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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

THE annual festival of Christmas is celebrated all over Christendom on the 25th of December. On this day, Jesus of Nazareth is said to have been born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem. At a simple level, Christmas is supposed to be the festival that emphasizes the spirit of giving. But do we really see that? Even the exchange of gifts has become customary, more of a social obligation—giving hardly any pleasure to the giver or receiver. H.P.B. reminds us that each one of us is endowed with a magnetic potentiality, which, when helped by a sincere and indomitable will, becomes a most effective lever for weal or woe. Hence, if we only send out sincere thoughts, such as “Peace and goodwill to all,” it will benefit the whole of creation. These sentiments are expressed more and more by some of the modern Christian writers. Oren Arnold makes some Christmas gift suggestions: “To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect.”

In the article “Spiritual Gifts and Their Attainment” in *Vernal Blooms*, Mr. Judge says that the term “Spiritual gifts” was coined by St. Paul, an apostle, adept and initiate. In his first letter to the Corinthians (Ch. 12:1-10), he writes about spiritual gifts. He says that there are various gifts, but all of them are but expressions of One Spirit or given by One Spirit. To some, the Spirit gives wisdom; to another the word of knowledge; and to some others, faith, healing, working of miracles, speaking of various languages and interpreting

them, etc. But he also asks people to covet the best gifts (Ch. 12, verse 31). Then again, in Ch. 13:13, St. Paul says that there abideth faith, hope and charity; but the greatest of these is charity. The reasons given are that the person with a charitable nature is ready to suffer long, which means he will forgive injury, insults, injustice, etc. Charity is kind, and that person does not envy another who goes ahead of him—he being a fragment of the divine, even he is a portion of himself. Charity is not puffed up, *i.e.*, a charitable person is free from pride. Such a person is not easily provoked, is not going to think evil of another, and does not want anything for himself. Charity loves truth, trusts people and things, and hopes for the good to come.

What exactly *is* a gift? A gift is something bestowed upon or given to a recipient. In one sense, it is easy to see that all those attainments that are listed as “gifts” by St. Paul are infinitely beyond mere human attainments and therefore must be considered “gifts” of the Divine, and that is what is conveyed by another apostle, James, when he says that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” However, Mr. Judge likens a “gift” to a fruit and shows that it is a more appropriate term to use. He gives the simile of a tree, which has produced nothing but leaves for several years, but finally bears fruit at the appointed season. Thus, “No new gift has been conferred upon it; it has simply reached a stage of development in its natural growth where certain powers, inherent in the tree from the beginning, have an opportunity to assert themselves” (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 30). The same is applicable to human evolution, wherein the powers begin to develop when the human soul has “reached a certain stage.” The first need is “to prepare a right soil for the growing out of the powers of the soul, which are dangerous if they spring up in our present selfish soil” (*The Heart Doctrine*, p. 42). Elsewhere, Mr. Judge states that “time is needed for all growth, and all change, and all development.” In living the Higher Life, there are no gifts; all that is achieved is the result of the self-induced and self-devised ways and means checked by Karma. Even the Adepts are not “gifted” with transcendental powers. The Knowledge and Powers

possessed by them may be regarded as the efflorescence of the profound development of spiritual potentialities, which are the birthright of all men.

When the earnest desire to be better is accompanied by the earnest desire to do good works for humanity, then it brings about growth and progress. But it may not be a continuous growth that is visibly seen. Mr. Crosbie explains spiritual progress by an analogy. There are trees in nature which denude and remain expressionless for a long time, while others continually renew themselves, putting forth flowers, fruits, or leaves. Thus, there seem to be two ways of making spiritual progress. In some cases, the progress is by fits and starts, while in other cases, there is continual progress, with unrelaxed efforts. At times, there might appear to be “growth” and “retardation,” but what appears to be “retardation” is really the process of “solidification.”

There is the story of a person who was fed up with life because nothing exciting or significant was happening in his life. So, he decided to quit life. He went to God to have one last word with Him and asked Him to give one reason why he should not quit. God asked this man to look around and see the fern and bamboo. God said that when He first planted the fern and bamboo seeds and watered them and gave them light, He found that the fern grew quickly and spread across the ground, producing a green cover on the floor. But nothing came from the bamboo seed for the first, second, third, and fourth years, and it was challenging. And yet, He did not quit. Only in the fifth year did a tiny sprout emerge from the earth, and it was small and insignificant as compared to the fern. But in the next six months the bamboo plant grew a hundred feet tall! It had spent all these five years patiently growing its roots, making a solid base, and gathering the strength it needed to survive. Likewise, he was told that all the while when he thought nothing happened, as he struggled, though there was no visible or obvious progress, he was building the foundation for future growth.

A good gardener does not dig out the plant by the roots to see how it is growing. We cannot force the growth of the soul-plant. It may not be large or strong enough to bear fruit when we wish it to, but some day it will, if only we are not anxious and nurture it well. “What is to learn, is to be content, or, rather, resigned to ourselves and our limitations even while striving to get above them....We cannot all at once live up to these high ideals as some others live up to theirs,” writes Mr. Judge.

The yearnings and strivings of the soul that include an aspiration of the soul for spiritual things, the resolve of man to lead a purer life, to help another, the desire for truth, and leading a life of righteousness have first of all come from the Divine within. In that sense, they may be regarded as “gifts.” They are all gifts from the higher or spiritual nature to the lower or human nature. This action of the Higher nature upon the lower nature is reflected in the humane attributes, enumerated by St. Paul, as “love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

An aspiration may be regarded as a strong desire, which one wishes to or is likely to translate into action. The aspiration of the soul for higher, nobler and spiritual things is a gift from our Higher to our Lower nature. But to receive that from the Higher nature, we have to bring our lower nature in line with the Higher nature. Just as the iron bar has to be put in the line of magnetic meridian to be magnetized, so also, when our mind becomes free from worldly thoughts, feelings and desires, it “becomes the guide of the highest mental faculties, and is the organ of the free will in physical man.” We should at once respond to the promptings from our Divine nature. Mr. Judge draws our attention to very simple things, which we must recognize as the promptings of the Divine within. For instance, if something within prompts us to visit a sick person or to visit our neighbour or friend who is in pain or distress, then we must, at once act upon it. If our Higher Nature prompts us to bring about a certain change in our nature, we should at once make a resolve to bring about the change.

It is important to reflect upon the humane attributes enumerated by St. Paul. Long suffering means bearing troubles patiently for a long time. Temperance is moderation or self-restraint. Joy is in the highest sense of “pleasure of greater worth,” or *Shreyas*. Pleasure of little worth is *preyas*, and that is the pleasure we experience when our lower nature is satisfied. But 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, and in fighting adversities. This joy can come, when our lower nature is in proximity to our higher nature. When it unites with the higher nature, we experience *Ananda* or Unconditional Bliss. What is self-restraint? It is an operation of will power. What is will power? It is the force of spirit in action. In stubbornness, determination or ambition, there is misuse of the power of will, and degradation of the power of Spirit. But when we use that power for overcoming the lower nature, then it is Divine Will, which is drawn by pure desire. When desire is made pure, then the Will becomes the sole force which then directs that energy. Meekness is the humble and submissive nature, or gentle nature. What is humility but allowing the lower nature to be subservient to the higher nature. A humble person is one who willingly decides to put aside his pride and strength. A person may bear troubles for a long time out of cowardice. But when it is done positively, one is guided by spiritual stamina. This stamina is the result of having spent many lifetimes in the service of humanity. It can be developed by a person by kind thoughts, unselfish actions and resisting the allurements of the world. What is spiritual energy? It arises when we submit our personal will to the Divine Will, saying, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

The Great Lord once asked all the lesser and greater Gods to bring him from the world of mortals some gift for the land of immortals. They should come back within a year. The year went by, and the Gods gathered together once more. Each had to show something he had brought back as his gift from the lower world.

Rare and precious samples of the enlightened minds and unfolding hearts, tales and stories and records of deeds of unselfish love and devotion, of charity and sacrifice, nobility and virtue, and many and varied instances showing Souls at various stages of their spiritual quest—all were accepted, all gladly admired. But the Lord wished for something Divine. Just then, a little God came running and took out from under his white robes a tiny box and a small leaflet. The box was opened, and within the box was a tear-drop. The little God described it as a tear of true repentance wrung out from the depths of a bleeding and sorrowing heart, an awakened Soul. A heart which has realized its own Divinity and is shocked and horrified to know what a tragedy it has made of life. But with the repentance there is the Resolve to be true to his Divine heritage and to serve and to sacrifice—to be a servant of the Wise Ones, unwaveringly. The Great One smiled and said that it was indeed the rarest of gifts.

“We are all human, and thus weak and sinful,” says Mr. Judge. But we need not remain so. When we sin, we temporarily move away from our divine nature. But whenever we are ready to remedy the wrong and re-establish the broken connection, our Divine nature is delighted. There is the simple but poignant parable of the “lost sheep” in the *Gospel According to St. Luke* (Ch. 15:3-7), bringing out the importance of repentance. Addressing a group of publicans and sinners, Jesus says that if a man had 100 sheep and if he were to lose one, then, he would leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness and go in search of that one sheep. When he finds it, he would carry it on his shoulder and bring it home and rejoice. So also, there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over the 99 just men who need no repentance.

True repentance re-establishes the ruptured communication with the Divine in us so that we can receive necessary guidance to correct ourselves. It also means humbly submitting ourselves to receive the just retribution from the all-merciful Law. True repentance must belong to our deepest nature, which makes us aware of our betrayal of the divine within us. Every time we remain deaf to the “Voice of

Conscience,” or the prompting of the inner God, we crucify the Christos within us. To resurrect the Christ *we* have crucified, we must allow our divine nature to control the terrestrial nature and thus raise ourselves to a spiritual level.

Theosophy traces the roots of the human mind and self-consciousness to the sacrifice of a Celestial Hierarchy of beings known by many names in the Hindu Puranas and other exoteric books. They are the mysterious beings known as *Manasaputras*, Kumaras, or *Agnishwatta* Pitris, who preside over the constellation of Capricornus or Makara, who bestowed the gift of mind on the mindless men. Just as there is a fire locked up in a piece of wood which blazes into flame when struck by lightning, so also the mindless human forms carrying within themselves the fire of mind were touched by the Fire-Fathers or the *Agnishwatta* Pitris, endowing man with self-consciousness and the power to think and choose. There are three aspects of the mind: (1) When involved in desires and passions, the mind is *reactive*, making man an animal-man. (2) When the mind functions on its own plane—thinking and reasoning—it is mind *per se*. (3) When the mind works in conjunction with spiritual nature, it is *creative*—making man divine. Thus, the gift of mind is the most precious gift, which has endowed humanity with the Light of Wisdom and the Power of Compassion, in however veiled a form at present. In our present-day world, Wisdom and Compassion are deadened. Scientific materialism and religious dogmatism have put to sleep man’s divine intuitions. The quote, often attributed to Einstein, says: “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift, and the rational mind a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.” Intuition is considered in Theosophy as “Divine Conscience.” Intuition is the faculty of Spiritual Discrimination or *Buddhi activated*.

No man who loves money, and loves pleasure, and loves fame, also loves mankind, but only he who loves virtue.

—EPICTETUS

FOOD FOR THOUGHT ALL MEN ARE MORTAL—II

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA advises meditation on birth, death, decay, sickness and error. Can we not live a life without meditating on death? Life and death are one of the pairs of opposites in the manifested world. It is difficult to appreciate or understand “good” without “evil,” “pleasure” without “pain,” and “life” without “death.” We are afraid of death because we are identified with the body and the personality, and the physical death implies separation from everything that we depend upon for our sense of “I.” On the other hand, we know that if life were to go on and on without any break, it would be equally agonizing. In the novel, Raymond Fosca realizes that in the two centuries that he lived, he waged wars and built new buildings, but did not achieve anything spectacular, nothing that he could not have achieved in a few years. He comes to the conclusion that those only who must die, are capable of truly loving life, undertaking great works, and running risks. The author suggests that meaningful human existence depends upon the prospect of death and its attendant joys and anguish, without which freedom and action have no value. In fact, a story or a poem must also have a moving and conclusive end. Are we not bored when a television serial drags on endlessly?

Death is only a passage or bridge that takes us to the other side. Death is not dying; it is waking into another life, say the Upanishads. The *Gita* says, “Death is certain to all beings and rebirth to all mortals.” “All that lives must one day die, passing from Nature to Eternity,” writes Shakespeare. Life is related to form, and form must die. The death of a physical form is a necessity. The permanent spiritual aspect in us—the soul—feels imprisoned during life. For the soul, “Death comes as a deliverer and a friend.” Sleep is called the twin brother of death. Sleep is essential for the body to be rested. Our soul is rested in a state after death, called *swarga*, heaven, or *devachan*. In fact, it is said that if an average man returned at once

to another body without passing through this restful and beneficial state, his soul would be completely tired out and also deprived of the needed opportunity for the development of the higher part of his nature.

It is death which can open the door to new life, a new body, a new environment, new experiences and new possibilities. From life to life, man moves on, going through different experiences, learning the lessons and progressing, unfolding his timeless potentialities. There are various stages in the spiritual evolution of man until some experience of life awakens us. It is then that the quest begins. Then comes a realization that it is possible for man to reach the deathless state. It is possible for man to become immortal. It is possible for him to become like Buddha, Jesus, or Shankara—by following in their footsteps. The great ones have attained *Moksha* from the rounds of life and death by their own efforts. The purpose of human evolution is the purification of the mortal self so that more and more of the Spirit may become manifest in the body, while the Soul, united with its spiritual source, may know and realize its own immortality.

Interestingly, there is something like being immortal in “good” and also being immortal in “evil.” In the article, “Death” by Eliphas Levi, we read, “To be immortal in good, one must identify oneself with God; to be immortal in evil, with Satan. These are the two poles of the world of souls...” (*The Theosophist*, October 1881). The good and the pure strive to reach *Nirvana*—the state of *absolute* existence and *absolute* consciousness. The evil and the wicked are caught in the wheel of birth and death, preferring evil over good.

Theosophy teaches that at every rebirth, the Higher Manas sends out a ray to function through the body, and this ray may be called the “incarnated mind.” The incarnated mind, functioning through the body, is in essence, identical with the Higher, Divine Mind, but when it incarnates, it forgets its divine origin and becomes of dual nature. The incarnated mind or manas is the personal ego, from which arises the feeling of personal “I” or personal Identity, of being Mr. X or Miss Y. The incarnated mind can choose to turn towards

the higher, divine aspect or gravitate towards *Kama* or passions and desires. That aspect of the mind which clings to *Kama* is dissipated with it in *Kama-Loka* after death. We lose a portion of the incarnated Manas at the end of every life. However, that aspect of the mind which seeks guidance from the divine nature and listens to the “Voice of Conscience” becomes part of the divine or the Higher Ego. It is called the “aroma” of the personality, which gets assimilated by the Higher Ego and becomes immortal. Thus, in every incarnation, a fresh ray of the manas is launched. In every birth, a portion of the incarnated mind that was engaged in something noble and spiritual, is assimilated in the Divine Ego. The aspect of the mind which gets entangled in worldly, personal affairs, desires and weaknesses, as well as downright evil and wickedness, is cast away. At the end of every incarnation, a portion of the incarnated mind or soul is lost. In rare cases, the *entire* incarnated mind or personality can be lost when a person persists in choosing the life of evil and wickedness. Such beings are called “lost souls,” who may be said to have become *immortal in evil*. The loss of soul can occur in extremely depraved and wicked people or in crass materialists. H.P.B. speaks of *spiritually dead* people whose only delight is in material and intellectual pleasures without any care for humanity. It is equally rare that the *entire* incarnated mind or personality is so pure as to get merged with and assimilated by the Higher, Divine Ego, and these may be said to have become *immortal in good*. Those who knowingly choose good, life after life, walk the Right-hand Path to reach Adeptship, while those who knowingly choose evil walk the Left-hand Path and become Sorcerers.

H.P.B. mentions that the philosopher’s stone and elixir of life are not just allegorical (applicable at a spiritual level) but real physical realities. The elixir of life can prolong life and renew youth. H.P.B. quotes some writer who expresses that just as nature can rejuvenate herself by drawing upon the source of energy or vitality, man can do the same and can also extract from the earth itself the juice with which to replenish his own forces. If the circulation of fluids in a

man's body is stopped, it can result in stagnation and death. If the alchemists had discovered some chemical compounds that could keep these channels of circulation unclogged, it would prevent decay and death. There are mineral springs, bathing in which is supposed to cure disease and restore physical vigour. Why should there not be chemicals in the bowels of the earth that can restore youth and prolong life? Robert Boyle mentions a wine that was tried on an old woman, producing wonderful results. (*Isis*, I, 502-3)

For ages, men have sought immortality or deathless existence through the “elixir of life.” Little do we realize what horrible results can ensue from such perpetual existence without a proper moral basis of life. Mythologies have shown what happens when powerful but evil men acquire a boon that makes them *almost* immune to death. They spread such terror in the three worlds that finally, a divine being has to fight and destroy them. Hence, the emphasis is on the *quality* of life and not its length. All gods and goddesses are agents of Karmic and Cosmic laws—they cannot contravene the Law. Thus, no boon, which is a form of a blessing, can be granted by contravening the law. It is interesting to note that never is the boon of “immortality” granted to any devotee, because it just does not fit in the framework of the universe. All that is born must die.

We have, as an example, the story of Hiranyakasipu, a Daitya king, who is said to have been slain by Vishnu in his *Narasimha Avatar*. The legend goes that Lord Brahma, pleased by his penance, granted a boon that would make him *as good as immortal*. He was granted the boon that he cannot be killed by man or beast, by devil or God; by night or day; with steel or stone or wood; inside or outside the house. This promise was kept. Vishnu, in the form of half-man and half-lion, laid hold of the Daitya king by the thighs with his teeth and tore him up the middle, sitting on the threshold of the house at twilight!

There are seven *Chiranjivis* or immortal living beings, mentioned in Hinduism, who are to remain alive on this earth through Kali Yuga till its very end. Tradition says that there are seven immortals,

at least for the present *Kalpa*, namely, Ashwatthama, Bali, Vyasa, Hanuman, Vibhisana, Kripa and Parashuram. In Hinduism “immortal” does not mean eternal.

Ashwatthama was the son of Dronacharya. After the last great battle between the Kauravas and Pandavas, Ashwatthama, with two other warriors, Kripacharya and Kritavarman, were the sole survivors of the Kaurava host. They entered the Pandava camp at night and killed five sleeping sons of Pandavas and many other prominent warriors. H.P.B. says, “Ashwatthama has gained an *immortality of infamy*” (*H.P.B. Series No. 35*, p. 43). Since Kripa or Kripacharya was an accomplice in the dastardly act committed by Ashwatthama, H.P.B. says, “Kripa’s association with Ashwatthama will explain the nature of his immortality.”

Bali or Maha Bali stands out for his valour and his charity—two great eternal qualities. It is said that he was trying to trap Laxmi and get her to his kingdom from Vaikuntha to bring prosperity exclusively to *his kingdom*. Vishnu manifested himself in the *Vamana* (Dwarf) *Avatara* (as a little boy) in order to restrain Bali, who was conducting a great sacrifice. As a sacrificial gift, Vishnu asked him to give him land which he could cover in three strides. When Bali consented, Vishnu assumed a huge form, and with his first step, he covered the earth, with the second he covered the Heavens, and for the third step Bali had to allow Vishnu to put his foot on his head. Thereupon, Vishnu, who is also called *Trivikrama*—the Lord of three strides—became extremely pleased with Bali, and he put his foot on Bali’s head and pushed him beneath to *Patala*, the nether region, where Bali was given a kingdom exclusively for himself, which Vishnu himself protected. H.P.B. observes that esoterically, *Patala* represents the earth. Also, “Bali is not an individual properly speaking. The principle denoted by the name will be known when the esoteric meaning of *Trivikrama Avatar* is better comprehended,” writes H.P.B. (*ibid.*, p. 43).

Hanuman is the divine monkey chief, a central figure in the great Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. Hanuman is considered to exemplify

selflessness, courage, devotion, energy, strength and righteous conduct. “*Hanuman* was neither a human being nor a monkey: it is one of the powers of the 7th principle [*Atman*] of man (Rama),” writes H.P.B. (*ibid.*, p. 44)

H.P.B. writes that twenty-eight times the Vedas have been arranged by the great Rishis in the Vaivasvata Manvantara, in the *Dwapara Yuga*, and consequently, there are twenty-eight Vyasas who were all in the form of Veda-Vyasa, who were the Vyasas of their respective eras (*S.D.*, II, 146 fn.). “Vyasa is immortal in his incarnations. Let [us]...count how many Vyasas there have been from the last,” writes H.P.B. (*ibid.*, pp. 43-44)

Parasu-rama literally means “Rama with the axe.” He is known for his hostility to the Kshatriyas because a *Kshatriya* king and his sons had killed his father. For this murder of his father, Parasu-rama vowed vengeance against them and the whole *Kshatriya* race. The *Mahabharata* mentions that thrice seven times, *i.e.*, twenty-one times, Parasu-rama cleared the earth of the *Kshatriyas*. “Parasu-rama’s cruelty made him immortal but he is not supposed to live in flesh and blood now; he is generally stated to have some sort of existence in fire though not necessarily in what a Christian would call ‘hell.’” (*ibid.*, p. 43)

Vibhishana was the younger half-brother of the demon (*Rakshasa*) King Ravana of Lanka. Vibhishana had a *sattvic* (pure) mind and heart. Vibhishana joined Rama’s army and made sure Rama was victorious in the great battle. When Vibhishana attained the position of the King of Lanka, Lord Rama, in his original form of Vishnu is said to have ordered Vibhishana to stay on earth and serve the people and guide them to the path of truth and *Dharma*. H.P.B. explains the immortality of Vibhishana by saying that he is “not a *Rakshasa* really, but the personification of *Sattva-guna*, which is immortal.” (*ibid.*, p. 44).

(Concluded)

B. W. RICHARDSON NERVOUS ETHER—II

OCCULTISM does not agree with Dr. Richardson's observation that ether is generated by the suns and stored and distributed by them. H.P.B. remarks that "The Occult Sciences reverse the statement, and say that it is the sun, and all the suns that are from *it* [Aether], which emanate at the Manvantaric dawn from the Central Sun." She adds that this Aether, whether Akasa is meant by the term or its lower principle, Ether—is septenary. Akasa is Aditi in the allegory and the mother of Marttanda (the sun).

Regarding the origin of the Sun, we read that Aditya or Sun, is the son of Aditi. Aditi is *Mulaprakriti* or Primordial matter. The "curds" or Cosmic matter is the first differentiation of primordial matter, and it is the origin of the Milky Way. The Milky Way is the storehouse of matter from which heavenly bodies such as stars, planets, etc., are formed after several stages of further differentiation. We read in *Transactions* (p. 145) that before becoming suns, matter from the Milky Way passes through a cometary stage and then settles down where conditions are prepared for them by Fohat and then gradually become suns. Moreover, after its formation, 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. (*S.D.*, I, 102)

Theosophy teaches that our physical Sun is the reflection or a *shell* of the *real* Sun or Central Spiritual Sun. The visible sun is only a window cut out in the Cosmic palace. The "willow leaves" are the reservoirs of the solar vital energy, which feeds the entire solar system. It is the *real* sun which generates and stores the vital fluid, which is received back after circulation. This fluid circulates through the solar system, just as the blood circulates through the human body. As the human heart contracts and expands, so does the sun, which contracts rhythmically when the vital fluid returns to it. While the blood circulates through the body and returns to the heart in a second or so, in the case of the sun, it takes ten years for

the vital energy to return to the sun and a whole year to pass through its auricles and ventricles, giving rise to Sun spots every eleventh cyclic year.

Robert Hunt corroborates the occult view that it is the Sun which *is* the storehouse of Vital force, and it is from its never-to-be-fathomed depths that issue those life currents which pervade all Space and also every living thing on earth. Occult philosophy considers life fluid, or Solar vital energy, or Vital force to be the noumenon of electricity, and therefore, when Robert Hunt says that this Vital Force is higher than light, heat, or electricity, and controls them all (*Popular Science Review*, Vol. IV, p. 156), H.P.B. comments that it is absolutely occult. (*S.D.*, I, 531)

We know that One Life is the essence and root of all electric and magnetic phenomena on our manifested plane. Since there is nothing inorganic, we might say that electricity is latent in everything, just as it is latent in amber, and we become aware of it when we provide the conditions necessary for its liberation, *i.e.*, by rubbing it. Electricity exists in everything. (*Transactions*, p. 123)

On p. 81 (*S.D.*, I), we read: “Electricity [is] the ONE Life at the upper rung of Being, and Astral Fluid...at its lowest.” Also, Fohat is ‘Cosmic Electricity,’ and this can be understood if, to the properties of electricity that we know, we add others, including intelligence. Also, it is “the invisible, but too tangible fluid that radiates from the fingers of the healthy magnetizer, for it is Vital Electricity—LIFE itself.” (*S.D.*, I, 338)

This is also the view of Dr. B. W. Richardson, who calls this vital fluid “Nervous Ether.” In his article “Theory of a Nervous Ether” in *Popular Science Review*, Vol. X, he says that in men and animals, the impulses, the will, the sympathies and passions, etc., are manifested through the physical or material body. The movement of the tongue, hands, feet, is in obedience to the impulses, which must be looked upon as initial and independent motions. He says that how these organs act in obedience to the impulses can be explained on the basis of nervous ether. According to the theory of

nervous ether, there exists a refined subtle medium between the molecules of matter that form the nervous organisms, *i.e.*, organisms possessing nerves (or probably it refers to the nervous system consisting of brain, spinal cord, nerves, ganglia, etc.) and all the organic parts of the body. Through this medium, the molecules can move upon each other, one part of the body communicates with other parts, and man receives stimuli from the outer world. While this subtle matter or medium is present, there is life, but when it is universally absent, the body dies. H.P.B. says that in the complete absence of this subtle matter or medium, the whole Solar System would go into *pralaya*.

Dr. Richardson calls this subtle medium “ether” because it is a subtle but material medium. He calls it *nervous* ether because he feels that it is especially connected with nerves and the nervous system but is not confined only to that, as the nerves spread through the body and are connected with all those parts which are concerned with movement and sensibilities. According to him, nervous ether is a direct product from blood and may be looked upon as part of the atmosphere of the blood.

Further, he says that the nervous ether is an elastic medium which pervades the matter of the nerves and can be influenced by simple pressure. For instance, if we press the nerve, we produce numbness. Just as when we press a vein, we affect the flow of blood within the vein, so also, repeated pressing of the nerve, connected with a muscle, causes repeated contractions of the muscle, which shows that there is an actual material agent in the nerve that is affected by simple pressure and which passes on the impulse to the muscle. This agent is the nervous fluid, as was taught by the predecessors.

From what has been given on p. 532 (*S.D.*, I) and footnotes, it appears that the Nervous Ether of Dr. Richardson is the *Liquor vitae* or *Archaeus* of Paracelsus, an essence which is equally distributed in all parts of the human body. H.P.B. points out that Paracelsus did speak about life fluid, which he called *Liquor Vitae* or *Archaeus*. If we turn to the article “Paracelsus—Philosopher” (*Theosophy*, March

1938), we read that Paracelsus gives seven principles, of which the second principle is *Prana* or *Jiva*, which he terms *Liquor Vitae* or *Archaeus*. He also writes that this vital force or *Archaeus* radiates around man as a luminous sphere. It seems to refer to both the magnetic aura and the magnetic fluid.

We must differentiate between auric fluid and auric light. H.P.B. explains that the “auric *light*,” or that which Reichenbach calls *Od*, is a light that surrounds every animate and inanimate object in nature and is but the astral reflection emanating from objects; its particular colour and colours, the combinations and varieties of the latter, denoting the state of the *gunas*, or qualities and characteristics of each special object and subject—the human being’s aura being the strongest of all. (*H.P.B. Series No. 9*, p. 33)

Thus, “auric *light*” seems to refer to the “aura” surrounding the person, which is described as the photosphere of the person, which reflects the inner man. We can look into the aura and know his emotional and moral state. What Reichenbach called “*Od*” is actually the aura of the person, which shows the reflection of the inner man.

We are floating in the ocean of life or *Jiva* that permeates every object on earth. Strictly speaking, *Prana* is breath. Generally, the terms *Prana* and life energy are used to denote that principle which permeates every part of our constitution. It is also suggested that the astral body is the vehicle of *Prana*, and just as blood circulates through the body, life energy or *Pranic* currents circulate in the astral body. The *Pranic* currents circulating in the astral body affect the body and ultimately stream forth as our magnetism in the form of magnetic fluid.

In one sense, *Archaeus* is magnetic fluid, because it has powers of attraction and repulsion. We are told about universal magnetic fluid or Spiritual light which flows from the only magnet, which is the Central Spiritual Sun. All and everything—sun, moon, stars, earth, etc.—are floating in this magnetic fluid and have become magnetic by induction. Hence, minerals, plants, animals, human beings and also sidereal bodies are giving off magnetic emanations.

According to Dr. Richardson, nervous ether is an “animal product.” In different classes of animals, it may differ in physical quality so as to be adapted to the special requirement of the animal, but essentially it plays one part in all animals, and is produced, in all, in the same way. H.P.B. disagrees and points out that nervous ether is not an animal product or produced in the system of an animal or man, but is independent of it. In fact, it is connected with the Sun-Force (*S.D.*, I, 538). Sun-force itself has been described as the *fohatic* force, which is the second principle, *prana*. As mentioned on p. 529 (*S.D.*, I) this sun-force is the primal cause of all life on earth. H.P.B. comments that “this ‘Nervous Ether’ is the lowest principle of the Primordial Essence which is *Life*. It is *animal vitality* diffused in all nature and acting according to the conditions it finds for its activity. It is not an ‘animal product,’ but the living animal, the living flower or plant are *its* products.”

“Nervous Ether” of Dr. Richardson is the Vital Principle. Among a whole lot of materialistic scientists of that time who considered life to be a product of mere interaction of molecules and atoms, Dr. Richardson and de Quatrefages considered this Vital Principle as something distinct from and independent of the organism. It is the vital principle which makes possible molecular combination in a living organism and so also in what is considered to be inorganic matter. According to the occult doctrine, life is the one energy acting, Proteus-like, under the most varied forms. In both organic and inorganic matter, life is present. When life energy is active in the atom, that atom is called organic; when that energy is dormant or latent, that atom is inorganic.

(To be concluded)

BUT pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white, then melts forever.

—ROBERT BURNS

ON ACCEPTING IDEAS—A DIALOGUE

WHY is it that the more we try to convey to another what to us is a self-evident truth, the more we get frustrated? Why do people, instead of seeing the falsity of their own ideas on a subject, try to find fault with the ideas that others present to them?

Friend, you forget a fundamental teaching of Theosophy, namely, that *ideas* are living, vital entities, with a life of their own. All forms, including thought forms, have an “elemental” inhabiting the form. Break the form, and the elemental ceases to be. Ideas are mental forms with a life of their own. When a new idea is suggested to us, the old one gets new vitality, as it were, to fight the new “enemy,” for its own life depends on the destruction of that “enemy.” Remember, all is vibration, and when one vibration strikes another, discord or harmony results. This “war of ideas” is often very subtle. It lasts until the old idea is destroyed or blended with the new.

How should we, then, greet a new idea?

Friend, let us first realize that it is only when we already have an idea on a subject that we do not welcome another idea. Only when the mind is free from preconceived ideas do we welcome new ideas. If we fight against a new idea, it means that the idea we hold itself needs analysis. When we fight the new, we do so by restating the old one. Let us *listen* to the new idea and say, “How does it work? Does it fit the universal basis? Does it clarify difficulties? Does it sound reasonable, or does reason reject it?”

I thought that reason “shuts out man’s spiritual perceptions,” as we read in *Isis Unveiled*. So why should I reason about a new idea?

True, Friend, but without reason we have only feelings, likes and dislikes, to guide us. In the animal, instinct works perfectly, but in our own animal nature where instinct used to function, our own feelings now hold sway, and without the use of the added faculty of mind—reason—we go wrong. Reason is the application of the knowledge we have to new conditions. We may not get true conclusions, but we go a step beyond feeling. We must go beyond

reason and, freeing the mind from Kama, we must seek the Universal Ideas which give us Truth, Harmony, Bliss. Hence, we must seek the Universal frame in which true ideas are fixed. H.P.B. asks us to use the law of analogy all the time, and by this law we can prove whether the new idea fits into the Universal Pattern of Life. Even if we *feel* we have a true idea, we must use our reason to prove that it is true.

Then can I never trust my own opinions? Must I always be changing them? There seems to be no security for me!

Friend, unless we constantly change our opinions, we can never grow in knowledge. An opinion is always personal and never grows into truth. Only full knowledge can bring to us any security, for it is based on universal laws. Hence the great Masters have no two opinions on any subject, for they teach Universal Law. When such knowledge is acquired and assimilated, it leads to realization; it becomes a part of our being. Everything fits into a perfect structure.

Then we must listen carefully to all ideas and see if they are true, if they fit into the pattern.

Friend, our whole life, all manifestation itself, is a pattern. There is the paper—mind—on which we draw the pictures. These must fit into the Greater Mind on which the Archetypal Ideas were etched at the dawn of manifestation. We ourselves make a pattern in life by our actions, feelings, thoughts. All is motion, colour, sound, form. The picture drawn of all our lives must blend in perfect harmony with those archetypal pictures. This makes for perfection—the perfection or harvest of our long line of lives. Personal opinions with their personal colour and form and sound disappear and we become the reflection of the white Light and the Spiritual Sound. Let us then voluntarily close our mind to personal preconceived ideas and opinions and learn to strive towards the True where reason does not function, but where the realization of the True is tested in the light of reason.

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE FRAGMENT ONE—XI

“THE name of Hall the second is the Hall of LEARNING. In it thy Soul will find the blossoms of life, but under every flower a serpent coiled.”

The footnote on page 7 of the *Voice of the Silence* explains that the second hall is the astral region and the psychic world of deceptive sights, and the world of mediums. “It is the great Astral Serpent of Eliphas Levi.” The Astral light is an invisible register, a photographic plate, and a picture gallery. Each thought, word and act makes an image there. Each thought, as it is evolved by a person, coalesces instantly with an elemental and forms an entity. The time for which this entity exists depends upon the intensity of thought and will of the person, and the power of the elemental with which the thought coalesced. The power of the elemental is determined by the class to which the elemental belongs. These factors must play a role in determining the time for which the images of our thoughts last in the astral light. Astral light is the “tablet of the memory” of the animal man. The layers of astral light nearer to the earth are polluted by the base and even wicked thoughts and actions. The images in the astral light throw upon us *suggestions* to repeat the same acts or thoughts. By the law of consubstantiality, we attract these thoughts when we engage in similar thoughts of anger, jealousy, hatred, or greed. At times, we find good people behaving in a manner that is unlike them. The suggestion often comes from the astral light.

Why is the Astral Light compared to the Serpent? The Serpent is the symbol of the Wise Ones. It is also the symbol of the tempter, Satan, who tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Astral Light is at once divine and devilish. Acting like a hypnotizing machine, it influences the mind of man. As the recorder of all our thoughts and deeds, it accumulates causes to strike back, like a serpent coiling up to strike the offender. As the great tablet of the earth, it records every moment and holds them in its grasp, and thus, in one aspect, it is Yama, the judge of the dead, because it is by the

pictures we impress therein that we are judged by Karma. However, the real reason why the Astral Light is compared with a serpent is its wavy motion, which deceives us. Mr. Judge describes its substance as imponderable ether, which permeates every atom of the globe. “Obeying the laws of attraction and repulsion, it vibrates to and fro, making itself now positive and now negative. This gives it a circular motion, which is symbolized by the serpent.” (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 61)

Mr. Judge quotes Shakespeare, who writes: “The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones” (*ibid.*, p. 12). These poetic lines convey that people have a very short memory of the good done by others. But the evil that is done is remembered for a longer time. In the same way, the good done by a person remains impressed on the astral light only for a while and then fades away. But the evil done remains for a longer time, partly because we are in the Kali Yuga, and therefore, evil thoughts and feelings are more naturally indulged in and are powerful, but the good is not done with the same intensity and therefore does not remain long in the astral light. Moreover, the astral is the lower form of material suited for lower forms of thoughts and desires. Just like anything written with chalk on a stone will remain for some time, but if it is carved, it remains for a much longer time, so also, good thoughts and desires do not make a deep impression in the astral, for them, more suitable material is Akasa.

“The astral light gives out nothing but what it has received; that it is the great terrestrial crucible, in which the vile emanations of the earth (moral and physical) upon which the astral light is fed, are all converted into their subtlest essence, and radiated back intensified, thus becoming epidemics—moral, psychic and physical.” (*The Theosophical Glossary*). However, we can make the Astral Light a Divine Uplifter by impressing upon it ennobling thoughts, feelings and actions, which can influence many for good, setting into motion “a new current in the world, whereby great and long-gone *Gnanis*, or wise ones, will be attracted back to incarnate among men here

and there, and bring back the true life and the true practices,” writes Mr. Judge. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 73)

Ordinarily, an evil thought of taking revenge or telling a lie attracts another thought of the same nature and gives us a push in doing that. But our conscience begins to prick. We also have the power of will. Normally, we push aside the evil and settle on a better course. But when we are in our weaker moments, or as Mr. Judge puts it, when our nervous vitality is exhausted, then the force of the thoughts that come from outside has greater power than the power of thoughts produced by us. We are then impelled by outside thoughts. This happens most easily to people who are like sponges, porous and bibulous, ready to absorb every thought preferred by their nature coming from outside. We all have more or less of this quality (*ibid.*, p. 16). When it is displayed to an abnormal extent, we call them sensitives and mediums; they are drawing these thoughts and are hypnotized by the astral light.

A medium is a person who is influenced by others to such an “abnormal extent” as to lose all self-control and has no power of will to regulate his own actions.

Attempts to cultivate clairvoyant faculty, which may involve gazing into a coffee cup or the white of an egg or a glass of water or shining objects in which pictures or images from the astral light get reflected, without proper training of the mind and senses, slowly but surely, lead to passivity, almost beyond recall. The will of the person, says Mr. Judge, is gradually overpowered, and they are under the control of demons and evil elemental spirits. A person who dabbles in the astral realm begins to live on the astral plane and hears and sees things of that plane, *without his control*.

To be a medium is to be attuned to the impressions in the astral light. Seeing in the astral light is done through the astral senses. The astral senses of the medium are accustomed to seeing images and pictures in the astral light, but the mind or Ego is not yet trained to interpret them correctly. For example, though the image on the retina of our eye is inverted, our mind is trained and experienced to reverse

that image and see it correctly. The images are also inverted in the astral light, but the mind and astral senses of the medium are not trained to enable him to differentiate the true from the false. H.P.B. writes:

“A medium is simply one in whose personal Ego, or terrestrial mind (*psyche*), the percentage of ‘astral’ light so preponderates as to impregnate with it their whole physical constitution. Every organ and cell thereby is attuned, so to speak, and subjected to an enormous and abnormal tension. The mind is ever on the plane of, and quite immersed in, that deceptive light [astral light]....His senses, accustomed from his birth...to the unnatural distortions of sights and images tossed on the kaleidoscopic waves of the astral plane—are unable to discern the true from the false.” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, pp. 79-80)

Mediumship developed by “extraneous influences” may include the use of drugs that may induce a trance state, as well as hypnotic and mesmeric trance. In a waking state, we operate on the physical plane, while in a trance state we operate on the astral plane. In a trance state, physical eyes and ears are paralyzed for the time being, and the brain is made to report what is seen and heard by the inner senses. In ancient times, there were prophesying priestesses called Pythia, and H.P.B. describes them as *half-mediums* and *half-magicians*. “Sitting on a tripod of brass placed over a fissure in the ground, through which arose intoxicating vapours, these subterranean exhalations penetrating her whole system produced the prophetic mania.”

In the article, “Delusions of Clairvoyance,” Mr. Judge cautions that the field of clairvoyance is full of delusions. If people could see clearly in the astral light and were able to interpret what they see, they should be able to aid us in discovering absconding criminals. They should be able to point out from where the stolen property could be recovered. We create pictures in the astral light and our aura by our thoughts and imagination. Hence, the picture of the object we have actually seen and the picture of the object we have

only thought about, impressed in our aura or in the astral light, may appear to be the same to an untrained seer. For instance, an anxious mother who vividly imagines her child meeting with a railway accident creates vivid thought-pictures, which are impressed in the astral light. When an untrained seer sees them, he may mistake them for pictures of a real event instead of being products of emotion and imagination. When the seer is not trained, he could project his own ideas onto the picture of a person he sees in the astral light. For instance, when seeing the picture of a person in a distant land, wearing winter clothing, may appear to the untrained seer to be wearing spring clothing because he was thinking about the spring season and spring apparels and sees the distant person in spring clothing.

In the article, “Thoughts on Elementals,” H.P.B. observes that in the astral light there are invisible Beings—conscious, semi-conscious and entirely senseless, which are called by a number of names in different countries. The generic name is “Spirits.” Even those who have developed their astral senses to a certain extent could be mistaken in identifying these denizens and can mistake the denizens of astral light for Gods or Angels. That was the mistake made also by Swedenborg, who is called the great Swedish seer and mystic. “His clairvoyant powers, however, were very remarkable; but they did not go beyond this plane of matter; all that he says of subjective worlds and spiritual beings is evidently far more the outcome of his exuberant fancy, than of his spiritual insight” (*The Theosophical Glossary*). Hence, Mr. Crosbie warns: “Do not try to open up conscious communication with beings on other planes. It is not the time and danger lies that way, because of the power of creating one’s own images, and because of the power and disposition of the dark forces to simulate beings of Light and render futile your efforts to reach the goal. When the materials are ready the Architect will appear, but seek him not; *seek only to be ready.*” (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 14)

(To be continued)

REASON, FAITH AND SCEPTICISM

SCEPTICISM, faith and reason are the innate faculties and qualities of the human mind and are interrelated. They are not only modes of thinking but also mental processes of acquiring knowledge, arriving at conclusions, and forming opinions which shape our attitude and form the basis of action. Inasmuch as our thoughts and actions are productive of far-reaching consequences not only for ourselves individually but for humanity as a whole, of which every individual is an inalienable part, so far as to shape our character and destiny, it is well that we must try to understand the basis of the working of our mind, intellect, and feeling or emotion, and the motives which actuate them.

Reason is a faculty which we use to determine whether claims to knowledge are evidence based, factual, supported by credible testimony, verifiable, logical and just. In Indian philosophy, fundamental elements on which right reasoning depends have been laid down as *perception*, *inference*, and *valid testimony*. Details are not gone into now. These are generally accepted popular forms of proofs which are used in academic engagements and in ordinary life as well, dependent on sense perception, but are insufficient for reasoning on propositions pertaining to metaphysical or noumenal fields of experience. For the latter, other methods of reasoning based on rigorous discipline of scientific morality, concentration, meditation, intuition, spiritual discrimination, analogy and correspondence, unvarying testimony of ages of human experience, etc., are employed. In either fields of human experience, ordinary physical or mystical or metaphysical, no claims to knowledge, or any proposition, ought to be accepted unless established as credible by right reasoning as briefly stated above.

What is called *faith* is another faculty of the human Soul. It is stated in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (chapter 17) that the embodied soul is gifted with faith and that it proceeds from the *Sattva* quality. In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, we read that the *Sattva* quality is the source

of faith of humans and is to be understood as the highest within everyone, which is “the power to understand.” This power of faith is innate in all and is endowed with a most potent creative power (*The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 318, Indian Edition). It is a formidable potency existing in the human will and imagination (*Isis*, I, 384). It is exercised consciously or unconsciously. It is an unlimited power in man, which Jesus illustrates when he said that if one has faith as small as a grain of a mustard seed, one can move mountains and that nothing would be impossible for such (*Matthew*, 17:20). There are countless instances of prodigious cures accomplished by the power of faith in all ages and climes. The instant cure of a woman with a bloody issue after touching the hem of the garment of Jesus was told by him that it was her faith that made her well. Curative powers attributed to magic stones, amulets and charms are intensified a hundredfold by the Will and power of faith of the beneficiary, especially when they are made by one versed in occult lore.

Though the power of faith in humans is almost infinite, it is not availed of by everyone because of the limitation we impose upon it by the ideas and beliefs we hold according to one or the other of the three qualities, or their combinations, which predominates in us, as taught in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Thus, we see that we ourselves shape our own character and fashion our own destiny according as we think and act based on the quality we ourselves have acquired.

This brings us to the relation between faith and reason. If faith is not based on reason, it is then a blind faith; if, on the contrary, it is founded on reason, it is enlightened faith. It is, however, noteworthy that prodigious results may be obtained by strong faith, blind though it may be. Sectarian beliefs are an illustration of blind faith. A sectary is usually unwilling to consider with an open mind what truth other systems of thought may have or examine impartially the validity of the assumptions on which the beliefs of his sect rest.

Blind faith is not confined to religion alone. It may pertain to any system of thought, philosophy, or belief. The system of healing, for instance, by affirmation and denials is believed in and practiced by

many because of the positive results obtained. The mind, in this system, is engaged in wrong thought when denying obvious facts of existence, affirming that all is good and that there is no evil, and achieving apparent cure of ailments. The practitioners are, however, blind to the fact that the very ailment which was flowing out of their psycho-physiological system from the plane of the mind is prevented and pushed back to the mental plane by such mental abstractions, only to recur later with a redoubled force. Acceptance of any system of thought, belief, or practice merely because of the personal advantage and benefit which may result is blind faith. A wise man looks into the epistemological basis of it, evaluates it by applying the criterion of Truth, and will not be carried away by claims of apparent benefits.

True faith is enlightened faith or enlightened belief. H.P.B., in her article on “Mahatmas and Chelas,” points out the meaning of true faith. She says that Mahatmas identify themselves with the Universal Soul, which runs through Humanity and pervades all, which is perceivable by the Higher Manas. “This perception of the *Manas* may be called ‘faith’ which should not be confounded with *blind belief*. ... The true perception of the *Manas* is that enlightened belief, which is the real meaning of the word faith. This belief should at the same time be accompanied by *knowledge*, *i.e.*, experience, for ‘true *knowledge* brings with it faith.’” (*H.P.B. Series No. 27*, p. 11)

Discussion on faith and reason necessarily brings up the question of scepticism. The word comes from the Greek root word *skeptikos*, meaning thoughtful enquiry, *skepsis*, doubt. Claims to knowledge, or statements purported to be true and factual in the absence of credible supportive evidence, would necessarily be received by the thoughtful with scepticism. This is quite common in the ordinary life of social interaction. Trustworthiness is closely related to, and is a component of, scepticism. When trust is lacking in the relationship between individuals or groups, the mutual relationship is vitiated by an attitude of doubt or suspicion.

Scepticism or doubt is an essential part of the scientific temper. Sir Francis Bacon, improving on Aristotelian inductive logic, established the modern scientific method—observation of many particular details pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation, hypothesising the probable general principle or natural law which best explains the phenomenon, which is to be further tested by experiments, more observations, and peer review. Only such propositions that stand the test of the scientific method are accepted as credible. It is essentially empirical science in that only that which stands the test of sensory and mental perception, and reasoning based on these, is accepted as credible. David Hume rejected as evidence tradition, beliefs or customs unless validated by the scientific method. His dictum was, whatever is begun with certainty ends in doubt, and that what begins with doubt may end in certainty.

Healthy scepticism is constructive doubt which questions ideas or propositions or claims, and keeps judgement in abeyance till credible supportive evidence is found. Healthy scepticism is critical thinking. To believe otherwise on blind faith is superstition. There is, on the other side of the question, unhealthy or radical scepticism characterised by a stubborn refusal to consider impartially established evidence or hold on to sweeping negative assumptions or preconceived notions. Negative sceptical attitudes are not confined to sectarian beliefs; even men trained in the scientific method exhibit this defect. Anton Mesmer, for instance, discovered for the Western world the wonderful phenomenon of vital magnetic fluid, which he termed animal magnetism, which everyone is naturally endowed with, and effected extraordinary cures of diseases by its use. The French Academy of Science, entrusted with the verification of the claims, refused to investigate, calling it superstition. Similar was the fate of the great scientist and philosopher Paracelsus. Western evolutionary anthropologists exhibit a bias based on Biblical chronology in dating fossils and ancient artifacts. In the work, “Forbidden Archeology,” by Michael Cremo and Richard L. Thompson is documented numerous instances of it. The phenomenon

of genes jumping from one place to another in a cell, discovered by the Nobel Laureate Barbara McClintock in 1984, was outright rejected by the scientific body as anomalous, but it was finally found valid and accepted after thirty years. (“Gentle Bridges,” by Jeremy W. Hayward and Francisco J. Varela, Shambhala Publications 1992, p. 20)

Unhealthy scepticism or the attitude of doubt in the face of supportive evidence, superstitions, and blind faith are foes of human progress. In the history of the Theosophical Movement, when Mr. A. P. Sinnet proposed to Mahatmas that if they would materialise the London *Times* in India on the same day when it was published in London, he would, with such solid evidence on hand, convince the western world of the reality of occult laws and powers in man. Mahatmas refused to comply with the request on the grounds that it would be counterproductive and hamper human progress. They said, “As for human nature in general, it is the same now as it was a million years ago, prejudice based upon selfishness, a general unwillingness to give up an established order of things for new modes of life and thought...proud and stubborn resistance to truth if it but upsets the previous notions of things: such are the characteristics of the age” (*The Heart Doctrine*, p. 15, Indian edition). They went on to say, “And we know that so long as science has anything to learn, and a shadow of religious dogmatism lingers in the hearts of the multitude, the world’s prejudices have to be conquered step by step, not at a rush” (*ibid.*, p. 16). They pointed out that the number of persons free from ignorant prejudice and religious bigotry is still very small.

One such scientist was Sir William Robert Grove (1811-1896), who truly said: “Science should have neither desires nor prejudices. Truth should be her sole aim (*S.D.*, I, 509). It is an echo of an ancient truism, an Apothegm of Narada: “Never utter these words: ‘I do not know this—therefore it is false.’” “One must study to know, know to understand, understand to judge.” (*Isis*, I, 628)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Nichiren Buddhism teaches that courage is the starting point of all human transformation. Each one of us must cultivate the courage to rise again, to start afresh, and to move forward with hope, because courage helps us to change suffering into growth, stagnation into progress, and despair into hope. Courage is quiet, invincible determination that enables us to take the next step when path ahead seems uncertain. “In Buddhist philosophy, courage is synonymous with fearlessness...an unwavering confidence in the dignity and infinite potential of one’s own life. Often, what stops us can be not the size of the obstacle, but lack of faith in ourselves.” There is the Buddhist parable of the jewel in the Robe wherein a poor man visits a wealthy friend who sews a priceless jewel into the lining of his robe, when he was asleep. This man wanders for many years in hardship, being unaware of the treasure he possessed, till he meets his friend again who shows him the jewel that was hidden all along. The parable reminds us that each one of us carries within a priceless jewel of courage, wisdom, and compassion, which we need to become aware of.

We can express courage in our everyday choices, such as in forgiving someone who has hurt us, choosing optimism in the face of uncertainty, take the first step towards realizing a long-cherished dream. “No matter how wonderful our dreams, how noble our ideals, or how high our hopes, ultimately, we need courage to make them a reality.” We should be able to translate into action our greatest ideas and plans and give expression to our feeling of compassion. “Without action, it is as if they never existed,” writes Daisaku Ikeda. It is important that we live each moment in such a way that it becomes the proof that courage is the most beautiful expression of human spirit, writes Minoru Harada, sixth president of the Soka Gakkai, a global Buddhist movement for peace culture, and education. (*The Speaking Tree, The Times of India*, November 18, 2025)

Courage is not necessarily the absence of fear. It is the ability to

overcome fear by an act of will and doing that which must be done. There are many aspects of courage and all of us manifest some facet or another as we go through life. H.P.B. gives several examples of courage, which she describes as *offering one's life in sacrifice* to philanthropy and duty. Thus, the captain who decides to remain alone on board of a sinking ship so that other lives are saved; or a scientist who continues his research, though fatigued to the point of death, in order to make a discovery for the benefit humanity, all these display a grand and noble impulse which makes them override the instinctive impulse to preserve life.

However, we do not need courage just to protect others and ourselves. We need courage to uphold a moral principle, to defend an innocent person, to bring about social and political reform, and to begin and sustain a spiritual life. One of the qualifications required of a person desiring to be a disciple is: "A courage undaunted in every emergency, even by peril to life."

A spiritual aspirant is asked to follow a double standard. He is told that if the injustice is against *him* then he must let it go. There must be a *courageous endurance of personal injustice*. All the great teachers like Jesus and H.P.B. never defended themselves. *Light on the Path* asks the disciple to surrender all weapons of offence and defense. A *disciple* looks for no such protection, because he realizes the fact that the only sure protection is our karma, our purity, and our Higher Self. If we are pure and if our Karma permits, no harm can come to us. In a sense, it is exhibiting highest faith in the Law of Karma. On the other hand, if he hears an innocent person slandered and does not undertake his defense as he would undertake his own, he is not fit to walk the path of discipleship.

Virya means *Spiritual* courage, and is one of the seven Divine or Transcendental virtues. *Virya* is energy, vigour, driving force, and in Buddhism it means energy in pursuit of the good, *i.e.*, in pursuit of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. *Virya* is defined as "the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal TRUTH, out of the mire of lies terrestrial." To practise virtues, to meditate, to

practise forbearance or patience, we need energy. Our spiritual energy gets drained through negative emotions like fear, hatred, anger, self-pity, envy, anxiety, etc. We stop this waste of energy by cultivating opposite emotion—love instead of hatred, confidence and faith in place of fear. Sexual indulgence and useless talk are the two main avenues through which we waste this spiritual energy.

We need spiritual energy in effecting the transition from being good people to spiritual people. *Virya* is Divine will. We do not have to manufacture this energy. Spiritual Courage is not really so much a muscle power, it is the simple surrender of personal will to the Divine Will. Mortal man can gain courage from his Immortal Spirit.

Research shows that our mindset can shape our lives as it has an impact on our perception, motivation and behaviour. “We think of mindset as a belief about how the world works...that, in turn shapes your interpretations of the world and your response to events, as well as your goals,” says David Yeager at the University of Texas at Austin. Carol Dweck at Stanford University in California was the first to popularise this concept when she was considering people’s beliefs about intelligence affecting academic achievement. People who believe that “your intelligence is something very basic about you that you cannot change very much,” are said to have “fixed mindset.” Those who have a “growth mindset” believe that “no matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.” Dweck’s research showed that people who have “growth mindset” are more likely to persevere after failure and be willing to take on challenges outside their comfort zone.

Psychologists have now uncovered many other mindsets that might affect our health and prosperity. Thus, research on “stress mindsets” has shown that people who believe that stress is enhancing and energising are better able to cope with life’s challenges than those who believe that stress is inherently debilitating. In a series of

studies published in 2022, Yeager found that combining a growth mindset and a “stress-is-enhancing mindset” improved students’ mental health and academic progress better than either alone. Likewise, developing the right kind of optimism can bring its own benefits. However, the researchers do not imply that a positive mindset can work miracles. People with a growth mindset do not believe that anyone with proper motivation and education can become Einstein or Beethoven. However, “they believe that a person’s true potential is unknown (and unknowable).” Thus, having a growth mindset means setting high standards and then working or growing to meet those standards. A positive attitude “can help us to put in the necessary efforts to reach our goals and cope with the tears along the way,” writes David Robson. (*New Scientist*, June 28, 2025)

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 him 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.

Positive thoughts and feelings call forth best efforts so that the thing that seemed impossible moves into the area of the possible. When we make a positive formulation, *it is a direct affirmation of the will*. Once we take the positive mental position saying, “I can do it,” or “it can happen,” the whole of the emotional nature must be brought in perfect harmony with this. *When the desire is intense, the will comes into action*. Mr. Judge says that when you ardently desire to do some good thing, “your strong desire will strike like Vulcan upon other hearts in the world, and suddenly you will find that done, which you had longed to be the doer of.”

We may perhaps consider a person having a fixed mindset also as someone with fixed moulds of thinking, feeling and action. We

have fixed ideas about people. Mr. Judge compares the human mind with the flanged wheel of an engine. He writes, “Each mind has a groove, and is not naturally willing to run in the natural groove of another mind. Hence often comes friction and wrangle.” He remarks that a flanged wheel of an engine can run only on a track of a particular size. If you take off the flange, and make the face of the wheel broader, then it can run on any track. “General human nature is like the engine—it is flanged and runs for a certain size of track—but the occultist, or the would-be one, should take off the flange and have a broad-faced wheel that will accommodate itself to the other mind and nature. Thus, in one life, even, we might have the benefit of many, for the lives of other men are lived beside us unnoticed and unused because we are too broad and flanged in wheel, or too narrow and flanged also.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 70)

In a sense, many of us are having a “fixed” mindset because we give fixed responses to given stimuli. For instance, when someone speaks angrily, we hit back without a moment’s thought, as if we were programmed. To cultivate a “growth” mindset is to learn to *respond* instead of *reacting*. We must learn to become an emotionally positive person who is always willing to see the brighter side of life that enables him to say, “With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.”

Psychologist William James says: “The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude 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, etc. On the other hand, there are those who resist change and are reluctant to leave their “comfort zone.” In the spiritual life, if the aspirant resists change from the fear of the suffering it entails, he invites stagnation, because there cannot be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage, writes H.P.B.

What is in a prayer? Persian mystic Hakin Sanai's advice is, "Don't pester the universe with your begging. Be thankful for all that has been bestowed upon you. Just ask for more opportunities to be grateful to the universe." A prayer is neither entreaty nor imploration, but it is a silent communication with the cosmos, or we might say a silent commune with one's own self. True prayer is not something engaged in to please some "Supreme Being" far away in the firmament to get something; it is a meditative process that connects us with our inner Self. A prayer is not the relegation of self or abnegation of ego. Both are symbols of existence. So, there is no need to try to get rid of the self and ego. Sublimate them to that level so that God himself should ask, "What's your wish?" according to Allama Iqbal, writes Sumit Paul. (*The Speaking Tree, The Economic Times*, November 21, 2025)

Theosophically, true prayer is Will prayer, which is not addressed to some extra-cosmic God with a request for fulfilment of a personal wish or desire. These purely verbal supplications can never reach the divine. In a true prayer, that which prays is the personal self, and that to which the prayer is addressed is the Divine nature or Individuality. Unless these two are consubstantial in nature, no communion can take place. Hence, in Will prayer, there is the need to purify the personal nature so as to bring it nearer to the individuality so that the prayer is answered. It is an unuttered prayer. In order to be answered or heard, a prayer should be pronounced mentally and by one who knows how to make himself heard in silence and must be addressed to one's "Father-in-Secret." Then that prayer acts as a "philosopher's stone" because of the intensity of the aspirations, transmuting finite thoughts and desires so as to be assimilable by the higher nature. In this the inner attitude is, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." For a brief space of time the mind is unfettered and becomes one with the divine, and hence it is as if the potentialities and powers of the divine nature, in terms of will power, become available, and hence our thoughts and desires get translated into action. It is then no longer a prayer but a command.