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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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SPIRIT OF CHANGE MEANING OF MAHASHIVRATRI

THE most universally notable phenomenon in Nature is that of constant change. Whether we observe physical or mental, visible or invisible, substantial or spiritual aspects of life, not for a day, not for an hour, is Nature stationary and still. In the sky, we see changes that are easily perceptible—in light, in colour, and in the movement of clouds. We perceive changes taking place in plants and trees, in the course of time. We observe *nitya pralaya* or constant change in the human body, and there is change even in the corpse. We notice ups and downs in our feelings and emotions. Our thoughts and ideas change from dullness to clarity, and back again to dullness. Thus, change in every sphere, in every kingdom, in every aspect, is the order of Nature.

Theosophy teaches that these changes do not take place haphazardly but according to the Law. Just as our heart beats, our lungs breathe, and our blood circulates according to Law, so also, every process in Nature without exception moves according to Law. This is the Law of Motion or the Great Breath. With the out-breathing, the one Unknowable Deity, breathes out a thought, as it were, which becomes the Kosmos and with the in-breathing, the Universe disappears into the bosom of “the Great Mother.” (*S.D.*, I, 43)

The whole circle of the progress of the universe is composed of

two halves—going forth and returning. The course of Nature is first manifestation, evolution or expansion—breathing out; then dissolution, involution or contraction—breathing in. This is known in the Hindu philosophy as *Pravritti* and *Nivritti margas*—the Path of Forthgoing and the Path of Return. Universes come to birth, then die, but come to birth again. If we apply this Law of Dual Motion to our own human lives, we see that the human body is born, grows, decays and dies: Birth and growth mark half of the process, and decay and death form the other half. Our bodily life depends upon our breathing—we breathe out and we breathe in, and as long as that dual process continues, the body lives. Waking and sleeping are the two halves of our complete day. One is able to find this duality or the pair of opposites in every department of our life.

Further examination of the human kingdom and human nature reveals that changes which occur are harmonious and rhythmic or the reverse. For instance, our heart beats harmoniously, but not always. If it beats faster or slower, it can cause pain and even death. The whole life process, bodily as well as mental and moral, is marked by health and sickness, pleasure and pain, harmony and disharmony. If we consider another aspect of this dual process, we find that some changes take place in us automatically, without our will or volition, while others are brought about by us with our Will and thought. We make some changes in our lives deliberately, while others take place without our knowledge and even against our wishes. We may try to learn something from this dual process taking place in every part of our being—involuntarily or voluntarily.

Thus, there are two types of change: harmonious and inharmonious; deliberate and self-induced as against automatic and involuntary. There are two kinds of ailments—those which are natural and necessary like teeth growing in a child, and those which are avoidable, like stomach pain caused by eating food not agreeable to it. Through harmonious change harmonious growth takes place, through disharmony also growth takes place, but there is suffering and sorrow.

There is growth through changes that take place without our wish or will, which we have not deliberately brought about. Change *is* the order of Nature and change must occur in us; but as human beings possess free will and the capacity to acquire knowledge, changes can be introduced deliberately or voluntarily. Take an example: we ought to know how to take care of our bodily health and eat, sleep, and exercise properly, mainly because we lack the right knowledge and are driven by our desires. As a result, the body grows in the process of change, and illnesses are imposed upon us by Nature because we do not acquire knowledge and work according to her laws.

Shiva is the God of Change, and some people dread Shiva as the God of Calamity and Death, while others worship him as the God of Regeneration—New Life. Why is this? Shiva is related to change, unharmonious as well as harmonious; when people do not cooperate with the Law of Change and Motion, which is the function of Shiva, and regenerate themselves, then Shiva forces the change on them, for, He is compassionate, though we do not always see His compassion. Death is one aspect of change which Shiva, so to speak, compels us to experience because we do not voluntarily undertake the task of regenerating ourselves. Theosophy teaches that we who possess free will should strive to regenerate ourselves. We must deliberately cooperate with Nature and change ourselves by acquiring the knowledge of the Wise Ones. It is thus that we become worshippers of Mahadeva (great god) or Shiva.

Shiva is also the “regenerator” who transmutes the lower forms of life into the higher. “Shiva, the *destroyer*, is the *creator* and the Saviour of Spiritual man, as he is the good gardener of nature. He weeds out the plants, human and cosmic, and kills the passions of the physical, to call to life the perceptions of the spiritual man,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, I, 459)

Why do all sages look upon Shiva as their Patron-Saint? Because He aids them in their labour at spiritual improvement, which task they have undertaken as their duty to humanity. Shiva, the spirit of

change, or more correctly, the spirit of betterment, helps us if we recognize that we have to become better and nobler, not only for our own sakes, not only for our salvation, but for the helping and uplifting of the world. We owe it to Nature, we owe it to humanity, we owe it to our own country, community, and family, to improve the conditions by self-improvement. This Duty is a real religious Duty or Dharma. When a person energizes himself to purify his mind and body, to impersonalize his feelings, to universalize his thoughts, he becomes a worshipper of Shiva—the great God of Regeneration. *Mahashivratri* is a festival which should remind us of the fact that our dark night of ignorance, of selfishness, of our self-preservation is over. A new Day is dawning—a day in which we undertake to ennoble our whole being so that inner soul-peace, and inner spiritual prosperity, which is changeless and immortal, may come not only to us, but to all others.

Let us consider what are the steps we, each one of us, now and here, should take to regenerate ourselves in soul, in mind and in consciousness. We may begin where we are and as we are, and turn our attention to bodily habits, such as waking-sleeping, eating-drinking, and work-recreation (exercise), which affect our health and nerves. One must watch the quantity and quality in this, following Buddha's Middle Path—temperance or moderation, remembering what the sixth chapter of the *Gita* tells us: "The meditation which destroyeth pain is produced in him who is moderate in eating and in recreation, of moderate exertion in his actions, and regulated in sleeping and waking." These are comparatively easy to change, for they are external; the inner process is more difficult. It is also true that regulating bodily habits does affect our minds and emotions. For example, food does affect more than just the body—it affects our feelings, not directly but *via* the astral body, which *is* affected by bodily habits. We cannot ignore the body and do what we like with it, as "Perfect physical health" is one of the qualifications of chelaship.

However, since our physical body is built on the astral body or

Linga Sharira, not only the appearance and size of the physical body but also its sensitiveness or grossness, the radiance or dullness, depend upon the astral body. Pure magnetism is the soul of bodily cleanliness. We are floating in the ocean of life or *Jiva* that permeates every object on the earth. Strictly speaking, *Prana* is breath. Generally, the terms *Prana* and life energy are used to denote that principle that permeates every part of our constitution. It is also suggested that the astral body is the vehicle of *Prana*, and just as blood circulates through the body, life energy or Pranic currents circulate in the astral body. The Pranic currents circulating in the astral body affect the physical body and ultimately stream forth as our magnetism in the form of magnetic fluid. The purity of magnetic fluid or pure magnetism is not to be obtained by water and soap, and though it is affected by the cleanliness of skin, hair, nails, etc., it is not dependent on it. “Man makes his magnetism with his mind,” says an occult aphorism. The quality of *Prana* that partakes of man’s psychic nature is dependent on his thoughts. Since we are always thinking our magnetism changes, for better or for worse, every hour. It gets reflected in our magnetism or magnetic emanations. A dynamic personality emanates a particular type of forceful magnetism. Any person who lives a morally pure life can purify his own magnetism and also the psychic atmosphere around him. Pure magnetism works like a wonderful talisman, repelling evil influences.

Two great functions of the physical body are not purely physical. Speech and Sex have their roots in the Astral or Design Body. Both speech and sex are creative, and misuse or abuse of either or both foul the magnetism directly. Thus, a change in habits of sex-life and speech is necessary. Sex function is for the purpose of procreation, and any perversion or excess in sexual activities tends to pollute or even weaken one’s magnetism. One of the evils by which modern society is debased is the constant misuse of the power of speech. Too many people talk for the sake of talking. When two or more people come together, they indulge in idle talk, small talk, or crack

jokes often, at the expense of another. Idle talk easily degenerates into gossip and backbiting. One of the Masters writes, “Each man is personally responsible to the Law of Karma for every word of his voluntary production.” “Gentle speech which causes no anxiety, which is truthful and friendly, and diligence in the reading of the Scriptures, are said to be the austerities of speech” (*Gita*, XVII). Both Sex and Speech are the greatest sins of our civilization, and unless both are properly attended to there can be no progress.

Soul-life demands *Sat-Sang*—True, Pure and Good company. We exchange magnetism with those with whom we come in contact. It is not enough that you do not drink; it is necessary that you do not keep company with the drunkard. Similarly, it is best to avoid the company of people with other bad habits. Unless one observes rules about speech control, sex-control and company influence, a mere change of bodily habits is not any great help. If one has not cleansed their sex-speech pollution then vegetarianism helps them but little.

Mahashivratri is observed on the Thirteenth Day of the waning moon of the month of *Magha*. How shall all of us observe *Mahashivratri*? Let us invoke Shiva, the God of Change; let us begin to lead a new life, a more enlightened life in reference to sex and speech. “*Mahashivratri*” means the “Vigil Night of Shiva.” In fact, at a higher level of spiritual progress, it signifies that the “Night of the Soul,” is the stage in the process of initiation, when the candidate is made to look deep into his consciousness, face the dark side of his nature, and purify it. It reminds us to practice divine discipline, which alone can unite us with Shiva within. The Divine Eye, the “Third Eye of Shiva,” opens in us when all worldly attachments are gone and love for humanity alone remains.

NEVER doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

—MARGARET MEAD

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE LOST WORLD—II

MAN and apes do not have a common ancestor. H.P.B. quotes Professor Pfaff, a professor of Natural Science, who says that the gulf between man and apes was as wide and as deep, in the Tertiary period as we find it today (*S.D.*, II, 87 fn.). The Tertiary period or Age consists of the Eocene, Miocene and Pliocene periods. If we turn to pp. 678-79 (*S.D.*, II) we read that in the Miocene period, there was the existence of the primeval savage, and fossil relics show that this savage man was acquainted with fire and the mode of kindling it, whereas at that time the only anthropoid ape was *Dryopithecus*. And from that time onwards, right through the Pliocene period and Glacial period it has not changed much, but is in the same low grade of development. How then can we explain the evolution of this ape into man during the first half of the Miocene period? If we push back to the Eocene period to find a common ancestor of man and *Dryopithecus*, we find that no fossils of anthropoid apes are to be found in that strata.

Theosophy teaches that giants are not fiction. The existence of gigantic animals, such as Dinosaurs, is an accepted fact. In remote antiquity, both man and animals were of gigantic stature, but in astral form. 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 says that scientists should apply this law to men as well, because had there been no giants in the ancient days, there would be none now (*S.D.*, II, 277). The same argument holds good for animals.

In “Mythical Monsters,” Charles Gould, a geologist, writes that man, “successively traced to periods *variously estimated from thirty thousand to one million years*...co-existed with animals which have long since become extinct (p. 20).” He describes them as weird and terrible. These animals were of *genus Cidastes*, “whose huge bones and vertebræ show them to have attained a length of nearly two hundred feet.” He writes that “the remains of such monsters were

seen by Professor Marsh in the Mauvaises Terres of Colorado, strewn upon the plains.” He also mentions “the *Titanosaurus montanus*, reaching fifty or sixty feet in length and the *Dinosaurians* (in the Jurassic beds of the Rocky Mountains), of still more gigantic proportions.” Further, he mentions 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.” As all these monstrous animals co-existed with man, and they mutually attacked each other, then man could have survived only if he was himself a colossal giant. (*S.D.*, II, 218-19)

Looking deep into geological strata, our explorers are finding, now and then, the remains of animals, birds and reptiles, but no human skeletons are found, indicating that these animals must have existed in far earlier ages than man. They doubt if man existed side by side with the dinosaurs and other huge reptiles, because no fossil pertaining to the *genus homo* (man) is discovered in the same stratum. The *Secondary Age* with its three subdivisions—Triassic, Jurassic and Chalk or Cretaceous periods, is considered to be the age of Reptiles, such as Megalosauri, Ichthyosauri, Plesiosauri, etc. Science denies the presence of man in that period. But if man did not exist side by side with these monsters, how does man know of their existence? The old records of China, India, Egypt and Judea are full of the accounts of these huge animals. Science admits the appearance of man only at the close of the *Tertiary Age*, which comprises the Eocene, Miocene and Pliocene periods.

H.P.B. writes that in the remote past, there were giant men and animals, both in astral and physical forms, and 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. The traditions about the race of giants in the days of old are universal. India had her *Danavas* and *Daityas*; Ceylon had her *Rakshasas*; and Greece had her Titans; Egypt, her colossal Heroes. The Bible (Deut: iii, 11) speaks of King Og who was nine cubits high (15 ft. 4 in.) and four wide, while Goliath was “six cubits and a span in height” (or 10 ft. 7 in.) (*S.D.*, II, 336). The Bamian statues which are found in Central Asia, near Kabul, are five in number and represent five root races. The first statue is 173 feet high, representing a completely astral race, which dwindled to around 5 to 7 feet height, in our present, fifth race humanity.

Esoteric philosophy teaches that for a vast period of time, about 300 million years, our earth, man and all kingdoms of nature, were in an astral stage. Before man and animals developed physical bodies, they had astral or ethereal forms. At the time of huge antediluvian animals, in the *Secondary Age*, animals absorbed so much of the total gross matter available that astral man remained without a physical frame, *i.e.*, without the “coat of skin,” but was not completely devoid of a *material one*. However, it appears that animals then were in a comparatively grosser form than man—though both man and animals did not have corporeal frames. Man could therefore survive in the same place with huge reptiles and birds without being afraid of them. Since his body was of a very ethereal nature, he left no impressions upon mud, soft lava or volcanic dust. At the end of nearly 300 million years, the process of hardening began, and the form of man was the first to become solid. This process of condensation was gradual.

As man thickened, drawing more and more gross matter, the animals felt the drought, and they grew smaller in size. This process of solidification went on for a long time, but it was not until man had acquired sufficient hardness, that he made a mark on any strata of the earth. “Physical man, we say, existed before the first bed of the Cretaceous rocks was deposited” (*S.D.*, II, 679), indicating

thereby that the body of man hardened in the later part of the *Secondary Age*.

When man's frame hardened his fossils were formed and then later discovered. When the form of man became solid, some of the astral prototypes of the animals from preceding periods (rounds) were also involved in the process of solidification. These fossils, so to say, solidified out of date. This is the reason why the fossil remains of man could be traced back to a few million years, whereas the fossil remains of flora and fauna go back to hundreds of million years. H.P.B. writes:

At the expiration of these 300 million years, Nature, on the way to the physical and material, down the arc of descent, begins with mankind and works downwards, hardening or materializing forms as it proceeds. Thus the fossils found in strata, to which an antiquity, not of eighteen, but of many hundreds of millions of years, must be ascribed, belong in reality to forms of the preceding Round, which, while living, were far more ethereal than physical, as *we know the physical*. That we perceive and disinter them as tangible forms, is due to the process of materialization or crystallization referred to, which took place subsequently, at the beginning of the Fourth Round, and reached its maximum after the appearance of man, proceeding parallel with his physical evolution....And thus man now finds, as tangible fossils, what were once the (to his present senses) ethereal forms of the lower kingdoms. (*S.D.*, II, 68 fn.)

Thus, we have fossil remains of creatures which never lived in our matter. When these fossils were discovered, it was argued that those huge creatures co-existed with man in gross physical bodies. To know the truth, science will have to first admit the existence of the astral body and astral senses, and then develop these senses to discover the missing links in the astral plane. However, the fossils, which so to say, solidified out of date, form an exception to the impossibility of finding any missing links. In other words, had the

astral prototypes of these earlier animals not hardened when man's frame solidified, science would not be in possession of any missing links. "The Theosophic adepts insist that there are still in the earth bony remains of man, which carry his first appearance in a dense body many millions of years farther back than have yet been admitted, and these remains will be discovered by us before much time shall have rolled away," writes Mr. Judge.

In an article that appeared in *National Geographic* magazine, (May 2018) we read that the raven-size, 150-million-year-old animal, *Archaeopteryx*, with a mix of attributes, is the oldest known root in the bird family tree. While today's birds are toothless, *Archaeopteryx* had jaws with sharp teeth, claws on its front limbs and a long, bony tail. All these features show its close ties to reptiles. But the fossils of *Archaeopteryx* show prominent wings covered in aerodynamic feathers, and a wishbone, which are characteristics of modern birds. "Not long after its discovery in the 1860s, the species was hailed as a clear transitional step between dinosaurs and birds." But later, dozens of other species were mined from early Cretaceous rock formations in China, and many of these animals appeared to be a mix between our notion of a modern bird and predatory dinosaurs.

H.P.B. observes that the fable of Kasyapa with his twelve wives, giving birth to numerous and diversified progeny of *nagas* (serpents), reptiles, birds and all kinds of living things, is a veiled record of the order of evolution in *this* (fourth) round. Thus: "He [Kasyapa] was...also the father of *Garuda*, the bird, the 'King of the feathered tribe,' who descends *from*, and is of one stock *with the reptiles*, the *nagas*..." (*S.D.*, II, 253-54). It shows that birds developed from reptiles. "This is a point on which the [Theosophical] teachings and modern biological speculation are in perfect accord. The missing links representing this transition process between reptile and bird are apparent to the veriest bigot, especially in the *ornithoscelidæ*, *hesperornis*, and the *archaeopteryx* of Vogt." (*S.D.*, II, 183)

(Concluded)

SOUND AND ITS POWER

III

THE EFFICACY or power of a *mantram* also depends upon how many times it has been chanted and at what time of the day. A certain amount of preparation is necessary for a *mantram* to assume the adequate brilliance, vitality, and strength, writes Swami Savitanandji. He gives an example of a bullet. Even if it is thrown with maximum possible force, it will not be able to penetrate even a pillow. But when the same bullet is shot through a gun, it can penetrate surfaces as hard as bones, wood and cement. The bullet is the same but the quality or the power of the medium grants speed and force. Thus, for instance when a person who has chanted the Gayatri Mantra for a considerable number of times, chants it again, its power is intensified. According to him it should be chanted during Brahma-Muhurta. (*The Science of stotras and Mantras*, pp. 49-50)

The Brahma-Muhurta is a segment of time before dawn. It starts approximately one hour and 36 minutes before sunrise and can change according to different seasons. The vibrations during this time are considered highly pure and conducive for spiritual practices. Additionally, during this period the mind is relatively undisturbed, which allows for concentration. This time period is seen as a source of immense energy.

The chanting of stotras and mantras stimulates the gradual process of inner purification as the hold of passions and desires on the mind gradually weakens. It tends to control restlessness of the mind. In other words, they help in restoring physical and mental wellbeing. (*ibid.*, p. 84)

Swamiji has given several examples of cure of ailments which include pain in the backbone, or area under the neck, menstrual problems, inability to get sleep at night, etc., for which he recommends reading or reciting specific couplets from the Dnyaneshwari *Gita* for a certain number of days. He writes that the

Dnyaneshwari is referred to as the Queen of Stotras and Mantras, and the divine vibrations generated by the recitation of relevant portions of this text are capable of curing many diseases. The Dnyaneshwari is written in Marathi language. Those who know this language should read 300 couplets of the book followed by reading of the *Pasaayadan* and singing of the *Haripatha*. It is true that each one of us faces difficulties, bad times and financial troubles, which cannot be escaped. However, the one who regularly reads the Dnyaneshwari as indicated above, will get inner stability and strength to remain undisturbed amidst calamities. The Dnyaneshwari is the product of a mind that remained calm even under the onslaught of the most bitter trials and tribulations. Therefore, it possesses built-in power to offer ultimate peace. (*ibid*, pp. 61-62)

When it comes to curing diseases through the power of sound or *mantrams*, we should remember that our diseases are the result of our karma in the present or in some past life. If the karma that produced the disease is so strong and overpowering that its action cannot be counteracted by other Karma then it becomes one's destiny and even *mantrams* may prove ineffective.

According to Ayurveda, *Pragnyaparadh* is considered to be the root cause of nearly all diseases. *Pragnyaparadh* literally means offences (*aparadh*) committed by intellect (*pragnya*), and thus implies misuse of intellect. Along these lines, Swami Shri Savitatanand describes *pragnyaparadh* as referring to an occurrence where one does something that is against the dictates of one's mind, intellect or conscience. For instance, one's conscience does not encourage one to indulge in alcoholism, gambling, philandering, or betraying a person's trust. But people often do not pay heed to the voice within and continue to indulge in sinful activities, arguing that one has to be practical to survive in this world. As a result, the consequences reaped for such actions often take the form of a disease—a disease that can never be cured by medicines. He tells us about three or four people who suffered from tuberculosis that not only was incurable but also no palliative care could bring relief to them. It was

discovered that each of these patients had neglected to provide treatment to their mothers who suffered from the same illness, even though they could afford the treatment. Under the justice of Karma, these individuals developed the same affliction. *The Voice of the Silence* says, “Inaction (an act of omission) in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin.”

He presents one more side to *Pragnyapradh*, such as is depicted in a conflict between a powerful and powerless person. The powerful person could possess the power of knowledge, power of intellect, or a social, political or military power. When a person intoxicated with power wrongs or hurts another person, the latter may not have the means to retaliate. But the pain inflicted on the victim sends out an involuntary curse, an ill feeling for the perpetrator. This ill feeling may show its effect on the perpetrator in the form of an incurable disease, which cannot be cured by any medicine; such people do not benefit from the chanting of *stotras* and *mantras*. (*ibid.*, pp. 56-57)

Shastra Vidya literally means the “Science of Weapons,” in which, among other things, training was given to wield various kinds of weapons, such as axe, mace, spear, lance, sword, bow and arrow, etc. *Astra Vidya* is normally defined as an art of throwing missiles. H.P.B. describes “Ashtar Vidya” as “the highest magical knowledge.” The astras are mentioned in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They were used by great warriors and archers like Rama, Krishna, Parashurama, Drona, Arjuna, Karna, etc.

Astras are supernatural weapons invoked by *mantras*. In a battle, a warrior could convert any ordinary weapon such as an arrow into a *divine* weapon by using a *mantra*. It is said that Ashwatthama used a blade of grass as his weapon and converted it into a divine weapon called *Brahmasirsastra*. These supernatural weapons are presided over by a specific deity, and are imbued with spiritual and occult powers. To summon a supernatural weapon requires a specific *mantram*, whereby the deity invoked endows the weapon with supernatural powers. As a result, these supernatural weapons could

not be countered through ordinary means. Since these supernatural weapons possessed enormous power, the one who used them had to fulfil specific conditions, violating the same could prove fatal. Such being the nature of these weapons, the knowledge involving them was passed on from the Guru (teacher) to his pupil by word of mouth, only after pupil's character had been established.

Agneyastra is one of the many *astras*. It is Agni's celestial weapon. When discharged, it emits flames that cannot be extinguished by normal means. The *Theosophical Glossary* refers to *Agneyastra* as the "magic weapons said to have been wielded by the adept-race (the fourth), the Atlanteans." On p. 563 (*S.D.*, I) we read about a terrible sidereal force called *Mash Mak* known to the Atlanteans, which was called *vril* by Bulwer Lytton, and was also known to Indian Rishis as it formed the part of the *Ashtra Vidya*. The Atlanteans could use it to reduce an army of 1,00,000 men and elephants to ashes, as easily as if it were a dead rat. In the *Vishnu Purana*, and in the *Ramayana* and other works, it is referred to as *Kapilaksha*—"Kapila's Eye," whose glance reduced 60,000 sons of King Sagara to a mountain of ashes.

However, there appears to be a more occult meaning associated with "Agneyastra." In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 629-30) we read that "In the occult records the weapon mentioned in the Purânas and the *Mahabhârata*—the *Agneyâstra* or 'fiery weapon' ...is said to be built of seven elements....The seven-fold *Agneyâstra*, like the *seven* senses and the 'seven principles,' symbolized by the seven priests, are of untold antiquity."

In the *Theosophical Glossary* we read that the "storm-hammer" of Thor, known as *Mjolnir* in Scandinavian mythology, "is the same kind of magic weapon as the Hindu *Agneyastra*, the fireweapon." It is equated with Swastika, and is used as a weapon of destruction. We are being told about destruction of the world and purification of the gods, after which there is "Renewal of the World."

(To be continued)

SELF-REGENERATION

HAS human life any purpose in the natural order of the universe? Darwinian evolutionists as well as scientists of other disciplines hold that laws of nature are blind and have no definite end or purpose. This non-teleological outlook of science has largely influenced the thinking and attitude of a large number of people and has been the materialistic underpinning of modern world order. Man, however, cannot live for long on nihilistic beliefs because the bitter experience of the negative impact of it on life compels us to review and rethink our beliefs. Human experience shows that life has a purpose though few have a clear idea of what exactly it is.

The general run of people limit the idea of life's purpose to the interests of personal self. For an average unlettered rustic, it is limited to earning a livelihood by physical labour to sustain himself. An average urbanite has for his aim in life education, a steady career, sufficient income, a harmonious conjugal life, a happy home, security, and enjoyment. These are generally regarded as the indices of happiness. HH the Dalai Lama, when asked what the purpose of life is, said that happiness is the object of life. He certainly must have meant something more than what is generally thought it is. A survey of the larger ambit of life which extends beyond the centre of personal self, shows that it must be so.

When considering the larger purpose of life, we need to keep in mind that it has different meaning and relevance to different people according to their experience and soul's need; and, therefore, we may broadly classify them under two categories: the general run of people who are attached to life and have no philosophical inclination but need help; and the other, rare and extraordinary sort, who aspire to live the higher life and have made some progress in soul-life. Consideration of the needs of the latter, being more advanced, will not have immediate relevance to those of the former.

The general experience of people whose conception of happiness is limited to satisfaction of personal desires, and ambition of

advancement in life alluded to before, is that it is not an unmixed blessedness. Anxiety, disappointment, frustration, soured relationships, discontent, disillusionment, obstacles, torments of negative emotions, and so on, constantly meet everyone in life, more so in respect of those who are in pursuit of personal success and preferment, to mar the happy state of life they seek and hold on to.

Supposing that even if we have obtained an uninterrupted enjoyment of the objects of our desires and surround ourselves with all the conveniences and luxuries of life, we discover before long that the happy state we thus obtained is marred by a feeling of discontent following an inexplicable sense of inner void or emptiness which none of the accomplishments and possessions we secured can satisfy. This is a common experience of prosperous people in advanced and sophisticated societies. Many such fall into mental depression, and resort to antidepressants, or intoxicating substances, which ends in degeneracy and death.

Experiences of life teach us that no lasting happiness can be found and held on to in the objects of personal possessions and preferment. To make life meaningful and purposeful in a higher and a nobler sense, one needs to think over some simple and basic truths of life and adopt them as guiding principles of right living. First and foremost, we need to understand and recognise that life is a school in which we are souls learning lessons, and that we are not mere perishable bodies but have been here in material life before coursing through cycles of birth and death for ages, experiencing in each life the fruits of our past thoughts and acts, for weal or woe as they may be, learning therefrom and progressing. We, being moral beings, who are inherent part of the moral order of the universe, it is imperative that we heed the moral principle of means and ends. Whatever end or object we seek to achieve in life will be of the same quality, of purity or impurity, productive of potential good or evil, as of the means we employ. Means is sowing, the end is reaping what we have sown. If the means resorted to are unjust, deceitful,

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harmful to others, productive of social evils, the end we so obtain will be bitter and painful. It is therefore incumbent on us, if we care for a truly happy life, that we maintain purity of means in all our undertakings, and treat others with the same kindness and consideration as we expect to be treated by others. Cultivation of virtues of gratitude, and forgiveness of transgression against us, renders the quality of life to be one of harmony, tranquillity, and peace.

A little reflection is enough to show us that we are indebted to our fellowmen, near and far, seen and unseen, indeed, to all life, for the good things we are blessed with, and, in fact, for our very existence. A recognition of this simple and obvious truism of life should arouse in us a feeling of gratitude, and a conscientious urge to reciprocate by thought and action for the general social good as well as for the good of our known benefactors. The maxim, “No evil to him who does no evil” points to the fact that pain of misfortune never touches us if we had not created a cause for it by our own indiscriminate thought and action. As we sow, so we reap. The hand that smites us is our own, and not of another who seems to be the cause. Therefore, an understanding of the just law of Karma calls for an attitude of charity and forgiveness on our part towards those who may offend us; which is a duty, which transforms enmity into friendship, and enhances the sum of good in the world. It is through proper performance of duty that man raises himself to godhood; but which, if neglected, man regresses in his moral and spiritual life to slide into animalism, the furthest end of which is annihilation.

We need to regenerate ourselves by our own efforts. No one can do it for us; the Teachers can only show us the way. The Kama Principle is fully developed and Manas partially so, at this stage of evolution of mankind. Therefore, the Karmic tendency of the average person strongly tends towards deriving satisfaction in material life and selfishness. Hence the path of self-regeneration is

difficult. But there is no middle ground whereon we might stand and hope to be carried forward like a twig in a flowing stream. We either progress or regress, and no higher progress in soul-life is possible without deliberate efforts towards self-improvement. Consistent and constant effort is needed to discriminate between what is evil and what is good, and refrain from the former and sedulously cultivate the latter by a knowledge of the law of the cyclic return of impressions, so that the tendency towards evil inherited from the actions in past lives is gradually weakened and virtues of right action develop and strengthen our character. Once

We understand the absolute justice of the Karmic Law, we will know that whatever the circumstances in which we may be placed, challenging or unpleasant as they may be, are the just outcome of our past actions, and, therefore, will not resent or rebel against fate but gracefully accept the same. The very attitude of acceptance and self-responsibility not only take away the feeling of bitterness but enables us to learn the lesson implicit in the experience and grow in the inner life of the soul. Once the lessons are learnt the necessity for the trial ceases, and we move on to learn other lessons leading to higher and greater progress. Thus, we can make our lives meaningful and purposeful, growing all the time in knowledge and wisdom, and thus fitting ourselves to be better able to help and teach others.

Growing thus in knowledge and wisdom brings one to a higher development of self-knowledge, that the soul is distinct and separate and separable from the body, from perceptive and cognitive faculties, and from the mind, which are soul's instruments to come in touch with and experience Nature. In ordinary cases, due to lack of spiritual discrimination, the soul, mind and perceptive faculties are mixed up in our outlook on life, and, therefore, we are deluded, mistaking right for wrong, and vice to be virtue and *vice versa*. This ignorance is the cause of egotism and selfishness, which is the chief cause of all misery and suffering of man through endless cycles of birth and death—thus man becomes enemy to himself. “He should raise the

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self by the Self,” teaches the *Bhagavad-Gita*; “let him not suffer the Self to be lowered; for Self is the friend of self, and, in like manner, self is its own enemy. Self is the friend of the man who is self-conquered; so self like a foe hath enmity to him who is not self-conquered.” (Chap. VI: 5-6)

Those who come to a realization of the soul—the Inner Man—to be separate from all else, immortal, of another order than the visible nature, one in essence with the Supreme Soul of the world, will be striving for complete self-conscious union with the latter. Unity of Self, and the Universal Brotherhood are a living reality to such. Actions of such an one in the world will be free from intent and motive of self-interest, but by the dictates of the Higher Self he would be labouring for the benefit of the world and emancipation of humanity.

Compassion and kindness are born in the heart
And in the making of a better Human World to live in they
play a huge part
And those who have such rare gifts are lucky indeed
And of more of their type we are badly in need
A beautiful person with a beautiful mind
Is the he or the she who are compassionate and kind
Such people are beautiful people to know
The seeds of good Karma for themselves they do sow
Their gift is with others they can empathize
Above the ordinary they surely does rise
One can only admire them for their humanity
They lead in the fight against World poverty
For their future good Karma they have planted the seed
And by good example they are known for to lead.

—FRANCIS DUGGAN

“COMPASSION AND KINDNESS”

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

FRAGMENT ONE—I

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE is a deep mine of invaluable information and guidance to an aspirant who has resolved to live the spiritual life. To be able to derive the benefit it is necessary to approach the book with eagerness, willingness and humility. Then, the book may take for us the place of a Guru, as we are then able to contact the mind of the author.

The teachings of the book are divided into three Fragments, each of which deals with the Spiritual Path in its threefold aspect. The main theme of the first Fragment, entitled, “The Voice of the Silence,” is the gradual freeing of the “mind” from various degrees of unreality or illusion. The second Fragment, entitled, “The Two Paths,” deals with the choice to be made, at the end of the spiritual journey, between the *Path of Liberation* or *Moksha* and the *Path of Renunciation*. In the third Fragment, entitled, “The Seven Portals,” the stages of embodying the spiritual virtues are dealt with.

In treading the Path, the blending of the Mind and Soul is essential. The Mind and Soul or the Mind and Heart may be regarded as the centripetal and centrifugal forces. In human beings, the centripetal force is *spiritual attraction*, and the centrifugal force is *terrestrial attraction*. As the centripetal force increases in power in comparison with the centrifugal force, the individual reaches a higher plane of existence and ultimately becomes one with *Paramatma*. If, on the other hand, the centrifugal force becomes greater than the centripetal force, the individual comes to a lower level of existence and is ultimately annihilated. However, when considered from the point of view of the Mind and Heart energies, we can see that these two must be in equilibrium. In other words, all the mental energies must be centred in understanding the Truth or Reality, by meditation on and search for the Reality (the centripetal action) with gradual overcoming of illusion. But at the same time, the Heart must expand in all directions from its present centre to the uttermost circumference

of Life (the centrifugal action) until it includes “all that lives and breathes.” The centrifugal energy of the Heart must accompany and balance at every stage the centripetal energy of the Mind. It is easy to see that without the centrifugal energy of the Heart, one would be treading the “Path of Liberation,” attaining the peace and bliss of Nirvana for oneself, which will culminate in “oblivion of the World and men forever,” described as “an exalted and glorious selfishness.”

The Fragment I emphasizes cultivation of the centripetal tendency of the mind, by learning the nature of “Dharana” or concentration, for which the mind must become *Antar-mukhi*, or turn inwards, instead of being *bahir-mukhi*, or turned outwards. The mind has to be transformed in its mode of functioning, the domination of sense-impressions must be destroyed and the thinking power must be cleansed of impure thoughts.

Before undertaking any journey, we must have adequate knowledge as to what it involves, the difficulties and pitfalls on the way, and find out for ourselves if we possess the necessary strength and ability to undertake the journey. Likewise, for the one who seriously wishes to embark on the journey of life, Fragment I of *The Voice of the Silence* contains instructions as to what this journey is likely to involve, its destination, and the capacities and qualities one must possess before starting out. Also, from being mere wanderers in this journey of life, which is a spiritual journey, we need to become travellers.

In reaching the spiritual goal, our mind and heart must not be permitted to wander, “for the path is narrow and the wanderings of a day may cause us years of effort to find the road again,” says Mr. Judge. It must be the common experience of all the student-aspirants that in the early stages of one’s discipline, if there is a break in the discipline—because of illness or a vacation—picking up the thread again requires enormous effort. By “wandering,” we set up a tendency, which repeats itself cyclically.

It is easy to “wander off” in the by-lanes of alternative systems of

philosophies that might promise a short-cut to self-realization or a quick solution to our problems. It is easy to be led astray, lured by the dazzle of psychic development and psychic powers. One who pursues psychic development without purifying the moral nature, walks the broad and easy path, which ultimately leads to destruction. Pursuit of psychic development is dangerous, and the untrained and impure dabbler is ultimately ruined in his psychic and moral health. When such a person realizes the mistake and begins his search for truth and desires to lead the true spiritual life, he might find it extremely difficult. His difficulty is compounded because his pursuit of psychic powers and consequent involvement with subtle but lower, material forces of nature (elementals), tends to strengthen the lower, personal nature. Even though he may be able to control desires of the flesh—abstaining from meat-eating or wine drinking—and might even make a great intellectual progress, he has to fight a difficult battle to surmount pride, jealousy, and other moral weaknesses.

Hence, the very first sentence in the first Fragment is: “These instructions are for those ignorant of the dangers of the lower *IDDHI*.” *Iddhi* is the Pali word which is synonymous with the Sanskrit term *Siddhi*. H.P.B. differentiates between lower, psychic, mental energies on the one hand and the spiritual powers on the other hand.

The lower psychic powers are exhibited by mediums without their control or any training due to past practices in earlier lives. Then there are those who follow *Hatha Yoga* in which they acquire certain psychic powers by excessive mortification of the body, by *pranayama* and postures, etc. They are of lower kind, unlike the seership of an adept mentioned in *Isis Unveiled* (I, 591). They are unable to correctly interpret what they see. Their visions are distorted by memory, by the wavy motion of the astral light, etc. In *Raja Yoga*, the unfoldment is from within without; involving work upon one’s nature to purify it, and at a certain stage of inner

development, powers are acquired spontaneously.

The two kinds of *Siddhis* pertain to psychic and spiritual powers. “Psychic” powers, as the name suggests, are concerned with the lower mind, and therefore they are said to involve the lower mental and psychic energies. However, since no effort is made to purify the desires and tendencies of the lower mind, the Will which comes into play is not the Spiritual Will. Nor are the powers of faith and thought really originating from pure faith and pure thoughts. Thus, the psychic powers can be acquired even without purification of desires. In the article, “Occultism Versus the Occult Arts,” H.P.B. says that there are those who only *suppress* their desires instead of transforming or eradicating them, and yet they possess powers. It is not as if there is no training involved in acquirement of psychic powers, but that training is not as rigorous as that required in acquirement of spiritual powers. For instance, even if senses are trained to look into the astral light, the mind, which is the interpreter of the data, has not been trained, then it is only a *psychic* clairvoyance in which the person is not sure as to what he sees in the astral light. The kind of training that is necessary for acquiring and using the spiritual powers is clear from the rules and discipline outlined in *Light on the Path*. “Before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears,” and we know that it involves the training of human emotions or *kama-manas*. We also get some idea of this training from the article, “Culture of Concentration,” which shows how one has to learn to control his anger, envy, hatred, vanity, fear, etc. in order to make the astral body coherent and duplicate the senses. Spiritual powers, such as, *Kriyasakti*, *Itchasakti*, *Mantrikasakti*, etc. cannot be acquired unless there is purification of the lower principles.

The footnote on page 1, draws our attention to *Srimad Bhagavatam* (Canto 11, Chapter 15), where Krishna says: “He who is engaged in the performance of Yoga, who has subdued his senses and concentrated his mind in me (Krishna) such Yogis all the Siddhis stand ready to serve.”

Here, it is useful to pause and reflect on the meaning of Yoga and types of Yoga. Yoga is defined as “the practice of meditation as a means of leading to spiritual liberation. Psycho-spiritual powers are attained thereby, and induced ecstatic states lead to the clear and correct perception of the eternal truths, in both the visible and invisible universe” (*The Theosophical Glossary*). In the Preface to his rendering of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, Mr. Judge mentions that the Yoga system is divided into two principal parts—*Hatha* and *Raja Yoga*. *Hatha Yoga* deals principally with the physiological part of man with a view to establish his health and train his Will. The Sanskrit term “*hatha*” means persistence or force, and *Hatha Yoga* is translated in the Monier-Williams’s dictionary as a kind of forced Yoga or abstract meditation, forcing the mind to withdraw from external objects; performed with much self-torture like standing on one leg, holding up the arms, inhaling smoke with the head inverted, and so on. *Hatha Yoga* was intended for those whose worldly desires were not pacified or uprooted, says Shri Shankaracharya.

In *Hatha Yoga*, the powers begin to develop fairly early even before one purifies one’s lower nature. Here lies the danger because then one might be tempted to misuse these powers and fall into black magic. “On the other hand, the Raja Yogis try to control the mind itself by following the rules laid down by the greatest of Adepts,” writes Mr. Judge. Thus:

“Patanjali’s rules compel the student not only to acquire a right knowledge of what is and what is not real, but also to practice all virtues, and while results in the way of psychic development are not so immediately seen as in the case of the successful practitioner of Hatha Yoga, it [Raja Yoga] is infinitely safer and is certainly spiritual, which Hatha Yoga is not....In Hatha Yoga practice...the result is psychic development at the delay or expense of the spiritual nature.” (*The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, p. ix)

(*To be continued*)

THEOSOPHY AND PLATO ON CITIZENSHIP

II

THEOSOPHY teaches that everything really happens under the law of karma. If the thoughts feelings, and actions of individuals are of a certain kind, then they may come together and produce a certain collective effect of their collective karma. This is where the special responsibility of the king, the leader, the ruler, and the social reformer comes in. He takes account of collective karma because he knows that what happens collectively is then also going to react on the individual. The starting point may have been a large number of individuals, but the effect is going to be *via* the collective situation. Why? Although only the individual has a conscience, who can choose and think for himself, it does not mean that he is separated from the community, or the country, nor is any country separated from the world. To think that it *is*, is to be deluded by the physical appearance of things. If we grasp the processes of cause and effect, then the idea of separateness is a very unpractical delusion. Therefore, selfishness is also an unpractical delusion and an unpractical policy, whether it is human individual selfishness, or social selfishness—a particular community wants to assert its special place or its special prosperity. Or, a country wants to assert what is called its hegemony, its special place in the world. Both are based on an essential factual error.

What happens in one corner of the world affects every other. Therefore it is not possible to lay down hard-and-fast rules concerning social change or legal reform, because nobody foresees all contexts and all situations. One general test may be given, namely, “Will the proposed action tend to promote true brotherhood?” In other words, does it tend towards universal brotherhood, or does it tend towards crystallizing more and more little divisions? Once the test is applied and the result is satisfactory, one’s effort should be in the direction of forming public opinion. (*The Key to Theosophy*, Indian edition, p. 233)

The question may arise: What is the role of the ruler and the law? What is the state for? One explanation is that a state is there to minimize the use of force. It may sound paradoxical because, in our world, unfortunately, a state is defined as the sort of entity that possesses not only an army of its own, but also a navy, air-force and nuclear deterrents. In his book *Ends and Means*, Aldous Huxley points out that if one looks at the actual mechanism of the League of Nations, one finds that a nation seems to be defined as a society prepared for war; a nation that does not have its own army is not recognized as a sovereign nation. The same situation obtains today after the bitter experience of World War II, after, the still more bitter experience of the Cold War, which was an ongoing political rivalry between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, and their respective allies that developed after World War II, from 1947 and ended in 1991.

Likewise, when a state is entitled to award capital punishment and imprison people, it becomes identified with force. However, philosophically this is viewed differently. Whether it is modern state with its apparatus of judiciary, prisons, etc., or it is an old-fashioned king delivering judgment, the point is that it is done so that ordinary individuals or groups would not fight one another by force but submit any dispute to a state, which is meant to be an impartial judge. Thus, the essential idea is that the justice of the state is meant to do away with the need for disputes and fighting among people by themselves. The negative side of the state's authority is that in many ways the idea of right and wrong is identified with the formal laws. The positive side is that what force and power may be available within the country or community is concentrated in an institution, so that it is not scattered among a lot of people who can then use it against one another. That is why we have a wonderful image in the *Raghuvansha*, of the great king of the solar race, King Dilip, who is described by Kalidas as,

Sena paricchadastasya dvayamevarthasadhanam
Sastresvakunthita buddhirmaurvi dhanusi catata

It implies that for him the army was like a lot of ceremonial attendants. For the purposes of the state, he needed only two things: That intellect which was never baffled by any science and operated in every direction; the other is, string stretched on his own bow. This is the ideal king who has both the understanding and the power to see justice done, and to protect his people. We do not always have kings like him, who appear cyclically. That puts a different kind of burden on us. In Bernard Shaw's play "Arms and the Man," an aristocratic person asks with an air of superiority to a man from Switzerland, "And what is your rank in your country?" The man replies, "My rank is the highest known in Switzerland: I am a free citizen." This is the idea behind the "republic." Plato spoke about the republic where the highest possible rank is that of a citizen. But that means we must accept all the powers and duties of the king mentioned in the great traditions. Thus, if we want to consider what a citizen in a republic should be like, then he should be like an ideal king.

But if any member of that public were to meet an Admiral in his uniform and his medals, it is very unlikely that the man would be able to stand up to him. But the fact remains that a decent Admiral obeys the decisions of the ministry, and the ministry obeys the verdict of the legislative body. When it does not, something collapses. India can be thankful to have produced a culture within which the armed forces have generally remained obedient to civil power. Whereas much smaller armies in much smaller countries in many parts of Africa and Asia have not done that. At the base of it all there is a culture which can be put in the form of an ancient piece of symbolism. For instance, when a sage, a prophet walks into his court, a king who knows his duty comes down from his throne and walks forward a certain number of steps to receive him. That is to say, the secular power is subservient to the *dharma*, to whatever is the known cultural and spiritual tradition of that civilization. The civilization is in its turn meant to stand or fall according to the quality of that culture.

If one forgets, what is sometimes called “hierarchy,” which has a very wonderful philosophical meaning, and it is sometimes called “degree” in Shakespearean writings, then it may prove disastrous. There is a wonderful speech which Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Ulysses in the play, *Troilus and Cressida*. Ulysses says, “Take, but degree away, untune that string, And hark, what discord follows. Each thing meets in mere oppugnancy.” Oppugnancy means being opposed or contrary. The metaphor that rises to Shakespeare’s mind that he puts in Ulysses’ mouth is that it is like misadjusting the string in a musical instrument, untune that string, the degree, the proper subordination of one thing to another, and hard-core discord follows. Thus, the human good depends upon the right order: an order in which each must play his part, exercising authority and obedience as fitting, according to a beneficent natural order.

So, the essence of the state, the essence of citizenship, the essence of kingship, the essence of understanding about collective karma is, not power on these lower planes of reality, but “order” or *Ruta*, which exists by a cosmic sanction. *Ruta*, *dharma*, righteousness, or whatever label we give, they must be brought to bear upon power and control it. The example of the armed forces obeying the parliament is only one trivial example of the fact that somehow in a civilization, reality, truth, and justice, must be brought to bear upon people’s notions of right and wrong, upon what things are punished and what things are not punished, what things are rewarded and what things are forbidden. In short, the king must walk a few steps forward to greet the sage and the prophet.

Where this situation does not exist, we may have very intelligent men spending their time adjusting various laws. As a result, in the next generation, some of the most intelligent students are taken away to find loopholes in those laws, unless the culture is such that it sees the subordination of material to moral things, the subordination of intellectual to spiritual perceptions. If this is missing, if this degree, this string is untuned, as Shakespeare made Ulysses say, then everything will encounter everything else simply in terms of force

and power. The supreme argument in favour of *ahimsa* or non-violence is that once you have violence, what is the guarantee that the right side will be stronger in terms of fighting? As Napoleon said, “God will be on the side of the big battalions” as far as winning battles go. That, of course, is not the end. We know that karma will put the balance right in the long run, but the process may be one of immense suffering for large numbers of people.

Therefore, Plato began the discussion of the *Republic* by asking: What is justice? Thrasymachus claims that “justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger,” which Socrates disputes. Socrates shows that the idea of justice, the idea of universal harmony, exists on its own level with a tremendous power which cannot be changed. And therefore, the man who understands justice in its own divine place can alone produce a kind of state in which individuals and groups can reach perfection, a perfection which is inherent in their own natures. Hence, according to Socrates the best form of government is that in which the philosophers rule. Thus, one needs kings who are philosophers, and also philosophers to become kings. The argument is that it is precisely because philosophers are the last people who would want to rule—which shows that they do not desire political power—that they can be trusted to rule well.

Justice, therefore, is the soul of the state. There is an inherent justice. There is some framework which will permit the soul within each man to express itself. Wordsworth said, “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting, The Soul that rises with us, our life’s star, Hath elsewhere had its setting, And cometh from afar.” We do not invent anything, it is just there, and we just have to recognize it. It is this that leads forward to Plato’s whole understanding of what the state should be.

(Concluded)

I HAVE always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

We need more personalised and holistic approach in determining how we can get best night's rest. Sleep is essential for good health, which includes cognitive function, health of the heart, moods, etc. Lack of adequate sleep can lead to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, hypertension, etc. We are advised to sleep for eight hours and avoid stress before going to sleep. However, it appears that “we don't all need the same amount of sleep—our age, sex, personal habits and tolerances all influence what we individually need. We all have different lifestyles, including work and travel, which might see us needing to adjust our sleep schedules on a regular basis.” But getting a good sleep is something more than just number of hours one sleeps. Now, new research reveals the benefits of a more holistic approach which shows that one's sleep is affected by what one eats, one's gut microbes and hormonal production. Moreover, what affects the quantity and quality of one's sleep is one's personal chronotype, *i.e.*, when one sleeps and when one is most active during the day.

According to the US National Sleep Foundation, a typical adult needs between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night, new-borns need 14 to 17 hours, teenagers need 9 hours and people over 65 years of age need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. These hours change with season and also sex—male or female. A person with a rare genetic trait called familial natural short sleep can do with just 4 to 6 hours of sleep.

One method to determine how much sleep one needs is to take a “sleep vacation,” which involves going to sleep at the same time without setting an alarm, and then observing the time when one wakes up. When this is done for two weeks it may help to figure out one's natural rhythm and the amount of sleep one needs. There are people who are natural morning larks; they go to sleep early and are early risers, who get enough sleep. However, people who are natural night owls, who go to sleep late have to struggle to wake up early. “A lot of research has shown that night owls tend to have

worse mental health....Evidence also shows that night owls perform better on cognitive tests than morning larks, provided they regularly slept 7 to 9 hours,” writes Michael Marshall. (*New Scientist*, January 25, 2025)

A man can survive without food for three weeks, but he cannot remain sleepless for that duration. Sometimes it is sleep that is needed to put right a bodily or mental ailment. Another simple explanation offered for the need for sleep is that when the body becomes tired and depleted of vitality, we fall asleep. But Theosophy gives just the opposite explanation. It says that we are more full of life energy when we fall asleep, than in the morning. As, this life energy exists around us like an ocean, when we are awake, the life waves rush into the body with greater intensity every hour. Our power to resist is limited, and so we fall asleep. Children are unable to resist the current and hence they fall asleep quickly. During sleep, life energy is absorbed or assimilated by the healthy organs of our body and equilibrium is reached. The physical organs are rested and recharged. “If this periodical adjustment did not occur, the life current would destroy us. Any derangement of the body that tends to inhibit this adjustment is a cause of sleeplessness, and perhaps death,” writes Mr. Judge.

In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 537-38) H.P.B. writes that the “Nervous Ether” of Dr. Richardson is the *animal vitality* diffused throughout nature. Animal tissues are said to absorb it according to their more or less morbid or healthy state and are regulated, strengthened and fed by it. It descends in a larger supply in the *Sushumna* ray of the sun which lights up and feeds the moon, and it is through her beams that it penetrates man and animals, more during their sleep and rest than when they are awake. It accumulates in nervous centres during sleep, and brings them, to their due tone. When the demand exceeds the supply, there is nervous exhaustion.

The actual number of hours for which a person may sleep, varies from person to person. A certain spiritual aspirant was told not to worry about the fact that he needed more hours of sleep,

because sleep nourishes the body and gives the consciousness an opportunity to be free from attending to the senses and the organs. It appears that the quality of *prana* must be different from plane to plane. Also, each human being is born with a certain quality of *prana* or vitality, weak or strong, pure or impure, and having a certain rate of vibration. We require to sleep longer because we are unable to draw to ourselves superior quality of *Prana* when we are awake. Shri B. P. Wadia writes that if you proceed in the right way, a superior quality of *prana* will flow into you. Our motive, ideation, imagination change the quality of *prana*. A spiritually advanced person does not require long hours of sleep.

The Japanese philosophy “shikata ga nai” which means “it cannot be helped,” teaches that we should learn to accept life’s uncontrollable events. Cultivating this attitude can help us to focus on the solution and to reduce stress, anxiety and frustration. In a world full of uncertainties and unexpected challenges, such an attitude of mind can help us remain calm while facing the situation and can inculcate resilience.

This philosophy tells us to embrace acceptance rather than resistance. Instead of fighting against life’s inevitable setbacks we may learn to let go and focus on what truly matters. For instance, if our flight happens to get cancelled because of bad weather, then instead of grumbling and complaining, we might choose to say, “we will make the best of it.” Sometimes it is necessary to learn to flow with the current instead of fighting against it.

“When experiencing disappointment, not having gotten that job you really applied for, or a bad breakup, there is always too much overthinking of what actually went wrong. And holding on to these often means unnecessary pain and suffering. This is relieved once one admits that some things were just meant to be this way.” Acceptance does not mean defeat, rather it is the way of responding to certain problems experienced in one’s life.

Application of this philosophy in daily life involves identifying the situations we can influence and remembering that majority of the things that hassle us are only temporary and minor, when considered in the broader picture. With the help of this philosophy one can learn to maintain peace even when things do not go as planned. (*The Times of India*, Lifestyle Desk, January 1, 2025)

The “ability to accept” is an essential virtue. Whether it is death, or huge financial loss, or a broken relationship, you are unable to take the remedial step, until you *accept* it. Acceptance is recognition, or becoming aware. There can be no self-improvement, so long as we are not aware of our weaknesses and wrong habits. Each one of us has some *subtle* faults and peculiarities, which we fail to become aware of. When others make us aware of them, we must be willing to accept and work on them. We are afraid of being ordinary and derive our identity from our achievements and possessions. When we try to project a certain kind of image of ourselves, instead of accepting ourselves as we are, we experience great conflict and struggle.

When we decide to accept people as we find them, we get an opportunity to cultivate the virtue of *Adaptability*. Adaptability is a very rare virtue. In a subtle way our likes and dislikes work havoc, reminding us that we must learn to adjust with those *we like*, as also, those *we do not like*.

The Voice of the Silence says: “Accept the woes of birth.” It is a dynamic, positive precept. It requires the courage and the stoicism of the brave to accept the woes of birth in a spirit of true resignation. It implies surrendering our personal will to the Divine will. When one accepts the good without exultation and evil without complaint, such “acceptance,” leads to equanimity, where one is ready to enjoy or suffer whatever the Higher Self has in store for them by way of experience and discipline. However, “acceptance” should not be equated with passivity and helplessness. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power to change it. We are not expected to remain poor, ignorant, weak, oppressed, or whatever

be our plight. We can use the situation as a raw material and extract the necessary lessons. With such attitude, we will not resort to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, or cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge the karmic consequences.

Philosopher Barry Lam, now a professor at the University of California, endorses only one rule, and that is, “we should have fewer rules.” Even as a teenager he had defiant disposition, with an urge to do just the opposite of what he was asked to do. For instance, he studied philosophy when his family pushed him to study computer science or medicine. In his book *Fewer Rules, Better People*, “he argues that the numerous rules that aim to improve our behaviour often do the opposite.” He agrees that there are good reasons why rules exist, and one of them is our desire for fairness or justice. He gives example of the criminal justice system in which “if some judges are biased when deciding whether someone goes to jail pretrial or gets released” then “creating a rule that automates that decision is a way to respond to injustice.” The darker side of the rules is the mistrust. The authorities feel that people are constantly trying to cheat the system, and hence they create complex rules to counter them. As a result, people begin to find loopholes which leads to framing of some more rules. Then there are those rules which leave no scope for exercising judgment and one is only afraid of violating the rules. The suggestion is not to do away with every kind of rules but that we should create more ways for people to exercise discretion. Rules must be framed in such a way that they would keep the middle way, not assuming everyone to be immoral or everyone to be all good.

What if decision-making is turned over to Artificial Intelligence? Lam is of the opinion that human decision-making when it is properly educated will always be better than automated, even if the result may be exactly the same. According to him a world in which an

individual has no human being passing judgment on them but only algorithms, could be a hollow world, writes Devon Frye. (*Psychology Today*, January 2025)

We all value individual freedom but we are also aware that freedom without restraints can become extremely risky. However, freedom works best within rules. It is necessary to have an ethical foundation for the right conduct. Normally, human conduct or human behaviour at home, in the office, in the society, and as a citizen, requires to be regulated by certain rules or laws to ensure protection, cooperation, peace and well-being of human beings. These are man-made rules, changing over time, in order to adapt to changing circumstances. Man-made rules are made by humans adapted to the needs of a particular time and place, but imperfectly modelled after moral or natural law. According to Martin Luther King Jr., a just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, while an unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law.

To ensure adherence to the rules, in the family, society or nation, it is essential to drive home the importance and necessity for following them by providing the rational or moral basis, or by setting one's own example, and not based on any external authority, which demands obedience. There must be "an internal recognition of the value" of what is required by the law. It is the authority of one's self-discrimination so that when one sees the importance of these rules, they will *naturally* be inclined to follow them.

According to Lao Tzu, a ruler must impose minimum laws and rule by setting an example which people could imitate. Thus, "When people are subjected to overmuch government, the land is thrown into confusion....The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be. Therefore, the Sage says: 'So long as I do nothing, the people will work out their own reformation....If only I am free from desire, the people will come naturally back to simplicity.'" (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 118)