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- (c) The investigation of the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers latent in man.

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### THE AGENTS OF KARMA

“THERE is no Karma unless there is a being to make it or feel its effects.” Each human being and every creature is under the law of action and reaction. In our daily actions, even the smallest—whether we are conscious of it or not—we become agents of Karma. We become agents for good or evil. Our single word may produce a deep impact on another and change his life forever. We could be the cause of someone's being late for an appointment and thus save him from a calamity. We may kindle the fire of passion and put another on the downward path, or the reverse.

Thoughts are the seeds of Karma. We act, based on our thoughts. Thinking is also action. We may feel that these thoughts vanish but every thought, feeling, word or act leaves an impress on the elementals or “lives,” described as units of energy or points of force. We may say they are the ultimate constituents of the atoms as also of the cells of our body. These “lives” or elementals are the “carriers,” or “messengers” of Karma, because they are the means or instruments through which the law of Karma brings reaction for our action.

We may think that it does not matter if we throw our book down in anger. The fact is that besides physically damaging the book, we also affect the “lives” in the book. It is as if even without our speaking, our anger “talks to” these “lives.” Continually, there are atoms rushing out of the body and being replaced by new atoms. This is true of

every material body. Hence, the atoms and therefore, the “lives” which constitute the book would be released from the form of book to build some other form. Wherever these “lives” are, when we come in contact with them again, they would tend to arouse our anger. The air and space about us are not empty, they are filled with “lives,” which carry the message throughout the universe, and they will bring back the effect of our thoughts, feelings and actions—good or bad, quickly or slowly. These “lives” are inseparably and magnetically connected with the individuals who used them. The highest of the Masters are not exempt from this Law. However, these Great Beings, through their compassion charge the atmosphere with entities, which have the power to produce only good effects. These congeries of “lives,” impressed with our thoughts, feelings and actions, constitute *skandhas* or *samskaras* or attributes. There are five *skandhas* or attributes which determine the nature of the body, mental and emotional make-up, and moral nature of the personality that the Ego takes birth into.

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

*The Secret Doctrine* (I, 122-124) mentions the Cosmic Forces of North, South, East and West, having each a distinct occult property.

There are the four *Maharajas*, described as Regents or Angels, who preside each over one of the four cardinal points and rule over these Cosmic forces. These Beings are also connected with Karma. Karma needs physical and material agents to carry out her decrees, such as the four kinds of winds. Science admits that the four kinds of winds have evil and beneficent influences upon the health of mankind and every living thing. The Roman Catholic doctrine which traces the various public calamities, such as the epidemics of diseases and wars, to the invisible “Messengers from North and West,” is based on the occult philosophy. H.P.B. explains that we produce the cause, which awakens the corresponding powers in the sidereal world. These powers are magnetically attracted to those who produced the causes, by thoughts or actions. Thus, it is not the *Maharajas* who punish or reward, but man himself, who attracts evil and calamity to himself through the individual and collective Karma. The cosmic forces on the invisible plane, and winds on the material plane become agents of Karma, and bring the effects of causes sown by us.

In the article, “Men, Karmic Agents,” Mr. Judge explains the special and technical sense in which the word “karmic agent” is used. He mentions that there are people who are concentrators of the forces, who become instrumental in sudden and quick precipitation of Karma. There are those who are gifted or cursed with this power, by virtue of the kind of life led in the past. Adepts, on the other hand, possess such power of concentrating the karmic forces, by training. This is hinted at in Patanjali’s *Yoga Aphorisms* (Aphorism 36): “When veracity is complete the Yogi becomes the focus for the Karma resulting from all works, good and bad.” It is a well-known tradition in India that when someone meets and talks with an adept, his Karma begins to precipitate faster than usual. There are accounts of people who had met by chance Yogis in the forest and telling them about a friend or a dear one at home, who was critically ill, and then on returning home finding that the illness had disappeared at the very time of the conversation. At other times, meeting with the adept would result in exhausting a lot of unpleasant

karma, once for all. The instance of this is to be found in the story of Centurion's servant and Jesus of Nazareth. The story goes that Centurion, a Roman officer, met Jesus when he entered Capernaum, and begged for help because his servant was sick in bed at home, unable to move and suffering terribly. Jesus offered to go to the officer's house and heal the servant, but the officer said that he was not worthy of having Jesus enter his house. Instead he suggested that Jesus should only give the order and his servant would be well. He said that he was an officer himself and when he commanded his soldiers to do something it was done. Jesus was impressed by this Roman officer's faith. He turned to the crowd and said, "I have not found anyone in Israel with a faith like this." The Roman officer was told, "Go back home. As you have believed, so shall it be." The Centurion returned home and found his servant completely healed.

Col. H. S. Olcott mentions in one of his writings that T. Subba Row told his mother that after meeting H.P.B. "it was as though a storehouse of occult experience, long forgotten, had been suddenly opened to him; recollection of his last preceding birth came in upon him." Also, his knowledge of Sanskrit literature came back to him.

There are also those ordinary people, who have brought from their past lives, the power of concentrating Karma, and they continually bring to other people *sudden* good or bad effects, which would have otherwise spread over many days or years, surfacing in small events of life rather than in one big event. Mr. Judge points out that this should also explain the power of the evil eye. A person with the evil eye, is a Karmic agent, who brings about destruction or harm to a person or a thing by merely looking at them.

However, we should never assume the role of a punisher or reformer, and become agents of Karma for those who offend us. We are not wise enough to know the impact of our suggestion or action, and hence in taking the position of a punisher or a reformer, we only generate bad feelings in others and receive the consequences of the same now or in future. On the other hand, when we encounter

suffering we must consider it our good Karma if we are able to be of help. We should be only too willing to help others, to the best of our ability and knowledge, instead of saying that it is their Karma to suffer.

In the Eleventh Chapter of the *Gita*, shri Krishna tells Arjuna, "I am Time matured, come hither for the destruction of all these creatures." "Time matured" means the completion of cycle, or ripening of karma. It is our action or actions which produce cycles and determine the duration of cycle. One such cycle is the cycle of birth and death. Shri Krishna tells Arjuna that even without him, *i.e.*, even without the intervention of Arjuna all the warriors in the opposing army were going to die. Hence Shri Krishna says, "They have already been slain by me: be thou only the *immediate* agent." This does not mean that life is predestined. Destiny or Fate is the Karma that has ripened, so that its expression cannot be averted or postponed. The Karma that is irreversible may be called fate or destiny. Mr. Judge defines Destiny as, "Karma so strong and overpowering that its action cannot be counteracted by other Karma." The person who understands the working of the Law can predict the future. It is based on this law combined with wisdom that Shri Krishna predicts the death of the warriors, saying that through their past actions they are destined to die. He invites Arjuna to fulfil his obligatory duty as a warrior and destroy unrighteousness, and become a mere instrument for the manifestation of the law. To be an "immediate agent," or an apparent cause, is to act without the feeling of doership. Thus, Arjuna will have to face the consequences of killing the warriors, on the physical plane, but since he did not *initiate* the act of killing, we may say that he will not face the consequences on the moral plane. The same might be true of a soldier who fights and kills the men in the opposite army, only with the intention of protecting his nation and not out of vengeance or with a feeling of animosity.

The hierarchies of intelligent beings, from the highest to the lowest level, called Dhyan Chohans or gods, are supposed to be agents of

Karma. They only carry out the decree of Karma, *i.e.*, bring the universe into existence based on Karma of the Egos in the previous worlds. They are instruments through which the Law manifests. These beings are agents of Karma and will never contravene the law. For instance, *Echoes from the Orient* (pp. 31-32) mentions that there are Masters and Nirmanakayas who “do not, will not and must not interfere with Karma; that is, however *apparently* deserving of help an individual may be, they will not extend it in the manner desired if his Karma does not permit it.” But they are constantly engaged in the far greater task of the betterment of the soul of man and the elevation of the race, which they accomplish through human agents. These wonderful beings have swayed and are shaping even today the destiny of nations through their human agents, such as, pillars of peace and makers of war such as Bismarck, or saviours of nations such as Washington, Lincoln and Grant. It is said that Lincoln always felt that in some way he was to be an instrument for some great work, and the stray utterances of Bismarck suggest that some unknown and unseen impulse was pushing him to whatever good he may have done.

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As THE Upanishads say “the Self shines in all, but in all it does not shine forth.” The Self is in all things, and things are in the Self. Whatever there may be of “shinning” through any form or under any condition, that “shinning” is from and of the Self. If this is recognized and admitted, we must begin to regard all things and beings in that light and act towards them upon that basis; in this way we act for and as the Self, and as we hold to and follow that practice, all ideas, habits and desires that conflict become overcome little by little, until at last we have the supreme power for good that comes with selflessness.

—*Note on the Bhagavad-Gita*

## THE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

THE BIRTH of a baby is not merely the birth of a body. Before birth, the Soul is connected with and attached to the body, and also to a mind, a character and attributes in terms of desires and thoughts, both good and evil—the same that it had created in the past. There is not only physical birth, but also birth on the side of consciousness, of the Soul.

In the ancient world, religious festivals were utilized by the wise teachers to impart knowledge of soul-life to the populace. Such a festival was that of the Winter Solstice, which far antedates the birth of Jesus, later celebrated as Christmas. The Festival of Birth was celebrated by the whole Pagan world, by Rome, Egypt, Persia and other countries, about the time of the winter solstice. The Christmas festival, then, is related not to the body, but to the birth of the Soul.

There are almost infinite gradations in the human family, and the stage of each is measured not by external differences like the colour of the skin or racial characteristics, but by mental perception and moral expression. The only right way to judge the status and stamina of any human Soul is to look for and ascertain the mental perception and moral expression of the individual. These two describe accurately the stage of evolution of any Soul.

The Soul has a series of progressive awakenings, each representing a spiritual rebirth. Self-conscious and deliberate effort, however, is required. The first awakening comes when, after many painful experiences, the Soul recognizes itself as a Soul, morally responsible and desirous of building its own future. However difficult it may be to bring the Soul to that first awakening, it has been done by some, and what has been done by one can be done by all.

Study of the condition through which the body must pass gives a clue to the stages through which the Soul must go. The body lives before birth; similarly, before the Soul is ready to be born from the spiritual point of view there must be conception and some stage

corresponding to the pre-natal condition. This is only an analogy, a correspondence, and must not be carried too far; but the Soul, like the body, must pass through conception, embryonic life and birth.

There are many human beings who have not gone through the stage of conception of the Soul; such are the living-dead. The body, which should be the Temple of a Living God, is ruled by low desires and passions. They are living animals, denying the Soul or oblivious of its existence. They bring on themselves suffering, which finally makes the Soul awaken. An *Avesta* fragment shows the Soul of man after death asking, "Where shall I go, O Ahura Mazda? In what direction shall I turn?" A living man is often in the same plight. It is a cry of inquiry as well as of despair. Nature gives the answer—"Self-reliance." Unless the Soul accepts the answer and looks within, conception will be frustrated.

Probation corresponds to the pre-natal stage. All life is probationary, but only for the awakened Soul are all the vicissitudes and miseries of life consciously recognized as tests and trials. The Soul on probation must keep its own self-discipline and use the knowledge offered by the Wisdom-Religion, which is the Mother of the Embryonic Soul. The period of probation may last many years and even lives, for the effects of wrong actions and motives in the past must be counteracted. This involves suffering, but the results are sure, and every good thought, every deliberate pure word and especially every deliberate self-conscious act of the awakened Soul brings a hundredfold result. Gradually, *Viveka* and *Viraga*, discrimination and dispassion, unfold until the embryonic Soul is ready for Birth.

Theosophy advises us to take advantage of the psycho-spiritual aspects of this season and resolve to colour the coming year with the golden gleam of the Sublime and the Beautiful. So, neither waiting for special opportunities nor creating them, neither looking for special events nor planning to perform special deeds, let us learn to use the daily round and the common task and draw out from them their hidden golden sheen of sublimity and beauty. Every deed,

which under Karma is ours to perform, can be transmuted and thus made to yield these grand qualities. We miss out because the personal self and its machinations intervene. We look behind and we are lost. We look before and pine for what is not; while, by a little dispassion, some ingenuity and confident attempt, we could transform the rigid into the mellow, the dull into the bright.

Just as the great Moment of Choice is made up of many, many moments of small choices, so the real inner awakening follows numerous small awakenings, which result from deliberate effort. These small awakenings are like days—each of which is a manvantara in itself—every morning we are born to a new life. If we would but induce in ourselves the mood of soul-freshness at dawn and sustain it in thought and feeling and by word and deed throughout the day, we should soon experience the vision of the Dawn of the Soul.

But there is another method. We are slaves of hours and days and die as such. When we work in a higher dimension, and not in the three-dimensional time—past, present, future—we learn to make each event a link in the chain of the Eternal Now. It is thus we live on through all changes including the change called death. How many psychological dawns there are for us in a single day! But most of us sleep through them because we are heedless of the Soul within, and hence we remain heedless to the soul of those dawns. Beauty and sublimity repose in each event, but we need Charity and Harmony and Patience and Dispassion and Endurance to feel and to perceive them. The Divine Virtues, the Paramitas, can and should be applied—one, or several, or all of them—to the sweeping of the floor, to the cleaning of the desk, to the keeping of the accounts, to the wishing of good-day to friends and acquaintances as well as to the study and the promulgation of Theosophy.

Let us all reflect upon the truth that "as a day can be coloured, so can a year. The Astral life of the earth is young and strong between Christmas and Easter."

## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

## THE FOOL—III

12. *An evil deed, like newly drawn milk, does not turn at once. Smouldering, like fire covered by ashes, it consumes the fool. (71)*

JUST as newly drawn milk does not turn bad at once, so it is with an evil deed. It may not bring evil consequences at once. We know that some seeds grow quickly while others take years to grow into a tree. Also, if the soil is not appropriate and if the plant does not get the required sunlight, manure and water, it cannot grow. So it is with the results of our actions. Our past actions bring forth result when the circumstances and surroundings are appropriate. It may come immediately or take years or even many lives, but it comes back to us in exact measure. Time does not weaken its force or intensity. The fool who knows not this feels that it is possible to escape from bad consequences of evil action. But the law is that virtue has its own reward and vice its punishment. Every time a person allows himself to do evil, something within him dies and the tendency to repeat the sinful action gets strengthened. The "Voice of Conscience," which admonishes us against evil becomes more and more feeble and eventually it is heard no more. Like the fire covered by ashes, evil consumes the fool.

13. *Whatever knowledge the fool acquires is not worked to advantage. That tarnishes his bright share of past merit and throws his head into disarray as he acts in the present. (72)*

"Difficult it is to hear the true *Dhamma*," says Lord Buddha. But even when one is fortunate to have heard it, one may not be able to derive benefit from it. Such a person is called "a fool" by the Buddha. Often, in such cases, the knowledge acquired is simply a book-knowledge or *panditya*. A foolish person lacks discrimination and the knowledge is misapplied or misunderstood and brings harm.

One may know all the finer details of the teachings or be able to recite the scripture or quote from holy books; but unless the teachings are applied and made a basis of living, they are merely the mental furniture. Such knowledge is called Head-learning, as against the Heart Doctrine. Heart Doctrine is that knowledge which has been woven into the fabric of one's nature. Spiritual insight unfolds when we apply our knowledge of the teachings in daily life. The general law of science is that any faculty which is not used atrophies—be it physical, psychological or mental. Unless we use our special faculties and abilities for the advantage of the soul, we are likely to lose them. Also, there are people who are forever seeking. They move from one religion to another; from one philosophy to another; ever wavering, ever in doubt; rather than applying in life what one has found to be true. Much learning and little thought leads him to confusion and he loses even that which he had gained with effort in the past.

14-15. *Let the fool wish for false reputation, for precedence among the mendicants, for lordship in convents and worship from all folk. "Let both the householders and the monks think that this is done by me. Let them follow my pleasure in what should be done and what should not be done." Such is the wish of the fool and so his desire and pride increase. (73-74)*

16. *One is the way that leads to worldly gain; quite another leads to Nirvana. Let not the Bhikkhu, the follower of the Buddha, having learnt this, seek mundane praise but strive after wisdom. (75)*

The last three verses clearly point out that foolishness of a different kind may exist even among men who have outwardly renounced the world to become *Bhikkus* or mendicants. They have not overcome the subtle desires. They seek praise, reputation, precedence and worship from others. Their knowledge gives them pride and sense of superiority. The real disciple never looks for praise. "The power that a true disciple covets is that which shall make him appear



as nothing in the eyes of men," says *Light on the Path*. The verses refer to the personal idea, of the wish to have one's attainments noted. The power of personality is great and insidious. It retains its hold even when the aspirations and efforts are noble in character. It is the most difficult thing to overcome in our race, where the training is all in accentuation of it. Especially is this so when one is taking a public leading part. Adulation fosters ambition, if the least thought of self remains; the person accepts leadership as something due to him or her, and the faults remain even though changed in direction. "Personality" is the last foe to be conquered, writes Mr. Crosbie in *The Friendly Philosopher*. Therefore, it is not surprising that we have so many self-styled god-men in the world, considering themselves nothing less than an incarnation of divinity. They accept worship from their devoted but ignorant disciples. Many of them even have their statues made for worship by their disciples. But a real Guru never proclaims himself to be one; he does not say: "Behold, I know," but humbly confesses, "Thus have I heard." Pride and Egotism assume subtle form and require watchfulness to detect them. These are some of the by-lanes in which a foolish spiritual aspirant is likely to get lost. In this regard, we find following warnings in *Light on the Path*:

The disciple who undertakes the task, secretly hoping for fame or success, to appear as a teacher and apostle before the world, fails even before his task is attempted, and his hidden hypocrisy poisons his own soul, and the souls of those he touches. He is secretly worshipping himself, and this idolatrous practice must bring its own reward. (p. 45)

Virtue and wisdom are sublime things; but if they create pride and a consciousness of separateness from the rest of humanity in the mind of a man, then they are only the snake of self reappearing in a finer form. At any moment he may put on his grosser shape and sting....(p. 79)

(Concluded)

## ON PERCEIVER AND PERCEPTION

### II

WHEN it is said that the Soul is the Perceiver; it is vision itself, pure and simple and looks directly on ideas, that Perceiver is the Higher *Manas* or the Higher Ego. However, the Higher Ego cannot act directly through the body. Also, the Higher Ego, being part of the essence of the Universal Mind is unconditionally omniscient on its own plane, and *only potentially so on our plane* because it has to act through its *alter ego*—the lower mind or incarnated consciousness. We are unable to appreciate the fact that the Perceiver is *changeless*. This is because we identify the Perceiver with its perceptions. The *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* mentions that at the time of concentration, the Soul or Perceiver is like a spectator without spectacle. But at other times, *i.e.*, as we live the ordinary life, our mind is modified by the object perceived through the senses, and the Perceiver, as it views the object through the mind, also *seems to be altered into that form*. If red light falls on a white marble it will *appear* crimson, though actually it is not so. We identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, and with its conditions and relations, which are also ever-changing. We say, "I am happy, or I am sad," "I am sick, or I am well." These expressions are because of the self-identifying attachment to some forms or conditions which are changing. We were likewise attached to other forms and conditions in the past, and in the future will be attached to another set of forms and conditions. But through all these conditions and forms which are changing continually, there is that in us, the "we," which has remained unchanged and unchanging. "If we can grasp this idea and hold to it, we will have taken first step towards right knowledge and freedom," writes Mr. Crosbie. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 189-190)

Hence, in *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. points out that we must distinguish between a simple feeling of self-consciousness, "I am I," and the complex thought that "I am Mr. X," or "Mrs. Y," which

is personal "I." The personal "I" consists of a bundle of daily experiences strung together by the thread of memory. Our sense of identity or the feeling that "I am myself and no other," when derived from such experiences, lasts only till the memory of these experiences last. However, there is true *individuality*, which is not dependent on these experiences, which is the true Perceiver or Spiritual "I." The Perceiver uses the mind as his *instrument* to comprehend things and natures on the plane upon which it is used. The Perceiver uses the lower mind as his instrument, like the astronomer uses his telescope for acquiring information respecting the heavens. If the telescope is not properly adjusted or is out of focus, there will not be correct perceptions, which in turn leads to wrong action. For correct perception, "the Perceiver must...learn, by experience and through the experience of others like himself with similar instruments, the proper adjustment and focussing of the instrument upon which right perception and action depend," writes Mr. Crosbie. The moment the Perceiver is identified with any perception, right perception becomes difficult. However, the Perceiver learns through experiences. When we say learning, nothing from the outside is added but it is expression of that which is within. For example, what happens to the Higher *Manas* and *Buddhi* of Shakespeare when he writes down his play? Is anything new added? The answer is no. Yet, in a manner of speaking, something is learnt as a result of expression of the ideas into words. The purity of the instrument allows for better and better expression of the Higher Ego.

In other words, the same power of perception is possessed by each one of us. Each human being has the power to perceive and know all things, though at any given time that power may be restricted. What produces this restriction? It is caused by the narrow range of the ideas we adhere to, because those ideas form the basis for our actions. As a result, we are unable to have right understanding of our observations and experiences. Hence, it is said that "proper adjustment and focussing of the instrument" is necessary. The instrument, mind, "is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects."

What we call "our mind" is a number of ideas held by us, and we act in accordance with these ideas, writes Mr. Crosbie. The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real, and "awakes illusion." We say that our perceptions are coloured by our conceptions. We are not able to see things as they are because our mind is covered with the dust of attachment, dust of passions, dust of prejudice and biases. Hence, to clean the mirror or to adjust the instrument implies that we must acquire universal ideas. Thus:

Every human mind is a ray of Soul, and in every incarnated existence that mind carries within itself the Seeds of Wisdom. The weeds of passion, pride and prejudices prevent their sprouting....Men and women do not live; they only exist and go through life; they pass through numerous experiences but fail to learn the lessons. The mind requires the breadth of vision resulting from the assimilation of universal ideas. It also requires the depth and insight born of noble feelings which are impersonal....The human mind is compared to a mirror....The mirror would reflect the light, but the dust of false knowledge, the dirt of passions, the ashes of moral death, are allowed to cover the mirror. (*Living the Life*, pp. 81-82)

We are told that the Perceiver must learn to adjust the instrument through his own experience and from the experiences of others like himself with similar instruments. There is learning from one's own experiences as also from those of the people around us. For some people, nothing is an experience till it happens to them. Learning from another's experience calls for imagination and sympathy. For those who are attentive, an ordinary train journey may become an experience. But for the one lost in his cares, the journey may mean nothing. It is also true of life. When we look at the lives of other people we can learn from their experiences. Learning is a continuous process for a spiritual aspirant. Every situation and every person becomes a teacher. "No man is your enemy: no man is your friend. All alike are your teachers. Your enemy becomes a mystery that



must be solved, even though it take ages: for man must be understood. Your friend becomes a part of yourself, an extension of yourself, a riddle hard to read" (*Light on the Path*, p. 24). It is said that when the lesson is learnt the necessity ceases. Mr. Judge mentions that by set ways of thinking and acting we have formed grooves in our minds. Each mind has a groove which is unwilling to run into the natural groove of another mind. It is like the flanged wheel of an engine, restricted to run on a track of only particular size, but once we take off the flange, it can run on the track of any size. Likewise, general human nature is like the engine with flanged wheels. When we are willing to take off the "flange," our mind is then able to adjust itself to other minds. When we do this we may have the benefit of having lived many lives, because we are able to observe and learn from the life and experiences of others around us by imaginative sympathy. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 70)

*The power to know* does not come from book-study nor from mere philosophy, but from the actual practice of altruism in thought, word and deed. Such a practice purifies the covers of the soul and permits the light to shine into the brain-mind, writes Mr. Judge. *The Voice of the Silence* speaks of "the right perception of existing things, and the knowledge of the non-existent," which means being aware that we are all fragments of the divine. The absence of spiritual discernment is delusion. Delusion is *Moha*, so that the person is convinced that his illusion is right. Delusion seems to be the result of egoism. Some people are self-assertive. In a discussion, when a person finds that his opinion is against the opinion of every other person in the group, then he should be at least ready to analyze whether he was being logical or just plain egoistic. It is possible to avoid delusion. In the Ninth Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna says, "The *deluded* despise me in the human form, being unacquainted with my real nature as Lord of all things." Arjuna, too, was under the same delusion. It is only when he is made to realize that in the heart of every creature there is the Master *Iswara*, that he said that his *moha* or delusion was destroyed and that he had

regained his (*smriti*) memory.

We cannot perceive God as we perceive everything else, because It is Itself the knower, and the knower cannot be the object of its own knowledge. For instance, the finger cannot catch hold of itself or the fire cannot burn itself. In the highest state of *Samadhi*, the perceiver, the perception and the object of perception, all three become one.

*The Bhagavad-Gita* mentions the three qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, of which *sattva* represents light, truth and goodness. Mr. Crosbie explains that each human being has all the three qualities, with predominance of one or other of the qualities, depending on the degree of attraction which each one has for one or other of the qualities. He points out that though the predominant qualities may be *Rajas* or *Tamas* for an individual, *Sattva* is that which seems good to him. For instance, the bee seeks and appreciates the sweetness (honey) in the flower, but is ignorant of the flower's nature or purpose. Each human being may have his own predominant qualities, but *the perceptions of these qualities* depend upon the nature of the perceiver, his understanding and knowledge (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 199). Hence, we say that good and evil are relative terms. What one person perceives to be good, from his limited understanding and knowledge, may be perceived as evil by a more advanced person, with higher knowledge and understanding. "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder," seems to apply even to one's perception of good and evil. There is the story of a man who was leaving his village to settle in another village. At the outskirts of this new village he met a saintly person. On inquiring with the saint as to whether the people of that village were good, the saint asked him whether the people in the village that he left were good. When the man said that they were good, the sage said that *then* he will find the people of this new village also good! We find similar incident in *Mahabharata*. Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, is a person of great integrity and honesty. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, is a person of meanest character. Hence, when

Yudhisthira was asked to find *one* bad person in a gathering, he came back saying, "There is not a single bad person. All are good." When Duryodhana was asked to find *one* good person in the same gathering, he came back saying, "I searched high and low, but could not find a single good person. There are only bad people." It shows that as the person is, the world appears to him to be like himself. However, it also shows extremes in perception. It is good to be honest and upright and try to see good in others, but one must also be able to distinguish between good and bad. Shri Krishna had that discernment, which both Duryodhana and Yudhisthira lacked. We ought to be able to see evil as evil and good as good. Lord Buddha draws attention to the warped psychology, thus:

They who feel shame when there is no cause for shame and they who feel no shame when they ought to be ashamed—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines....They who fear when there is no cause for fear and they who do not fear when they ought to fear—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines....They who discern evil where there is no evil and they who see nothing evil in what is evil—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines. (*The Dhammapada*, verses 316-18)

(Concluded)

WHATEVER accords with the acquired nature of each being, will appear to it as good; whatever obstructs or opposes it, will appear as evil; this being true, it is self-evident that good and evil are not things in themselves, but are appearances due to the attitude of the perceiver towards the things, forms, conditions and circumstances.

—Notes on the *Bhagavad-Gita*

## THE THREE OBLIGATORY DUTIES

### I

Human beings have certain duties of life, which are obligatory. They are prescribed by no god, or by any man or a church. They devolve on man by virtue of the law of life, known from ancient times as *Dharma* in India. Man's *dharma* is to strive constantly to bring his life in this world to accord with his Higher Eternal Self. He is in existence as man for that purpose, and his happiness and progress, individually and collectively, is dependent solely on the fulfilment of this primary duty. Lower kingdoms follow their natural instincts and always act in accordance with the law of life appropriate to them—perform their *dharma*—and evolve by natural impulse. But man has free will to choose and act in whatever manner he thinks it is befitting—whether to do the duties proper to his estate or neglect it; and in either case the consequences follow his actions. In latter case he wastes his life even as he seems to enjoy through gratification of his appetites, but regresses in his soul-life. In the former case he mounts on high in accord with the harmony of life, and becomes more and more a beneficent influence for the good of the world. Great Teachers have always taught mankind to perform obligatory duties by precept and example.

Manu enjoins practice of ten virtues. They should be practiced daily by all men, at all the stages of life, and says that those who study them, and that after having studied conform their lives thereto, reach the supreme condition, and that one who neglects them lives in vain (*Manu*, VI: 91-93). In the *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, the Sage enjoins practice of five ethical practices and says that those are universal great duties obligatory on all men, not confined only to those who practice yoga. Buddha shows that man should restrain his evil thoughts and hasten towards the good, and that if he neglects doing so his mind naturally inclines to delight in evil with dire consequences, because soul in incarnated life is enveloped by *Kama*, desires. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Sri Krishna reviews various systems,

beliefs and religious practices; discusses their relative merits, rejects those which are false, correcting wrong notions in regard to some others, and finally declares three great disciplines as obligatory duties to be performed by all men. Thus:

Among these divided opinions hear my certain decision, O best of Bharatas, upon this matter of disinterested forsaking, which is declared to be of three kinds, O chief of men. Deeds of sacrifice [*Yajna*], of mortification [*Tapas*], and of charity [*Dana*] are not to be abandoned, for they are proper to be performed, and are the purifiers of the wise. But even those works are to be performed after having renounced all selfish interest in them and in their fruits; this, O son of Pritha, is my ultimate and supreme decision. (*Gita*, XVIII)

The three disciplines prescribed are evidently not three separate and distinct practices. They are one, and must be practiced together. To understand and apply the three disciplines in life one has to first of all comprehend their universal basis, and that basis is the Supreme Spirit manifesting in the heart of every creature and every man, as the higher Divine Consciousness. It is also called *Iswara*, whose very being is Sacrifice—*Yajna*—by which the universe comes into manifestation, is sustained and evolves. Self is one, not many, is the constant refrain of the *Gita*. “As a single sun illuminateth the whole world, even so doth the One Spirit illumine every body, O son of Bharata.” (*Gita*, XIII)

It means that the sense of separateness, which is the cause of egotism, is an illusion, and that it is the one radical source of all evil in human life. This profound truth that there is no separateness has to be realized by us by constantly dwelling upon the idea, and thinking and acting on that basis. This vision and conviction of *the true Self* to be *the Self of all* is the foundation on which the three disciplines stand as the practical means by which we may transform that conviction into actual realization. It is the highest ideal, the final goal of man, which we ought to constantly strive to realize. It means

sacrificing the personal idea, and the selfish interests which grow out of it, to the Eternal in our daily lives.

Esoterically, there is no other way, means, or method of sacrificing oneself “to the eternal” than by working and sacrificing oneself to the collective spirit of life, embodied in, and (for us) represented in its highest divine aspect by Humanity alone. (*H.P.B. Series No. 36*, p. 43)

Striving to realize the Eternal then, instead of being an incomprehensible abstraction to our minds, becomes perfectly comprehensible truth of the essential oneness of humanity, and practicing Universal Brotherhood in thought and act as a perfectly practical ideal in daily life.

Constant study and reflection on the nature of the true Self, on Universal Brotherhood, on the Laws of Karma and Reincarnation, and their application to our lives, arouses our intuitive perception to the fact that humanity is formed, spiritually, mentally and physically, of *one* eternal universal essence, and that we are indissolubly bound up with the whole of humanity. We begin to learn the truth that our actions, and their moral and physical results, do not remain confined to us alone but, due to the fact of human solidarity and interdependence, affect, for good or ill, the whole of mankind and all the lower kingdoms of Nature. As one’s perception and appreciation of these universal truths grow a change in one’s attitude to life, relation to fellowmen, motives of action and value system begins to take place—from one of indifference to one of a concern for, and love of, fellowmen, from selfishness to altruism. When conviction of the reality, and far greater importance of the Soul and its inner life over the concerns of the outer transitory personality, deepens, motives of personal self-interest give place to concern for, and devotion to, higher interests of humanity. Of this shift in consciousness of the devotee, Mr. Judge wrote to one of his students:

Rely within your Higher Self, and that gives strength, as Self uses him whom it will. Persevere, and little by little

*new ideals* and thought-forms will drive out the old ones. This is the eternal process. (*Letters that have helped me*, p. 129)

This is Mortification of self (*Tapas*). When the rays of the sun concentrated by means of a lens burn away the object on which they are focused, so do the heat of the fire of higher aspiration kept up steadily over a long time melts, so to speak, and transforms the gross nature of the lower self into a finer and more ethereal one which then begins to respond to the action of the Divine Self within. Then the devotee begins to hear the Inner Voice, the Voice of the Silence, and follows its behests. This act of consigning concerns of personal self, in the course of performance of life's duties, on the altar of Self Impersonal, in the fire of discriminative knowledge that wells up within in progress of time in the disciple's inner consciousness, is Sacrifice—*Yajna*.

A serious reflection along Theosophical lines brings to us the conviction that there is nothing we can in reality claim as our own. How can we claim even our body to be our own? Says Sri Krishna to Arjuna:

These finite bodies, which envelope the souls inhabiting them, are said to belong to Him, the eternal, indestructible, unprovable Spirit, who is in the body; wherefore, O Arjuna, resolve to fight. (*Gita*, II)

The idea of possession is born of the personal idea which we see dissipating before our *eye of understanding* when we contemplate the nature of our true Self. "We" are exiles from higher spheres sojourning here in this world of temporary shadows, in a series of temporary bodies, obtained by our actions done here, alternating between hours of birth and hours of death like a pendulum. Our stay here is probationary, learning and perfecting ourselves through the ages in the school of life for final initiation into complete knowledge of the Oneness of all, or Divinity. Life itself is daily and hourly teaching us the lesson that we can never obtain complete

satisfaction or happiness in persons and things to which we cling, through self-identifying attachment, as our own, which come and go, and that nothing in fact adheres to Self which is Eternal. Mr. Judge puts across to us the right perspective the student should have on life. Thus:

Remember this, that you own not one thing in this world. Your wife is but a gift, your children are but loaned to you. All else is given to you only while you use it wisely. Your body is not yours, for Nature claims it as her property. Do you not think, Oh Man, that it is the height of arrogance for you to sit in judgment upon any other created thing, while you, a beggar, are going about in a borrowed robe? (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 36*, p. 5)

Stagnant water putrefies, causing disease, while flowing water renews and purifies itself, giving life and nourishment wherever it flows. So are our possessions. If we keep them only for our own benefit and enjoyment, they poison our souls, and we finally lose them. To give is to retain, and to withhold is to lose. Mr. Judge shows in his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* that when we renounce all self-concern from our minds and hearts while carrying out the duties of life, placing entire reliance on Higher Self and Karma, *i.e.*, Truth and Justice, we become disbursers of enormous riches. He wrote to one of his pupils, thus:

In every effort you made to lighten another mind and open it to Truth, you were helped yourself. Those pearls you found for another and gave it to him, you really retained for yourself in the act of benevolence. For when one lives thus to help others, he is thereby putting into practice the rule to try and "kill out all sense of separateness," and thus gain little by little in possession of true light. (*Letters that have helped me*, p. 1)

(*To be concluded*)

## ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

A TEACHER it is said, can but point the way. He guides or readjusts, but cannot push or pull the pupil forward, nor pour in vast masses of knowledge. A pupil acquires learning and wisdom by his own efforts. A teacher can provide evidence of fact—the history of past occurrences. In the present, the teacher can show evidence of method, or the laws of relationship. The future is in the hands of the disciple. He has to work on himself and establish his own disciplines if he desires success.

When a pupil seems to go out of line, or encounters a “blank wall,” he may come to the teacher for assistance, in which case a good teacher would first have the pupil review his achievement, place it in as broad a context of experience as is possible to him; then perhaps point to a principle that would serve the pupil to achieve his own readjustment. Efforts to seek, to understand, to correlate, these are the building blocks of self-induced and self-energized progress. One has to desire something to work for it. This orientation of the personal desire requires careful consideration on the part of the pupil, since this will lead him to his self-chosen goal. So in the ancient wisdom of the *Veda* it is said: “Desire first arose in It, which was the primal germ of mind; and which sages, searching with their intellect, have discovered to be the bond which connects Entity with Non-Entity.” (*S.D.*, II, 176)

Each should think over questions deeply, in all their aspects, in order to find the answers for himself. Let us make some observations and ask ourselves some questions based on the Rig-Vedic statement quoted above. It (the SELF of ALL) antecedes “desire.” Then would not “desire” (Kamadeva) be the divine, universal and all-embracing LOVE which unites all beings and creatures into one single family? This is the mysterious connection that links embodied selves to the One SELF (entities to Non-Entity). So, should not a condition of brotherhood be the normal state of affairs, instead of that of fear, doubt and conflict that besets our lives? If all that exists now, exists

because of prior causes, do not such conditions arise because of our mental state of confusion, delusion and ignorance? Each one desires a “way out.” One of these is to secure confidence in the great Law of Karma, eternal Justice, which rules the world with constancy. The disciple ought, then, to avoid anticipating the future. He will get his just due. He cannot avoid it.

A few more aphorisms may help. “Impermanent are all conditioned beings (forms of matter),” said the Buddha, directing our attention thus to that which lies behind “form” and causes it. We do not sense matter at all, but only its phenomena. The atom corresponds to the solar system and to the galaxy; so, too, does man, as he embodies in potency every force and form of the WHOLE. That which is changeable cannot define change. A stable basis for observation is needed. Since we see alternation in space, in time and in motion, something in us has to be fixed, or stable. It is this which records the experience of matter (form) as *instinct*. It is this which records the experience of attraction and repulsion as *feeling*. It is this which records the experience of comprehension, of analogy and correspondence, as *mental action*. It is this which is one with eternal LAW and records its impress as *intuition*. Finally, it is this which we refer to as ATMAN, or IT. This is the great secret of all life. This is why we are asked to “look inward” so that we may see that at the innermost core of our being we are Buddha—all-wise—and be inspired to transmute our nature into that of a Buddha-like individual. This is the goal of all learning—that we may teach our lower nature to recognize the “highest” within as its *guru* and its friend.

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REBELLION against your handicaps gets you nowhere. Self-pity gets you nowhere. One must have the adventurous daring to accept oneself as a bundle of possibilities and undertake the most interesting game in the world—making the most of one’s best.

—HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

**Question:** What is “Divine intervention”? When should one ask for it?

**Answer:** “Divine intervention” is a term for a miracle caused by god’s active involvement in the affairs of the world. Miracles are considered to be performed by breaking the laws of nature. It was believed that order created by God could also be suspended by him. Theosophy points out that “miracles” or seemingly miraculous manifestations may be produced by anyone who knows the occult laws of Nature, without the slightest intervention of God or Devil.

Closely allied to the term “Divine Intervention” is the Latin phrase *deus ex machina* which means “god from the machine.” The term was first used in ancient Greek and Roman drama, and was named for the convention of the god’s appearing in the sky, an effect achieved by means of a crane (Greek: *mēchanē*). In many Greek plays a god appears to solve a crisis by divine intervention. Thus, it is a person or thing that appears or is introduced into a situation suddenly and unexpectedly to provide an artificial or contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty. Since ancient times, the phrase has also been applied to an unexpected saviour or to an improbable event that brings order out of chaos. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

Sometimes while we are in the middle of a hopeless situation and when there seems to be no way out, suddenly, a new factor is added and things begin to change for the better. It could be illness of a loved one or business on the verge of sinking, etc. When no way is found, people sometimes appeal to God to come and take charge of the situation. What may actually happen is that if under karma the relief has to come then things begin to change for the

better and we feel that there is “divine intervention.” In this respect the stories in the *Mahabharata* or in the lives of saints and very holy people indicate the working of the Karma which is difficult to understand or explain. For instance, in the *Mahabharata*, Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava, puts his wife Draupadi at stake in gambling and loses her. As was agreed, Draupadi then becomes the property and slave of the Kauravas. Dussashana, one of the Kaurava princes, then began to disrobe Draupadi and when not a single person in the assembly, including the Pandava princes, came to Draupadi’s rescue, she appealed to Krishna. Immediately Draupadi’s sari started increasing in length as Dussashana continued to pull the sari. The sari seemed to become infinitely long. At last, completely exhausted Dussashana fell down unconscious. We may call this divine intervention, where Shri Krishna almost magically helped Draupadi. However, such intervention is not outside the law of Karma. Draupadi had merited such help because of her past action. The story goes that when Krishna was wounded while fighting Shishupala, a person who had committed several evil acts, Draupadi had rushed to Shri Krishna and bandaged his wound by tearing a piece of her sari. Krishna was very pleased and he had told Draupadi that he would be by her side whenever she called out for Him. Hence, the “divine intervention” at the time of disrobing of Draupadi.

Similarly, there are several stories in the lives of saints where help seems to come, in the most unimaginable manner, because of intense faith and trust of the devotee. There is the story of a Gujarati saint-poet Narsi Mehta, who was extremely poor. When his daughter had to be married and he had no means to meet the expenses, his relatives humiliated him. At the last moment Shri Krishna saved his honour by providing timely help in the form of presents. The legend goes that Krishna Himself came in disguise of a wealthy merchant and honoured a *hundi* (similar to a present-day cheque/draft) issued by Narsi Mehta.

What appears to be divine intervention may be simply the working of the law of Karma, often in a manner that is difficult to



explain. When we seek to be brought out of pain, adversity or difficulty without making effort, through “divine intervention,” we are only trying to dodge the law of Karma. It would be better to do our best in a given situation and leave the rest to the Law. “All things work together for good, for him who loves the Lord,” and we may replace the word “Lord” by “Law.” In a sense, the divine within is always ready to help if we would only turn within. But the help that comes from the inner planes of our being, aids us in meeting the karmic consequences in right manner, and not in escaping them.

Similar divine intervention is seen in the doctrine of Avatar, when collective Karma of the people permit divine beings to take birth in human form. Divine beings take birth to instruct, guide and mould the races of humanity from time to time. A divine being like Krishna comes as an Avatar when wickedness has reached a maximum development. In other words, the bad Karma of the world goes on increasing with the lapse of time and produces at last a creature who is, so to say, the very flower of wickedness. He is not only wicked, but also powerful with knowledge of magic powers. Then an Avatar such as Krishna appears “in visible shape, a man with men,” for the destruction of the wicked and establishment of the righteousness.

**Question:** Human beings possess free will, but we do not seem to exercise it always. Why?

**Answer:** In *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, H.P.B. points out that every person is endowed with self-determining power, which enables him to override circumstances. We observe that when animals of the same species are put under similar circumstances, they will behave in a closely similar manner. But when a few men are placed under the same circumstances, their actions will be as different as their character, i.e., their *psychic individuality*. The “psychic individuality” refers to the *personal* identity, which makes each person different from others. It is the *false* (finite or transitory) *personality* that gives us the feeling of our being a distinct individual as against the *true*

*individuality* or the Reincarnating Ego. It is the personality composed of various *skandhas*, which gives us our peculiar traits, characteristics, temperament, etc. Aldous Huxley mentions in *The Perennial Philosophy* that according to Sheldon, the American psychologist and a physician, every individual is mixture of three physical, and three psychological components, in varying proportion. The three physical components are called endomorphy, mesomorphy and ectomorphy. The three psychological components are called viscerotonic, somatotonic and cerebrotonic. Physiologically, endomorphic people are rounded and soft, mesomorphic tend to be square and muscular and the ectomorphic are thin and fine-boned. Psychologically, the viscerotonic personality consists in being relaxed, comfortable, extroverted; the somatotonic personality consists in being active, dynamic, assertive, aggressive and the cerebrotonic personality is introverted, thoughtful, inhibited and sensitive. We can see that depending on the physical and psychological composition, each individual may respond quite differently to a given situation. Thus, in a dangerous situation, the somatotonic person may respond by charging forward, while the cerebrotonic person may withdraw or sink back. Thus, self-determining power to override circumstances is limited or coloured by the character of the person.

As stated in the *Secret Doctrine*, “There are *external and internal conditions* which affect the determination of our will upon our actions” (I, 639). In other words, the exercise of free will is conditioned or limited by the external circumstances, as well as, the inner capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma. A cow tethered to a pole with a long rope feels she is free to roam anywhere, but the perimeter of the area in which she can move is fixed. Real will or *Spiritual* will belongs to the higher plane. Most of us do not make use of the real “will.” We simply *react*. We do not *respond*. There are fixed moulds of thinking. Instead of *reacting* angrily to criticism, bad behaviour or selfishness, we could always pause and reflect, “Why does he behave the way he does?” When

we are up against a difficult situation or difficult person, instead of our usual reaction of frustration and despair we could always ask, "Why is it that no one else but *I* am put into this situation? Do I have to perhaps learn something from this?" We are not able to do this because mind is caught up in passions and desires. But when it is able to disconnect itself from lower desires, we are able to exercise free will. Thus:

Mind...or rather its lower reflection, which whenever it disconnects itself, for the time being, with *kama*, becomes the guide of the highest mental faculties, and is the organ of the free will in physical man. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 64)

In other words, whenever mind is freed from *kama*, even for a moment, it works on its own plane, becomes an observer and is able to see things objectively. As stated earlier, generally, our choices are influenced by the external and internal conditions, *i.e.*, our likes and dislikes, our biases, our character, our tendencies, our characteristics. For instance, when ice-cream is put on the tongue, the tongue reports that it is cold and sweet, but the mind intervenes and says, "I like it and I want more of it." But when a person is able to disconnect himself from *Kama* for the time being, he can choose not to take a second helping.

Generally our thinking is influenced by our emotions and desires. A distressed mother, trying to find solution, keeps brooding over the problem instead of thinking *rationaly* to arrive at the solution. When mind is disconnected from *kama*, one is able to look at the situation objectively, able to think, reason, evaluate options and exercise free will in making a choice. In addition to disconnecting the mind from *kama*, temporarily, if there is a gradual purification of mind, then the lower *manas* turns to the divine parent for help and guidance, and becomes receptive to higher influences and even flashes of intuition. When mind is purified, personal will is surrendered to the divine will.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

The spiritual path can be described as the journey from being nobody to becoming somebody and finally to being nobody again. Like the honey in a flower or the oil in the infinitesimal mustard, the extraordinary lies in the ordinary. To become aware of it we only need to change our ways of seeing, writes Nandini Murali (*Life Positive*, November 2009). The word "ordinary" stems from the Latin *ordinarius*, which means regular, normal, as also, boring or commonplace. In the Taoist fable, *The Tao of Pooh*, Benjamin Hoff mentions that we can learn from the ordinary everyday events, which have hidden messages for our souls. In the fable, it is the bear Pooh, with his simplicity and harmonious way of living, who epitomises the Taoist ideal of "going with the flow," in contrast to other intellectual animals. The spiritual aspirants tend to seek the extraordinary, waiting for some extraordinary event to take place in future that will overtake the ordinariness of everyday living.

In the process of trying to be perfect, whole and complete, we try to fill the void within from the outside. We seek to fill our emptiness by striving to be somebody. We are afraid of being ordinary and derive our identity from our achievements and possessions. When we try to project a certain kind of image of ourselves, instead of accepting ourselves as we are, we experience great conflict and struggle. We become strangers to ourselves, writes G. L. Sampooran, psychologist and healer. The spiritual quest is all about being comfortable with our ordinariness, and that quest is all about discovering the joy of being oneself. People who have accepted their ordinariness are loved for their simplicity, openness and unpretentiousness. The fear of being ordinary is dispelled the moment we begin to become aware of our true identity and realize that we are not the body, mind, emotions, thoughts, but we are the Spiritual Self. "If each identifies with the spirit within, then each of us is special and ordinary at the same time. If indeed I AM spirit, then I am neither ordinary nor its opposite. I just AM. We are an expression of

Spirit. An orange tree does not get confused and strive to be an apple tree. Why humans?" writes Jasmine Bharathan, therapist and healer. We need to surrender the false sense of self. Paradoxically, when people are completely ordinary and unassuming, and have learnt to be themselves, the world sees them as "different" and at times even as "extraordinary." When we are truly ordinary we are inclusive in our approach to life and people and it emphasizes our interconnectedness and interdependence. "The spiritual quest is a journey from fear of being ordinary to complete acceptance of one's ordinariness. To be great is to be truly ordinary!" writes Murli.

We tend to derive our identity from what surrounds our true Self, *i.e.*, our body, ideas, feelings, education, etc. This derived sense of self could be extremely fragile, requiring continual maintenance, nurturing and defending. To bolster the sense of identity we gather possessions. Our identity is often measured in terms of houses, cars, television sets, furniture and paintings. We fear physical death because it implies separation from everything that we depend upon for a sense of self. "Your only true greatness lies in your inner true self and it is not desirous of obtaining the applause of others," says Mr. Judge.

Writes Mr. Judge: How shall we be proud when we are so small [in our personal nature]? How shall we be humble when we are so great [in our divine nature]? Each one of us is potentially divine, having the powers to make, sustain and remake. A truly extraordinary person is one in whom there is manifestation of the power and glory of the divine self. In geniuses, who we describe as extraordinary persons, the vehicle or brain-consciousness becomes fit to receive and manifest *from within outwardly* the light of the real, *Inner* man, explains H.P.B.

In *Tao Te King* Lao Tzu expresses well the paradox hidden in true greatness, by saying that he who is great must make humility his base. The Sage is "free from self-display, therefore he shines forth; from self-assertion, therefore he is distinguished; from self-glorification, therefore he has merit; from self-exaltation, therefore

he rises superior to all." Says *Light on the Path*: "And that power which the disciple shall covet is that which shall make him appear as nothing in the eyes of men."

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In 1888 an Egyptian farmer digging in the sand near the village of Istabl Antar uncovered a mass grave consisting of thousands of mummified bodies of cats. There are many such sacred sites throughout Egypt from which thousands of mummified animals were dug up, for material gains. However, now, archaeology has become a science providing insight into traditions and customs of ancient people. Regarding animal mummification it is stated that in about 2950 B.C., kings of the first dynasty were buried at Abydos with dogs, lions and donkeys, and then some 2500 years later some of the common men also seem to be buried with their pets. One of the reasons for burying mummified animals (often pets), among other personal items, has been attributed to the belief among the ancient Egyptians that all the personal belongings of the dead would be magically available to them after death. At times, mummified animals were provisions for the dead, such as, best cuts of beef, geese and pigeons were salted, dried and wrapped in linen, so that the dead would get to eat these after death. Some animals were mummified because they were the living representatives of a god. Apis bull was considered to be one of the most revered animals in all of ancient Egypt, symbolizing strength and virility. Apis was closely linked to the all-powerful king, and was part animal, part god. He was "chosen for veneration because of his unusual set of markings: a white triangle on his forehead, white winged patterns on his shoulders and rump, a scarab silhouette on his tongue, and double hairs at the end of his tail....When he died his divine essence was believed to move on to another bull," writes A. R. Williams (*National Geographic*, November 2009). Bulls were worshipped at Armant and Heliopolis, fish at Esna, rams at Elephantine Island, crocodiles

at Kom Ombo. Likewise, there have been ibis mummies, which probably represented Thoth, the god of wisdom and writing, as also Anubis, the guardian of the dead. Crocodiles became symbols of Sobek, a water god of fertility, and were also regarded as having the ability to foretell because they instinctively laid their eggs at the heights, where they would be unaffected by the annual flood in the river Nile, says Egyptologist Salima Ikram.

*Isis Unveiled* mentions that Egypt is called the birthplace and cradle of chemistry. The art of making linen and fine fabrics was one of their branches of knowledge. The linen of Egypt was famous throughout the world. The mummies are all wrapped in it and the linen is beautifully preserved. Regarding the mystery of mummification not much is known. According to one view, the dead body was considered to be an earthly home for the soul and therefore, had to be preserved. The inevitable decay of the bodies was therefore recognized as a disaster that would, if uncorrected, prevent the deceased from achieving eternal life. As a result, the whole art and science of mortuary was perfected through experimentation over generations and its secret was passed from father to son.

Ganesa is the Hindu equivalent of Egyptian deities—Thoth-Hermes, Anubis and Hermanubis. Ganesa, as well as the Egyptian equivalent deities, have animal head and body of man, which refers to that point in evolution when man was man only in form but no better than an animal. It may be the reminder that the Hermaphrodite man separated into sexes and being devoid of mind, imitated animals and uniting with huge she-animals (unnatural union), gave rise to Anthropoid Apes. Anubis, the Egyptian god of generation, is represented with the head of an animal, a dog or a jackal. As for Thoth [Hermes], we have:

He is the god of wisdom. He is the recorder and the judge. His ibis-head, the pen and tablet of the celestial scribe, who records the thoughts, words and deeds of men, and weighs them in the balance, liken him to the type of esoteric

*Lipikas*. He is the lunar god of the first dynasties, the master of cynocephalus—the dog-headed ape who stood in Egypt as a living symbol and remembrance of the Third Root-Race....Thoth carries the serpent-rod, emblem of wisdom....He is the Greek Hermes....Hermes was the serpent itself in a mystical sense. But he is the foe of the bad serpent, for the ibis devoured the snakes of Egypt. (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

The mysterious beings called *Manasputras*, who gave the light of mind to man, preside over the constellation Capricornus, Makara, or “Crocodile” in India as in Egypt (*S.D.*, I, 233). Moreover, “The crocodile is the Egyptian dragon [symbol of an Initiate]. It was the dual symbol of Heaven and Earth, of Sun and Moon, and was made sacred in consequence of its amphibious nature, to Osiris and Isis” (*S.D.*, I, 409). There is universal adoration of the cow and bull, “one the productive, the other the generative power in Nature: symbols connected with both the Solar and Cosmic deities.” (*S.D.*, I, 67)

Recent studies have shown that between 20 and 25 per cent of the population are procrastinators. Psychologists define procrastination as a gap between intention and action. Laziness involves lack of desire. In procrastination the desire to start the work is there, but that desire loses out to our tendency to delay. That delay is caused because we prefer to do something else which is seemingly more rewarding. Procrastination is seen to be rooted in impulsiveness, where the mind is distracted by more interesting things in one’s surroundings, instead of pursuing a task which promises long term reward. Procrastination is an act of omission that could lead to our biggest regrets in life. Even indecision and inaction are really decision and action, observes Canadian psychologist Timothy Pynchyl. Like overspending and overeating, procrastination has serious consequences in many domains of our lives. At work, it

undermines teamwork and threatens both job performance and job security. How likely are we to delay the task depends on our confidence to do that task, how important we consider that task, as also on how easily we are distracted, writes Steven Kotler. We are given four tips to end procrastination, which include forming a concrete mental image of the goal we are trying to achieve, as though it were happening in the present. For instance, a person who is procrastinating on saving on the retirement might vividly imagine himself/herself living on their potential retirement savings. We must resist the temptation of giving in to the immediate short-term gain, acknowledge the negative emotions of fear and anxiety and motivate ourselves to begin the work, focussing on the long-term goal. One must reduce uncertainty and distractions. We may resort to mindfulness meditation and learn to keep focussed attention on the task, which can help to reduce procrastination by strengthening self-regulation. (*Psychology Today*, September-October, 2009)

Procrastination is the thief of time. Procrastination means delay in action. It is said that justice delayed is justice denied. Often, on account of procrastination we miss a good opportunity, which may not come our way again. A Master of Wisdom writes that "it is by doing noble actions and not by determining that they shall be done, that the fruits of meritorious actions are reaped." Procrastination may often stem from sheer laziness or sloth and it could be a deadly foe of the spiritual aspirant. A Master of Wisdom writes that self-purification is a slow process, stretching over days, months, years, or rather, over a series of life-times. But it must be begun as soon as possible. "The later a man begins the living of a higher life, the longer must be his period of probation for he has to undo the effects of years spent in objects diametrically opposed to the real goal. The more strenuous one's efforts and the brighter the result of his work, the nearer he comes to the Threshold." We delay the living of the spiritual life because it is easier to carry on along the beaten path, swimming along the stream, instead of against it.

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