

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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WHY SHOULD WE MEDITATE?

ALL OF us seek peace, harmony and happiness. It is the goal towards which we strive, but rarely attain. If we wish to have physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being and happiness, it is essential to give place to meditation in our lives. We observe that once the mind becomes free from negative emotions, the physical benefits automatically follow.

“For man, mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation. Mind absorbed in sense-objects is the cause of bondage, and mind detached from them is the cause of liberation,” teaches *Amrita-bindu Upanishad*. The Sixth Chapter of the *Gita* describes self as being both the friend and an enemy of the person. In other words, the lower self or mind tending towards passions and desires must be controlled and mastered, else it will drag down the man and become his enemy. But on the other hand, the same mind when conquered, moves towards the divine, is guided by the divine, becomes the friend of man, who has subdued and conquered it. The mind that moves towards the divine, not only overcomes its attraction to sense-objects, but also recognizes its oneness with the divine, and only then does it become a friend of man. This concept has been symbolically expressed in Sufi mystic Rumi’s poem, which says that a man went to the door of the beloved and knocked. When asked who he was, he replied, “It is I.” The door remained shut and the voice said, “There is no room for Me and Thee.” After a year of

solitude and deprivation he returned and knocked, saying, “It is Thee,” the door was opened for him. The beloved opens the door when he recognizes their unity, and then she becomes his firm friend. This recognition results only when there is self-denial, self-abnegation, self-effacement and self-transcendence.

Mind is dual in nature. In most of us the mind is a slave and victim to the passions and desires, and is the “*Kama-tending*” mind. But when it becomes free from desire nature, it turns upwards to the divine nature, and then it becomes a channel for the flowing in of the divine ideas. Meditation is a state or a condition of consciousness in which our mind is turned inward and remains steady in that direction. Meditation is impossible without developing the faculty of attention.

However, true concentration is not the concentration of the brain-mind on external things. True concentration is the concentration upon the Higher Self within. That is the Highest Yoga, says Mr. Crosbie. Shri S. N. Goenka, the teacher of Vipassana meditation, teaches that even in the daily actions of ordinary life, concentration is required, but it is not necessarily the same as *right* concentration. “A person may be concentrating on satisfying a sensual desire or forestalling a fear. A cat waits with all its attention focused on a mousehole, ready to pounce as soon as a mouse appears. A pick-pocket is intent on the victim’s wallet, waiting for the moment to remove it.” We could also take the example of a surgeon who performs surgery with one-pointed attention or a painter who is completely concentrated while painting. But does this concentration change their nature? Do they, as a result, become free from anger, greed, attachment or aversion? Right concentration must have as its focus an object that is free from all craving, all aversion, all illusion.

There are various kinds of meditation and mind-control practices, but not all are safe ethically and sound philosophically. Theosophy recommends two practices. The first deals with the exercise of self-examination, and the second is concerned with turning the

attention and thought to some high and noble spiritual theme, such as brotherhood, compassion, sacrifice, etc. If we wish to be better and happier human beings, we need to introduce into our lives the exercise of self-examination. It is the examination of the lower, personal self by the Higher and Impersonal Self. We must undertake self-examination at the end of the day, and review not only the events of every day, but also our thoughts, feelings, words, habits and actions, without trying to explain away our mistakes and blunders. We must note our good points and weak points, and resolve to strengthen the good and eliminate the weaknesses.

The contact of senses with the objects produces pleasurable or painful sensations which results in our likes and dislikes. We seek to repeat pleasurable sensations and avoid the unpleasant ones. Our mind has a natural tendency to fly to a pleasant idea. Uncontrolled desires make a man slave to his desire. That which was the source of pleasure becomes the source of pain through craving and addiction. The mind entangled in the desire gets so blinded and obsessed that it does not hesitate to sacrifice anything or anyone for its fulfilment. We see this happening to an ordinary man who becomes a gambler, an alcoholic or a drug addict. The uncontrolled desires often bring pain and loss of reputation. Why should we permit our pleasures to become the cause of such extreme pain? It is better to be moderate in everything and try to cultivate contentment and detachment. To cultivate detachment, we have to reflect upon the transitory nature of our enjoyments and meditate upon our true nature which is not affected by our pleasures or pain. The attention must be diverted from its natural outward-going tendency and turned within.

The *Gita* teaches that the mind spontaneously turns inwards when there is realization that those pleasures which arise from contact of the senses with external objects are wombs of pain, because they have a beginning and an end. In fact, one begins to realize that such pleasures follow the law of diminishing return. Every time one tries to repeat a pleasurable experience, such as eating a favourite dish, it gives less and less pleasure. Also, that which is the source of pleasure becomes the

source of pain, because, even if it continues to give pleasure for a long time, sooner or later, one will be separated from it, because all conditioned things are impermanent.

People usually separate meditation and day to day life, but they are interdependent. The strength and the power gained during meditation manifest themselves as fortitude and patience in the daily struggle for existence. The man of meditation shows foresight and calmness in each event. We have a remarkable example of the power and effectiveness of meditation in an incident that took place in the year 2018, when twelve young boys, aged between eleven and sixteen years, along with their twenty-five-year-old soccer coach got trapped in a dark underground cave in Thailand for nearly two weeks due to unexpected flash floods. The rescuers were surprised to find that there were no hysterics or breakdowns. They discovered that the secret of their equipoise was the guided meditation and breathing that their soccer coach taught them, who was himself a former novice Buddhist monk, practising meditation daily.

We might say that those of us who are satisfied with life as it is, and feel that there will be smooth sailing till the end of life, or those who are not disturbed by the uncertainties of life and oscillation between the pairs of opposites, of heat and cold, pleasure and pain, success and failure, or those who refuse to explore spiritual angle of life, are the ones most likely to question the need for meditation.

For most of us there are ups and downs in life. Though we know this and see it happening in others' lives, so long as *our* life moves on smoothly and nothing happens to upset it, meditation, mind-control, spiritual discipline, etc., seem irrelevant. Swami Shri Savitanandji gives examples of people who felt that they had no need to meditate. One of them was a scholar, well-versed in Economics. He had been a professor in an Indian and then American University and was for some time an economic advisor in India. Though a very humble and generous person, he had no interest in religious or spiritual matters. He came to meet Swamiji at the suggestion of his close friend. In his conversation with Swamiji,

many interesting subjects and books were discussed, and he said that reading was his favourite pastime. Swamiji sought to indirectly turn the conversation to spiritual matters by asking him if he had ever given a thought to the future. If he had ever thought what he would do if, for instance, he suffered from a severe attack of paralysis that would disable him from reading any more. How will he pass time? This person looked shocked and confessed that he had never given a thought to it. Unfortunately, after 3-4 years he did suffer from a paralytic attack and found himself in an extremely helpless state. He regretted not having given a thought to spiritual discipline, which, as Swamiji explains, does not mean mere reading of scriptures or sitting with eyes closed, but consists in transforming one's life, and learning to change one's perception of life. Meditation helps in achieving this.

Philosophically, change is the very nature of existence. No one expressed it better than the Buddha who taught, "All Conditioned existence is impermanent." It is not possible to hold on to things, people, or places forever and ever. Our body, our ideas and our emotions, all keep changing. Pleasant things get replaced by unpleasant things. But even for a moment if we imagine that our life will continue to be the same, bringing the same joys, comforts and luxuries, then will we be happy? We are likely to get tired of the monotony of life. The constantly moving wheel of life brings pleasure and pain, and to be unaffected by these there is a need to be equal-minded, and that can be achieved by recognizing that aspect in us, which is unchanging and identifying with it.

Some of us cannot remain alone for more than ten to fifteen minutes without reaching out for a phone or switching on the television. Every day we must observe silence for a few minutes, and set apart half-an-hour for meditation. Most of all we need to cultivate companionship with that *Silent Spectator* within. A Shah of Persia, when asked, why he meditated all through the night, answered, "At night I pursue God, and during the day God follows me." Thus, the regular practice of meditation must get reflected in one's day to day life

with the experience of being guided by the divine within.

We often ask, “What are the signs of a successful meditation?” The answer generally given is that among other things, one should feel more cheerful, calm and happy within. Meditation helps to divert the attention from its natural out-going tendency to turn within so that there is no longer any response to external stimuli. Regular practice of meditation helps to build an island of pure thoughts, to which one can retire at will. One becomes more and more receptive to the inner, divine voice. It helps to unfold one’s intuitive faculty to know the truth in all things and experience superhuman bliss which is not dependent upon anything external

A regular practitioner of meditation finds that it is far easier for him to concentrate his mind, and as a result, there is a deeper understanding of what he reads, and an increased ability to see different facets of the subject. Such a person is not satisfied with the first answer received to his question but finds himself on an ongoing quest for Truth. Meditation practice tends to refine one’s psychic nature, so that one may find oneself dropping grosser desires and looking out for refinement and substance in the psychic pleasures. There is an easier acceptance of pain, adversity, loss, and also, less and less dependence on external pleasures. Meditation helps a person to remain undisturbed if any or all pleasures are denied to him.

Besides controlling the wandering nature of the mind, meditation helps to change other undesirable traits. For instance, at times, the mind is obsessed with one idea, pleasant or unpleasant and dwells constantly upon it. We have to learn to steady the mind, pay conscious attention to those things we desire to know. What happens when we do not do this? Patanjali reminds us that mind becomes that on which it dwells. Hence, we should dwell on what is desirable, exercising control. Regular practice of meditation makes the mind positive, alert and active, thereby avoiding passivity, which makes the mind susceptible to outside influences, good as well as bad.

We should meditate to learn to take charge of ourselves, by changing the quality of our mind, by converting the reactive mind

into the creative mind. Our ordinary, everyday mind is reactive. It does not really *act*, but it *reacts*, *i.e.*, it does not act *spontaneously*, but requires some stimulus to set it in motion. We have fixed responses to given stimuli. It is as if we are programmed. The creative mind *responds*, instead of reacting. For instance, we react angrily to criticism, bad behaviour or selfishness. When criticized for being proud or stingy, we can always do some soul-searching. If the criticism applies, we must take steps to improve; if not, we may ignore it. We must learn to *act* from within and not just *react* to stimuli from without. The creative mind loves *unconditionally*. The creative mind is always willing to see the brighter side of life, which enables a person to say, “With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams it is still a beautiful world.” The creative mind makes for an emotionally positive person. As Hugh Downs observes, “A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.” A creative mind is able to create heaven in hell’s despair, says Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher.

THE PRACTICE of Samadhi is like that of shooting. An inexperienced archer will at first practise shooting at a large target, next a small one, and finally hit the bull’s-eye. He will train himself to hit an object by making it smaller and smaller, first a coin, then a stick, then a few hairs, then a single hair, then a tenth, a hundredth and finally a thousandth of a hair. Thus having increased in skill, he will be able, as quick as thought, to hit a thing, no matter how small, so that even if he only heard the voice of a man or an animal sounding in the dark, he would be able at once to locate it and hit it without fail.

—*Ryogon Sutra*

LIVE in the world but keep the pitcher steady on your head; that is to say, keep the mind firmly on God.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE OVERCOAT

THE OVERCOAT, sometimes translated as “The Cloak” is a short story by Ukrainian-born Russian author Nikolai Gogol, published in Russian in 1842, and in English in 1850. The story narrates the life and death of Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, a low-ranking official who works as a copyist in a department in the Russian bureaucracy. His job is to copy documents such as letters. Although he enjoys his work and never makes a mistake, he has no desire to take on more challenging work, realizing that he has limited capabilities. His surname, Bashmachkin, is derived from the word *bashmak*, meaning a type of “shoe.” When used in certain Russian expression, it means, to be “under someone’s thumb.” He lives an extremely dull life. He does not care about his appearance and also does not socialize with the other officials. After a day’s work is done, while others enjoy themselves by going to the theatre or playing cards, Akaky sits down and eagerly copies papers he has brought home with him. Although Akaky is dedicated to his job, he is little recognized in his department for his hard work. He does not get any respect from his superiors or anyone else in his office. Even the porter refuses to get up when he passes. The other clerks make fun of him. Sometimes they drop pieces of paper over his head, calling it snow. It is only when they go too far that he shouts at them to leave him alone. His threadbare overcoat is often the butt of their jokes.

He takes his coat to his tailor, Petrovitch, to get it repaired. The tailor tells him that the coat is so worn out that it is not worth repairing, and that he should buy a new overcoat. The tailor tells him that the new coat would cost nearly one hundred and fifty rubles. Akaky convinces the tailor to sell him the coat for eighty rubles. Even so, the cost of a new overcoat is beyond Akaky’s meagre salary, so he forces himself to live within a strict budget to save sufficient money to buy the new overcoat. He meets his tailor frequently to discuss

the style of the new coat. During this period Akaky’s zeal for copying is replaced with excitement about his new overcoat, to the point that he thinks of little else. Finally, with an unexpected bonus from his department, he has saved enough money to buy a new overcoat.

Akaky and Petrovitch go to the shops in St. Petersburg and pick the finest materials they can afford. For instance, marten fur was too expensive, so they use cat fur for the collar. The American Marten is a fur-bearing member of the weasel family. The new coat is of impressively good quality and appearance. When he enters the office, everyone inspects his new coat and congratulates him. Someone suggests that he should hold a “christening” party for it after work. He is pleased but very embarrassed. Then a supervisor butts in and invites everyone to his home instead to celebrate his birthday. All the party-goers compliment Akaky on his new coat, and they push him to drink some champagne. This lifts his spirits, but he decides to leave the party at midnight, as it is late. On his way home, two ruffians confront him, take his coat, kick him down, and leave him in the snow. When he recovers, he shouts for help, and the watchman nearby tells him to report the incident to the police in the morning.

When he reaches home, his landlady advises him to go directly to the District Police Superintendent. After waiting the entire day, he is admitted into the District Police Superintendent’s office. After hearing his story, he treats Akaky as if he had committed a wrong, asking why he was out so late and whether he had been to a brothel. He finds no help from the authorities in recovering his lost overcoat. The next day, when he attends office, wearing his tattered overcoat, some co-workers ridicule him, while a few others collect some money to help him. One co-worker advises him not to rely on the police. If they track down the cloak, Akaky may have a difficult time proving that it is his. Finally, on the advice of another clerk in his department, he asks help from an “Important Personage,” a general recently promoted to his position who belittles and shouts at his subordinates to solidify his self-importance. When Akaky arrives,

the “Important Personage” is talking with an old friend on a matter of little importance. But he makes Akaky wait in the ante-room just to demonstrate to his friend that he has the power to make people wait. When he finally allows Akaky to enter his office, Akaky awkwardly explains that his cloak has been stolen. The Important Personage tells him that he should have presented such a trivial matter to his secretary and not directly to him. Akaky makes an unflattering remark concerning departmental secretaries, provoking his anger. He shouts at Akaky until he leaves the office in a daze.

Soon afterwards, Akaky is struck by fever, which rapidly intensifies. In his last hours, he is delirious. He imagines himself again sitting before the Important Personage; at first, Akaky pleads forgiveness, but as death nears, he curses him.

In its final pages, the narrator himself points out, “our little story unexpectedly finishes with a fantastic ending,” because after his death, rumours begin to spread that a ghost has been seen walking the city, stealing the coats from people that it passes. One night, the Important Personage decides to visit his mistress’s house. While he is on his way, he feels a hand on his collar, and on turning around sees the ghost of Akaky, who demands his overcoat. He is terrified. He throws his overcoat at the ghost and drives home. From that time onwards, he is seen to treat his subordinates with a little more humility. After that incident, Akaky’s ghost is not seen again. The narrator ends his narration with the account of another ghost seen in another part of the city. This other ghost meets the description of one of the ruffians.

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “*The Overcoat* is perhaps the best-known and most influential short fiction in all of Russian literature. Gogol’s *Dead Souls* and *The Overcoat* are considered the foundation of nineteenth-century Russian Realism.” Vladimir Nabokov, writing in 1941, called it “The greatest Russian short story ever written.” The story and its author have had a great influence on Russian literature. Writing about Russian realist writers, Eugene-Melchior de Vogue (some attribute it to Dostoevsky) says,

“We all come out from Gogol’s ‘Overcoat.’” The story includes tragedy and comedy, and is considered to be a satire on the oppressive bureaucracy of nineteenth-century czarist Russia. Some critics have described it as the portrayal of a common man enduring the oppression and ridicule of an unfeeling society and its bureaucracy.

Generally, bureaucracy is defined as government by the central administration, characterised by specialisation of functions, adherence to fixed rules and a hierarchy of authority. Nevertheless, when bureaucracy is used as a depreciatory term, it implies a system with officials who are oppressive and insensitive; a system marked by red tape and excessive rules and regulations. There is a universal human need for compassion. However, when Akaky seeks help from the authorities to get back his stolen overcoat, he meets with hierarchical bureaucracy which tends to inculcate the lack of compassion, by refusing to recognize the brotherhood of humanity. We see it in the description of the “Important Personage” who typifies all that is pretentious and inconsequential in a hierarchical bureaucracy. This system emphasizes rank and status, and some people are so obsessed with it that it tends to affect their ability to act humanely towards one another. The “Important Personage,” who is only too conscious of his position, is an example of it. Akaky, on the other hand, is not concerned with rank and status and tolerates mistreatment from everyone.

A similar lack of sympathy and sensitivity is seen in co-workers of Akaky. All through the story the author paints him as an unimpressive character, but at the same time he emerges as a pathetic character. Many critics draw attention to a “humane passage” which demonstrates a sudden shift in the narration’s style from comic to tragic. When the despotic treatment meted out by his co-workers becomes unbearable for him, Akaky says, “Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?” These words bring about a sudden transformation in a young man, who is a new-comer, and so far, had been joining other co-workers in making fun of Akaky, as he is moved to pity.

The narrator expresses it poignantly: “Some unseen force repelled him from the comrades whose acquaintance he had made, on the supposition that they were well-bred and polite men. Long afterwards, in his gayest moments, there recurred to his mind the little official with the bald forehead, with his heart-rending words, ‘Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?’ In these moving words, other words resounded—‘I am thy brother.’ And the young man covered his face with his hand; and many a time afterwards, in the course of his life, shuddered at seeing how much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage coarseness is concealed beneath delicate, refined worldliness, and even, O God! in that man whom the world acknowledges as honourable and noble.”

The “Overcoat,” which is also called the “cloak” is a symbol with many meanings. At a simple level, it symbolizes the basic necessity for survival in the extremely cold climate of St. Petersburg, and Akaky has to pass through hardship to save enough money to buy a new overcoat. The determination to acquire an overcoat, however, gives a purpose and meaning to his dull and monotonous life, filling it with vigour and passion. His feelings have been very vividly described: “From that time forth his existence seemed to become, in some way, fuller, as if he were married, or as if some other man lived in him, as if, in fact, he were not alone, and some pleasant friend had consented to travel along life’s path with him, the friend being no other than the cloak, with thick wadding and a strong lining incapable of wearing out. He became more lively and even his character grew firmer, like that of a man who has made up his mind, and set himself a goal.” According to some critics, while school uniform, a standardized outfit, puts all students on equal footing, in the story, the “overcoat” is a status symbol; for the new overcoat brings him acceptance and respect from his companions, at least temporarily, because when he loses the coat, they once again forget about him. In robbing him of his cloak, the thieves rob him of all that mattered in his life, so that he dies soon after losing his cloak.

The Supernatural or “fantastic” element is added to the story

when Akaky’s ghost is described as stealing the overcoats from people regardless of their rank, and that makes the ending “unique and unexpected.” In dying, he has been able to take some kind of revenge, which he was not able to during life. “Constant complaints poured in from all quarters that the backs and shoulders, not only of titular but even court councillors, were exposed to the danger of a cold on account of the frequent dragging off of their cloaks.” It was as if he was seeking compensation after death, for the way in which he was ignored in life. Some critics describe the stealing of the overcoat or rather cloak from the “Important Personage” as symbolizing taking away or exposing pretension that had kept him from acknowledging his common bond with Akaky and the rest of humanity. After that as if the desire to settle the account was satisfied, “no more instances of his dragging cloaks from people’s shoulders were heard of.”

A cloak is a cover or an outer garment that tends to conceal or hide. In a far deeper sense, our personality is a cloak. “The cloak of darkness is upon the deep of matter; within its folds I struggle. Beneath my gaze it deepens, Lord; it is dispelled beneath the waving of thy hand,” says *The Voice of the Silence*. What and Who are we? The world sees and evaluates us only on the basis of our personality, achievements, skills, knowledge, etc. Likewise, the way we see the world is like a man inside a cloak. We do not see things clearly. We mistake our perceptions to be knowledge and experience, but that is not true. Even if we have read several books and are considered knowledgeable, we realize that we lack self-knowledge. The way we see ourselves is not the real “me.” Our moods are unreliable and changing. One may be depressed due to some serious problem, but on getting one’s favourite dish to eat, one’s mood changes entirely. Our thoughts and actions are self-regarding. Our ordinary personality is like a cloak. It is suffocating. Spiritual life involves a struggle to come out of that cloak and realize our true divine nature. The task of recognizing our base tendencies and overcoming them, and thus throwing off the cloak to unfold the divine within is a difficult task,

but it must be accomplished. “Unless above himself he can erect himself, how poor a thing is man!” says Samuel Daniel. This task is made easier by taking the help of a Spiritual Teacher or a Scripture.

Theosophy teaches that two-thirds of the world’s evil is due to man’s inhumanity to man. The real source of evil is the reasoning man who dissociates himself from Nature, refusing to recognize the divine element in everything. It gives rise to the feeling of separateness and selfishness. The first object of Theosophy is to form a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour. “If the action of one reacts on the lives of all, and this is the true scientific idea, then it is only by all men becoming brothers and all women sisters, and by all practising, in their daily lives true brotherhood and true sisterhood, that the real human solidarity, which lies at the root of the elevation of the race, can ever be attained,” writes H.P.B.

IF WE really and truly understood what is our true personal dignity, we should at once spring to our feet and change our very hearts and minds....We should have compassion on the sick and the poor. We should work with all our might for our home and family. We should be obedient to the ordinances of our rulers. We should be merciful, honest and patient, so as to be good examples to all men. Then without appearing to instruct we should in the most natural way be able to act as guides. Then all classes of the people would associate in peace. Everyone would pass through life with smiling faces, co-operating with the Buddha and the Gods of heaven and earth.

Then the eight million Gods, *Bonten* (Brahma), *Taishaku* (Indra)...all of them would be a protection to you. Evil demons and false gods would flee. There would be no sickness. The whole world would be at peace. The five harvest grains would mature and every home be prosperous. The children who were born would be good too.

—HAKUIN

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS LOVE—FRIENDSHIP—AFFINITIES—II

PEOPLE fancy they love another while they love themselves and want love from son or husband and so on. Between blind Cupid and all-seeing Eros there is the difference between Kama and Buddhi. The gulf to be bridged between divine and the human love is wider—and deeper—than between human and animal love.

Our human emotions of love and the rest are different from animal emotions (there is a volume by Charles Darwin on animal emotions). The Love of the cow for the calf is different in kind from the love of the human mother for her babe. In some ways that animal instinctive love is superior to erratic, uncertain love of human mother; though in reality reason and rationality are meant to improve the intelligent love of the human. Anyway, Divine Love, Compassion is again different in kind from human love. The ingredients of devotion, gratitude, sacrifice and so forth which Manas brightens up make for divine emotions. Becoming Compassion is a higher stage and follows possessing Compassion. We can develop good emotions and become truly human, but to become divine we have to secure, absorb and assimilate the stuff of Compassion. The higher aspect of *Prajna* is Compassion and the highest is Compassion Absolute.

We all love differently. Purification of love means in the end impersonalization of love. Recognize that Brotherhood is more a matter of feeling than of thought and more a matter of thought than of words. If people were to act Brotherhood about which they speak, they would be practising the *Shila* virtue. One has to make a deliberate effort to *be* brotherly to one person or another. We hope to be brotherly and we are vague and we miss out acting when occasion arises. It is very necessary, therefore, to plan, let us say every morning, how we shall be brotherly to so-and-so during the day, and remember to carry out the resolve. This sounds mechanical, but I do not think it is. There are will, thought and feeling behind such a deliberate act.

Of course none of us is without foibles and weaknesses; but also, is there anyone without love and sacrifice and consideration for friends? As Judge says, in the great round-up our petty faults and even meanness matter but little. Love is the most powerful of forces—immortal and unifying. So, I say—let friendship grow from more to more—more friends and a deepening quality of love for old ones. Exclusiveness and the sense of possession mar the strength and the beauty of love. I do not hold that “Two is company and three is not.” The Self manifesting in different friends is different; each face reveals a new colour, a new number, a new tone, and a new word. To learn to see the Self in the friend enables us to learn to see the Self in the foe.

The joy created by the bond between real boon companions touches all those ready to experience that kind of joy. The invisible effects of love and joy are not calculable and are many and vast. Is it not a saddening commentary on present-day human nature that love and joy have become narrow and restrictive and even polluted? The shadows of lust which look like love produce grief. So, enjoy in secrecy and in silence the love and the joy in the inner recess of your heart created by the bond of companionship and strengthened by true knowledge and pure service of human souls. You must learn to radiate your silent power of love and joy in a quiet, unobtrusive way. As we strive to live and experience heart-love and heart-joy, not only our own thoughts and ideas rise to high elevations but they in their turn raise others to the heights of our own hearts. It is from the Heart that the Path to Them starts within and the depths and the heights become one.

Personal love is not only a stepping-stone but a very necessary one and badly needed. Love, pure and impersonal, is a force or a power which focuses itself at various levels—from the body to Atma. Most of us, at this hour, find it focused in our Kama-Manasic nature. Students of Theosophy, with the aid of our Philosophy, should try to move it one step higher. Manas has to be extricated from the grip of Kama. When this is done we are *Antahkaranic* beings and love

from that stage is purer and more impersonal as it focuses itself in body and brain. Lust is *tamasic* Kama; personal, selfish love is *rajasic*, but when we are centred in *Antahkarana* and act as *Antahkaranic* beings we begin to express *sattvic* love.

As to personal affection and love which are so necessary to be good so as to become spiritual—at our stage we have to learn to purify our love in order to elevate it. Krishna calls Arjuna his “devotee and friend,” and that stage of love is perhaps the last stepping-stone to impersonalization of love. Love for a friend like you seems necessary to me for myself at my stage of evolution; and not only to give and radiate love but to receive it also. The next stage, it seems to me, is the deepening of it through love and devotion to the Guru. Love between co-disciples—*Guru-bhais*—deepens as devotion towards our own Guru and His Blessed Compeers increases. Just as the personality has not to be destroyed but has to be transformed and transmuted into a *Nirmanakaya*, so also good and pure love between companions becomes elevated, becomes more and more noble, bringing them nearer to the throne of impersonal love. Through family love broadened we come upon love of those who are not blood-relations and proceed to widen our circle of love. In doing so we come upon the deepening process. We come to love our friends better than our parents and our brothers and sisters. Because of soul-ties co-workers and companions become special friends.

Trust and love tie the knot of friendship, but there are also trust and love in blood ties. There is less of the personal force in friendship and more of the egoic. Love is love—difficult to analyse, but the emotion has to be felt. Love has in it compassion, affinity and devotion; it seems to me that these three ingredients must exist in proper proportion to overcome the vagaries and other awkward obstacles which must come to test our compassion and affinity and devotion. Love is the binding power in and of *Tanha*—the will to live with others, in others. Hate is the will to live for self and with and in others provided the self is satisfied. A sonnet of Shakespeare

has real understanding. It refers to that love which “bears it out even to the edge of doom.” To live with and in others, to pour out any or all of the three aspects into another, into others, into all—that is expansion and hate is contraction.

It is not only natural but essential that there should be a mutual exchange of love, trust and faith between friends. But one must not have a bargaining spirit: “He is cold, therefore I will be cold.” “He is warm, therefore I will be warm.” You say that it must be two-way traffic, but in chelaship we are learning something more. To begin with, take an example not from individual, but from corporate life: Masters love humanity; it is one-way traffic. They work, watch and labour, and civilizations rise and fall and rise again, but They go on. Now, in a similar fashion, take our own real and great Guru. He knows us from the past. *Kali-Yuga* and other Karmic conditions blot out our personal memory of the inner relationship. What does the Master do? Ever ready He is, waiting for the chela to get ready. Then, even during chelaship how graciously, how patiently, how compassionately He watches, now coaxing, now admonishing, mostly in silence, to make the chela awaken! That, in a way, is one-way traffic. Now we have to learn quietly and silently to copy that almost unapproachable example. Suppose you find your friend going astray, then going wrong, will you stop loving him, advising him, admonishing him, etc.? If you left him, would it be for you a step taken on the right path? So, you will soon find yourself developing the holding power which labours for two-sided traffic while going singly on the single track. What I am trying to convey to you is in one of Shakespeare’s sonnets:

Love’s not Time’s fool...

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

Read the whole of it. It begins: “Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments.”

(To be concluded)

ON POSSESSION AND EXORCISM

THE DICTIONARY meaning of possession is, the state of owning or controlling something. A person said to be possessed is someone who is influenced or controlled by something, such as, an evil spirit, a passion or an idea. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in religious and folk traditions, a possessed person is under the direct control of an external supernatural power, and exhibits violent unusual movements, shrieking and uttering disconnected or strange speech. From the scientific point of view, demonic or spirit possession have been treated as epilepsy, hysteria, schizophrenia or some other forms of psychological illness. However, in other traditions, the possessed person is seen as an intermediary between men and spirits and functions as a medium for the controlling spirit. Such a person goes into a trance state, which is either self-induced or induced by drugs or by collective hysteria.

Exorcism is the religious, spiritual practice of driving away the demons or djinns or other spirit entities from a person or an area that is believed to be possessed. Exorcism may be done by causing an entity to swear on oath by performing an elaborate ritual or, simply by commanding it to depart in the name of a higher power.

In Catholicism possession may mean only sudden attacks of irrationally obsessive thoughts or it may assume far more severe form in which demon or evil spirit can take a full possession of a person’s body without their consent. A possessed individual may manifest superhuman strength, or may speak in languages not known to him, or there might be revelation of knowledge that is not possessed by the victim. According to eastern belief, a person could be possessed by a good and benevolent spirit or a malevolent spirit. It could also be a *bhut* or ghost of a person who has died with some unfulfilled desire.

It is important to know, who is vulnerable to “spirit” possession? Theosophy teaches that victims of possession are those extremely passive individuals called mediums. 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. The more passive he is, the more successful he is as a medium. The moment he begins to exercise any control, that moment he ceases to be a medium. Attempts to cultivate clairvoyant faculty, which may involve gazing into coffee cups or white of the Egg or glass of water, or shinning objects, in which pictures or images from astral light get reflected, without proper training of the mind and senses, slowly but surely, leads 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*.

H.P.B. describes a “medium” as a “sick sensitive,” born with a peculiar organization. Mediumship developed by “extraneous influences,” may include the use of drugs that may induce trance state, as also, by hypnotic and mesmeric trance. In waking state, we operate on the physical plane, while in trance state we operate on the astral plane. In trance state, the physical eyes and ears are paralyzed for the time being, and the brain is made to report what is seen and heard by the astral, 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 this abnormal state she delivered oracles” (*Isis*, pp. xxxviii-ix). It appears that repetitive, mechanical and monotonous movements of the body can also put a person temporarily into a passive and mediumistic state. A sort of religious frenzy is experienced by women in India, who vigorously move their heads and torsos round and round, in gyrating motion, till finally they slip into a sort of trance state and answer certain questions put to them. It is believed that in such a state of religious frenzy a god or goddess enters into and takes possession of her, answering questions concerning future events or advising on the

course of action in certain matters.

The moment the person becomes passive the door is opened and all the unknown forces, mostly lower, rush in and affect the lower, animal nature. Thus, a medium can become prey to evil entities, and under their influence become a murderer, a drunkard, a thief, etc.

“Mediumship is measured by the quality of aura with which the individual is surrounded. This may be dense, cloudy, noisome, mephitic, nauseating to the pure spirit, and attract only those foul beings, who delight in it...or it may be pure, crystalline, opalescent as the morning dew. All depends upon the moral character of the medium.” It appears that “possession” may also be by an elemental spirit who takes control of the mind and faculties of the passive person. In the time of Moses there were men and women who were consulters of “familiar” spirits. Mr. Judge explains that these are the individuals who have opened up intercourse with either fire or air elementals or nature-spirits, who have knowledge peculiar to themselves and can use the inner (astral) senses of man for the purpose of getting him answers which he himself cannot obtain in an ordinary manner. This is analogous to what happens in hypnotism, wherein the inner astral man is temporarily disengaged from the outer one. In the Acts of the Apostles (16:10), we read about a “*damsel possessed with a spirit of divination*,” which helped her to make predictions, and St. Paul is said to have driven the possessing spirit out of the woman. St. Paul could drive out the elemental spirit using the power of his Will. Mr. Judge distinguishes the elemental in this case from the ghost or *bhut* or astral remains of a dead person, which could take possession of the body of a medium. Such “familiar spirits” or elementals are the “nature-spirits” that have yet to pass through human stage, and therefore they lack *manas* and spiritual principles. Lacking in conscience and spiritual principles they tend to influence only lower nature in man, paralyzing the moral qualities, and inflaming passions over a period of time.

Socrates, the Greek philosopher, was a medium, and was never

initiated into the Mysteries, because he had his “familiar spirit,” or a *daimonion*, so that he would allow himself to be ruled by this “guide,” and not according to the rules of the sanctuary. Any mediumistic person would be passive and he could be “*entranced* at the will and pleasure of this ‘power’ which controlled him,” and therefore such a person could not be entrusted with secrets of the final initiation. (*Isis*, II, 117-18)

After the death of the body, generally, souls go back to the spirit world. But unfulfilled desires, the family’s attachment to them, a brutal or unnatural death may stop the soul from moving on to the spirit world. Such souls may possess another living human being. Among the Hindus it is customary to offer *Pinda* (rice balls) after a person’s death by his relatives, calling upon the name of the departed person. In Russia, for six weeks after the death of a person, dishes full of rice with a candle stuck in the middle are laid on the tomb of the dead. A mass is said for the *rest* and peace of the departed soul, in order that it should not become a *bhut*, a restless, wandering soul, in the earth’s atmosphere.

H.P.B. explains by means of an incident that it is very difficult to ascertain a genuine case of possession. There was a lady called Lakshmibai whose wish it was to be removed to another place or room before dying because it was believed that whoever died in the room she was then occupying, became a *bhut* or ghost. But this wish was not fulfilled, and she died. Six months later a distant relative of Lakshmibai, who stayed in that room, got a high fever and was trembling. The same was construed to be “possession” by a spirit. When questioned, whose spirit it was, the ghost introduced itself as Lakshmibai and said that the thought of not being removed to another room and becoming a ghost, as a result, had tormented her. So, could it be that the unfulfilled desire detained the Ego and brought it back after six months? H.P.B. explains that the intense thought or desire of the dying person can spread magnetic, unhealthy influence that affects all people for a long time to come. For instance, a person who dies of a contagious disease, the objects touched by him/her or

a bit of his/her clothing can communicate that disease to a *physiologically sensitive* person (and he may not be anywhere around the dying person) long after his death. An intense thought is equally contagious, like the germs of infectious diseases. Just as the thoughts of the living can so work as to affect and psychologize another mind, so also the thoughts of a dead person. Thus, the intense thought of the dead person can work on the brain and nervous system of the sensitive and pave the way for rushing in of the mass of other floating thoughts of the dead person. Hence, the person so infected by the thoughts of the dead person is able to answer any question put relating to that dead person (*The Theosophist*, January 1882). Hence it is not easy to be sure whether it is the “ghost” of the dead person that visits, and has taken possession.

Mediumship is always marked by *passivity*. When a medium is perfectly passive, his own astral spirit may be benumbed or crowded out of his body and the body is occupied by some depraved entity, which is termed *possession* or *obsession*. The depraved entity refers to someone who has severed all connections with his divine nature by living a series of lives of vice, crimes and animal passions. Such entities seek to enter the bodies of simple-minded, weak, passive and sensitive individuals, who then become possessed and obsessed, till they are dislodged or driven away by a pure and powerful will. “But too often the cause of the most celebrated crime is to be sought in such possession....Spirits never control persons of positive character who are determined to resist all extraneous influences. The weak and feeble-minded whom they can make their victims they drive into vice” (*Isis*, I, 487-490). It can be seen that such disembodied spirits are those who had always delighted in evil, and now being without a body they take every opportunity to enter someone else’s body to commit the evil acts.

The book, *Arigo: Surgeon of the Rusty Knife*, by John G. Fuller, deals with the curious case of a peasant named Arigo in a small village of Brazil, who brought about almost miraculous cures and hundreds of operations, without antiseptics and anaesthetics, and

usually with an ordinary kitchen knife, while in a mediumistic trance. He made thousands of correct diagnoses without even examining the patient. He saved many with cancer and other fatal diseases who had been given up as hopeless by leading doctors. According to his autobiography, around 1950, he began to suffer from trances and hallucinations. One day he felt that the voice that was pursuing him took over his body and he had a vision of a bald man, dressed in a white apron, and supervising a team of doctors and nurses, in an operating room. This entity identified itself as “Dr. Fritz,” a German surgeon who had died during World War I. Hence, it is said that when Arigo performed operations, he embodied the spirit of Dr. Adolf Fritz.

It appears that one of the forms of obsession is insanity. “We have to include in obsession that mysterious thing—insanity. Physicians do not understand this affliction. They cannot explain how a man suddenly loses his identity and becomes a raving maniac,” writes Mr. Judge. In milder cases of insanity, the man becomes, for long periods of time, some other person and does not have a memory of his former state. Such a person alternates between two personalities. Broadly, we may define insanity as the condition in which the Ego loses all control over the psycho-physiological side of his body without losing the body itself. Our mind is connected to the body through certain electric and magnetic channels. Just like water leaks out of the tank, which has cracks, so also our hold on the body could become weak and we are not able to remain in possession of these channels. Then we leave the body for some time when other forces or intelligences—good or bad—take over. But the Ego is able to take possession of the body for a short term, intermittently, so that the insane man exhibits lucid intervals. Finally, a time comes when all the magnetic and electric channels are so clogged or destroyed that we have to leave the body forever. (“*Forum*” *Answers*, pp. 32-33)

Another form of insanity is witnessed during the state of hypnotism. In the article “Hypnotism,” Mr. Judge explains that in a

sane man’s body, soul and astral man are in proper and harmonious relationship with one another. A hypnotized man is not wholly sane, because the relation between the Ego and the astral man is temporarily severed, and the possibility exists that another and different entity may enter the body and brain and masquerade as the real person. If the astral shells of men and women long since dead, enter the body of another living being, the person becomes insane; and many a maniac is simply a body inhabited by an external/foreign entity that does not belong to it.

“Jesus, Apollonius, and some of the apostles, had the power to cast out devils, by purifying the atmosphere *within* and *without* the patient, so as to force the unwelcome tenant to flight (*Isis*, I, 356). A true exorcist is someone who is able to discern correctly the case of possession or obsession and able to drive out the entity. Like the purity of mesmerizer in healing the sick, the purity of the exorcist is emphasized. People like Apollonius, Plotinus, Jesus, Porphyry, etc., had around them an atmosphere of such divine beneficence, created through superhuman morality and sanctity of their lives that they caused evil spirits to flee before them (*Isis*, I, 487). These evil spirits can be dislodged by a powerful and *pure* will. The best protection against negative forces and possession is a clear conscience and a feeling of good-will towards all, combined with the desire to benefit humanity.

In the article “A Case of Obsession,” H.P.B. makes the following suggestion for the cure of obsession. “He can be helped by a magnetizer who understands the nature of obsession, and who is morally pure and physically healthy; it must be a powerful magnetizer, a man of commanding will-force. But the fight for freedom will, after all, have to be fought by the patient himself. His will-power must be aroused. His diet must be of the simplest, he must neither eat animal food, nor touch any stimulant....[He must] control his thoughts and compel them to dwell upon pure, elevating, spiritual things.” (*H.P.B. Series No. 9*, p. 44)

THE MYSTERY OF SELF

THE QUESTION of who or what we are constantly baffles us. The Self that we are cannot be divorced either from the concept of Life as a whole or from any particular aspect of that Life. We need to know not only that part of us which is aware and conscious and which we call our *self* during waking life, but also that in us which operates during dreams, sinks into fathomless depths during the deep-sleep state, and at death survives the disintegration of our physical frame and physical consciousness. But it may be asked, what, if anything, survives? What is consciousness? What is immortality? The key to all these questions cannot be found anywhere else than in Self.

It has been said that man was created in the image of God. This is true provided we formulate clearly in our minds what is really meant by man and by God. Man, as a trinity of spirit, soul and body, is an integral part of the Cosmos. What are the specific relationships of man to the rest of the manifested universe?

Manifestation is the expression on this plane of the Unknown Thought of the One God, unknown until, through the instrumentality of the Divine Will, it became objective. Many mistakenly believe the objective, material universe to be the reality. If we understand that not an atom or particle of matter remains motionless and unchanged for a split second, we realize that gross, solid matter is an illusion. There is only the ideal form within which countless physical atoms, made up of the “lives,” arrange themselves. What is cognizable by our physical perception is only the outer form, and it is this form that man calls his self and that he worships. It has acquired an identity of its own, and few look on it as but a vehicle of the true Self, of the God within.

As said above, the whole of Cosmos is the reflection of that which has existed from Eternity in the imagination of the “Unknown God.” It is called “Unknown” because, could it be known, the whole panorama of life which is the concretized expression of Divine

Thought would automatically become cognizable. This is impossible to the human mind as it is at present. The deific essence remains for ever the unfathomable source and origin of all that is, has been, or ever shall be. It does not exist in time and space, and yet It for ever Is. It is the ultimate Reality underlying all things, for how could the deceptive images thrown upon the screen of the illusionary life of the Cosmos be perceptible if it were not for the shining spark of Eternal Consciousness which is embodied in both the cognizer and that which is cognized? Only that which is immortal in us and of the nature of the true can aspire to the ultimate Truth.

Man alone can mould himself in the image of the Divine. He possesses the three attributes of the Deity, that of creation, preservation and destruction. His true Self, which partakes of the deific essence of the Great Unknowable, is fathomless. It is the Great Mystery and man’s only God, his Higher Self. The great mystery of Selfhood lies beyond the reach, comprehension or range of vision of the brain consciousness. Yet the true heart and abode of man is that Self, and it is that Self which sustains and gives light and life to that which is familiar to us as our personal self.

That self of ours which thinks, feels, suffers and enjoys, that self which we think we know, is a pure shadow, a sheer illusion, for it is impermanent and ever changing. It is an image created out of a thousand thoughts and sensations, habits and prejudices, which change from day to day. This image we call our self is not created from within without; extraneous forces work to model and fashion it. To give up that comforting picture of self is a distressing experience, but it needs must be faced and the true field of our life’s experience perceived.

The personality has to be seen for what it is; it is not the whole of the being. It is complex, has many facets, and has impulses which make the true heart turn away with a sense of horror. Man has to renounce from his heart that image of his lower self and begin the long task of living the life of the true Self, which implies living in harmony with all creatures, bearing love to the meanest among them.

We then begin to see the universe in a different light. The consciousness which is being born anew each day reveals a world of infinite possibilities, in which to create is to live—not in time and space, but in eternity.

Man need not remind himself constantly of his sins and weaknesses; he ought rather to keep constantly in mind his greatness, his oneness with all the great beings, great souls who can help him to break through the limited conceptions he has of himself and of God. The good or evil we do is not our own good or our own evil. To do evil is to subject our own will to the cosmic forces of evil, and to do good is to work in harmony with the laws of life. The vastness and profundity of Nature fill us with awe. Can we be less than that? Identifying ourselves with Krishna, the Lord of all creatures, we see ourselves as the unborn, the unmanifested, the infinite and the All-Wise.

THE REASON why the life of man was, as tradition says, spontaneous, is as follows: In those days God himself was their shepherd, and ruled over them, just as man, who is by comparison a divine being, still rules over the lower animals. Under him there were no forms of government or separate possessions of women and children; for all men rose again from the earth, having no memory of the past. And although they had nothing of this sort, the earth gave them fruits in abundance, which grew on trees and shrubs unbidden, and were not planted by the hand of man. And they dwelt naked, and mostly in the open air, for the temperature of their seasons was mild; and they had no beds, but lay on soft couches of grass, which grew plentifully out of the earth. Such was the life of man in the days of Cronos.

—PLATO

THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS

ARE ALL those who are drawn to Theosophy *true* Theosophists? In the ultimate analysis, they are, but until that ultimate state is reached, they are not.

This is how Madame Blavatsky defines Theosophy in the *Key to Theosophy*:

Theosophy is Divine Knowledge or Science....The real meaning of the term [is] “Divine Wisdom,” *Theosophia* or Wisdom of the gods, as *Theogonia*, genealogy of the gods...

Theosophy, in its abstract meaning, is Divine Wisdom, or the aggregate of the knowledge and wisdom that underlie the Universe—the homogeneity of eternal GOOD; and in its concrete sense it is the sum total of the same as allotted to man by nature, on this earth, and no more.

Further to these two definitions we have the following definition of “Theosophia” in *The Theosophical Glossary*: “Wisdom-religion, or ‘Divine Wisdom.’ ...In its practical bearing, Theosophy is purely *divine ethics*.”

Is there a difference between “divine ethics” and the ethics taught and practised in the race or nation to which we belong? Divine ethics by its very nature is eternal, universal and impartial in its application. To the extent, therefore, that racial or national morality and conduct are based on universal principles, to that extent do they conform to and are a part of divine ethics. However, we find many “codes of ethics” peculiar to the races and nations that make up our present-day world. and the application of these codes tends more towards separation than towards unity. Here we see the evil of the “dire heresy” of separateness which divides individuals and groups of individuals, nations and races, from one another. This sense of separateness results in unrest and strife, and in a tendency towards war and destruction, instead of towards peace and construction.

Where, therefore, must we start in this search for divine ethics as a basis for morality and conduct? If, as Theosophy teaches, the individual is the “nucleus” for nation and race, then it naturally follows that the

search must be an individual one, and must begin here and now, where we are presently situated. All that is good in our family, nation and race must be fostered and embodied within us—first, by desire for it; secondly, by discriminative choice between that which is “good” and that which is “evil”; and, thirdly, by the study of such books as clearly set forth those ethical values that are universal in their scope and practice.

The basis for true ethics has been clearly enunciated in such books as *The Voice of the Silence*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the Sermon on the Mount. They can be traced and found in the ethical precepts expounded by Mohammedan mystics and Sufis; they may also be found in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and other sacred texts of the world. From this it will be seen that the avenues for research are many and varied, but an essential basis for such research, in order to avoid the pitfalls of non-essentials, is a comprehensive and complete study of the Three Fundamental Propositions of *The Secret Doctrine*.

We have Madame Blavatsky’s definition of who a Theosophist is: “Be what he may, once that a student abandons the old and trodden highway of routine, and enters upon the solitary path of independent thought—Godward—he is a Theosophist; an original thinker, a seeker after the eternal truth, with ‘an inspiration of his own’ to solve the universal problems.” This gives the general principle for judging who a Theosophist is. Another statement of H.P.B.’s is more specific: “A Theosophist is who Theosophy does.”

If Theosophy is Divine Wisdom or Divine Knowledge, and in its application is Divine Ethics or Divine Morality, then the steps from speaker to practitioner will indicate the many types of Theosophists that there are in the world. Many are Theosophists because they live according to the basic Teachings and Ethics we call Divine Wisdom and Divine Ethics, even though they may themselves be unaware of the fact. There are many others who have recognized the Teachings and the Teachers, and because of this, theirs is the duty of promulgation by word of, mouth or pen, and more important still, by action in terms of the Teachings they study and promulgate.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Will Justice be fairer with Artificial Intelligence? In a 2002 American science fiction film, *Minority Report*, *Precrime* is a specialized police department, whose task is to identify and eliminate persons who will commit a crime in the future, based on the foreknowledge provided by three psychics called “precogs,” supposed to have the ability to see future events. “Precrime” is a term used to criticise the tendency in criminal justice systems to focus on crimes not yet committed. We see the reflection of it in 2016 ProPublica expose on algorithm bias in risk assessment tools evaluating the possibility of recidivism or the habit of relapsing into crime, in offenders. The use of algorithm-based decision making and Artificial Intelligence tools in criminal justice systems have been on increase. We hear of certain countries designing and making use of “robot judges” for handling minor disputes or cases. The data-driven decisions with Artificial Intelligence tools help the law firms by providing “the profiles of judges, their past verdicts, motions they are likely to admit, which citations could hook them, and line of argument opposing lawyers may take.” In India, the development of such decision support systems can aid judges to reduce the burden of pending cases.

Those involved in the development of data analytic tools feel that there may not be sufficient algorithmic fairness in the criminal justice system, because Artificial Intelligence “could reinforce old biases since it learns from historical crime data that was disproportionately harsh on marginalised communities.” Artificial Intelligence bias is defined as an anomaly in the output of machine learning algorithms, due to the prejudiced assumptions made during the algorithm development process or prejudices in the training data. The suggestion is to use Artificial Intelligence as a “diagnostic tool” to reveal inequality, to question old data and inherent social biases. The advantage of using Artificial Intelligence is saving on fees paid to the lawyers by making use of the *courtroom5 app* that offers low-cost digital drafting and filing in small claims civil cases.

However, it is felt that the Artificial Intelligence tools that can provide the profiles of judges and predict case outcomes could be undermining the idea of a fair trial. The six-part *In AI We Trust?* Podcast expresses the hope of a fairer, efficient justice system, if judges develop a sufficiently critical attitude to Artificial Intelligence, and humans work on their “imperfections” with AI’s “technical objectivity” and combine it with human experience. (*The Times of India*, January 8, 2022)

Supporters of the theory of “Artificial Intelligence” feel it probable that computers and computer-guided robots will eventually—with their superior intelligence—make human beings superfluous. A machine is designed by the human mind and a human mind is capable of designing a better machine, which can give better output. The algorithms, the robot judges, the Artificial Intelligence tools are all designed by the human mind. A machine cannot “think” like a human being, but gives judgement based on man-made tools and programmes. These programmes and tools themselves are subject to human biases. The Artificial Intelligence systems contain biases due to (1) Cognitive biases, which are unconscious errors in thinking that affect an individual’s judgements and decisions. These biases could seep into machine learning algorithms. (2) If data is not complete, it may not be representative and therefore it may include bias. Man is superior to a machine on account of his self-consciousness and freedom of choice. Regardless of mechanical and chemical developments, the higher powers of the mind will remain, apparently, the undisputed prerogative of man. Unlike the machine, man has intuition and imagination, compassion and the will to create and sacrifice and serve.

Intuition is far superior to the reasoning process. Intuition is the direct cognition of what is right in all areas. This faculty of intuition is developed by observation and experience, and helps a person to make quick decisions without having to reason things out. People making such quick decisions feel something familiar that calls up the memory of earlier experiences, and respond accordingly. Their

judgment is based on a hunch or gut feeling. When the mind works in conjunction with spiritual nature, it is a creative or intuitive mind, guided from within to make the right choice. A machine is limited by the programme and the data fed by individuals, and is incapable of making an independent judgement. A human being can develop his power of intuition by exercising it more frequently, by learning from previous errors and by living a morally pure life.

Let us be civil to each other. There should be respect and dignity for each human being, based on the recognition of the one Divinity within all of us. Our interactions with one another must be based on a concept, which the author, Glen Kezwer, calls “life-supporting.” In other words, let us acknowledge that we are living, conscious beings, who contact the world with our five senses. This life in each of us must be recognized and accorded dignity. In Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms, emphasis is laid on *ahimsa* or non-violence. The cornerstone of Gandhiji’s freedom movement was non-violence. We commit violence by thoughts, by words and by actions.

In Indian tradition, when people meet each other or take leave of each other, they fold their hands together and greet each other with the words, “*Namaste*.” It means “I honour you,” or “the Divine in me honours the Divine in you.” The author says that if we break this word into “na” meaning “not,” “ma” meaning “me,” and “te” meaning “you,” *namaste* would mean, “not me or you.” As we point the folded hands upwards, it symbolically indicates the highest, infinite essence which is the pure consciousness within each of us, which deserves respect and honour. We could list out many examples of incivility, which include road rage, racism, being violent with a subordinate or a co-worker, use of demeaning language, and so on.

Let us admit that when we interact with another person in a civil and respectful manner, we are able to connect, and convey that their presence is valued as a fellow human being. We enable them to recognize their own intrinsic greatness. Civility means consideration

for others and it should rate higher than personal freedom. Personal freedom goes hand in hand with a personal obligation. We get what we give. According to Billante and Saunders, “Civility is behaviour in public which demonstrates respect for others and which entails curtailing one’s own immediate self-interest when appropriate.”

In the Tenth Chapter of the *Gita*, we read that Krishna resides in each one of us as our inner Self, and we are connected to one another by this inner consciousness. We are all united on the basis of the oneness of life. Focussing on what brings us together rather than on what divides us, enables us to deal with others in a respectful manner. The respect and dignity that should be accorded to all human beings and to all creatures have been expressed in the Sanskrit verse: “May all on Earth be blessed. May all remain healthy. May all see goodness and auspiciousness in every being. May all be free from suffering,” writes Glen Kezwer, a long-time meditator and a teacher of meditation, its philosophy and practice. (*Life Positive*, November 2021)

Civil behaviour forms part of the larger concern, namely, how should we treat each other? If we treat one another *humanely*, as one human being should treat another, two-thirds of the world’s evil will vanish into thin air. Today, we prefer to follow the Mosaic Law of retaliation, “Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.” Our present culture is full of violence, corruption and cheating. Our films, television serials, video games, newspapers and magazines seem to cater to and awaken the hidden demon in us. Yet, in his heart, each one expects to be loved, trusted and honoured. We must deserve before we desire and do unto others, as we would have them do unto us. We see and emphasize the personality, which is but a mask hiding the actor, the real man. Like pots of varying shapes and sizes, made from the same material, people of different nationalities, cultures, ideologies and idiosyncrasies, are identical in their essential nature. We, unfortunately, cannot see beyond the personalities and are caught up in the dire heresy of separateness.

In the spiritual life, we have to learn to use double standards, *i.e.*,

if the injustice is against us, we must let it go, but we must be ready to take up the defence as we would our own, when we see an innocent person being slandered unjustly. As the stone thrown into the pond creates ripples and those ripples converge back to the centre of disturbance, so also the reaction comes back to the actor. However, when we act for and *as the self* of all creatures, we do not offer a focus for the Karmic reaction to return. It is then like throwing a stone into a pond that has no boundaries so that the ripples do not converge back to the centre. “No particular mode of treatment is given by Theosophy. It simply lays down the law that governs us in all our acts and declares the consequences of those acts. It is for us to follow the line of action which shall result first in harmony now and forever, and second, in the reduction of the general sum of hate and opposition in thought or act which now darkens the world,” writes Mr. Judge.

We should try to transform loneliness into creative solitude. This advice is very relevant at present. Those who were accustomed to always being on the move have been confined to their homes during this pandemic. The aloneness, which should not be confused with loneliness, brings with it peace and deep silence. A certain Italian journalist, after many years of reporting across Asia, spent a month being all alone, reading books and observing nature. He experienced freedom from the incessant anxieties of daily life.

All religious traditions speak about the value of solitude. Jesus, after his baptism in the Jordan, is said to have spent 40 days and nights, alone in the desert or wilderness. Ancient Indic tradition considers solitariness as a necessary precondition for spiritual well-being and enlightenment. When an individual is alone in the wilderness, he has to fight his fears and the feeling of loneliness, by discovering inner strength and true identity. This is termed Wilderness Experience.

However, one can experience solitude in the midst of one’s

activities in the world. Spirituality is all about learning to cultivate inner solitude while in company with others. When we learn to convert loneliness into creative solitude, we can gain perspective on our lives and the happenings around us. As a result, we are enabled to solve our problems constructively. Solitude “can teach us to be independent, yet connected. It can rest the mind, lead us to contentment with what we are and have. It teaches us the value of silence. It helps us to have good look at ourselves and helps us to dissolve unhealthy attachments,” writes Janina Gomes. (*The Speaking Tree, The Times of India*, January 22, 2022)

There are people who are constantly seeking company and are other-dependent. On the other end of the scale are those who prefer to be alone. They will be seen going alone for a movie, for shopping, to a restaurant; they make their own choices and decisions. Right Loneliness is not to be attained by a loner or even by a gregarious person. It is to be achieved by one who combines in himself the capacity of a voluptuary and a stoic—one who is able to enjoy all the pleasures of life to the fullest and yet is not cast down if any or all the pleasures are denied. Likewise, he must combine the capacity of a loner and, a gregarious and social person. Paradoxically, Right Loneliness goes hand in hand with Right Companionship. A really solitary person will make friends wherever he goes. Self-reliance has radiating and drawing power.

For developing right loneliness, we are asked to increase impersonal moments in our life—such as when we are lost in appreciating sunrise or sunset, in helping someone. We might learn to spend some time every day in solitude. Most of all we need to cultivate companionship with that silent Spectator within. The Buddha teaches Right Loneliness and says that it must be preceded by Right Purity and Right Thought, followed by Right Rapture. These are inner states. Right Loneliness is the last but one stage on the Path. It implies inner equipoise and an absolute detachment from worldly matters, such that one lives *in* the world but is not *of* the world.