciples that development of *Viveka* is absolutely necessary to live the spiritual life. It is one of the most important skills for obtaining liberation. Discernment gives us the ability to choose that which feels absolutely right for us, uninfluenced by what others suggest.

In the *Gita*, Krishna teaches Arjuna the discernment of the eternal and temporal realities, and leads him from slavery and obscurity of *avidya* (ignorance) to the freedom and splendour of *jnana* (wisdom). Human beings often find themselves in paradoxical situations in life, making it extremely difficult to choose between right and wrong. Krishna instructed him that when a person is capable of watching everything that happens within and around him dispassionately and acting with an attitude of detachment, he attains equanimity and

liberation. The practice of *Viveka* helps us to discover that body, breath, mind, intellect, thought and feeling, are all changing, and that we should purify our mind and aspire for the Self that never changes, writes B. L. Razdan. (*Bhavan's Journal*, July 16-31, 2024)

Mr. Crosbie explains that true Discrimination distinguishes between *good*, *evil* and *mixed natures*. It proceeds from a universal point of view and understanding, which arises from the knowledge that everything in the manifestation has common divine origin. Everything is an expression of the One Spirit to a greater or lesser degree. We need to understand and to appreciate that all human beings are *inherently* perfectible and that imperfections exist only in the lower *acquired nature*, and that the vices of men are due to ignorance and not due to *innate* wickedness. It is then that we shall begin to gradually acquire patience, fortitude, modesty, mildness and compassion, and know that what makes for evil and destructiveness can be turned into that which makes for good and constructiveness. Hence, instead of condemnation of the wicked and the evil, we would hasten to create opportunities to reform the murderers, rapists, prostitutes or drug-addicts. Mr. Crosbie defines true discrimination as, “the ability to do the *right thing*, at the *right time*, and in the *right place*; on every plane of action.”

The act of discrimination ranges from the simple levels to the subtle and complex levels. Not only does one need the *capacity* to discriminate in subtler matters but also must have the *right basis* for discrimination. Otherwise, discrimination can easily degenerate into partiality and prejudice. We hear of “racial discrimination” and “caste discrimination.”

“Discrimination” may be defined as the faculty or power whose range and value depend entirely upon the knowledge and understanding of the individual using it. We all possess and exercise this faculty of discrimination, but the greater or lesser extent to which we are able to exercise it would be determined by our inner development and the state of knowledge or ignorance. Only knowledge blended with dispassion can give rise to unbiased,

unprejudiced, impartial and clear judgement. In order to acquire true discrimination, we need to move over from blind belief to reason, and from reason to intuition. Shankara defines *Viveka* as discrimination; wisdom or *Buddhi* made active. *Buddhi* is the all-knowing Spiritual Soul, so that when *Manas* is conjoined with *Buddhi*, man becomes omniscient. Spiritual Discrimination leads to the realization that the Eternal is the only reality, all else is evanescent, *i.e.*, ability “to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting.”

For many decades people who wish to end their life with the help of a doctor, also known as Euthanasia or medical assistance in dying (Maid), have travelled to those countries where such assisted dying was permitted. We find that more countries around the world have begun to permit the same. “In Canada, where medical assistance in dying (Maid) became legal in 2016, the government intends to extend eligibility to people whose sole reason for ending their life is mental illness.”

In the episode of “The Conversation Weekly podcast” the situation in Canada was discussed with a leading psychiatrist, Karandeep Sonu Gaiind, who later became the chair of the hospital’s Maid panel, setting up policies around the new law.

He is a vocal opponent of this step. When he began working as a psychiatrist in Canada more than 20 years ago, there were no assisted dying laws on the horizon. He never thought that a doctor would be one day required to help patients to end their life. But all that has changed in the recent past. He did believe that in some cases “we could compassionately offer this pathway for people to avoid a painful death,” but he has been concerned about the expansions or extensions that have happened since.

For instance, in 2021 there was an extension of Maid to include “those whose illness or disability is not necessarily fatal, but is incurable and causes unbearable suffering.” In 2022 there was

proposal to extend Maid to “those suffering solely from mental illness,” known as *psychiatric euthanasia*. The same did not come into force in March 2023, but was delayed until March 2024 and now has been delayed until March 2027. If and when it is permitted, Canada will join the ranks of countries like Belgium, Netherlands and Switzerland, in permitting psychiatric euthanasia.

According to Gaiend, there are “distinct differences between assisted dying for those suffering from physical and mental illness” because it is not easy to predict whether a particular condition is irremediable, or whether the person has a medical condition that will not improve. Thus, for instance, in a disease like cancer, and other medical conditions, especially when they are in advanced stage, their outcome is far more predictable. But, for mental illnesses “we simply cannot make those predictions with any honesty.” Gaiend is also concerned about the reasons people are seeking to end their life. It appears that people are able to get Maid for all sorts of life suffering, which includes things like poverty and lack of access to care, writes Gemma Ware. (*The Conversation*, May 16, 2024)

There are two types of euthanasia. Active euthanasia is killing a patient by active means, such as, injecting a patient with a lethal dose of a drug. Passive euthanasia is intentionally letting a patient die by withholding artificial life support such as a ventilator or feeding tube. Some doctors consider euthanasia or “mercy-killing” as permissible in the case of a patient who is undergoing great agony and is pronounced incurable by a panel of medical experts, provided there is consent of the patient and the next of kin. But there are those who are totally opposed to this practice on the grounds that it is likely to be taken advantage of for criminal purposes. What is powerful for good can also be potent for evil. For instance, it could be wrongly used by the heir of the dying man by making a pact with the unscrupulous physician to inherit money or property.

Theosophically, pain needs to be seen in a right perspective by both the patient as well as the attendants. “Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self,” says Mr. Judge. The experience

of natural death and its final lesson, bitter though it be, should not be denied to the reincarnating Ego. The whole subject when viewed in the light of Karma and Rebirth takes on a new angle which is almost completely ignored by the medical and public debate on the issue. By trying to end life, we leave behind unexhausted Karma—which is like leaving a debt unpaid—so that in some future life we will be placed in a similar situation by the unerring law of Karma, till the lesson is learnt. It is perhaps an opportunity for the family members also to learn something in attending to a terminally ill patient, and be willing to suffer along with him, helping him in bearing his suffering. H.P.B. writes: “No man...has a right to put an end to his existence simply because it is useless. As well argue the necessity of inciting to suicide all the incurable invalids and cripples who are a constant source of misery to their families.” (*H.P.B. Series No. 15*, p. 34)

Life is difficult and throws challenges. But even in the darkest times there is hope. Joy is present at all times, we just have to recognise it. “Finding joy in the little things can be a game-changer. A smile from a stranger, a beautiful sunrise, the laughter of children, and scores of other little things bring joy to life,” write Jaya Row. We miss out on these joys because either we are too busy chasing after external objects, or preoccupied with worry and anxiety. Our mind tends to focus on something that we do not have. When our mind is focussed on a future achievement, we miss enjoying what we already have. As soon as we get what we wanted, our mind shifts to something else. This goes on endlessly. As a result, we find ourselves always unhappy, miserable and agitated.

The essential prerequisite to finding joy is a calm mind, and ability to enjoy what the present moment offers. Swami Rama Tirtha said, “If you are not happy as you are, where you are, you will never be happy.” We must learn to rejoice in other people’s achievements, rather than remain stressed to earn more money to afford all the

comforts and luxuries. “A calm mind thinks of higher, more fulfilling avenues. As you get anchored in the higher, you become free from lower desires. You evolve spiritually,” writes Jaya Row. (*The Speaking Tree, The Times of India*, June 29, 2024)

The Buddha, the greatest psychologist of our age, asks us to surrender pleasures of little worth in order secure the deep joy or the “real joy,” which is not dependent upon any object. Joys of this world are conditioned, transitory and depend upon external objects or beings. 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. It is that pleasure which is born from the contact of the senses with the objects, which is sweet as the waters of life in the beginning, but is like poison at the end, which the *Gita* (XVIII, 38), describes as *rajasic* pleasure. The pull of *Preyas* keeps us anchored to worldly life with its gross pleasures, whereas the pull of *Shreyas* can take us to higher planes of existence. Even those who possess all that earth life can give are dissatisfied and unhappy, because in pursuing them they lose sight of the needs of their higher nature. We have the answer in *Through the Gates of Gold*: “How can that which is external satisfy or even please the inner man—the thing which reigns within and has no eyes for matter, no hands for touch of objects, no senses with which to apprehend that which is outside its magic walls?”

There is happiness, or joy in appreciating the worth of suffering, going through it and learning from it. There is joy in facing difficulties, in winning over an enemy, in fighting adversities. If we look back in our lives, we find that we experienced deep joy, which came unsought, when we performed a loving deed, or in one way or another tried to promote the happiness of others. There is an eternal bond uniting all human souls, and therefore, in a sense, an individual can hope to attain the “deep joy” only when the whole of humanity has attained happiness.