

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

A Magazine Devoted to
The Living of the Higher Life

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"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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TRUE DISCRIMINATION

THE DICTIONARY meaning of the word "discrimination" is the ability to understand the difference between things, to differentiate or distinguish. Is it always easy to see the difference? Are there not many shades of grey between black and white? We can differentiate and separate grain from the chaff, or gold from stones, but is it easy to see the salt in the water? The ordinary discrimination must be distinguished from the subtle spiritual discernment symbolized by Hansa (Swan). Hansa is a fabulous bird, "which when given milk mixed with water for its food (in the allegory) separated the two, drinking the milk and leaving the water; thus showing inherent wisdom—milk standing symbolically for spirit, and water for matter" (*S.D.*, 1,79). Could it perhaps also refer to the ability to separate the "Self of Spirit" from the "self of matter," *i.e.*, making personality subservient to the Spiritual Self? *The Voice of Silence* says that the spiritual aspirant must "learn to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting." The act of discrimination ranges from the simple levels to the subtle and complex levels. Not only does one need the *capacity* to discriminate in subtler matters, but also must have *right basis* for discrimination. Otherwise, discrimination can easily degenerate into partiality and prejudice. We hear of "racial discrimination" and "caste discrimination," where certain group of people are judged or seen to be "superior" or better than the other, based on wealth, caste, religion they belong to, or

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based on the colour of their skin! History speaks of ill-treatment received by dark-skinned people at the hands of white-skinned people. The dark-skinned Indians or Negroes were discriminated against by the white-skinned people. A Master of Wisdom wrote, "The white race must be the first to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the dark nations, to call the poor despised 'nigger' brother." Elsewhere, the Master is at pains to explain to an Englishman, who regarded the Hindus as *inferior race*, that though the highest race in *physical intellectuality* was that of the white conquerors, the "highest people now on earth (spiritually)... are the Aryan Asiatics." Do we really possess the necessary yardstick to distinguish between the superior and inferior?

In order to acquire true discrimination we need to move over from blind belief to reason and from reason to intuition. Our judgment should not be based on a few unproven and unprovable, and hence, untenable dogmas perpetrated by our religion, such as, "one only needs to confess one's sins and believe in the blood of the Christ to be absolved of one's sins" *or*, "if you have killed a cat, just make a cat of gold and offer it to a deity and you will be absolved of your sins." H.P.B. mentions that for medieval Casuists, the basis of judgement was *divine Revelation*. They distorted the truth and even suppressed it, if certain statement clashed with *divine Revelation*. It is believed in certain religions that God or Gods reveal their will and certain truths to people, and thus truths or doctrines, which have come from supernatural source, are termed *revelation*. The term "Casuistry" originates from the Latin *casus* (cases). In ethics and morals, casuistry is case-based reasoning, rather than reasoning based on principles and rules. It is clever, but unsound reasoning. Often theoretical rules are applied to particular instances to solve a moral problem. In principle-based reasoning one might say that lying is always wrong, but a Casuist will say that depending upon the details of the case, lying may or may not be unethical. A Casuist might argue that while lying is wrong for a person under oath, during legal testimony, it is the best moral choice if lying saves

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a life. There was modification of the principle to suit the case and likewise this method was misused in meting out punishment for "Confessions" made. It is said that through clever reasoning the sins of the wealthy used to be condoned or they were given mild punishment, because they made large donations. The poor were punished severely for similar sins.

In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, "Discrimination" has been defined as the faculty or power whose range and value depend entirely upon the knowledge and understanding of the individual using it. We all possess and exercise this faculty of discrimination, but the greater or lesser extent to which we are able to exercise it would be determined by our inner development and the state of knowledge or ignorance. Only knowledge blended with dispassion can give rise to unbiased, unprejudiced, impartial and clear judgment. We all perceive and act according to our *acquired nature*, i.e., according to the aggregate of mental and moral tendencies, which we have gathered through evolution. All our perceptions are in terms of the "pairs of opposites." For instance, there could be no perception of light without darkness; no perception of pain without pleasure and no perception of sin without holiness. However, we need to grasp that we are not our perceptions and that these perceptions are relative to each perceiver. Whatever accords with our acquired nature will appear to us as good, whatever tends to obstruct or oppose it will appear to us as evil, though it need not necessarily be evil. Likewise, what is pleasure to some is pain to others and what is holy to some is sin to others. Thus, a religious fanatic may look upon human and animal sacrifice or extreme asceticism such as, piercing one's cheeks and standing on one leg for many days, etc., as holy, but an enlightened person looks upon it as sin. As one grows in one's perceptions, one perceives life differently. When Lord Buddha was fainting, after wrong ascetic practices, which he erroneously perceived to be helpful in reaching the goal, he was reminded of the "Middle Way" by a band of dancers and musicians. They spoke metaphorically about tuning the sitar wires, "neither

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too high nor too low," which if kept too tight or too loose will not produce music. The Buddha said: "The foolish oftentimes teach the wise; I strain too much this string of life, belike, meaning to make such music as shall save." (*The Light of Asia*, pp. 153-54, Mysore Ed.)

True discrimination stems from the appreciation of the pairs of opposites. A person who is exposed *only* to good can never reach true discrimination. He needs to know and face evil and overcome it. It is said that *Devas* are all the time in the pure state while the enlightened beings have reached the pure state through exercise of discrimination. A spiritually advanced person knows more about evil than a sinful person, because the sinner sinks deep into his vice or sin, while a spiritual person is able to remain detached while observing it. It is said that when one begins to live the spiritual life, the evil in one's nature does not disappear, but it undergoes subtle transformation and reappears in some different and subtler form. Hence, a spiritual aspirant is required to face evil, to recognize and overcome it, in its grossest as well as its subtlest forms. To be able to do this we need to realize that we are not our perceptions.

After one learns to discriminate between good and evil, one must raise oneself beyond "the influence of the pairs of opposites." This calls for detachment or dispassion. It is not enough to be able distinguish between good and evil, or true and false, but one must also not have *attachment* for the good or *aversion* for the evil. To "turn away in horror" is *not* detachment. We are not to hate vice, or love vice, but *understand* it, says Mr. Judge. When Buddha met Angulimala, a highway robber and killer, he was not shaken, and could deal with him effectively, bringing about an inner conversion. It is only when we are sufficiently detached that we are able to appreciate that evil is good gone astray.

In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, Mr. Crosbie explains that true Discrimination distinguishes between *good*, *evil* and *mixed natures*. It proceeds from a universal point of view and understanding, which arises from the knowledge that everything in the manifestation has

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common divine origin. Everything is an expression of the One Spirit—to a greater or lesser degree. We need to understand and appreciate that all human beings are *inherently* perfect and that imperfections exist only in the lower *acquired nature*, and that vices of men are due to ignorance and not due to *innate* wickedness. It is then that we shall begin to gradually acquire patience, fortitude, modesty, mildness and compassion and know that what makes for evil and destructiveness can be turned into that which makes for good and constructiveness. Hence, instead of condemnation of the wicked and the evil, we would hasten to create opportunities to reform the murderers, rapists, prostitutes or drug-addicts. Mr. Crosbie defines true discrimination as, "the ability to do the *right thing*, at the *right time*, and in the *right place*; on every plane of action." Thus, for instance, we need to exercise discrimination even in physical charity. We should think twice before giving money to a beggar, if we see him buying cigarettes, tobacco or alcohol with that money. It has been observed time and again that lakhs of rupees are given in charity by sympathizing people toward cyclone or flood relief, but at times, a lot of it is retained by the middle men—very little actually reaches the needy.

H.P.B. advises exercise of discrimination even in helping others. She writes:

...it takes a very wise man to do good works without the danger of doing incalculable harm. A highly developed adept in life may grasp the nettle, and by his great intuitive powers, know whom to relieve from pain and whom to leave in the mire that is their best teacher....Kindness and gentle treatment will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of man or woman who has led a fairly presentable life when kept down by pain and despair. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 31*, p. 10)

We, not having such intuitive power, will do well to follow the advise of Mr. Judge: "If some pathetic story of suffering has moved you, act on the emotion while your cheeks are still wet with tears."

However, we must learn to look upon human suffering in a much wider perspective. Pain has a definite and important place in man's life. When we learn to see pain in the right perspective, we would not want to shun pain. Often people are driven to commit suicide for trifling reasons like inability to pass an exam, unrequited love, etc. We should not grumble, fret and fume but regard every unfavourable situation as an opportunity to learn and grow.

The Great Ones possess spiritual discrimination and have the ability to do the right thing at right time for the benefit of humanity. Using spiritual discrimination and following the law of cycles, the Masters withdraw the spiritual knowledge as also give it to humanity at the appropriate time. When the Theosophical Movement was started in 1875, and the knowledge of Theosophy was given to the world, a Master of Wisdom points out that they had broken the silence of centuries, knowing it to be the appropriate time when minds of men were receptive. It was launched at the right place, *i.e.*, in the west, and not in India. Mr. Judge explains that the Movement was not begun in India because the Masters pointed out that it would have been far more difficult to start and sustain it there, since people in India were steeped in a lot of metaphysical dogmatism. As a result, they had built on the psychic and psycho-mental planes a hard impervious shell around themselves, making it difficult to reach their minds and hearts. There was also the pride inherited from the past as regards their spiritual and cultural heritage. On the other hand, making an entry into the hearts and minds of westerners who were without any fixed opinions in spiritual matters, was thought to be easier.

THE DISCERNING power that knows how to begin and to renounce, what should and what should not be done, what is to be feared and what not, what holds fast and what sets the soul free, is of the *sattva* quality.

—Notes on the *Bhagavad-Gita*

UNDERSTANDING THE INVISIBLE WORLD

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

— FRANCIS THOMPSON

THERE is a similitude between war and death. War dismembers a civilization; death, a body. Men and women in their thousands do not seem to have learnt from the repeated lesson of history that wars are disintegrators of human society. The reason is obvious: the stench of the rotting corpse is recognized as signifying death, that of rotting society is not. After the death of a human being the survivors refashion their lives, and so do peoples and nations after a war. But in doing so peoples and nations do not apply the lesson of death, any more than do the human survivors of a relative or a friend, most of whom do not enquire into the meaning and purpose of death. In the one case, death is death of the corpus. Who talks of the Soul of the departed? How many seek satisfying knowledge of the subject? Similarly, after a ghastly carnage, how many ask about the spiritual side of things, about what poet "A.E." called the National Being, the soul of the nation?

By our education we are prepared to look only at the material and visible side of all phenomena—even psychological phenomena. Sickness is sickness of the body, death is death of the body. In national affairs, it is economics and the visible aspects of the corporate social order which not only loom large, but are the sole basis of thought and consideration. Hygiene of the body is valued disproportionately in comparison to the hygiene of the mind, just as words are used guardedly because they are heard by others, while thoughts are allowed to create cesspools by men and women who fancy that unseen thoughts leave no aroma behind.

The invisible occupies a far greater space in cosmos than the visible. The ocean of air is invisible but plays a vital part in human

life. A hundred animalcules are invisible in a tumbler of water, but they cause life or death, health or disease, to the person who drinks that water. Electricity is invisible, but it gives light and heat; it can cure or kill. If people would only look around they would very soon find that in their own existence the invisible plays not only a very vital part, but also a very large part—larger than that which the visible plays. In the way we see and hear, the invisible plays a greater part than the objects seen and the voices heard. Speech which brings us in contact with our fellowmen is almost altogether an invisible process, the only visible aspect being the movement of lips and of tongue.

One of the objects of our Theosophical work is to show the importance of the invisible while demolishing the superstitions about it. For there are very stupid superstitions about the invisible, rooted in false knowledge. Spiritists play with one aspect of false knowledge about the invisible, the orthodox religious ceremonialists with another, and there are other classes who dabble in objectionable practices, fruitless or very mischievous. Absence of true knowledge plays havoc. Ignorance is bad, but false knowledge is worse.

Where shall a person begin to get correct knowledge? He should begin with himself: What is he? A body of flesh and blood only? What is his mind? What is the relationship between brain and mind? What are human emotions? Whence depression and elation, meanness and magnanimity? How can jealousy be conquered and kindness developed? As money cannot purchase peace of mind, what can purchase it? If emotional agitation drives sleep away, what can conjure it to bless the agitated to calmness and refreshment? Here are some of the aspects of the invisible which touch us to the quick, and with them a person should begin.

In the olden days religion was not a matter of blind belief; knowledge of religion was sought and pious men taught it in a dozen different ways. Ancient religious texts clearly indicate that priceless knowledge existed. We have to learn not only the old languages in which the books were written, but also the mould and form in which

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great ideas were cast. For, the ancients, being nearer to the invisible nature than we of the 20th century are, used allegories, symbols, comparisons which look somewhat bizarre to us. One of the reasons why men and women today do not study their own religious scriptures is that the language used to convey ideas unfamiliar to modern knowledge is not understandable by them.

Death is an universal experience and is so near to us that we take the phenomenon for granted and do not even care to ascertain whether any reliable knowledge about it as a process is available. Equally universal is the phenomenon of day-to-day living, with its pleasures and its pains, its evil and its good; between birth and death men and women laugh and weep, but they know not what precedes birth, what follows death, what laughter is and how tears are formed. "All is mystery," say men, with a nod which they think is a nod of wisdom and humility, while most of the time it is but the nod of ignorance and mental laziness.

In the Wisdom-Religion of the ancients this knowledge is to be found: for the modern world it is made available in Theosophy—the scientific religion, the religious science. In its authentic textbooks men and women will find reliable information about Spirit, Soul, Body; about the good in themselves and the Evil which envelops that Good; about their moods caused by hurt feelings, or intoxications caused by inflated egotism. But we know that in our civilization people find no time for reading and study. Men are busy making money—but they do not ask what they will do when they come to possess it; women are climbing the social ladder, some of them panting for their very breath in the process, and they, too, do not know what it will feel like when they have reached the top! The fundamental truths of genuine Soul-science alone can help on the evolution of the *real* man, the *inner* man, and unfold his spiritual vision. Spiritual and divine powers lie dormant in every human being; and the wider the sweep of his spiritual vision, the mightier will be the god within him.

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE WISE MAN—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Panditavaggo* or The Wise Man. A person who knows and follows the *Dhamma* or law, who is well versed in the scriptures is called a *Jnani* or a *Pandit* in the Jaina and the Buddhist philosophy. The term *Pandit* is applied to the man who not only possesses knowledge but also puts it in practice. The wise man lives *in* the world but he is not *of* the world. He prepares to retire from the world at an appropriate time to become a *Sannyasi* and a sage by contemplation and meditation. We come across the description of "the wise" in various chapters of the *Dhammapada*. A lot has been said about the "the wise" in various chapters of the *Dhammapada*.

1-2. *If you see an intelligent man who detects faults and blames what is blameworthy, follow that wise man. Value him as a revealer of hidden treasure. He will be beloved of the good; by the bad he will be hated. Let such a man admonish, let him instruct, let him forbid what is improper.*
(76-77)

It is true that tolerance is one of the highest virtues. But if it is a pseudo-tolerance, it can be harmful in the long run. There is a story in which a little boy stole a pencil. His mother did not reprimand him because she loved him too much. When he grew up, he went on to become a thief and a murderer. Finally, when he was being taken to the gallows, he met his mother. He told her that had she admonished him when he first stole a pencil, perhaps, he would not have become a murderer. A fool looks only for praise and rejects an honest criticism. Buddha asks us to follow that intelligent and wise man who blames what is blameworthy.

It is the duty of the discerning wise to blame what is blameworthy and admonish. The fearless and bold stand of Theosophy "to speak the truth alike without malice or prejudice" enshrines this principle,

which arises out of a deep sense of duty to and compassion for humanity. If we come across a falsehood, we must have moral courage to speak up, gently but firmly. It is our duty. And likewise, we should be glad to accept truth, from whichever corner it comes. It is by discarding pseudo-tolerance that the wise can reveal the hidden treasure of truth in all matters—mundane, religious or philosophical. Explaining the importance of truth Mr. Crosbie writes:

Tolerance is good, if understood rightly; but there are many strange ideas in regard to it. Some think it to be intolerance to point out to others holding different views any errors of statement or fact. But Truth never yet agreed with error, nor does error agree with error; Truth agrees only with Truth. So if we firmly believe, and are convinced by fact and reason, that we are in possession of Truth, it would be a false tolerance which would withhold it in the face of error. Truth exists in the world for the purpose of destroying error. Error is dogmatic and does not court close investigation. Truth courts all and every possible investigation, and, calm in its certitude, examines everything upon its merits, tests it by the standard of Truth. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 124)

To those who dilute Theosophy or sacrifice truth for the fear of hurting the feelings of others because they have false idea of brotherhood, Mr. Crosbie writes:

This [brotherhood] does not mean indiscriminate acceptance of everything and everyone. The attitude of "namby-pambyism" is but a pseudo-tolerance. Carried to its legitimate conclusion, this false idea of "brotherhood" would signify that sin, sorrow, suffering, error, all religions and all philosophies are all right; that everybody is doing the best he can, and the best he knows how to do, and cannot do any different, and that all are steps of learning.

Is it not the bounden duty of those who know, to hold aloft the White Standard of Truth? It must be so, else how

could an enquiring one perceive it? Theosophy has to be held aloft in such a way as to confront errors of every kind, with their handmaidens of cant and hypocrisy. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 12)

The magazine *Theosophy* for May 1956 throws valuable light on this verse. It mentions that it is one thing to decline association with fools but to "detect faults and blame"—especially openly or publicly, as Buddha clearly implies—is to take strong steps, to interfere, presumably, with the course of events, or at least with prevailing opinions. H.P.B.'s article, "Is Denunciation a Duty?", embodies the essence of the Buddha's discourse in this regard. Since magazine *Lucifer*, as she admits, often took part in certain forms of "denunciation," H.P.B. feels obliged to answer those critics who claim a glaring discrepancy between the professed theosophical ideal of non-condemnation of others and the policy of H.P.B.'s own magazine. She writes as follows:

We may be told, perhaps, that we ourselves are the first to break the ethical law we are upholding. That our theosophical periodicals are full of "denunciations," and LUCIFER lowers his torch to throw light on every evil, to the best of his ability. We reply—this is quite another thing. We denounce indignantly systems and organization, evils, social and religious—cant above all: we abstain from denouncing persons. The latter are the children of their century, the victims of their environment and of the Spirit of the Age. To condemn and dishonour a man instead of pitying and trying to help him, because, being born in a community of lepers he is a leper himself, is like cursing a room because it is dark, instead of quietly lighting a candle to disperse the gloom. "Ill deeds are doubled with an evil word"; nor can a general evil be avoided or removed by doing evil oneself and choosing a scapegoat for the atonement of the sins of a whole community. Hence we denounce these communities, not their units; we point out the rottenness of our boasted civilization, indicate the

pernicious systems of education which lead to it, and show the fatal effects of these on the masses. (*H.P.B. Series No. 33*)

Likewise, she impartially denounced the distortion of the original line upon which the Theosophical Society was built. We are further told that the real purpose of the wise in "detecting faults" is not to punish or hate another but only to "admonish" and "instruct." The aim in "opposing evil" is instruction, understanding—never to be accompanied by hate, or even righteous anger. Buddha's "Wise Man" could easily absent himself entirely from the scenes of human strife and discord. But he chooses instead to remain in the middle of that discord, *in the sense that he accepts what men call "evil,"* as well as what the conventional majority call "good." Patience, not righteousness indicates his mood. This is what Mr. Judge writes:

To "turn away in horror" is not detachment. If we hate anything, it seizes on our inner selves by reason of the strong horror we feel for it. In order to prevent a thing we must understand it; we cannot understand while we fear or hate it. We are not to love vice, but are to recognize that it is a part of the whole, and, trying to understand it, we thus get above it. This is the "doctrine of opposites" spoken of in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. So if we turn in horror from the bad (we may feel sad and charitable, though), in future life we will feel that horror and develop it by reaction into a reincarnation in a body and place where we must in material life go through the very thing we now hate. So, we must strive to regard the greatest vice as being something we must not hate while we will not engage in it, and then we may approach that state where we will know the greater love that takes in good and evil men and things alike. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 22)

Since Buddha did not sanction the use of force, nor condone the punishment of one man by another, the central meaning of "*forbid*" would have to be that of non-support or non-cooperation. Our

legitimate powers of "forbidding" allow us to announce the ethical impossibility of continuing to support whatever action we regard as detrimental. Another way to put this would be to say that the spirit of Gandhi's "passive resistance" becomes the force employed. *Satyagraha* means love of truth, and one who practices it opposes evil by refusing to support or associate with its doers—not because he hates *them*, but because he loves truth. "Forbidding," therefore, in Buddha's terms, means that one announces that he cannot sanction a certain course. The refusal of Buddhist priests to sanction warfare had much to do with keeping Asia far freer of bloody strife than any other portion of the globe—at least over the course of many centuries. It is the duty of the society to un-cloak the evil, say, of dowry, rite of Sati, child-labour, oppression of women, etc., by not only condemning but actually doing something about it. The wise man does not look at a weakness in ordinary way. He offers constructive criticism—shows skillfully how it can be removed. We know how Buddha instructed the grief-stricken mother the profound lesson in life and death by asking her to bring a fistful of mustard seeds from the house that had not been visited by death. Similarly, Narada employed subtle way to instruct Valmiki which transformed his life completely. As an elder or as a parent or a teacher it is our duty to point out faults, but it must be done without arousing ill-feeling and that calls for real sympathy and understanding. A student paying tribute to Mr. Judge writes, "His most lovable trait was his exquisite sympathy and gentleness. It has been said of him that no one ever touched a sore spot with such infinite tenderness, and I know many that would rather have been scolded and corrected by Mr. Judge than praised by anyone else." Gandhiji told a teacher who wanted to beat children for their own good that if you love them as their mother would then you can beat them. St. Paul said "love and do what you like."

(To be continued)

THE SYMBOLOGY OF CHURNING

THERE are various kinds of myths: myths of creation, myths of humanity, myths of heroes, myths of cosmic disasters and myths of supernatural beings. Myths of creation speak of the origin of the world. The well-known one is the Hindu Myth of the "churning of the ocean." The Churning of the ocean or *Samudra Manthan* is a very important mythical story in Hindu mythology. It is described in the *Mahabharata* and some of the *Puranas*. According to one version, when sage Durvasa cursed Indra and all the *Devas* (gods) to be bereft of all strength, the *Devas* were defeated by *Asuras* or demons in all the battles. Lord Vishnu suggested that the *Devas* and *Asuras* should jointly churn the ocean for obtaining *Amrita* or nectar of immortality. In the process of churning, mount Mandara was used as the churning tool and Vasuki, the king of serpents, as the churning rope. The gods holding the tail of the serpent, and the demons holding its head, pulled on it alternately, causing the mountain to rotate, which in turn churned the ocean. However, during the churning process, the mountain began to sink, hence Lord Vishnu in his second incarnation (*avatar*) as the tortoise (Kurma) dived to the ocean floor and supported the mountain on his back. As a result of the churning fourteen precious things along with poison came out of the ocean. These precious things were: Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and wealth; Kaustubha, a precious gem; Chandra, the moon; Varuni, the goddess of wine; Parijat, the divine flowering tree with blossoms that never wither; Kamdhenu, the wish-granting divine cow; Kalpavriksha, the wish-granting tree; Dhanyantari, the divine physician; Apsaras, divine nymphs; Airavat, the three-headed elephant; Uchhaisravas, the divine seven-headed horse; Sharanga, the bow of Vishnu; Shankha, the Conch of Vishnu, and *Amrita*, the nectar of immortality.

The ocean represents the primordial *chaos* or the homogeneous, undifferentiated matter. Just as butter comes to the surface while churning the butter-milk, so also, "churning of the ocean," represents

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differentiation of primordial, homogeneous matter, which results into formation of the universe with its Milky Way, Sun, Moon, etc. Both *Amrita* (immortality) and *Visha* (poison, death and evil) are latent in the primordial *chaos*. H.P.B. explains in the *Secret Doctrine* (1,67) that cow and bull represent the productive and generative power in nature, respectively, and they are symbols connected with Solar and Cosmic deities. The meaning and occult properties of the "fourteen precious things," which came out during the churning, are explained only at the fourth Initiation.

Further, according to this myth, through deceit, Vishnu gave the *Amrita*, the heavenly nectar of Immortality, to the *Devas*, leading to the "War in Heaven," between the gods and the demons. "War in Heaven" refers to many things. It represents the trials, which a candidate has to pass through, on his way to becoming an adept—a war between his higher and lower nature, in which, he either succeeds or fails. If he succeeds he is called "Dragon slayer" or even "Serpent" because like a serpent casts off his old skin, he too, is born into a new body—a spiritual re-birth. This war in heaven also represents the war between the Aryan adepts of the Fifth Race and the Atlantean sorcerers.

The "churning of the ocean" is called *samudra manthan*. We may compare mind to an ocean, in which there arise waves of emotions and thoughts. We often use the word, "*manomanthari*" which represents the great churning in the mind, whenever we are faced with difficult situation and are unable to decide what course to choose. When our mind is pulled in two different directions, it is subject to intense churning, and a great turmoil is set up. A spiritual aspirant experiences this turmoil very often because of the inner conflicts, where one part of him yearns to pursue the spiritual path while the other opposes it. There is an opposition on the inner planes from our own tendencies. Even a small resolve to take a walk for 15-20 minutes every day in the morning will give rise to many conflicting forces. Our habit of late rising, reading the newspaper in the morning, having our tea leisurely, etc. will clash with this resolve.

Our body cells are made up of very tiny units of energy, called elementals. Many such elementals form one cell. All our habits leave a deep impress on these elementals because we have been doing it for many years and many lives. Such elementals may be compared to an army of soldiers, who are trained in a particular way to follow a given set of commands. If the colonel of the army changes and he wants to work in a different way, then he would give a different set of commands. But, if the commands change drastically, the soldiers would unite and oppose. It would require a great effort on the part of the colonel to efface their old habits. Likewise, changing old habits and ways of thinking and acting is difficult, where we are required to give reverse kind of impressions to these elementals.

In an ordinary person, the good and bad tendencies exist as complex collective forces, but when one decides to achieve some spiritual goal, these tendencies separate out into good and bad tendencies. Whenever one aspires towards the higher life, the good tendencies flourish, but it is a death-knell for the bad tendencies. The "stirring" or "churning" is the result of living the spiritual life in earnestness, bringing to surface all the latent negative thoughts and desires, or poisons, as also, all the latent good tendencies or *Amrita* in proportion to one's sincerity and devotion. As one lives the spiritual life, he gradually begins to acquire psychic and spiritual powers, which may be compared to the fourteen precious things that came out of the ocean during the churning. The aspirant is cautioned not to get enamoured by these powers, nor use them for any selfish gain, but for the benefit of humanity. Perhaps this is the reason why gods and demons are said to have distributed these precious things among others without keeping anything for themselves. They did not want to lose sight of their original goal of obtaining *Amrita* and gaining Immortality.

We are told that mountain Mandara was held on his back by Vishnu in the form of Kurma or Tortoise. One who wants to establish himself in spiritual knowledge, must be able to draw in all his senses, and restrain them from moving towards their accustomed objects.

The Voice of the Silence advises the seeker: "Thou shalt not let thy senses make a playground of thy mind."

Each symbol in esoteric philosophy has seven keys. In the article "Mount Meru," first printed by Mr. Judge in *The Path* magazine for January and February 1891, anthropological (physiological) key is applied to the myth of the churning of the ocean. The article mentions that the churning of the ocean takes place round about Mount Meru, in order that the Gods may obtain *Amrita* or waters of immortality. "Where and What is Mount Meru in man? What process in him corresponds to the churning of the ocean? Is it not electro-spiritual process by which he produces the brain fluid; the moon or soma juice or 'World-Mother' [*Kundalini*]?" Our attention is drawn to the footnote on p. 10 of *The Voice of the Silence*, which mentions that *Buddhi* as a vehicle of *Atma* is a passive principle. However, when *Buddhi* is activated it gives rise to one of the mystic yogic powers, an electro-spiritual force called *Kundalini*, a creative power which when aroused into action can as easily kill as it can create. It is the Power, which rises into the sixth, the middle region, the place between the eyes. Could it be between the optic thalami? "We are given reason to believe, through the *Secret Doctrine*, that the seat of this process is pineal gland, or pine-formed heart—secret heart of occultism—and that this gland corresponds to Mount Meru." Further, the article points out that mountain Mandar, which was a great obstacle to the process of churning, was put to use for the same purpose. A Teacher writes: "There is good and evil in every point of the universe." So, mountain Mandar, inhabited by both good and evil forces, and which could not be removed, was used in the process of churning. It appears that Mandar represents solar plexus, around which the great serpentine force (*Kundalini*), represented by serpent Vasuki (used as a rope for churning) is deployed. The mountain Mandar was placed on the back of the tortoise. The article points out that tortoise is androgynous creature and symbolizes bi-sexual force. The solar plexus, symbolized by Mandar, is in the pelvic region, and the shape of pelvic bones resembles that of tortoise.

THE SYMBOLY OF CHURNING

The myth goes on to say that as the fight between the gods and the demons continued, the pot of heavenly nectar of immortality was hid at four different places to protect it from the demons. These places are said to be Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik—the four cities in India. It is believed that a drop of nectar spilled from the pot at each of these places, so that they acquired mystical power. A *Kumbha Mela* (fair) is celebrated at the four places every twelve years for this reason, among others. In spite of hiding the pot, eventually, the demons got hold of the heavenly nectar of immortality. Hence, the gods appealed to Lord Vishnu who took the form of Mohini, a beautiful and enchanting damsel. She distracted the demons with her beauty and took the *Amrita* and distributed it among the gods. The aspirant has to be wary of all sorts of allurements on the Path. *The Voice of the Silence* points out that even when victory is nearly achieved, "a sense of pride would mar the work." The disciple is asked to "make pride and self-regard bond-maidens to devotion."

The process of churning implies motion. The myth of Prometheus relates to evolution of man. There was a time in evolution of man, when man was really no better than a beast, though in human form. According to this myth, Prometheus stole fire from heaven and brought it to earth. This myth refers to the "light of the mind" given to man by solar deities, endowing him with the power to choose, think and to reason. Prometheus also represents fire by friction. H.P.B. observes that the Promethean myth relates to the first opening of man's spiritual perception. The name Prometheus is derived from Sanskrit word *Pramantha*, i.e., the instrument used for kindling the fire. In the Vedic sutras we are told that by rapidly turning the stick in the socket, first heat and then fire was produced. "The motion of the stick is not a continuous rotation, but a series of motions in contrary senses, by means of a cord fixed to the stick in its middle: the operator holds one of the ends in each hand and pulls them alternately... The full process is designated in Sanskrit by the verb *manthami*, *mathnani*; which means 'to rub, agitate, shake and obtain

by rubbing,' and is especially applied to rotatory friction." The stick was called *Pramantha*, the discus or socket was called *Arani*. H.P.B. observes that in one sense Prometheus represents fire by friction, which in metaphysical sense represents the fire that cements *Manas* with *Buddhi*; in the physical sense it relates to the creative spark, or germ, which fructifies and generates the human being. (*S.D.*, II, 524 and 247).

While explaining the myth of Prometheus, H.P.B. points out that the root *manth* implies *rotatory* motion. In the *Mahabharata* legend of the churning of the ocean, Narayana suggests to Brahma that the ocean should be churned for *Amrita*. Narayana is "the mover on the waters, who is the personification of the Eternal Breath of the Unconscious All, Parabrahm." The ultimate source of all motion is GREAT BREATH from which all Cosmic motion originates. The Great Breath is supposed to symbolize absolute abstract motion, which in turn symbolizes unconditioned consciousness. When Great Breath is projected it is called Divine Breath. It may be regarded as the breathing of the Unknowable Deity, which as it were, breathes out a thought which, becomes the Kosmos. The perpetual motion of the Great Breath awakens Kosmos at the dawn of every new period, setting it into motion by means of two contrary Forces (namely, centrifugal and centripetal, or positive and negative, physical and spiritual), and thus making it objective on our plane. In other words, that dual motion transfers the Kosmos from the plane of the Eternal Ideal into that of finite manifestation, or from the *noumenal* to the *phenomenal* plane. The Great Breath is the name for *absolutely eternal* universal motion or vibration.

AT one time there grew to be the one alone out of many,
and at another time it separated so that there were many out
of the one.

—EMPEDOCLES

THE THREE OBLIGATORY DUTIES

II

THE FIRST and basic virtue on and from which all other divine virtues grow and blossom in man is *Dana*—Charity. It is the key which alone can open the golden gates that lead man "on the hard and thorny way to *Jnana*." If that is lacking, whatever we may achieve will at last turn into dust and ashes in the mouth. So teach the Great Ones. It is putting the ideal of Universal Brotherhood into action in daily life.

Mr. Judge says that it is height of arrogance on our part to sit in judgment over any other created thing. Criticism and condemnation of others is a universal human defect which grows out of ignorance and hypocrisy. Jesus points out this common human defect, its consequence and the way of overcoming it, thus:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?...Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (*Matthew*, vii)

Man is outwardly a creature of a day but in his real being, inwardly, he is Eternal. His outward mortal self is the product of his Karma whose workings are hidden from our view so long as we are bound, through ignorance, *Avidya*, to conditioned existence. How then can we sit in judgment over the acts of omission and commission of others? Even a little reflection shows us that we do not perceive the Karmic causes which lead one to act in a certain way, and that it would indeed be impudent on our part to condemn any one for things done or not done according to our petty personal standards. By so doing, we violate the universal Law of Justice and incur

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adverse reaction on ourselves. For Teachers show that when we let our mind and attention to fix in judgment on other's defects we draw into ourselves those very defects into our being, because it is nature of the mind to become that on which it dwells. When Karma has not judged the one on whom we cast our critical eye it is evident that we are guilty of disregard of the Law, which is the highest Deity, as Law is Deity and Deity is Law, and thereby violate the basic law of our being, for which we become accountable.

The student of *the Science of Life* understands that any defect he might see in others is a reflection of the very same defect in himself, at least traces of it. It would then be hypocritical of us to point our fingers at others in a spirit of unjust criticism. Our critical or condemnatory attitude and evil speaking only results in swelling of the same fault in us, degrading not only ourselves but increasing the sum of evil in the world, whether we are aware of it or not. The true and the correct practice is indicated by Jesus, which is to try to detect the defect we may perceive in others in ourselves and strive to eliminate it from our nature—the "beam in our eyes." There is indeed much that is good and noble in every soul, and we must have the humility and magnanimity to note them and try to emulate those qualities and strengthen our virtues and build our character. This duty we owe, not only to ourselves, but also to humanity at large.

To do good to those who do good to us is common, but not so common is to do good to those who seem inimical to us. The common human tendency is to retaliate and avenge the wrong done to oneself. If one were aware of the principle of Universal Brotherhood, and of the undeviating and unerring law of Karma, one would desist from revengeful thoughts and intentions, and instead, entertain charitable thoughts towards the apparent enemy and seek ways to do good to him in turn. Theosophy shows that as Karma is sure to react on the wrong doer, it would be presumptuous on our part to take the law in our hands and punish the offender. By so doing the implacable law of justice will cause a reaction on the one who thus

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takes revenge, which will come to him as punishment, and compensate the one injured by reward.

Therefore, even human laws should be preventive, restrictive, reformative and educative but not punitive, as the latter will create more discord and cause worse evils in society than those, which are sought to be eliminated by punitive means. The moral cause of most of the social evils lies in ignorance and disregard of this law of our being.

No circumstance in our individual life, however painful or unpleasant it might be, is to be shunned, resented or found fault with, as is commonly seen among many people. This is due again to disregard of Law. Adversities that come to us are not accidental but caused by ourselves by our own actions, no matter how long back. They come to us in the course of restoration of harmony of life we ignorantly broke, as an opportunity for us to make amends by necessary adjustment and learn the precious lessons of life implicit in the experience. There is no other means of learning and evolving in our Soul life except through experiences of life our own Karma brings to us. By such right attitude and approach to life we thus purify and strengthen our moral nature and grow in wisdom.

The threefold obligatory discipline incumbent on all men, which every one eventually will have to learn to practice, at one time or the other, in Soul's long pilgrimage, is summed up by Mr. Judge in his teaching to one of his pupils:

Do all those acts, physical, mental, moral, for the reason that they must be done, instantly resigning all interest in them, offering them upon the altar. What altar? Why, the great spiritual altar, which is, if one desires, in the heart. Yet still use earthly discrimination, prudence and wisdom.
(Letters that have helped me, p. 1)

(Concluded)

ON SELF-CENTREDNESS

SELF-CENTREDNESS is a condition which produces the opposite of what is expected from it. It seldom brings happiness to the self-centred person. If it does, it is a counterfeit happiness, like that of the miser gloating over his treasure, in (to speak figuratively) a locked room, behind barred and shuttered windows.

Occasionally we meet old folk who complain of loneliness and neglect, and though we may pity them and sympathize with them, are they not, perhaps, themselves to blame? Have they ever done anything positive to win the friends they now lack? Or have they led self-centred lives, pursuing only their own interests, showing indifference to others? In later life, when the activities and ambitions which at the time they found soul-satisfying are waning, they discover that the self in which all these centred has by no means gained the happiness it looked for.

Yet the self *is* our centre. And no less a teacher than Mr. Judge bids us tend it, if, as in the plant world, it is to be the core of eventual fruit not only in our present life but in lives yet to come. Speaking of membership of the Theosophical Society in the first place, "each," he says, "must study for himself (p. 3)—a necessary and valuable form of self-centredness for the time being, and one conducive to the general good of the Movement.

In another letter he puts the question, "What of the defined object, if any, for our work?" and goes on to say, "That can be answered in many ways." The one he puts foremost is the rightful practice of a particular kind of self-centredness. "There is, first, our own work, in and on ourselves, each one. That has for its object the enlightenment of oneself for the good of others... We have to watch ourselves so as to make of each a centre from which, in our measure, may flow out the potentialities for good that from the adept come in large and affluent streams" (p. 75). Note—"the enlightenment of oneself *for the good of others.*" That is the justification for introspection and private study. There is another reason also, but

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we shall leave that till later. Meanwhile, we have Mr. Judge's approval for the sort of self-centredness we are considering.

Individual advance is to be sought by working for the Branches from which Theosophical thought can radiate out for the good of others.

Then there is the matter of doing our duty. Necessarily that calls for some self-centred consideration. "It is one's duty to try and find one's own duty and not to get into the duty of another," says Mr. Judge (p. 130). Not so easy, perhaps, as it sounds, for pure kindness can move us to lend a helping hand, yet Mr. Judge's views on this could not be plainer. "Your own duty is hard enough to find out... The duty of another is full of danger" (p. 132). "It is better to die in one's own duty than to do that of another, no matter how well you do it." (p. 138)

The above shows the need for discrimination. "Use your discrimination, always," he writes, and states bluntly: "No one was ever converted into Theosophy. Each one who *really* comes into it does so because it is only 'an extension of previous beliefs.'" It is with reference to this that he urges the need for discrimination. "Do not adopt any conclusions merely because they are uttered by one in whom you have confidence, but adopt them when they coincide with your intuition." (p. 23)

Wise counsel—to let intuition be our guide. But intuition will function only if we have periods of withdrawal into stillness. So here again is an act of self-centring which is for our good, and which no one can decry, which Mr. Judge in fact urges upon us when he says, "Let all talk and other people's concerns slip by... Retire into your own silence," and "Hold fast in silence to all that is your own." (p. 133)

Mr. Judge had great knowledge and clear vision. It is from these that his guidance comes forth to us. So in this particular matter of seeking to develop our innate gift of intuition he reminds us of "the Great Workers who are behind us," and goes on: "I know their desire is that each should listen to the voice of his inner self.. ..By a

dependence of that kind you become at last thoroughly independent, and then the unseen helpers are able to help all the more." (p. 121)

Here again we see the need for a specific sort of self-centredness. Without it we could not listen, could not acquire that independence, could not be open to receive that help from the unseen. But consider first what "self we are thinking of. Mr. Judge defines it on page 6 of his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*: "We very well know that within the material, apparent—or disclosed—man, exists the *real* one who is undisclosed." It is for the sake of this real self, only for it, that we are adjured to be, from time to time, self-centred, or rather "to live as much as possible in the higher nature." (p. 115)

Speaking of the emanation of the universe, he tells us how "the presiding spirit... differentiates itself continually in various directions, becoming the immortal part of each man," and concludes with the solemn reminder: "This *Self* must be recognized as being within, pondered over, and as much as possible understood, if we are to gain any true knowledge."

Such would be Self-centring indeed, of the sort that is our *dharma* while in the body. Mr. Judge evaluates it aright when he tells a correspondent who is evidently interested primarily in the attainment of occult powers that his "only true greatness" lies in his inner true Self, advising him to turn instead to "concentration upon the Higher Self, and aspiration toward the Higher Self." (p. 124)

In words all this is plain enough. Perhaps in words we now know what right self-centredness can mean. But how to practice it is another matter. Does the "true knowledge" Mr. Judge would have us gain seem beyond us? It may *seem* so, but in him we have a teacher who can always be relied upon to point out the first step. "What I recommend you to do is to study the elementary principles of Theosophy and gain some idea of your own nature as a human being and as an individual," is the final injunction he leaves for us to act upon.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Question: How to recognize interdependence from dependence, with the true understanding of being independent?

Answer: The process of growing up is moving from dependence to interdependence. We are born in the first place, because some woman carried us for about nine months in her womb and nourished us. A child abandoned after birth would cry and cry and finally die. Children who are fed but not caressed and cuddled, *i.e.*, given love and warmth, are also known to die. There is no such thing as self-made man. Right from our childhood there has been contribution of many people in making us what we are. For our basic needs of food, clothing and shelter we are dependent on others. We are also emotionally dependent on others, and likewise others too, are dependent on us. We observe this dependence and interdependence in lower kingdoms of nature, described as *symbiosis*, which means living together of unlike organisms. *Mutualism* is a form of symbiosis in which relationship between individuals of different species is such that both the individuals derive benefit. However, *parasitism* is the form of symbiosis in which one is dependent and is benefitted at the expense of another. Interdependency can easily degenerate into dependency if we passively receive without giving. We tend to lean on another to the extent of draining him of his physical or psychic energy.

The moment we recognize that we too need to make our own contribution, it becomes interdependence, else we are parasites, or as the *Gita* points out, only thieves who receive without giving back. The law of universal brotherhood has its recognition in the system of co-operation among beings. We know that a city is thrown into

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utter chaos when the garbage collectors or chemists or motormen go on strike. When one country suffers from any calamity, such as, earthquake, tsunami, famine or recession, its repercussions are felt in other countries.

Ultimately, Independence and Interdependence is a study in Collective Karma. "No man can sin alone or bear the consequences of sin alone." We either accelerate or retard the progress of the race, by ever so little measure, through our good or bad actions. For instance, living in this century, we enjoy amenities like better transport, computers, and electrical gadgets. But it also means having to bear with crime, pollution, and corruption. This is the collective aspect of karma, where we share and bear the good and bad consequences by virtue of being part of the whole. We are not alone on this pilgrimage. We have to reach the "destination" in the company of other pilgrims and not by isolating ourselves. And yet, no one else can lift us out of the mire and put us into sunshine. A mother can feed the child, but the child has to eat and digest the food. So also, we are helped by spiritual beings, but each individual makes progress by making right or wrong choices. Interdependence is an important aspect of spiritual progress, and it is through interdependence that true independence is recognized.

Family, Nation, Race, etc. have given us certain characteristics and as a human being when we uproot a bad tendency from our personal nature, we are contributing in the purification of our Family, Nation and Race tendencies, changing its Karma as a collectivity, and assert our independence. Buddha and Shankara even in the Fourth Round possessed knowledge, which the average humanity will acquire in the Fifth or Sixth Round. As Mr. Judge writes: "You may go through the appointed course in 700 births, in seven years, or in seven minutes." An individual can progress ahead of the race. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, American ed., p. 21)

In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Mr. Judge says, "I am tired of these people who gape and gape and are so Americanly 'independent'—as if men were ever independent of each other."

This is the crux. There is that state of positive freedom, in which individual exists as an independent self, yet united with other men, world and Nature. A really free man has unfolded his divinity to such an extent that he is able to live with other men and women without interfering in their lives.

Question: If there is rebirth how does one account for "population explosion"?

Answer: The objection that doctrine of rebirth cannot account for increase in the world population is an old objection. It was put forward as an argument against the doctrine of reincarnation by Church father Tertullian. He argued that if there is rebirth where did all the *extra people* come from? In other words, if 50 people died then only 50 people should be reborn. Instead of that if 100 or 200 people were born then where did the extra people come from? Do we then have to believe that for every new baby born a new soul is created? In *The Ocean of Theosophy* (pp. 82-83), Mr. Judge points out that the objectors of rebirth assume that we know surely that the population on earth has increased and that we are being kept informed of every fluctuation in the population. However, this is not the fact. He mentions that statistics of the people that are born every year is mainly maintained in the Western countries and that too is not perfect. There are large number of people destroyed in famine, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis, but we do not have the exact figure of the same. In our days, the projection regarding stupendous increase in population in certain number of years is seen to be going off the mark.

Dr. Ian Stevenson, engaged in reincarnation researches, points out that we have only rough estimates of the number of human beings, who have lived on earth since the origin of man. Mr. Judge points out that although the number of Egos belonging to our earth is definite; no one knows what that quantity is, or the total capacity of the earth in sustaining them. We are unable to say how many people were on the earth, at some prior period, when our earth was inhabited in all the parts. Therefore, we do not know the number of

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Egos waiting to be born. A Master of Wisdom says that since the total number of Egos is vast, although the numbers that die may be small, there would be sufficient number of egos waiting to be born. We are given the analogy of a hall in the town. At any given time the number of people in the hall is finite, but people are added from the greater population of the town outside. Hence, the number of people in the hall fluctuates, as there is constant supply of people from the town. We may compare our earth to the hall in the town, and the state after death, which is called *Swarga* or paradise or *devachan* to the town. We are told that the time for which each ego remains in *devachan* is different. The Egos in *devachan* do not take birth at the same time or at the same interval of time. It is stated that whenever there is great number of deaths caused by wars, pestilence, famine or earthquakes, it is followed by "baby boom," *i.e.*, there is rush of souls to incarnation, either in the same place or in some other place or race. It is also stated that the "intermission" between two lives was very much longer in the earlier days than it is now. Hence, in earlier times, there would be greater number of souls in *devachan* waiting to be born than on earth. In the recent centuries the case is reversed, hence, greater number of egos take birth and only few egos remaining in *devachan*. Plato affirms in *The Phaedo* that the interval between two births was very long in the earlier days. Likewise, Shri Krishna mentions in the *Gita*, an "immensity of years" between two lives. We need not worry about "population explosion," because as mentioned in *Reincarnation: A new Horizon in Science, Religion and Society*, there seems to be some intelligent regulatory factor in the birth of human beings preventing extraordinary excesses. It has been observed in case of the fruit flies that their population shot up at an exponential rate, but then levelled off. Dr. Stevenson points out that often, after a war, more male babies are born than female. It may be taken to be the capacity of the Nature to compensate for the increased number of men dying during wars.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Freemasonry, on which Dan Brown's book, *The Last Symbol*, is based, is one of the oldest yet little known fraternities in the world. Some claim that Freemasons, as a fraternal community, with a membership of around six million, began in the 16th century England, while others claim that it was started in the 12th century Scotland, by the founding fathers who were masons by profession. The British brought Freemasonry to India in 1729, but it was much later that Indians were initiated into it. Today, there are 366 Grand Lodges in India at 142 different locations, and having 18,414 members. Doctors, Judges, Lawyers, Industrialists and bureaucrats are members of the Freemasonry in India. The dropout rate is a cause of concern because the young initiates mistake the fraternity's meetings as a place of social and business networking, whereas the meetings, which go on for three to four hours, are for testing one's commitment. For the first time in the history of this secret society, the veil of secrecy was lifted a little when on November 21, 2009, the new Grand Master was installed in a public ceremony in Chennai. The new Grand Master of the Freemasonry in India says that one of the reasons for having public ceremony was to remove the misconceptions of some people that Freemasons are practitioners of black magic and that Freemason lodges are haunted houses. It seems that the entire philosophy is built on honesty and integrity. The Freemasons have signs and codes for mutual recognition. Freemasons call their handshakes "grips." "The Eye of Providence" is the all-seeing eye of God (who is called the Great Architect of the Universe)—reminding the Freemasons that their thoughts and deeds are observed by God. In the earlier times, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Mark Twain, Swami Vivekananda, Dr. Rajendra Prasad (the first President of India) were among the few Freemasons, writes Arun Ram. (*The Times of India [The Crest Edition]*, November 28, 2009)

W. Q. Judge speaks of Freemasonry as a great and important

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part of the Theosophical Movement, because it includes all efforts that lead to human freedom and enlightenment. Masonry has played and is playing an important part in the world because it emphasizes Brotherhood of Man, it debars from its lodge all considerations of religion and politics, recognizing those to be the greatest provocatives of dissensions and lastly, it is the enemy of religious intolerance. It was through Masonry and Masons that the United States of America was made possible, writes Mr. Crosbie. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 36)

The role that the Freemasons played in the struggle for American Independence has been described in the article, "The Adepts in America in 1776" (*W.Q.J. Series No. 12*). The adepts were looking for a mind that could awaken the Americans who were in bondage, and they chose Thomas Paine in England. In 1774, it was with the help of Benjamin Franklin, who was a Freemason that the adepts influenced Thomas Paine to come to America. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and other Freemasons, whose minds through the teachings of masonry were fitted to reason correctly, and to reject theological conservatism, suggested to Paine to write a book. At their suggestion he wrote *Common Sense*, "which was the torch to the pile whose blaze burned away the bonds between England and America."

In a landmark study published in 1976 it was found that we integrate auditory and visual cues, such as mouth and face movements, in speech perception. Is this ability to integrate different sensory cues acquired by experience, or has evolution hard-wired us to do it? There is a growing body of evidence that such integration is innate. In a paper published in *Nature*, Bryan Gick and Donald Derrick of the University of British Columbia report that people can hear with their skin. The researchers made their subjects listen to spoken syllables, "pa" and "ta" and at the same time a tiny puff

of air was blown onto the skin of their hand. When syllables "pa" and "ta" are spoken they produce a brief puff from the mouth, while the syllables "ba" and "da" do not produce puffs. However, the researchers found that when "ba" and "da" were spoken and a puff of air was blown onto their skins, the subjects perceived the sounds as "pa" and "ta". Thus, in this study, the cues from the sensory receptors of the skin overpowered the reception through the ears. Gick admits that it is very rare that any one would sense the tiny puff of air produced while pronouncing these words by oneself or another. He observes that the stimulus is subtle but powerful. We are not aware that while hearing another person speak we are using this cue from the skin. There might be other sensory cues at work in speech perception. "We are these fantastic perception machines that take in all the information available to us and integrate seamlessly," says Bryan Gick. It goes to show that integrating different sensory cues is innate, writes Henry Fountain. (*The Times of India*, November 27, 2009, courtesy *New York Times News Service*)

In the article, "The Sheaths of the Soul," Mr. Judge explains that the Soul in man understands Nature through various instruments or "Sheaths" which it has constructed for its own use. The sheaths closer to the Soul are very fine, made of subtlest matter while the remote ones are made of grosser matter. Physical body, the grossest, is one such sheath, subdivided into seven. Likewise, astral body is another sheath of the Soul. These sheaths transform various sensations and ideas and as a result, either the Soul gains some experience or directs the body to act in a certain manner. Each subdivision of the physical sheath performs the function of receiving and transmitting sensations, as also, of retaining the memory of them. Generally, for a normal person, there is compounding and integration of various sets of sensations, experiences and recollections into one whole. One set of sensations is not recognized as distinct from the rest. However, the lower man, who collects all impressions and sensations for Soul's use can, either at will when trained, or involuntarily due to abnormal birth, live in the sensations and

impressions of one or many of the various sheaths of the physical or astral body. Thus, when the lower man is connected with one or more of the sheaths, and disconnected from the rest, there is delusion. It gives rise to the feeling that man is a collection of several personalities, each complete in itself. Thus, it appears that in abnormal condition, when the person is not trained, sensations and impressions from one or two sheaths are received and processed separately, as distinct from those received from other sheaths. In a normal person all the sensations and impressions reach the Soul as an integrated whole.

The article in *Utne Reader* for September-October, 2009, excerpted from the Fall issue of *Greater Good*, an online magazine about the "science of a meaningful life," speaks about the mood of growing distrust in America captured by the television drama, *The X-Files*, during the period 1993-2002. Since then trust in one another seems to have further declined, so that "Trust no one" could well be considered America's motto for the past 40 years, which may be owing to, among other things, Vietnam, Watergate, junk bonds, Enron, sex scandals in the Catholic Church, and the Iraq war. Some researchers, such as, Robert Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone*, have argued that the collective loss of trust is the result of a profound generational shift. Americans born between 1910 and 1940 were a particularly trusting generation, when the Great Depression and World War II, required people to rely on one another and bond together. A series of interviews, conducted in 2001 by Harvard University's GoodWork Project revealed an "overwhelming" distrust of politicians, the political process and the media among teenagers. One of the explanations given is that interpersonal trust depends upon contact people have with one another. The modern-day Americans are comparatively more isolated than the older generation. The electronic media seems to have contributed to bringing about

the isolation and hence the loss of trust. Economic disparities, the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, is also believed to have contributed to the loss of trust. However, all is not lost. "A growing body of research hints that humans are hardwired to trust, which is why institutions through reform and high performance, can still stoke the feelings of loyalty, just as disasters and mismanagement can inhibit it," write Pamela Paxton, an associate professor at Ohio State University and Jeremy Adam Smith, the senior editor of *Greater Good*. It is suggested that individual citizens can help rebuild trust by joining community groups, connecting with neighbours and talking to others about important issues in their lives. Voluntary associations must work towards connecting different groups and rebuilding communities. But it is recognized that all that will call for deep commitment and expenditure of much energy, and hence it would be better if each individual would learn to trust another, at least a little.

Growing distrust of one another and of institutions is a universal phenomenon today. Lord Buddha says: "Trust is the best of relationships." However, we find that it is not easy or practical to trust any and everyone because often, people betray our trust. We would do well to differentiate between spiritual principles on the one hand and our ability to apply them on the other hand. Just because *we* cannot apply them to the hilt, does not mean that they are not practicable. Often, it is also a question of how willing we are to suffer the consequences that practice of such a spiritual precept may bring. As beginners, we may keep in mind the Cardinal virtue of "Prudence." Prof. C. S. Lewis writes: "Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it." In other words, we may use our discrimination. For instance, when someone gives back the money he owed, we must count before putting it into pocket. So also, if a person is known to be a cheat, we may think twice before dealing with him or trusting him. Then again, it is possible that some people cannot be trusted with money, but can be trusted to keep a secret,

keep their word or to finish their work on time and so on. In short, there may be areas in which they are perfectly trustworthy.

However, we must keep in mind that a spiritual person trusts irrespective of the consequences, unafraid of betrayal. Just as we have to learn to love unconditionally, so too, we have to learn to trust *unconditionally*.

If we lack faith in others, we find ourselves in a terrible state of mind—a mind full of suspicion. As a matter of fact the world runs on trust. We trust that the Sun will rise at a certain time and it does. It is not only nature which is trustworthy, but even man-made things run on trust. We travel by trains, buses and planes without any feeling of apprehension or doubt, as we know that the driver/pilot has taken on a job and will do his best. We trust our servants, not only to do the work they have been assigned, but also not to steal from our homes. There is the exceptional servant who will even murder for money. But have we stopped employing servants? Why not? It is because we feel that, by and large, we can put our trust in them. The murderer becomes news, the trustworthy do not.

"Trust is the best of relationships." This verse occurs in the chapter on "Happiness" in the *Dhammapada*. It seems to suggest that among other things, mutual trust in human relationship is productive of happiness. Trust begets trust. If we do not trust the law and the mankind, we cannot live in the world. Trust alone can bind humanity into one grand whole.

DISOBEDIENCE is the mouth of hell; argumentativeness is its tongue, whetted like a sword; self-gratification is its sharp teeth; self-justification its throat; high opinion of oneself, which casts one into hell, is the belching of its all-devouring belly. But he who, through obedience, conquers the first, by one stroke, cuts off all the rest and with one stride reaches heaven.

—ST. GREGORY OF SINAI