

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

A SUGGESTION is defined as the psychological process by which one person guides the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of another person. We all possess the power of suggestion, also, all of us are *suggestible*, i.e., capable of being influenced by another, to a greater or a lesser extent. Psychological scientists Maryanne Garry, Robert Michael and Irving Kirsch explore the phenomenon of suggestion in an article, in the journal, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, and observe that deliberate suggestions can influence how people perform on learning or memory tasks, which products they prefer, and how they respond to medicines and treatments, which accounts for the well-known placebo effect. The powerful and pervasive effect of suggestions is attributed to something called “response expectancies.” This implies that if something is suggested or if we expect an outcome, then our thoughts, behaviour and reactions will actually contribute to making that expectation occur.

There are deliberate suggestions, reminding us of our capacities, which in turn influence our expectations of achieving what looked impossible at first, and that in turn influences our action. Placebos are inert pills with no medical properties. They work through the power of belief alone. It is because people believe them to be medicines that can cure, the power of their expectations does all the healing work. There are indirect or non-deliberate suggestions such as wearing a dress of particular colour, or wearing a charm to bring

luck. The influence of suggestions is so far-reaching that Psychological scientist, Maryanne Garry, feels that “if we can harness the power of suggestion, we can improve people’s lives.” Intensive research can show how suggestions may influence medical treatment, criminal investigations, policy decisions and educational processes.

The Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale is a psychological test created by Icelandic psychologist, Gisli Gudjonsson, and is designed to assess levels of interrogative suggestibility. It relies on two different aspects of interrogative suggestibility: it measures how much an interrogated person *yields* to leading questions, as well as how much an interrogated person *shifts* his responses when additional interrogative pressure is applied. These tools help identify those individuals who may be particularly vulnerable to the pressures associated with police interviews and who, as a result, may require extra care during interviewing. They are also used for investigating the socio-psychological processes that influence the levels of interrogative suggestibility.

As Robert Crosbie points out, “As we look the field over, we find that we are all prey to the power of suggestion in every direction.” Like any other power, the power of suggestion can be used in twofold manner: it may be rightly used and then it can prove a blessing; or wrongly, and a curse is created. There is special and technical sense in which the word “suggestion” is used, and it implies *hypnotic suggestion*. Mr. Crosbie explains that “Hypnotism is a modern name for a power known for ages. By means of this power, one who has it and uses it on his fellowmen, paralyzes that channel in the brain of his subject through which the subject, as Ego, operates and controls his brain. This action prevents the subject from receiving any other impressions than those suggested by the operator, in ordinary cases.” Since hypnotism deprives the subject of free will, it has been called Black Magic. Crimes have been committed under such suggestions, the subject being ignorant of the fact that the suggestion of the operator led to and impelled the act.

In the article, “The Signs of the Times,” H.P.B. writes that crimes

have been committed under “suggestion,” divorces have occurred, and husbands have nearly killed their wives. “For indeed, indeed, many will be the unconscious crimes committed, and many will be the victims who will innocently suffer death by hanging and decapitation at the hands of the righteous judges and *too innocent* jurymen, both alike ignorant of the fiendish power of SUGGESTION.” (*Lucifer*, October 1887)

Today, hypnotism is increasingly being used, especially, in the field of medicine, to help patients overcome a variety of mental illnesses. Like most other psychological phenomena, hypnotism is very little understood, even by those who use it for a good purpose. Even when the outcome of submitting oneself to hypnosis may appear to be good, there always remains the possibility that some suggestion or psychic infection that was introduced during the passive state of the subject, can manifest after many years. As against few and dubious advantages, there are immeasurable dangers in this practice.

Often, hypnosis is used in the treatment of deleterious habits. It has been effectively used and has helped the person to overcome alcoholism, insomnia, nail-biting, fear phobias, etc. But, in the process, the person so treated becomes dependent on the hypnotizer. When a habit is overcome by hypnosis, the person has to face the same temptation again, with added handicap/weakness of increased suggestibility. Thus, sooner or later the person has to regain his self-control and learn to overcome the habit himself.

Some doctors have pointed out that hypnotism tends to increase suggestibility and such patients are open to accepting suggestions, both favourable and unfavourable. Hypnotism tends to weaken the will and hence, self-control of the subject. As an English physician put it: “The confirmed and trained hypnotic subject is a maimed individual in mind and body, and is likely at any time to be dangerous to himself and to society.”

It is evident that our lives are based on suggestions, from our parents, teachers, elders, peers, society, religious, scientific, and philosophical books, and so on. One life is not sufficient to acquire

in-depth knowledge of all the fields. What are we to do about these suggestions? We cannot help but follow them. The answer is, we begin by critically analyzing the suggestions by applying our reason and moral sense, combined with heart response. Moreover, these days there is no dearth of magazines, newspapers and television channels which carry experts' opinion and analysis on crucial and burning political, religious and scientific subjects. Having heard or read these diverse views we must arrive at our own judgment. A suggestion in the true sense of the word, should only *suggest*, and not try to impose, to psychologise or convert. Mr. Crosbie says that the Masters of Wisdom have given the Theosophical ideas as a "suggestion," which each one is free to accept or reject, or leave aside and wait till he rises in his own level of perception to appreciate those ideas. Moreover, when the ideas are presented they also provide the means by which we can verify those ideas. "That means is not anyone's authority or endorsement, but in the fact that we can perceive it and test it for ourselves. *The final authority is the man himself*," writes Mr. Crosbie. Thus, for instance, belief in re-birth is not forced upon anyone, but we are given arguments supporting re-birth.

This habit of critically examining every suggestion must be cultivated from childhood. H.P.B. writes, "Children should above all be taught...to think and reason for themselves" so that they may grow up to be unprejudiced, and intellectually and morally *free* individuals. Thus, for instance, when children are encouraged to read classics, in contrast to usual fiction, do we really have the reasons? When a suggestion is made to a child to read classics, we can give them the basis for making such suggestion, which the child can verify for himself, as he begins to read the classics. Some of the reasons why reading of classics is recommended are: they tend to improve language skills, vocabulary, and develop imagination. Classics allow us to go through a variety of human experiences, and a variety of human emotions, by exercising imaginative sympathy. They help develop artistic and scientific temperament as there are several classics with scientific theme.

A suggestion influences or even biases a person positively or negatively. If the suggestion is that getting one's ears pierced is an extremely painful procedure, then we are predisposed to find it so. We are likely to find the new boss a "difficult" person, if before meeting him we have heard our peers say that he is a "peculiar" person. It is amazing how suggestion or opinion of the "many" can lead us to doubt our own first-hand experience. Sometimes the mass opinion could be hypnotizing. There is a *Panchatantra* story of a brahmin who was returning back to his village, carrying a goat on his shoulder, which was presented to him to offer as a sacrifice. On his way home he was seen by three crooks, who were starving and hence worked out a plan to rob the brahmin of that goat. The first crook went ahead of the brahmin and when he saw him approach, he told him that he was carrying a profane dog on his shoulders. When the brahmin had gone a little further, second crook accosted him and told him that he was carrying a dead calf. The brahmin paid no heed, but already his conviction was beginning to weaken. Just then he was approached by a third crook, who said that the brahmin was carrying a donkey. Now the brahmin was convinced that he must be carrying a goblin which was changing shape all the time. He threw the goat on the ground and ran away. In one sense, this illustrates the power of suggestion. It is not easy to hold on to our principles and morals against the hypnotizing influence of the majority in the world that holds contrary views and doctrines.

As student-aspirants work for Theosophy, often against overwhelming odds, the important thing is not how much they achieve, but as Mr. Crosbie says, at times, to stand our ground is in itself a victory. That is because it is very easy to get "brain-washed" like the brahmin of the story. It is very easy to feel disillusioned when others enjoy life or seem to get solutions to their problems by attending a ten-day crash course in spirituality. We begin to wonder if we have made the right choice and come to the right place! "Beware of Change!" cautions the *Voice of the Silence*.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT RIGHT JUDGMENT

CHOOSE, a good straight stick and dip it halfway into some water: the stick will appear to be bent in the middle. But that is an illusion, and if you were to think that the stick was actually bent, your judgment would be wrong. Pull out the stick and you will see that in fact it is still straight.

On the other hand, it is possible for a stick that is actually bent in the middle to appear straight if it is carefully placed in a particular way in the water.

Well, men are often like sticks. If you look at them from a certain angle, you may not see them as straight as they are, and sometimes too, they may have a deceptive appearance and seem straight when they are crooked. That is why you should trust appearances as little as possible and never judge anyone lightly.

In India, a mendicant monk was going across the country asking for alms. In a meadow he met a ram. The furious animal got ready to rush at him, and to do so took a few steps back and lowered his head.

“Ah!” said the monk, “here is a good and intelligent animal. He has recognised that I am a man full of merit, and he is bowing down before me to greet me.”

Just then the ram rushed and knocked the virtuous man to the ground with one blow of its head.

So it can happen that one judges too respectfully and trustingly those who least deserve it. For sometimes there are people who are like the wolf that the good La Fontaine speaks of—the wolf whom the sheep took for the shepherd because it had put on his cape; or else like the ass who was taken at first for a dangerous animal because it had put on a lion’s skin.

* * * * *

But if one can make mistakes like this by trusting to appearances, it more often happens, on the contrary, that one is tempted to make hasty and uncharitable judgments on others. The Shah of Persia,

Ismail Sefevi, had just conquered the land of Khorassan and was returning to his capital. As he was passing by the home of the poet Hatifi, he thought he would visit him. He did not have the patience to go as far as the gate of the house, so great was his desire to see the famous man, that he caught hold of the branch of a tree overhanging the wall, and jumped over the enclosure and into the poet’s garden.

What would you have thought if someone had suddenly entered your house like this? You would probably have taken him for a thief and given him a very poor welcome.

Hatifi did well, not to judge by appearance or according to the first impression of the moment. He gave a warm welcome to his odd visitor. And later he wrote poems on the exploits that the Shah had been so eager to tell him.

In general, nothing is easier than to see in others what is least to their advantage; each one has his faults, to which his neighbours give more attention than he does. But what we should look for in every man, if we do not want to judge him too unjustly, is what is best in him. “If your friend has but one eye,” says the proverb, “look at his good side.”

A friend of yours may seem awkward or slow, and yet be the most hardworking student of the class. And your teacher whom you find strict and severe probably loves you much and desires only your progress. A friend who sometimes seems so boring or so surly to you, may after all be the best friend you have. And how many people who are looked upon as wicked and are treated harshly, carry deep in their hearts something which no one has been able to perceive.

A great wolf was causing terror in the woods and fields around the town of Gubbio, so that the people dared not even venture on the roads. The monster was killing men and animals alike. At last the good Saint Francis faced the frightful creature and subdued him. “Brother Wolf,” Saint Francis told him, “All men hate you. But I

would gladly make peace between you and my friends of Gubbio.” The legend goes that the wolf put his paw in the saint’s hand as a pledge of his good behaviour for the future. However bad the wolf may have seemed, in truth there was something in him which no one had discovered until the saint had called him his brother. In this legend the wolf no doubt represents some great offender, much hated by other men. It is intended to show that even in those who seem lost beyond hope, there still remains some seeds of good that can be awakened with a little love.

In the cheerless land of Guiana, which is so fatal to Europeans, prisons have been established for convicts sentenced to hard labour or transportation. Some years ago, a military warder was taking a working party to Cayenne when, by accident, he fell into the harbour just as the tide was coming in....At full tide, the harbour is flooded by extremely swift currents, bringing the sharks. The warder who had fallen into the water was in a critical situation, for he hardly knew how to swim. Every second that passed increased his danger of being snapped up by one of these voracious creatures. Suddenly one of the convicts, heeding only his noble feelings, threw himself into the water. He was able to catch hold of the warder and, after a great effort, to save him.

This man was a criminal, and normally those who saw him pass by in his convict’s uniform, would turn away in contempt, thinking him unworthy of a single glance or word of compassion. And yet their judgment was quite unjust, for in him there was compassion. In spite of all his faults, there was nobility in his heart: he was ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of the very man who was bound by duty to never show him any mercy.

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

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

THE MEANING OF PAIN—III

THERE ARE two kinds of pain; there is the legitimate, necessary, beneficial pain, which comes with the natural growth and evolution, which should be welcome pain, and we should be able to understand its place and its purpose in our own growth, and be able to learn from it. The child has to go through the teething process which is a very painful side in his development. Likewise, boys and girls whose bodies are trying to grow, impelled by the very power within themselves, experience, what is known as “growing” pains. The child, when he must leave behind his toys and begin to occupy himself with more serious things, through the transition stage, naturally experiences a certain amount of pain and suffering, but it is natural and necessary for its own growth and progress. When a person leaves *tamas* behind, and begins to energise himself to become active, he passes through the period which brings him sorrow and pain, but which in the end, serves the purpose of his evolution, and so it is throughout the great ladder of growth.

But the other type of pain, the pain which comes upon us because we have not co-operated with nature and fulfilled the very law of our own growth, that pain which arises as a result of the efforts that we have made in the wrong direction, is a very different kind of pain. When we experience, for instance, giving way to our own evil temper or to any of our own weaknesses, we know that it causes our own suffering and the suffering of those around us. It is unnecessary suffering. We always are the free agents, choosers, and we can, if we try to understand nature and ourselves, avoid that particular type of pain throughout our growth. We experience both types of suffering. This is true of all beings except the two extremes, except those who have fallen so low that now they are going downwards, and those beings who have finished the complete cyclic process and evolution of humanity, and have thereby overcome both classes of pain, because they stand beyond the three qualities. Except

these two classes, we are all in the ascending march, encountering success, and sometimes failure, but failure is no failure if we continue to persevere, to energize ourselves, to move in the *right* direction.

This discourse becomes, when we understand this great proposition, a very practical one. It gives us very definite advice, for in showing to us what the tendencies of the infernal natures are, it gives the opportunity to begin to look for these tendencies in ourselves, for they exist if only in the germ, and try to overcome them intelligently. In verse 21 especially, we find a most vital piece of advice. Krishna says: “The gates of hell are three—desire, anger, covetousness, which destroy the soul; wherefore one should abandon them.”

The word for “hell” in the Sanskrit original is the very word “*tamas*” the lowest quality, the quality of darkness, and that is the important point for us to note. There are three gates which will take us again into the *tamas* quality, and if we persist in doing evil, it will take us below *tamas* itself, for these three qualifications are given here as the three gates of *tamas*—desire, anger and greed. The three Sanskrit words with which students are familiar are *Kama*, *Krodha*, and *Lobha*. These qualifications belong to the *guna* of *rajas*, belong to the very stage we are all occupying today. In us, these three qualifications, which are vices, can show themselves; if we allow them to remain with us and become sufficiently strong, they will through their own power and force, take us again into the stage that we have succeeded in overcoming, the stage of darkness and *tamas*. That is why they are called the gates of hell. Therefore, Krishna says, we should abandon them, for, if on the other hand, we succeed in overcoming desire, anger and greed, we shall enter the succeeding stage of *sattva*, and we shall help our own growth and evolution.

Then in verse 4 we find a very important lesson which can be applied in our own life. There, Krishna gives the evil tendencies as hypocrisy, pride, anger, presumption, harshness of speech and ignorance. We all know these tendencies, for they exist to a certain extent in our natures. But if these are allowed to take root, they will bring the three enemies, the three vital enemies of all mankind—

desire, anger and greed, and will take us down and make us retrograde, and that is the very essential point to understand. Thus, we have to abandon and fight against these lower evil tendencies, but to fight against them does not mean to begin to brood over the fact that we have weaknesses and blemishes in our nature. It is enough to recognize what weaknesses we have, and then to resolve to overcome these weaknesses, for our strength and power alone will enable us to overcome all that is evil in ourselves. We shall find this strength in the meditation, in the understanding of the real divine qualities that are given to us in verses 1 to 3.

These divine qualities have been reiterated by Krishna over and over again. There are, however, two of these qualities, which are especially important. The first one is the one that is given at the very head of that list of qualities—fearlessness. It is important for us to remember that we are not to be afraid of the existence of darkness, ignorance and evil in the world. We are to become fearless, and we can overcome all fear when we have within ourselves found the divine. When we are convinced of the reality of the divine in us, that inner and immortal Self, and if we persevere in our efforts to obey the dictates only of that Inner Ruler, and overcome all that is low and evil in our natures, we need not fear. We only have to keep on trying sincerely and honestly. It is most important to know that fearlessness is required at every step, along the spiritual path.

Krishna continuously says to Arjuna, “You should not be afraid, therefore stand up and fight,” meaning, he has to fight his own weaknesses. The very name “Arjuna” is a very wonderful indication to us of the stage occupied by Arjuna. Arjuna, in Sanskrit, means “silvery white.” This simply indicates the fact that Arjuna has already overcome *tamas* and *rajas* and belongs to the *sattva* sphere or condition. He has resolved to become pure, truthful, and righteous, and it is that resolve which makes us recognize our own weaknesses and to persevere in the arduous task of overcoming them, which is the true attitude. It is from the *sattva* quality that we can go on beyond into the path of chelaship, and for that we need patience, perseverance

and absolute sincerity. That reminds us of another quality, namely, assiduity in devotion, which implies not just trying for one day, and then getting tired and forgetting our resolves the next day, but continuing, every single day and every hour, without failing in the attempt. Assiduity in devotion is in the Sanskrit original, assiduity or fixity in union through knowledge, or *Jnana-Yoga*. Here, we are able to see the connection between this discourse and the Fourth, which is entitled “Union through Knowledge.” What this knowledge is, has been further indicated by Krishna in the last verse of this discourse. He says in verse 23:

He who abandoneth the ordinances of the Scriptures to follow the dictates of his own desires, attaineth neither perfection nor happiness nor the highest path. Therefore, in deciding what is fit and what unfit to be done, thou shouldst perform actions on earth with a knowledge of what is declared in Holy Writ.

The Scriptures, or Holy writ, is that great message of Theosophy, the Wisdom Religion, which has been handed down throughout the generations of mankind, that knowledge which man did not invent, but which they heard from their spiritual and divine rulers. That is the knowledge necessary to decide what we are going to choose and how we are going to act, for without that knowledge we still decide in terms of our desires, and that is a very erroneous basis for action. Krishna seems to suggest that in deciding what is wrong, what is fit and what unfit, we are the ones who must decide for ourselves, but if we decide in terms of the impersonal knowledge of Theosophy, then we can decide on a right and true basis instead of on the wrong basis of our personal nature which changes all the time. What is required is, true faith, faith which comes as the result of real knowledge and understanding, and that is the very subject, namely, the Awakening of Faith, which will be considered in the Seventeenth Discourse.

(Concluded)

TRANSCENDING THE LAW OF KARMA

II

MAN may be looked upon as an “aggregate” of tendencies or attributes, also known as *Skandhas*, *Vasanas* or *Samskaras*, which constitutes the physical and mental individual, that we call Man. “There are five *Skandhas* or attributes in the Buddhist teachings: *Rupa* (form or body), material qualities; *Vedana*, sensation; *Sanna*, abstract ideas; *Samkhara*, tendencies of mind and *Vinnana*, mental powers. Of these we are formed; by them we are conscious of existence; and through them communicate with the world about us.” (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 127)

These *skandhas* accumulate from life to life and are also known as Karmic Germs. These are created by our thoughts and actions, and remain waiting at the threshold of *Devachan* (*swarga*), after death, maintaining a magnetic link with the Ego. At the time of birth the Ego will make a choice of the *Skandhas*, and depending on the set of *Skandhas* chosen, the birth or the physical, mental, emotional and the moral constitution will be determined.

This leads us to the fifteenth aphorism which states: “And until such appropriate instrument is found that karma related to it remains unexpended.” In the *Bhagavad-gita* it is mentioned that our mental states are based on our moral states, so we need to be aware and work on our moral nature. We need to also keep in mind that the three qualities, *i.e.*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* which arise from nature, bind the soul to the body, by attachment of self to the qualities perceived. Hence, every person is attached to the physical existence through these three qualities in various proportions.

Thus, every form in nature has its own peculiar qualities but the perception of these qualities depends on the nature of the perceiver. Therefore, in life we perceive each situation differently, and even the same situation is perceived differently by different people. Therefore, the highest path which leads to emancipation is the non-identification with these qualities, since *ahamkara* creates in us a

false sense of separateness which binds us to rebirth. We need to have an equal mind, *i.e.*, *vairagya* and engage only in necessary actions or duties, to surmount these qualities.

In this manner only through non-attachment can the soul come out of pain and suffering. In other words, we need to raise our thoughts from the *Kama-manasic* level to the higher level of *Buddhi-manas*. Moreover, we need to keep in mind the right performance of duty, in whichever station of life we maybe.

Now as mentioned in the *Bhagavad-gita*, *Dharma* or duty means “the sacred Law,” the fulfilment of our karmic destiny through many incarnations. It is the working out and elimination of defects which have brought us to earth life under the conditions in which we find ourselves, which conditions we should feel and know to be the very opportunities needed for our further progress.

Let us note that action can be performed on the physical, *manasic* or intellectual and emotional plane. It is our thoughts which feed the desires, and that forms the basis for action on various planes, and it is only through the mind that the effects of the actions can be received. We see here a complete cycle, a continuous loop.

These three planes, the physical, mental and emotional, deal with the objects of sense perception, and are called the great battlefield of Karma. This is the real *Kurukshetra*. If we focus our mind and aspirations during our daily life on one particular plane, let us say, the physical, by indulgence in the sense-gratifications, then we see greater amount of energy being taken up on the physical plane, than on the other planes. This will cause the past karma to unfold itself on the physical plane.

Similarly if we have altruistic motive and higher thoughts and related desires and aspirations, then we are detached from the plane of sense-gratification and focused on the attainment of the highest ideal, and then the karma will not be completely channelized on the physical plane. In this manner, we can say that the karma is manifested only in harmony with the plane of desire. In the second case the sense energy of the physical plane will exhaust itself on the

higher plane and thus become transmuted in its effects. This leads to the 13th aphorism of karma which states: “The effects may be counteracted or mitigated by the thoughts and acts of one self or of another.” Thus, the effects of Karma can be changed. The destiny of our life is not pre-determined, it is not fixed. Man has free will and has full control over his current state and future state. We can have no attachment for anything that we do not think about.

The first step is to always focus our minds on the highest ideals and thoughts. The more our mind dwells on any action whether with pleasure or pain the less chance it has to become detached from such action. But on the other hand, if our mind loses interest in any object, then there will no longer be a link between the karma connected with that object and the individual. Thus, it is the attitude of the mind which draws the karmic cords around the soul. It is our free will or rather spiritual will with which we become our own saviours and transcend our karma.

“Good karma is that which the ego requires and desires while bad karma is that which the ego neither desires nor requires.” Our body and surrounding are the best environments for the precipitation of karma. The lower kingdoms in nature depend on man for their progress and evolution, since it is man’s responsibility to so think and act as to aid the lower kingdoms to evolve. We constantly exchange lives and atoms from our body which are tainted by our thoughts and go to various lower kingdoms of nature, which affect nature and our fellow human beings, for good or ill. Similarly, we attract new set of atoms to ourselves, depending on the law of consubstantiality, which enable us to evolve or involve.

To overcome or transcend karma does not mean escaping the consequences of karma, but to live in harmony with the Law of Karma, by enveloping our minds in higher thoughts. Shri Krishna says: “But for those who thinking of me as identical with all constantly worship me, I bear the burden of the responsibility of their happiness.”

(Concluded)

NATURE OF REALITY

THE TERM *Reality* has many connotations, depending on different views held by different people and schools of thought regarding life. In everyday life reality is generally understood to mean a thing or a fact actually existing, or an event actually occurring, or has occurred, objectively, and is not something fanciful or imaginary. Realism, in this sense, is the attitude which values, and places reliance on, only facts which are apprehended with our senses, as distinguished from ideas, beliefs, or opinions with regard to them. In the modern world much stress is placed on realism in this sense in almost every walk of life and in every field of thought, as scientific method has come to be trusted as the only criterion of truth, and scientific temper as a virtue to be cultivated, as opposed to idealism of ancient thought. Metaphysical ideas, mythical narratives, poetical imageries, aesthetics, metaphors and symbols which characterized art and literature in the era preceding the rise of scientific thought—the era of romanticism and classicism, as they are termed—yielded place in the psyche of the Western world to, what the critics of art call, realism in art, and by sociologists as realism in social and political philosophy. Realism in art is representation of subject-matter as it really is, without poetical or mythical embellishment, or aesthetic ornamentation. Realism in social, economic and political thought is pragmatism, or realization of tangible and measurable results of any idea that practically benefits society, and does not rest on abstract ideals, moral principles or ethical considerations—an outlook which characterizes the modern Western civilization.

This shift of consciousness of the race mind from the ideal to the concrete, from ontology and aesthetics to mundane rational thought, may be understood as “realism” of the modern times, the chief governing power of modern man.

That which lies beyond the human power, and from which flowed inspiration for ancient art and culture, is now discounted and disbelieved. For instance, when Madam Blavatsky cited the

beautiful poetical description of the great poet, William Wordsworth, to illustrate the true meaning of the term *reminiscence* to be the memory of the soul, her interlocutor dismissed it as poetry and abnormal fancy, which, he said, was inadmissible in modern schools as credible evidence; while she maintained that such visions of the past—what the poet called “Intimations of Immortality”—are not unreal but very real, though abnormal as contrasted with our normal daily experience. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 123)

Modern scientific outlook has been that the only reality is the objective world which exists independently of individual human perceiver or group of perceivers, and has its own structure, which can be known by observation, sensory experience, and interpretation of the observed phenomena through reason and logic, and that this alone is the source of certain knowledge. The same positivist outlook extends to sociology to understand the dynamics of social relations and functions, and forms the basis for evolution of theories of political economy, the underlying assumption being that competitive and conflict side of man is the reality of human existence.

It is, however, interesting to see that the belief in reality of the objective world independent of the subjective self is challenged with mounting evidence to the contrary, as scientific exploration wanders into the borderland of metaphysics and spiritual psychology. Theory of relativity and researches in quantum physics demonstrate to the investigator that the so-called objective world is not only not independent of the subjective self, or the consciousness of the observer, but inseparably bound with it, and influences it, and that the two together should constitute reality. The scientist is now left with no option but to turn inwards and explore the mystery of consciousness which, after all, may well be the fundamental basis of the so-called objective reality. Many a leading scientist is now of this view. This is precisely the fundamental axiom of ancient thought. It is only in the acceptance of the truism that Consciousness, or the Self, is the eternal, changeless basis, final support of every phenomenon—whether physical, psychic or spiritual—that true

knowledge can ever be attained. Outside of it we can but obtain a partial view of Truth which is one, and fall into error of mistaking a part for the whole. That alone which is eternal is *real*, and all those which have beginning and ending, subject to time and change, though appearing as real to our senses, are no more than passing illusions. The truth of it is demonstrated in various ways in occult science by reason, experiment and experience. A beautiful passage from an ancient text of Hermetic philosophy, *Divine Pymander*, strikes the key-note of the philosophy of the Real, which faithfully echoes Vedantic teaching and the leading thought of Occultists. (*S.D.*, I, 287):

“Reality is not upon the earth, my son, and it cannot be thereon....Nothing on earth is real, there are only appearances...He (man) is not real, my son, as man. The real consists solely in itself and remains what it is....Man is transient, therefore he is not real, he is but an appearance, and appearance is the supreme illusion.

Tatios: Then the *celestial bodies themselves are not real, my father, since they also vary?*

Trismegistos: That which is subject to birth and to change is not real....There is in them a certain falsity, seeing that they too are variable....

Tatios: And what then is the primordial Reality?

Trismeg.: That which is one and alone, O *Tatios*; that which is not made of matter, nor in any body. Which has neither colour nor form, which changes not nor is transmitted but which always is.

Here is a clear distinction between what is real and what is unreal. There is but One Life in which periodically arise innumerable lives, Monads, each mirroring the One as well as every other Monad, manifesting its various aspects in a sevenfold differentiation, striving to return to the One under the dual action of spiritual and physical evolution under Karmic Law. Different grades of evolving beings mirror a portion of the One Life, thus produce in them egoism. The embodied self, thinking itself separate and distinct from others,

identifying itself with ever changing forms, conditions and circumstances, losing awareness of its true self to be Universal Spirit which is indivisible, immutable One SELF, falls into error of mistaking appearance to be real. This mistaken idea of reality is *Avidya* or Ignorance.

We are taught that the pilgrim soul, after aeons of evolution in lower kingdoms, arrives at self-consciousness, or the human stage, which is the beginning of selfishness, and heresy of separateness, viewed from the plane of the Spirit. However, it must hasten to overcome its ignorance of its true Self and nature—that ignorance is the rife cause of its endless pain and misery through the cycle of rebirths caused by its own Karma—through acquirement of Self-knowledge. Teachers say that one striving for Self-knowledge must continuously dwell on the truism that there is but one Self, and not many, the Self of All, realize it as much as possible, and cross over the wide abyss of matter to the life eternal beyond individuality—attainment of conscious immortality in Spirit. It is undeniable fact which every thoughtful person recognizes that we are not our bodies, thoughts, emotions, or ever-changing panorama of life in ceaseless flux, but the Perceiver of them, himself changeless and unaffected. That changeless reality, the true Self, is: Being, Consciousness and Bliss—*Sat-Chit-Ananda*.

The One consciousness pierces up and down through all the states or planes of Being, and serves to uphold the memory—whether complete or incomplete—of each state’s experiences. Thus in waking life, *Sat* experiences fully and knows. In dream state, *Sat*, again knows and sees what goes on there, while there may not be in the brain a complete memory of the waking state just quitted. In *Sushupti*—beyond dream and yet on indefinitely, *Sat* still knows all that is done or heard or seen. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 99-100)

It is the earthly *personality*, bound as it is by Karma to limitations of senses and mental faculties, which masks the true Self, the Self

of All, and awareness of Universal Brotherhood. Overcoming the illusion of personality and realization of Self should be our ideal and the goal of life. *Mandukya Upanishad* teaches that just as a dream which we experience during sleep appears real to us so long as the dream lasts, but we realize on waking up that it was unreal, an illusory creation of our mind, so are our experiences during waking hours equally illusory; that all the phenomena of waking consciousness too disappear, as dreams do when we awake from sleep, as soon as the light of the Higher Self, *Sat*, illuminates our consciousness. All the phenomena of lower self—the universe, which we see and think real—also disappear, being creations of mind. The one so abiding in the true Self is forever free from *Maya*, immortal, in full possession of Absolute Truth. Of that grand and glorious state of illuminated Soul, and of the further heights of still greater perfection to which liberated Soul is heir, it is said in *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 330):

That Ego, progressing in an arc of ascending subjectivity, must exhaust the experience of every plane. But not till the Unit is merged in the ALL, whether on this or any other plane, and Subject and Object alike vanish in the absolute negation of the Nirvanic State (negation, again, only *from our plane*), is scaled that peak of Omniscience—the Knowledge of things-in-themselves; and the solution of the yet more awful riddle approached, before which even the highest Dhyan Chohan must bow in silence and ignorance—the unspeakable mystery of that which is called by the Vedantins, the PARABRAHMAM.

BECAUSE people in general have been in the habit of admitting to be real only what they can see with the physical eye, they have at last come to suppose that the unseen is neither real nor material. But they forget that...water may exist in the air held suspended and invisible, until conditions alter and cause its precipitation.

—W. Q. JUDGE

ON BIOLUMINESCENCE

BIOLUMINESCENCE is the production and emission of light by a living organism. It occurs widely in marine vertebrates and invertebrates, which includes fish, jelly fish, comb jellies, crustaceans and cephalopod mollusks. It also occurs in some bacteria and fungi. Non-marine or terrestrial bioluminescence is less widely distributed, and its examples are fireflies and glow worms. The disturbed water of the sea sometimes glows and glitters at night, and that is due to the presence of bioluminescent organisms known as dinoflagellates. Before the discovery of safety lamp, in Britain and Europe, dried fish skins were used as a weak source of light in coal mines. They also used bottles containing fireflies for illumination in coal mines.

There are about 1500 fish species that are known to be bioluminescent, of which some involved taking up of bioluminous bacteria from the surrounding water while in other cases, light evolved through chemical synthesis. These fish use the light not just to lure prey or hide from predators, but also for communication. Bioluminescence is used for attracting both the prey and mates. Fireflies use light to attract mates. Some squid shoot out bioluminescent liquid, instead of ink, to confuse their predators. The sea-firefly is a small crustacean, and when at rest, it emits a dull glow, but when it darts away, it leaves a cloud of shimmering blue light to confuse the predator. During World War II, it was gathered and dried by Japanese military, as a source of light during clandestine operations. In Bioluminescence, light energy is released within an organism's body by a chemical reaction. This reaction involves a light-emitting pigment, the luciferin, a molecule, which when reacts with oxygen, produces light. Many organisms also produce the catalyst luciferase, which helps to speed up the reaction.

It appears that no higher animals exhibit bioluminescence, *i.e.*, there are no naturally occurring, light-emitting reptiles, birds, mammals or human beings. There are some artificially created organisms, using genetic engineering technique, such as, lab mice.

The latter have been created by inserting into their DNA, genes found in certain bioluminescent jellyfish, and as a result their skin and eyes give off an eerie light, writes Mukul Sharma. He adds that according to religious and mystical beliefs all human beings are surrounded by a glowing aura which is visible to the “sensitives.” This has been described as an intangible and normally invisible emanation, contiguous with the physical body, extending in all directions. The halos that are described around saintly beings, are merely rough attempts to represent those emanations.

Ultrasensitive cameras reveal that our bodies emit tiny amounts of light that are too weak for the human eye to detect. Research carried out in the past has shown that the body emits visible light 1000 times less intense than the sensitivity of our naked eyes. To learn more about this faint visible light, a team of scientists from Tohoku Institute of Technology, in Japan, used extremely sensitive cameras capable of detecting single photons. Five healthy male volunteers were made to sit in a completely dark room in front of the camera, for 20 minutes, for every three hours. It was observed that the body glow rose and fell in the course of the day, suggesting that the light emissions were linked to our body clocks. Faces glowed more than the rest of the body, which is very suggestive, as the halos are normally shown in the pictures of the saints, around the head. These findings were detailed online in the journal *Plos One*.

Micah Hanks, a writer, podcaster and researcher has written about the cases that involve mysterious glowing that emanates from individuals, often from the specific regions of their bodies. In his book, *Death and its Causes*, H. Carrington, a researcher and a member of the American Society for Psychical Research, has mentioned an incident of a young boy, who at the time of dying, was enveloped in a strange blue glow which resembled flames that could not be extinguished. In 1869 an incident was reported in *English Mechanic*, of a woman whose toe was glowing inexplicably. Rubbing increased the phosphorescent glow and it spread to her foot, and did not subside even after washing the foot with soap and

water, but continued to glow for few hours.

H.P.B. explains that occultism distinguishes “auric *fluid*” from the “auric *light*.” Auric light is what Reichenbach called *Od*, and it is a light that surrounds *every animate and inanimate object in nature*. It is the astral reflection emanating from objects. The colour or colours in the aura and their combinations, denote the qualities and characteristics of each object and subject. The aura of a human being is the strongest of all (*H.P.B. Series no. 9*, p. 33). It is interesting to note that the Kirlian photographic process, invented by a Russian electrician, Semyon Kirlian, reveals visible “auras” around the objects photographed. There is evidence that Kirlian photographs do give indications of the health and emotional changes in living things by changes in the brightness, colour and patterns of light. The photographs have been subject to much myth and controversy over the years.

A good clairvoyant could tell of the inner state and inner psychological and moral nature of the person by looking at his aura. For instance, one might refrain from giving vent to feelings of anger or hatred but it is not possible to hide it from a trained seer or a clairvoyant. H.P.B. describes the difference in the aura of a medium and of an adept. In case of a medium, the aura is constantly subject to fluctuation and disturbances by the surrounding astral influences, like a flame, which loses its pyramidal form when fanned. But in the case of an adept, this aura is compact and concentrated, and the same is depicted in the pictures of the Mahatmas, such as Buddha, as a pyramidal crown upon their heads (*The Theosophist*, August 1884). The purity or impurity of aura surrounding a person depends upon the moral character of the person. Since the Adepts led lives of superhuman morality and sanctity, they gathered about themselves heavenly nimbus, a pure and radiant aura (halo). They radiated around them an atmosphere of such divine beneficence, as to attract to their aura only pure spirits, and repel evil spirits. This is the reason why Jesus, Apollonius and other holy beings could exorcize, and drive away bad spirits from the people who were possessed. (*Isis*, I, 487)

Occult science assigns the quality of luminosity to the human eye. According to Aphorism 21 in Book III of *Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms*, in order to be able to see an object, not only is it necessary for the light from the object to proceed to the eye, but also light must proceed from the eye towards the object. When the light from the eye falling on the object is cut off, the object disappears. When the character and amount of luminousness coming from the eye is changed, the object perceived also changes in shape or colour. Mr. Judge explains that according to the ancient Hindus everything in manifestation is made up of three qualities or *gunas*—*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Sattva* is the quality of light, truth and goodness. Ancient Hindus held that all things are seen by reason of differentiation of *Sattva*, which is manifested as luminousness, operating in conjunction with the eye. Since the quality of luminousness is completely under the control of an ascetic, he can check it and cut off the light from the eye.

Spirit or *Atman* is present everywhere, including a speck of dust, and is regarded as the source of light and life, metaphorically. But though that light shines in all, it does not shine forth equally in all. For the light surrounded by a glass covering to shine forth, we need to clean the soot on the glass. The *Atmic* light is covered by layers or sheaths or vehicles, which need to be purified. When that light of wisdom and compassion shines forth, that being is described as *Divya-purusha* or the Resplendent One. At the time of the last initiation the candidate is allowed to see his future Self, called the *Augoeides* or Luminous Self, when for a few seconds the trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* becomes unity. *Augoeides* means one having the brilliancy of the stars. In the New Testament we are told that when the eye is single, the whole body will be full of light, *i.e.*, “when we do all our acts, small and great, every moment, for the sake of the whole human race, as representing the Supreme Self, then every cell and fibre in the body and the inner man will be turned in one direction,” explains Mr. Judge.

SAINT JNANESHWAR: LIFE AND TEACHINGS

III

DURING the Thirteenth century there was a revival of religious devotion among the common people in India. One of the pillars of this revival was the poet-saint Jnaneshwar. Jnaneshwar began teaching people the *Bhagavad-Gita* in their own language, Marathi, in a simple devotional style. These discourses were given by him when he was only fifteen years old. This commentary on the *Gita*, was later recorded and is known as *Jnaneshwari* or *Bhavarth Dipika*, which means “the light showing the inner meaning.” In this work, Jnaneshwar has expanded around seven hundred and fifty *slokas* (Sanskrit verses) of the *Gita* to approximately nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine Marathi verses (or *ovis*). Instead of rational explanation, he has chosen to explain the *Gita* by the profuse use of similes, metaphors and illustrations. The first line of each *ovi* rhymes with the next two, rendering lyrical quality to the entire work.

Some of the other excellent works by Jnaneshwar include *Amritanubhav* (or “The Nectar of Self-Awareness”), *Changdev Pasashti* and *Abhangas* (devotional, religious songs), and in all his works he has disclosed the knowledge of the Self. *Amritanubhav*, considered to be a milestone in Marathi literature, is the work written by Jnaneshwar on advice of his elder brother and guru, Nivruttinath, and it contains his own experiences in Yoga and philosophy. The basis of the book is non-dualism or *advaita*. *Amritanubhav* is a work of philosophy and deals in esoteric knowledge, the wisdom of the *Upanishads*, writes Savitribai Khanolkar. She points out that in this work Jnaneshwar defines Spiritual Power as potentially present even in the bound souls. It is dormant like the beauty of a young girl in a new-born child. There is only a difference of degree. Unconsciously the whole universe seeks release from its own bondage. In the end, all meet in the same constant Light, just as all tributaries of Ganga become the Ganga. *Amritanubhav* dwells deeply on the *Samkhya* system of philosophy, which describes creation as manifestation of

the interplay of spirit (*Purusha*) and matter (*Prakriti*), and these two ultimately get diffused in *Brahman*.

Jnaneshwar takes up the examination of *Brahman* or One Reality in *Amritanubhav*. He believes that the One Reality is self-evident and requires no proof. It is above the dualistic distinctions of subject-object, knower-known, or knowledge and ignorance. It is pure knowledge and pure consciousness. Thus, “It is pure knowledge itself that is not enlightened by any other knowledge or darkened by ignorance. But can the pure consciousness be conscious of itself? Can the eyeball perceive itself?...Can the fire burn itself?...Therefore, that which is pure consciousness itself, without the quality of being conscious, is not conscious of itself.” How can one express through words, the Knowledge and Feeling of the Ultimate Oneness? “It is beyond words and description, like a puppet of salt which becomes totally absorbed when immersed in a vessel of water.” He cautions against reliance on scriptural testimony, which is normally accepted as a valid source of knowledge. But Jnaneshwar points out that scriptural validity stems from its agreement with experiential truth and not *vice versa*.

Theosophy also teaches that everything in the scriptures is not sacrosanct because when the teacher retires from the scene, the disciples try to systematize the teachings. In the process, knowingly or unknowingly, there are misinterpretations. When a priest or a *pandit* steps in, often, there are deliberate additions, subtractions and interpolations to these teachings. “Each has to make his own verification of the truth. *The final authority is the man himself*,” writes Mr. Crosbie. “We are to examine thoughtfully all that comes to us from such [wise] persons, and all that comes to us from any source wearing the aspect of truth, and try faithfully to see wherein it may be true, laying aside, if we fail, as the fruit not ripe for us yet. We are not to yield up our intuitions to any being, while we may largely doubt our judgement at all times,” advises Mr. Judge.

Changdev Pasashti (*Pasasht* means sixty-five in Marathi language) are the sixty five verses written by Saint Jnaneshwar on

the blank paper sent to him by Changdev, and these are considered to be the quintessence of Vedanta. This work is regarded by some as *Sutra-grantha*, i.e., a scripture containing aphorisms, like Yoga sutras of Patanjali. In an aphorism there is clear but succinct exposition of truth, leaving no scope for additions or subtractions. It is not easy to comment on these *sutras*, as Jnaneshwar seems to have saturated this work with the essence of many scriptures. This work is mainly concerned with *atma-jnana* or self-realization, and the discipline leading to it.

Scholars studying *Jnaneshwari* have explored different aspects of that work. For instance, those who study it from the point of view of poetry, regard Jnaneshwar to be the best poet, and nothing more. Some study that work even without understanding the meaning, in order to accumulate merit (*punya*). Saint Namdev has said, “Jnaneshwari is an excellent work, but one must try to *experience* the teachings, given in one line at least.” There are many who give lectures on *Jnaneshwari*, and have only intellectual knowledge, but there is hardly anyone with experiential knowledge of that work.

The *Gita* mentions four kinds of devotees who worship Krishna: the one in distress, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth and the man of wisdom or *Jnani-Bhakta*, or one who has gone beyond duality and become one with Him. Shri Krishna says that he likes the devotees who worship with a selfish motive, but above all he loves *jnani-bhakta*. He gives an illustration of a cow whose legs have to be tied at the time of milking her, but she suckles her calf without being bound, because the calf does not recognize anyone else with its heart and soul and knows the cow to be its mother by mere sight. The calf is solely devoted to the cow and the cow likes it. Likewise, the *jnani-bhakta* is solely devoted to Krishna and has forgotten the worldly existence. Jnaneshwar is regarded as *Jnani-bhakta*, a rare combination of intellect and love. In fact, Saint Tukaram has praised Jnaneshwar as the prince among the *jnanis*.

Who is a *Jnani-bhakta*? In a Preface to the English translation of

Jnaneshwari, Shri M. R. Yardi explains that according to Saint Jnaneshwar true knowledge consists in knowing God in the non-dual form, and that devotion should culminate in *Advaita* (non-dual) *bhakti*. The devotee should realise God as all pervasive, so as to see God in everything. Yoga does not become complete without knowledge. In the *Amritanubhav* he calls the yogi “the moon in the day-time,” *i.e.*, the yogi becomes as lusterless as the moon before the sun of knowledge. When a person casts off all vanity of being great, forgets his learning and becomes humble, then we may know that he has attained to the knowledge of *Brahman*. Normally, a devotee ascribes human attributes to God and worships God with a form, and such devotion is based on a distinction between God and the devotee. Jnaneshwar says that if God is worshipped with the knowledge that he pervades this whole universe, then it becomes chaste, non-dual devotion. In order to attain to *moksha* or liberation, one can begin with devotion. It is to be attained step by step, by performing one’s duties in a selfless spirit, devotion to God and attainment of knowledge. In this way one becomes *jnani-bhakta*, who is identified with God.

Jnaneshwar praises humility greatly. He says that if a person casts off all vanity of being great, forgets his learning and becomes humble, then know that he has attained knowledge of *Brahman*. Jnaneshwar had that humility so that after creating an excellent work such as *Jnaneshwari* he gives all the credit to his guru Nivrittinath. Jnaneshwar writes, “A humble man is he who regards all beings from the ant to the highest God as identical with his own self.”

In *Notes on the Bhagavad Gita*, Mr. Judge comments that spiritual knowledge includes every action without exception and that it is to be obtained by means of devotion. He goes on to point out that ignorant or unlettered men like Jacob Boehme, who had no access to books, have by their inward sense perceived the real truth of things, as they have attained to devotion which cleared away from the eye of the soul the clouds of sense. And yet, learning of the human sort is not despised among the highest occultists, even among

the adepts. They use it and acquire it. They accumulate the record of experiences of seers and devoted men of small learning for long periods of time, until a great master of both learning and devotion arises, who, by reason of his profound knowledge joined to devotion can make the wonderful deductions in the possession of the Lodge respecting matter far beyond imagination. This shows the necessity and importance of both knowledge and devotion, because as Mr. Judge observes that there can be high disciples who may have gained much only through devotion, without the study, but still greater spiritual heights are reached by those who combine knowledge with devotion.

Likewise, in *Jnaneshwari*, commenting on the third chapter of the *Gita*, on Yoga of Knowledge and Yoga of Action, Jnaneshwar explains that though these two paths are different, they lead to the same result, even as one derives the same satisfaction by eating food cooked by himself or by another. *Or*, as the two rivers flowing in different directions eventually join the sea and become one in the end, these two paths lead to the same truth. But he says that the seeker must choose the path which suits his capacity. Thus, for instance, a bird can fly straight to the tree and seize the fruit all at once. But a man has to climb the tree slowly and go from one branch to another in order to reach the fruit. So adopting the way of the birds, the Sankhyas pursue the way of knowledge and soon attain final release. The yogis, follow the path of action, and by following the prescribed duties achieve liberation in the course of time.

Theosophy teaches that Devotion and action combined with knowledge leads to final wisdom. Knowledge and action are the two wings that are necessary for the soul’s ascent. As the actions grow more and more free from attachment, equal-minded and sacrificial in spirit, one becomes fitted to acquire higher and abstruse knowledge. But on the other hand, with the acquirement of knowledge the soul becomes firm in desireless and sacrificial acts. We need to put into practice the spiritual teachings, because only then can the quality of mind change, making it porous to the influx

from above.

Jnaneshwar hints at the special bond that exists between a true *guru* (teacher) and true *chela* (disciple), as it existed between Krishna and Arjuna. Commenting on the Tenth Chapter of the *Gita*, Jnaneshwar writes that just as one puts, at first, only a little water in the earthen pot, to see whether it leaks, before filling it up, so also Krishna made sure that Arjuna was attentive to his teachings, before revealing to him his deeper teachings concerning Divine Manifestations in the Tenth Chapter. Just as a mother enjoys looking at her child that she has decorated with ornaments, though the child does not know it, so also, the more the disciple is adorned with knowledge and realizes his own good, the more it pleases the guru. He says that by the grace of the *guru*, one who has been immersed, in the worldly joys and a dream of ignorance, can be awakened by hearing from his guru, “*tat tvam asi*,” or “That Thou Art.” He adds further, “In order to grant what the Lord could not give through words, the Lord hugged Arjuna, and then ‘the two hearts mingled and what was in the heart of the *Guru* was transferred to the heart of the disciple,’ and so the Lord made Arjuna like himself without obliterating the duality between the guru and the disciple.”

Theosophy teaches that an accepted disciple becomes the “outpost” of the Master or *Guru*’s consciousness. A *Chela*’s consciousness comes to represent the Master’s consciousness, or is an extension of the Master’s consciousness. There is a closer tie between the adept and the *chela* and there is psychic interchange taking place between them. A Master of Wisdom writes, “As the water in a full tank runs into an empty one which it is connected with; and as the common level will be sooner or later reached according to the capacity of the feed-pipe, so does the knowledge of the adept flow to the *chela*; and the *chela* attains the adept-level according to his receptive capacities.” It is up to the *chela* to keep the channel unclogged by faith and receptivity.

(To be concluded)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

In the month of December 2017 Thomas Piketty, a French economist, released the World Inequality Report, revealing worsening income inequality in virtually every country. Typically, income equality is viewed as an unqualified good. But is that so? There are shortcomings to this view. Pol Pot launched the greatest equalization programme in history on coming to power in Cambodia, after the US soldiers left in 1975. Within three days he drove all city folk into the countryside to do manual agricultural labour. Pol Pot aimed to create the most equal communist regime. It was found that cities were far richer than villages and educated city folk were richer than farmers and labourers. To end inequality, Pol Pot decided to bring all, especially highly educated, city folk on par with villagers doing manual work. This move was resisted, not only by those who were forcibly evicted but also by dissidents within his own party. He ordered the liquidation of all dissenters, condemning them as enemies of the people. He murdered an astonishing three million people, of the country’s total population of eight million people. People were ruthlessly killed with clubs and agricultural implements, and dead bodies were dumped into pits dug by the victims themselves. Pol Pot certainly achieved unrivalled equality. He and his colleagues lived Spartan lives, determined to maximize equality. If income data of that period were available, Piketty’s methodology would surely show Pol Pot’s Cambodia as the most equal country ever. But at what cost?

We must not exaggerate the virtues of income equality. People swam across shark-infested waters from Mao’s egalitarian China to in-egalitarian Hong Kong. Forced equality can kill opportunity, and can become an instrument for oppression, not empowerment. Equality of opportunity can be more important than equality of income. Extreme income inequality is bad, and it can be reduced by taxing the rich at a progressive rate. True equality is about the equality of opportunity, and includes some equality of power and some

checks on the ruler. Piketty should cover all three kinds of inequality—of income, opportunity and power—the last two are the most important, writes Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar. (*Sunday Times of India*, January 14, 2018)

Theosophy does not hold that all men are born equal, nor that all men, here and now, can be made equal by a legal statute. Theosophy teaches that every human soul should exert himself to better the surrounding conditions. Theosophy may well be defined as the Philosophy of Exertion, for its pivotal doctrine is that each human soul progresses by self-devised effort, and therefore each soul must follow the religion of self-reliance and responsibility. Man is a soul or self-conscious Intelligence, and *has* a mind and a body.

The article published in the magazine *Theosophy* for November 1922, entitled, “The Higher Socialism,” makes us aware that the higher socialism is not merely concerned with equal distribution of wealth, and is based on moral and spiritual laws rather than economic and political laws. It does not endeavour to level all by pulling down those who stand at the upper rungs of the ladder of progress, but instead endeavours to raise all to as high a level of society as the highest among us have reached. The Higher Socialism is based on the law of Universal Brotherhood. We cannot make all people equal in mind and in bodies, but we can make all people equal by giving them an equality of opportunity to make progress as souls. We believe in a kind of Spiritual Socialism, that observes the fundamental law of love against hate, and that does not work according to the principles of the *rights* of man, but on the basis of the *Duties* of men. We believe in the internationalism that will bring peace and harmony to the various classes in all the countries of the world, providing opportunities for all. The article goes on to explain that Higher Socialism deals with poverty of many types. It stands for the removal of poverty not only of money but also of mind and of morals. The maxim of the socialist, “From every one according to his capacity and to every one according to his needs,” is not just applied to those who work by hands, but also to those who work by

heads and hearts, for man does not live by bread alone.

Self-improvement through the discipline of many individuals in a single community can beget a Social Order which aims at eradication of avarice, and also, the cultivation of love and of the spirit of service. Such tendency would seek to create such wealth as would give joy to the minds and characters of others.

Giant tortoises are rare today but once roamed four continents. According to a new theory, tortoises evolved into giants on at least seven occasions and four continents, undermining the long-standing idea that tortoises become enormous only if they are stranded on remote islands. For instance, giant tortoises are found on the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean, and Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean, having shells more than 120 centimetres long. It is amazing that though these islands cover an area of only a few thousand square kilometres, as contrasted with the Earth’s continents which cover around 150 million square kilometres, they are home to just one truly large tortoise, namely, the *African spurred tortoise*. This implies that tortoises are most likely to become huge when they live on islands, which is in line with a famous but controversial concept, the “island rule.” According to this rule, on islands, small animals tend to evolve larger bodies, while large animals evolve to be smaller.

However, fossils show that giant tortoises once roamed Africa, Eurasia and the Americas, suggesting that tortoises do not need islands to evolve to be larger. According to Yuval Itescu at Tel Aviv University, Israel, there are two competing hypotheses that seek to explain the presence of giant tortoises on remote oceanic islands: Either they were giants when they reached these islands, or they became giants on the islands. It is crucial to know what their ancestors were like.

Researchers have drawn tortoise family tree using data from extinct and living species. The tree suggests that the first giant tortoises, with shells at least 80 centimetres long, evolved 37 million

years ago in Africa and Europe, which gave rise to continental giants. According to Evangelos Vlachos at the Museum of Paleontology Egidio Feruglio in Argentina, tortoises tended to become giants on continents, so that giant tortoises found today on remote islands were already big before they arrived. In other words, gigantism evolved on continents, ruling out island origin for gigantism. However, “it is now even less clear why tortoises sometimes evolve into giants. Gigantism seems to have evolved on different continents at widely different times,” writes Colin Barras. (*New Scientist*, December 16, 2017)

Theosophy teaches that giants are not fiction. In remote antiquity both man and animals were of gigantic stature, but in astral form, and that is why man could co-exist in the same place with huge birds and reptiles without fear. Then man’s body began solidifying, or becoming dense, and as he thickened the animals grew smaller. In the section, “Are Giants a Fiction?” (*S.D.*, II, 277) which mainly seeks to prove that men were gigantic in stature in early antiquity, H.P.B. quotes the argument put forward by Charles Darwin that the species of animals which result from cross breeding “always betray a tendency to revert to the original type,” and she says that scientists should apply this law to men, because had there been no giants in the ancient days, there would be none now. The same argument holds good for animals. At more than one place in her writings it is made clear that in the remote past, both in astral and physical form, there were giant men and animals. Giant men and animals flourished on the Lemurian and Atlantean continents. Some of the islands today, with gigantic animals on them are remnants of these two continents which have been submerged and have disappeared millions of years ago.

Mention is also made of monstrous *Sivatherium* in the Himalayas, the four-horned stag, as large as an elephant, and exceeding the latter in height; of the gigantic *Megatherium*: of colossal flying lizards, *Pterodactyli*, with crocodile jaws on a duck’s head. H.P.B. points out that “the few remaining giant animals, such as elephants, themselves smaller than their ancestors the Mastodons, and

Hippopotami, are the only surviving relics, and tend to disappear more entirely with every day. Even they have already had a few pioneers of their future genus, and have decreased in size in the same proportion as men did.” (*S.D.*, II, 218-19)

Can old age be conquered? The Bulgarian Centre of Gerontology and Geriatrics has set for itself the task of finding out whether it is possible to counteract aging and to find methods and means of doing so. Aging is a biological phenomenon, and old age develops in accordance with irreversible biological laws. It appears that there are biological and social factors which either counteract or speed up the setting in of old age. It has been proved that inaction, a life lacking in movement, *i.e.*, the lack of functional strain or even diminished functional strain, steps up the process of aging. On the other hand, work, physical exercise, particularly sport and hiking, could delay the setting in of old age. As a result of women’s menses, pregnancy, childbirth and nurturing of their children, they are functionally much more heavily loaded than men are, and the fact that in most countries women live longer than men, is a proof that functional strain counteracts aging.

Research has shown that diseases of the cardiovascular system, and especially degeneration of artery walls, account for the greatest number of deaths among people above sixty years of age. Science has proved that degeneration of artery walls can be overcome, and the average life span can be increased, by adopting an active way of life with plenty of movement, combined with proper rest and scientific feeding which does not cause fats to collect and bring obesity, and avoidance of such poisons as nicotine and alcohol. “If we had the possibility of functionally loading or, in other words, of exercising every cell in our organism, that would be the most effective way of combating old age.” In Bulgaria there are no starving people and public welfare undertakings such as physical education, sport and hiking can be enjoyed by all people, and all this has contributed to lengthening the Bulgarian people’s average life span, writes Professor

Dragomir Mateyer. (*Bhavan's Journal*, December 31, 2017)

Our physical body is built on the model body called the astral body. The article, “*The Elixir of Life*” explains that both astral and physical bodies are made up of atoms or “lives.” When we purify our thoughts and desires, we are able to give pure impulse to these “lives,” leading to refinement of the matter which composes our body. Following the law of affinity, refined atoms will be attracted to our body. In an ethereal form there is less friction among the atoms leading to reduced wear and tear of the body. This is the key to longevity.

The ancients spoke of the “Elixir of Life” which possesses the power of removing all the seeds of disease from the human body, and of renewing youth and prolonging life. H.P.B. explains how it may work. “...stop the circulation of the fluids in man, and stagnation, absorption, calcification from old age, and death, ensue. If the alchemists had simply discovered some chemical compound capable of keeping the channels of our circulation unclogged, would not all the rest easily follow?” If the surface-waters of certain mineral springs have such virtue in the cure of disease and the restoration of physical vigour, it is quite possible to find a chemical in the bowels of the earth, which can bring about similar results. (*Isis*, I, 503)

Since mind affects matter, an equal or even more attention must be paid in keeping the mind, healthy and active. It is very important to keep at bay mental aging even more than the physical aging. In the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita* Shri Krishna asks us to meditate on birth, death, decay, sickness and error, so that among other things, we can learn to accept the inevitability of passing through certain changes in life. A little reflection must show that it is better to cultivate a youthful outlook and enthusiasm towards life more than a youthful body. Quality is better than quantity. The Buddha says, “Better than the life of a hundred years of the man who perceiveth not the deathless state is the short life of a single day of the man who senses that deathless state.” (*The Dhammapada*, verse 114)