

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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CAN MAN KNOW GOD?

EVEN before we answer this question, we need to ask, “Does God exist?” Humanity has always been divided into two camps: believers and nonbelievers. Belief in God’s existence rests mainly on the anthropic principle, while non-belief rests on unaccountability of so much pain and wickedness, as an article in *The Week* pointed out. Epicurus, the Greek philosopher, said: “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is not omnipotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” Like the Greek philosopher Epicurus, the atheists argue that if an omnipotent and benevolent God exists, why should there be so much suffering and evil? “Why does God—if He exists—allow earthquakes, floods and typhoons to occur, bringing death and destruction in their wake?” The theists counter this with the free-will argument. The anthropic principle seems to emphasize the existence of intelligence behind the orderliness of the universe. There is evidence of law and order from all branches of science. For instance, if the electromagnetic force were even slightly weaker than the gravitational force, stars would have burnt a million times faster, burying the universe in darkness a long time ago, writes Debashish Mukerji. (*The Week*, May 2, 2004)

Except for the atheists, each person has his/her concept of God. Human history shows that in the beginning when man identified

himself with nature, he worshipped animal gods. But as time passed and man became aware of himself as the crown-piece of evolution, he endowed God with human form and attributes.

God in Theosophy is an Impersonal, Eternal, Boundless, Omnipresent and Unchanging Principle. To assign to it any attributes is to dwarf it. It is difficult for us to conceive of God as all-inclusive. It is Absolute Light and Absolute Darkness, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Non-consciousness, Absolute Being and Absolute Non-Being. It is BENESS. For instance, it is possible for us to conceive of any *one* type of triangle at a time, say an equilateral or an isosceles triangle that satisfies all properties of a triangle. But it would be impossible for any of us to visualize “triangularity”—an abstraction, embracing all types of triangles. God or Absolute is like triangularity.

The Absolute is the Causeless Cause and the Rootless Root, which is not involved in the cause-effect chain. It is the noumenon of all the noumena which must underlie all phenomena and give to them whatever shadow of reality they possess, but which we are not able to cognize at our level. An example is given to understand this. The atoms of gold scattered throughout the substance of auriferous quartz may be imperceptible to the naked eye of the miner, yet he knows that they are not only present there but that they alone give his quartz any appreciable value. The relation between noumenon and phenomenon is similar to that between gold and quartz. But whereas the miner knows what gold will look like when extracted from quartz, we at our level cannot form any conception of the reality of things as separated from the veil of *Maya* which hides them, *i.e.*, we are able to grasp only its manifested aspect. (*S.D.*, I, 45)

The basic idea of the *Rig-Veda* is that One Unity pervades the entire universe. Shankara explains that God is the only reality—when God is known, everything is known. Creation is compared to magic or jugglery; God is a magician who creates the world by the magical power called *Maya*. The world is an *appearance* which

God conjures up with his power, *Maya*. When rope appears as a snake, we have superimposed snake on the substratum or reality called rope. We see many objects in the one Brahman on account of our ignorance, which conceals the real Brahman from us and makes it appear as many objects. For one who sees through the trick of the magician, he fails to be a magician. Similarly, for those who see nothing but God in the world, God ceases to have *Maya* or the power of creating appearance. Shankara distinguishes between two different points of view—*Vyavaharika*, practical or ordinary viewpoint that regards the world as real and God as its omnipotent and omniscient creator, sustainer and destroyer. God in this aspect appears to have qualities and is termed *Saguna-brahman*, (with attributes) or *Ishwara*. From this point of view the Soul or Self appears as though limited by the body. The second is the real or *Paramarthika* viewpoint, which is that of the wise who have realized that only God is real and that the world is an appearance. Here, God is *Nirgunabrahman* or transcendental reality. Here the body is recognized as apparent and illusionary and hence there is nothing that distinguishes the soul from God (*An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, pp. 50-52). Shankara taught that *Jivatma* is not separate from *Paramatma* or One Reality. The Higher Self or *Atman* is like a ray of the sun, which may *appear* separate but cannot be detached from the Sun.

The archetypal plan or blueprint for the phenomenal universe resides in the Universal Mind. It is the collectivity of Dhyana Chohans, or Beings who perfected themselves in prior periods of evolution, who interpret the plan and impress the ideas in the Divine Mind onto the matter as the laws of nature. God is Law. God is all-pervasive and so is Law. In fact, in the manifested Universe the presence of God is felt through the Law, which works impartially and unerringly. It is this law which makes the universe orderly and gives it meaning. It would be miserable living in a universe where one day water felt cold to our touch, and another day burnt our fingers!

We cannot perceive God like we perceive everything else, because It is Itself the knower, and the knower cannot be the object of its own knowledge. For instance, the finger cannot catch hold of itself or the fire cannot burn itself. “It is wisdom itself, the object of wisdom, and that which is to be obtained by wisdom” (*Gita*, XIII). So it is said that in the *Dhyana* stage of meditation, one enters the light but does not touch the flame. That is, one experiences Oneness with all the creatures. In *Samadhi*, “the ascetic loses consciousness of every individuality, including his own. He becomes—the ALL.” The perceiver, the perception and the object of perception, all become one.

Says *The Voice of the Silence*: “Look inward: thou art Buddha.” It shows that we are gods in the making. Spiritual development is not possible without close communion with the God within. Voice of conscience is the voice of the Higher Self; the more we pay heed to it, the louder it speaks.

Though divinity is present in the tiniest of atoms, we fail to discern It. Our personalities are like waves in the ocean. A wave rises in the ocean and *appears* separate, but for how long? A few seconds, then it falls and merges back into the ocean. How many times in our dealings with other people, are we able to look beyond the personality, *i.e.*, not see him as the individual who fought with us yesterday or as one who is proud or stingy? Krishna says, “The deluded despise me in human form, being unacquainted with my real nature as Lord of all things” (*Gita*, IX). In the story by Count Leo Tolstoy, God appears to a shoemaker—saddened by the loss of his loved ones—in his dreams and makes a promise: “Look out in the street tomorrow for me. I will come.” As the day passes, he feeds and comforts a sweeper, an old lady, a poor woman with a child, all the time waiting for God to appear. At the end of the day, when he sat down disappointed, one by one the people he had helped seemed to appear in the corner of the room, and he heard a voice saying, “It is I.” When he opened the Bible he read: “For I was hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me

drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in... In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.” God appeared to him in the form of the poor and the stranger.

Symbolically, the deity is in the *sanctum sanctorum*, the innermost chamber of the temple. Moreover, in many temples there is Nandi the bull, in front of the idol of the deity, obstructing the view. This bull represents the lower, personal or animal nature that needs to be surmounted or tamed. It is too much identification with the personal nature that makes us oblivious of the presence of the God in others and in us. As Mr. Crosbie points out:

It is a fact that we do identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, and with its conditions and relations, which are also ever changing. We say, “I am happy, or I am sad,” “I am sick or I am well,” “I am contented or I am dissatisfied,” all of these expressions being due to some form or condition which is changeable....

The past changes have perished; the present changes are perishing; the future changes will also perish; but “we” remain through them all, unchanged and unchanging. If we can grasp this idea and hold to it, we will have taken the first step towards right knowledge and freedom. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 189-90)

This Spirit in the body is the Perceiver, something which Itself remains unchanged but perceives all the changes. Our body, our likes and dislikes, all change, but the power to do, to know, to feel, all these comes from It. So the power to make, to unmake and to re-make—which are powers of divinity—are all within us. Mr. Judge has the following advice:

Here is advice given by many Adepts: every day and as often as you can, and on going to sleep and as you wake—think, think, think, on the truth that you are not body, brain, or astral man, but that you are THAT, and “THAT” is the Supreme Soul... By persistence in this, by submitting your daily thoughts each night to the judgement of your Higher Self, you will at

last gain light. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*)

H.P.B. sums it all up in *Isis Unveiled*:

For the first time we received the assurance that the Oriental philosophy has room for no other faith than an absolute and immovable faith in the omnipotence of man's own immortal self. We were taught that this omnipotence comes from the kinship of man's spirit with the Universal Soul—God! The latter, they said, can never be demonstrated but by the former. Man-spirit proves God-spirit, as the one drop of water proves a source from which it must have come. Tell one who had never seen water, that there is an ocean of water, and he must accept it on faith or reject it altogether. But let one drop fall upon his hand, and he then has the fact from which all the rest may be inferred. After that he could by degrees understand that a boundless and fathomless ocean of water existed. Blind faith would no longer be necessary; he would have supplanted it with KNOWLEDGE. When one sees mortal man displaying tremendous capabilities, controlling the forces of nature and opening up to view the world of spirit, the reflective mind is overwhelmed with the conviction that if one man's spiritual *Ego* can do this much, the capabilities of the FATHER SPIRIT must be relatively as much vaster as the whole ocean surpasses the single drop in volume and potency. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, prove the soul of man by its wondrous powers—you have proved God! (*Preface*, p. vi)

JESUS said: If those who lead you say to you: "See, the kingdom is in heaven," then the birds of the heaven will precede you. If they say to you: "It is in the sea." Then the fish will precede you. But the Kingdom is within you and it is without you.

—*The Gospel According to Thomas*

HUMAN DIGNITY AND FREEDOM

Freedom is linked with [moral] power and the capacity to use it wisely. The very idea of freedom rests on the profound respect for humanity. It rests on the profound conception of human dignity. It rests on the belief of human brotherhood. It is deeply religious or if you prefer ethical and moral in its basis.

—DOROTHY THOMSON

THE above words of Dorothy Thomson sum up the concept of human dignity and freedom and the preconditions of achieving liberty for the Soul of man. Freedom, be it individual or social, is primarily based on human nature itself, its inner needs, and on the fact of humanity being one Brotherhood. It is man's spiritual nature that lends "dignity" to his existence and demarcates his unique place in the world.

In the last two centuries much has been discussed about the "Right to Freedom," among other equally important rights. "The inalienable right of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" mentioned in the Declaration of American Independence, clearly recognized what Aristotle calls the "Complete Life" for a free citizen. These rights are necessary pre-conditions for social and individual well being and growth, as well as for the maintenance of peace and progress of the whole civilization.

The real value of anything, be it a natural faculty like the eyesight, respiration and health, or a gift like friendship, is acutely felt in its deprivation. But most of us take "freedom"—like our health—for granted, until we face the threat of its loss. People in the "developed" countries with their socio-economic and political freedom seldom keep in mind the historical fact that a dire price had to be paid by their patriotic predecessors to obtain the freedom they are now enjoying.

Many are oblivious of the suffering and the stunted growth of people in "under-developed" countries. Truly speaking, these latter should be called socially "disadvantaged" people in terms of human

values rather than in economic terms. When freedom is taken for granted and taken undue advantage of by mistaking it to mean unrestrained liberty of indulgence, then a natural reaction is found to descend on such people. The price of pleasure, in the end, is pain. Such is the law of human constitution and nature. Hence the need for vigilance, and sincere concern for the under-privileged and the down-trodden masses who have not yet fully achieved even freedom from hunger—a fundamental need for sanity and survival.

Admitting that freedom for the masses is intrinsically connected with health, growth and well-being of a society, the real issue, which may be lost sight of, is the “dignity” that is hallowed for being “human.” Where is that dignity if human beings are biologically classified under the “animal kingdom”? Where is his claim to right to freedom if man is considered merely an intelligent animal with animal drives and instinctual propensities, with “conditioned reflexes” which largely govern his behaviour—only modified by his cleverness if not cunning!

Are we willing to accept this dehumanizing picture (of an animal-man), and yet grant him the privilege of freedom a little above that of beasts, because he can smartly lord over them? Such a position will encourage a tyrant to declare himself privileged because his “might is right.” And what if the “rule of the jungle” prevails? Vigilance is the price of Freedom. Nations that are heedless are already in danger of internal unrest, if not in the state of complete lawlessness or anarchy. Here is an excellent definition of “Humanity,” that makes us aware of our responsibility towards one another:

Humanity is a great Brotherhood by virtue of the sameness of the material from which it is formed physically and morally. Unless it becomes a Brotherhood also intellectually, it is no better than a superior genus of animals. (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

CAN THE DEAD COMMUNICATE?

I

FOR someone who has lost his near and dear one, who finds a terrible void in life, for whom life has lost all its meaning with the sudden departure of the loved one, it is not unusual to have a burning desire for establishing contact with that dear-departed. Something within us tells us that life cannot terminate in this manner. That our loved one must live on, body or no body. Moreover, many religions speak of the spirit of man surviving the death of the body, waiting in heaven or hell for the “Day of Judgement,” or enjoying its heavenly stay according to its merit, to be reborn again in a new body.

While the desire to communicate with our dear-departed is natural, have we ever asked ourselves whether they in turn have any desire to communicate with us after death? The *real* man is not the personality of Mr. X or Y, known to us and now dead. He is the spirit within—which has a clear purpose, clear goal, which may or may not get realized during one lifetime. Death is only an incident in life’s great journey, an interlude, before the journey continues in a new body, new life. Life’s possibilities, its expressions can never be exhausted in one life; man must return to earth to pick up the thread in a new life. Having achieved the specific purpose in a particular life, the *real* (immortal) man moves on. It is only in rare cases that after death, he remains behind for a brief period, if he has some intense unfulfilled desire or something important to communicate to someone. It is then possible for the real man—the spirit of man or soul within—to communicate with us. After this brief period, the soul has no more to do with earth until it reincarnates again. Thus, at the moment of death the soul may speak to some friend on earth before the door is finally shut. H.P.B., while responding to an inquirer on the possibility of the disembodied spirit communicating with the living, says:

Yes, there is a case, and even two exceptions to the rule. The first exception is during the few days that follow immediately the death of a person and before the Ego passes into the Devachanic state. Whether any living mortal, save a few exceptional cases—(when the intensity of the desire in the dying person to return for some purpose forced the higher consciousness to remain awake, and therefore it was really the individuality, the “Spirit” that communicated)—has derived much benefit from the return of the spirit into the objective plane is another question. The spirit is dazed after death and falls very soon into what we call “pre-devachanic unconsciousness.” The second exception is found in the Nirmanakayas. (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 148-49)

Many such instances have been reported in which a dead person is known to have appeared before his mother or wife or a friend or a distant relative to convey some important message—often far away from the actual place of his death. But in these cases, the spirit has not yet left our earthly plane and may appear in his inner, finer body—called the astral body or *Mayavi rupa*—to someone who is sensitive and receptive, to tell something important or just to be with him.

Immediately after the clinical death, the spirit of the man has a panoramic review of the life just ended. The spirit within only takes with it the aroma of life—the noble qualities, high aspirations, appreciation of that which is pure and good, higher impulses, kind feelings towards other people, helpful nature, desire to pursue a noble art such as music, painting and so on. All the desires of a worldly nature are left behind by the spirit in its flight to *Devachan* or heaven-world. Man’s evil tendencies, envy, pride, jealousy, hatred towards another, desire to progress at the cost of another, selfishness, passion for enjoyments of gross nature, gluttony, excessive sex indulgence, greed for money and such are not in harmony with our divine nature. These tendencies or drives are left behind which then get combined with the astral body to form

what is known as astral shell or *Kama-rupa* or ghost. The real man or spirit leaves behind this shell in lower regions of earth’s atmosphere called *Kama-loka* or hell and itself wakes up on the plane of heaven. The spirit, as it were, partakes of the banquet of gods. It wakes to the joys of *Devachan*.

Devachan is an illusory but real state in which the soul of man is rested. It is like going for a long holiday with family and friends to Switzerland or some such place of beauty and quiet, but without any possibility of getting disturbed by mobiles, faxes or phone calls while we are on our well-earned holiday. It is a blissful state which cannot be disturbed by anyone on earth—not even the nearest and dearest. If it were possible, then it would cease to be heaven—an abode of complete peace and bliss—the world in which there is no trace of sorrow, grief or unhappiness. For the person who has died, there is no recollection of death. He makes a transition from earth-life to heaven-world without being aware. He lives in a subjective world, in the company of his loved ones, doing all the noble works that he longed to do during life but could not, pouring his intense love on the dear ones. He builds a beautiful and happy world of imagination, visualizing vividly the happiness and prosperity of loved ones, which he hoped to see during his life just ended. Thus, a dead mother may see her drunkard son, sober and a good man. A harassed wife of an unfaithful husband on earth may feel herself a happily married wife of a devoted husband in that self-created happy world. The divine love of a *Devachanee* has power to make itself felt by those on earth. If sensitive and attentive, those on earth may actually feel the presence and guiding hand of the departed, particularly in their hour of need.

Again we say that love beyond the grave, illusion though you may call it, has a magic and divine potency which reacts on the living. A mother’s Ego filled with love for the imaginary children it sees near itself, living a life of happiness, as real to it as when on earth—that love will always be felt by the children in flesh. It will manifest in their dreams, and often in various

events—in providential protections and escapes, for love is a strong shield, and is not limited by space or time. As with this Devachanic “mother,” so with the rest of human relationships and attachments, save the purely selfish or material. Analogy will suggest to you the rest. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 148)

All this notwithstanding, man is not satisfied. He longs for the physical presence of the one whom he has loved and lost. He wishes to re-establish the contact and yearns for familiar mode of communication. To such, séance rooms open their doors wide open, promising to put them in touch with their loved ones. They claim to bring the spirits of the departed to the séance rooms. And it is not surprising that the desperate, distressed, bereaved person on this side of the earth, grabs this chance of establishing a channel of communication. He has no idea what a dangerous zone he is entering into, when he walks into a séance room to get in touch with the spirit of the departed. With an intense desire to be reunited with the dead, he is credulous, unprepared and unguarded. Those who believe that it is indeed the spirit of the loved one who appears at the séance should ask themselves whether it is possible to drag the spirit back from his happy *Devachanic* state to the sorrowing group of his loved ones, just to reassure them of his undying love or to answer their questions of purely worldly nature. Moreover, could it be done on a regular basis day after day, like family members coming together, over the dinner table, every night? Our sense of privacy and decency is outraged when we are told that mere dabblers in necromancy may and can even summon the spirit of Newton, Plato, Gandhi, Jesus—including our dear ones. Can we believe that the spirit that has passed on to another plane can ever be attracted to the foul atmosphere of our séance rooms? It is only in some rare instances that an unpaid and pure medium ascends to the state of Devachan and communicates with the beings in that state. But in today’s world of paid mediums where men flock the place to ask the spirit which horse they should bet on and what stocks they should invest in, in short with a selfish desire for profit,

cases of mediums ascending to actually contact the spirit of the departed in their subjective devachanic state are almost entirely absent.

We say that in such cases it is not the spirits of the dead who descend on earth, but the spirits of the living that ascend to the pure Spiritual Souls. In truth there is neither ascending nor descending, but a change of state or condition for the medium. The body of the latter becoming paralyzed, or “entranced,” the spiritual Ego is free from its trammels, and finds itself on the same plane of consciousness with the disembodied spirits. Hence, if there is any spiritual attraction between the two they can communicate, as often occurs in dreams. The difference between a mediumistic and a non-sensitive nature is this: the liberated spirit of a medium has the opportunity and facility of influencing the passive organs of its entranced physical body, to make them act, speak, and write at its will. The Ego can make it repeat, echo-like, and in the human language, the thoughts and ideas of the disembodied entity, as well as its own. But the non-receptive or non-sensitive organism of one who is very positive cannot be so influenced. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 30)

(*To be concluded*)

ON the whole, who knows how to reverence the Body of a man? It is the most reverend phenomenon under this Sun. For the Highest God dwells visible in that mystic unfathomable Visibility, which calls itself “I” on the Earth. “Bending before men,” says Novalis, “is a reverence done to this Revelation in the Flesh. We touch Heaven when we lay our hand on a human Body.”

—THOMAS CARLYLE

SIGNIFICANCE OF DREAMLESS SLEEP

THEOSOPHY explains to us what happens during the hours of sleep, when we seem to be unconscious of life, unconscious of happiness or sorrow, work or play, tiredness or activity. Those who crave for sensuous enjoyment live a “night life” of pleasure; but to most of us the hours of sleep come around cyclically at night-time and we wake up the next morning to begin our normal life.

What is it all for? Partly for the sake of the bodily machine which, like all machines, needs rest; also for the rest of the emotional nature and of the desire-mind; and, most important of all, for spiritual refreshment.

We are taught that there are three states of consciousness in which we normally function: *jagrat*, the waking state; *swapna*, the dream state; and *sushupti*, the dreamless state. There are others, but we are not concerned with them here. Dreams are either impressions received by the consciousness during the *sushupti* condition; or, as is more commonly the case, they are reproductions of memories stored in the brain or of pictures seen in the Astral Light; or they may be caused purely by physiological disturbances. We rarely recollect any spiritual impression on waking up, though warning dreams and prophetic dreams *are* remembered at times. Why is it so difficult to remember the real dreams and experiences of the higher Ego?

The secret of the understanding of the higher reaches of consciousness lies in a knowledge of the *sushupti* condition. In this state the lower constituents of our being, the senses, the feelings, the desires and even the lower mind, are in a paralyzed condition and only the Higher Manas, Manas freed from Kama-desire, is active. This true fifth principle, the immortal entity, lives its own life on its own plane, and it is because we do not familiarize ourselves with our teachings on *its* life and condition that we find so many difficulties in the way of our understanding.

What is this fifth principle, the Ego? It is the individually

conscious link between our world and Atma-Buddhi. Once we can grasp this idea, we have crossed one great hurdle in the way of our understanding of our nature. Left to itself, Atma-Buddhi, the Monad, is unconscious on this plane. Divorced from the fifth principle, Manas, the Monad can have no consciousness or perception of things on this earthly plane. “The highest sees through the eyes of the lowest” in the manifested world: Spirit remains blind without the help of matter in the material spheres; and so does Atma-Buddhi without Manas. It is through the mind of man that the radiance of the Spirit shines on the personality. It is in the human kingdom alone that the Universal Mind is able to function through individualized centres of consciousness. Man has not reached this condition automatically, but as the result of evolution and experience he has come to the stage where he is capable of being aware of the idea-forms in the Universal Mind and of giving them concrete shape by projecting their reflection on to the lower planes through the portion of Manas which functions during the waking life of the personality to which it is attached.

Manas is the thinking principle. Thought is creative; therefore Manas is a creator, is incessantly creating. Creating what? The Universe came into being because it first existed in ideal form in the mind of the Deity. The Buddha, the Christ and the long line of Divine Beings are rapt in thought, and therefore are incessantly creating. What do they create? We are told that their thoughts are living entities and that they create a Wall of Protection around mankind. As Nature on our plane works incessantly, moulding forms, evolving better and better forms, helped by lives that are builders, so the architects of every aspect of the universe incessantly create ideas which these builders bring into objectivity.

We too are builders. Take an idea such as Universal Brotherhood. Is this idea rooted in the lower planes of being? No; it is the reflection of the Oneness of the ALL. On the higher plane Brotherhood is an actual fact, a reality. On this plane of ours it is only an ideal or an idea. Why is it not an operative fact here?

Because we do not understand it thoroughly, do not know the rules and laws to make it work, or care sufficiently to think clearly about it or to feel its necessity; therefore we do not exert our *will* to realize it. We look around and say that others are not brotherly instead of looking within and realizing that we ourselves are not brotherly. Real Brotherhood is not easy to build, for all kinds of difficulties come in our way; but with persistent effort they can be overcome.

Action follows thought and thought creates action. It is in the mind, therefore, that we must plan and search and learn, just as the potter first gets an idea and then, applying the laws of his craft, gives it external form. We need to know the laws as well as have the idea.

How do we get great ideas? We get them often in *sushupti*. In this state, even though what we know of as “our” mind, aware of itself, is semi-paralyzed or totally paralyzed, so that the higher Ego is untrammelled by the lower, yet the actions of that Ego impress themselves on the paralyzed personality. For example, if we fall asleep or semi-asleep in the sun, we are unaware of the sun-burning of the skin—unaware until we awake. Yet we have the effect of the burn. The actions of the Ego are vaguely seen if the personal mind is only semi-paralyzed; and on awakening some of these impressions become ideas and ideals. Every great and noble thought comes to us from the higher, and so often we fail to seek the guidance of that higher in translating those ideas and ideals into facts on this plane of being.

There is no need for us to be in this paralyzed or semi-paralyzed condition. We *can* enter and emerge from *sushupti* in a collected condition. In *sushupti* the mind searches for knowledge. If in waking life we think about what we want to learn and make the necessary preparations for reaching the higher plane in a conscious and collected condition, we shall gradually find the knowledge we seek. In any case, whether we go through *sushupti* in a collected condition or in a semi-paralyzed or paralyzed state, it always leaves

an effect on us, a purificatory effect through contact with the Ego. If we were collected when we reached that plane, then we are more likely to remember and to retain the beneficent influence.

We must, in waking life, saturate our consciousness with the idea that while entering and coming out of that condition we shall remain self-controlled and one-pointed. Hence the teaching given to us that we should review the past day, weigh the experiences gone through and see their worth, good or bad; that we should close the day while ideating on some spiritual thought, on the great Self whose representative we are, and open ourselves to Its benediction.

What we need is not so much the detailed memory of the experiences as watching for any great idea or ideal that comes to us with the urge to realize it. We already have many such, so our main object should be to learn how to realize them. This is our work through our vehicles of this plane.

Three things are necessary: the idea or ideal; the imagination, the image-building faculty of the mind; and the will. An idea like Universal Brotherhood fails to become a reality unless we use the mind to build such a brotherhood in our imagination, and we need the will to keep the image-building faculty at work. We have to make the image and destroy it, make it better and destroy it with greater knowledge as we do with all things in life. Science shows that we must build *on what we have learnt*. From there we pass onto more and more knowledge, destroying what we have done in the past because now we can do better, and so on and on. Brotherhood is based on universal laws, on the principle that there is but one essence which we all are, and it touches the material, psychical and mental aspects of our being.

Just as Divine Beings work on the Ideas in the Universal Mind and reproduce them perfectly on dense matter, so must we do the same. Otherwise we shall find them reflected upside down on the Astral Light and shall work on them wrongly. We need to realize that to say that “Universal Brotherhood is a fact,” or, “Let there be

a Universal Brotherhood,” is not enough. To talk of peace is not enough; to talk of kindness is not enough: to talk of the Great Ones is not enough. The key to the development of human nature is at the moment the mind, the thinking principle, and with it the will. It is the will that, in these days of distress and uncertainty, seems to be neglected, for we have got into a way of thinking, “What is the use of doing anything? What *can* we do?” H.P.B. gave us wise advice in *The Key to Theosophy* when she said that every individual can contribute to the general good what he can of ennobling thought. It is the individual himself that is the key to progress. It is the work of each individual in and on himself that will make Universal Brotherhood a reality, not the criticism of others.

To get clear-cut ideas, therefore, is important. Our last thought on going to sleep will determine the condition of our consciousness during sleep. During the waking condition we have to do the work of building a channel between the Ego and our ordinary life of thoughts, feelings and actions. We can do this, first, by paying attention to the voice of conscience; but that is not enough. We have to form the habit of turning for help and instruction to the great and glorious Entity which is our real Ego. We can do this by attuning ourselves to that Ego, by practice and absence of desire. Even our physical brain has layers which vibrate to these higher, spiritual vibrations, and in our kamic nature is the seed of compassion and not only of passion. To develop the higher in and through the lower is our first task in waking life if we are to get to the condition where we can receive the full benediction of the *sushupti* plane. Let us begin the task of working for humanity by building the universal ideas here, on this material plane.

I desire to have in everything a purpose (*niyah*); even in my eating, my drinking, and my sleeping.

—AL-GHAZALI

DISCRIMINATION AND VALUES

“LET us examine a few words.” So says Mr. Judge in one of his articles. Acting on his advice, let us straightway start with that key word, Discrimination, which is a “must” for every student of Theosophy. He himself defines it well in his *Letters That Have Helped Me* (p. 3) where he speaks of those of us who are still in the “Rajasika regions” of the inner life, “ever aspiring, ever trying to purify our thoughts and free ourselves from the attachment to actions and objects.”

That is the very process of Discrimination, a process of selectiveness in values. Standing at the point of choice between the real and the unreal, between “what is from egotism alone and what is not” (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 172), only Discrimination, innate or acquired, can save us from error. Acquired it has to be by most of us, often through mistakes and painful experiences, for only rare souls come into the world with perfect spiritual judgement from childhood upwards. Hence the inestimable value of the teachings of Mr. Judge, which, profound as they are, are never obscure, and who seems so wonderfully to align himself with the humble student, as though treading the Path alongside. “What I am saying,” he writes in a letter, “should help some as it does me also” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 71). And his correspondence with Jasper Niemand practically opens with these words: “I am, like you, struggling on the road.” (*Ibid.*, p. 1)

The first step towards acquiring Discrimination is “to know the distinction between the intellect and spiritual mind” (*Letters*, p. 96); in fact, to accomplish this *is* to discriminate, for most people instinctively assume the intellect to be the controlling centre of their being. Particularly in the age we live in has intellect usurped the throne, served slavishly by our scientists, pseudo-philosophers, educationists, and theorizers generally. It is a worship that is bringing many ills upon us, but it pertains to *Kali Yuga* and is inescapable for the present, since none of these would dream of

looking back to lost Atlantis for a warning. But between “mind” in the popular sense and the “spiritual mind” referred to by Mr. Judge there is so little similarity that even the barest modicum of Discrimination should suffice to show us the difference. “The much-lauded mind is not the final judge, and there are higher faculties which may be exercised for the acquirement of knowledge.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 112)

Discrimination may be reckoned as one such. Even the most powerful mind is not necessarily discriminative, for Mr. Judge refers to “great strength of mind, *whether discriminative or not*” (*Ibid.*, p. 40, Italics ours). As for the twentieth century’s intellectualism, with its pronouncements and its products, few or none of them backed by spiritual discrimination, what he wrote in *The Path* in 1892 under the heading “The Signs of This Cycle” holds equally true today. “The Theosophist in all ages has regarded loss of spirituality as equivalent to the state of death or darkness; and mere material progress in itself is not a sign of real advancement, but may have in it the elements for its own stoppage and destruction. Preeminently this age has all these characteristics in the Western civilizations.” (*The Heart Doctrine*, p. 199)

Let us cease to comment, though, and try to learn. We have seen how Mr. Judge would have us apply Discrimination to life *in toto*. Now let us see how to apply it (1) to our acts and motives; (2) to our use of our bodily tenement; (3) to Theosophy both as we study it and as we try to express it in daily living.

Mr. Judge analyses action closely. “We may do a supposed good act,” he says, “and that shall outwardly appear good, and yet as our motive perhaps is wrong the act is naught, but the motive counts” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 26). Think this over, the last four words especially; they are more than a little startling. We may be quite aware of our motive inwardly; say it is the desire to impress others with our generosity or with our concern to put right some wrong. Or we may be self-deceived and unaware of it. In either case we perform the “supposed good act.” But we do not

add thereby to our good Karma, because, explains Mr. Judge, “all acts are dead when done; it is in the heart that they are conceived and are already there done; the mere bodily carrying out of them is a dead thing in itself.” (*Ibid.*, p. 26)

Would not you agree that in such case there is great need for Discrimination? If, as Mr. Judge says, “the motive counts,” we might do better to omit the act, good though it seems to be, thereby saving ourselves from spiritual hypocrisy. But if we have not trained ourselves to discriminate, what then? Mr. Judge can only warn us that “the performance of a good act is no virtue unless the person within is in the right attitude of mind,” and advise us with his customary common-sense to begin at the beginning and put first things first. “We must attain to a proper state of mind...in order to know how to skilfully perform our actions without doing so for the sake of result; doing them because they ought to be done, because they are our duties.” (*The Heart Doctrine*, pp. 52 and 53)

How does Discrimination affect our bodies?

We shall bypass the mundane plane where, through our diet and habits and (when choice is possible) our environment, it can ensure us good health, and consider something more far-reaching—the life of the atoms of which our bodies are composed. These, says Mr. Judge, are “all affected for either good or bad results by the spiritual aspirations or want of them in the man who is the guide or god, so to say, of his little universe” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, p. 7). We may think it ends there, but far from it, as Mr. Judge makes clear in *The Heart Doctrine* by teaching us that “when the Soul is reincarnating it attracts to itself those physical and astral atoms which are like unto its old experience as far as possible. It often gets back again”—note this point especially—“some of the identical matter it used in its last life.” (p. 125)

How vital, then, for us that that matter should be good! But its quality will depend upon the stamp we are putting on the atoms *now*. Only if we order our present life with Discrimination (in its inner aspect, of course, particularly) will the atoms that return to

us in our next life be likely to help us forward in our course of evolution.

Faced by a subject so momentous and recondite, let us seek guidance from our Teacher. “We are to do our duty with the thought that we are acting for and as the Supreme Being, because that Being acts only by and through the creatures. If this be our real rule it would in time be impossible for us to do wrong, for constantly thinking thus we grow careful as to what acts we commit and are always clearing up our view of duty as we proceed.” (*The Heart Doctrine*, pp. 54-55)

These words are most apt to our relationship with the atoms, since we do indeed stand towards them as the “Supreme Being,” the controller of their destiny for good or ill. If ever Discrimination was called for, it is here, regarding both our acts and the mental activities we indulge in. “Not one passing thought may be ignored, not one fleeting impression missed.... You must learn to be able to thus go backward into your days so as to go over carefully and in detail all that happened, all that you permitted to pass through the brain.... This we can perceive is no simple task. It is a gigantic work,” Mr. Judge warns us solemnly. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 18*, pp. 15-16)

States Mr. Judge, “No one was ever converted to Theosophy. Each one who *really* comes into it does so because it is only ‘an extension of previous beliefs,’ ” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 23). But even in our Theosophic life Discrimination is necessary. We must not be parrot-like, regarding its teachings, picking them up, as it were, mechanically, through attendance at meetings or superficial reading, or because we are attracted by the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth while ignoring much else. Here is what Mr. Judge has to say of this, though we adopt it from another context. “No proposition stands apart or can be taken separately without limiting and often distorting its meaning. Every proposition has to be considered and held as subservient to the synthetic whole.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, p. 18)

Casually to adopt or to reject shows a sad lack of Discrimination, which is as essential to our philosophic studies as to practical matters. Some may wish to bypass philosophy altogether and concentrate solely, perhaps, on some form of meditation, or on meritorious acts, or on simply “being good,” with such help as they may derive from Theosophy. But, says Mr. Judge, “while we ignore philosophy and do not try to attain to right discrimination, we must pass through many lives, many weary treadmills of life, until at last little by little we have been forced, without our will, into the possession of the proper seeds of mental action from which the crop of right discrimination may be gathered.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 42)

To summarize these three points—Discrimination in our acts, in our attitude to our bodies and to Theosophy—let us turn to those other invaluable Notes by Mr. Judge, namely, on the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali. On page 27 there is a supremely far-reaching one, covering the whole pilgrimage of the Ego throughout this Manvantara, and showing the true meaning, value and purport of Discrimination, a word put so often to humble use in daily matters: “The conjuncture of soul and body, through repeated reincarnations, is due to its absence of discriminative knowledge of the nature of the soul and its environment, and when this discriminative knowledge has been attained, the conjuncture, which was due to absence of discrimination, ceases of its own accord.”

Can we *learn* to discriminate? Mr. Judge, who never leaves us in the void, proceeds to show us clearly how, beginning with our ordinary daily doings. “Seek to realize the meaning of every event,” he says, a course of study which should gradually enable us to distinguish between the real and the unreal, the fleeting and the lasting. “Remember this: that as you live your life each day with an uplifted purpose and unselfish desire, each and every event will bear for you a deep significance—an occult meaning—and as you learn their import, so do you fit yourself for higher work” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 36*, pp. 6-7). A wise amount of reflection will further

this. “By submitting your daily thoughts each night to the judgment of your Higher Self, you will at last gain light.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 125)

With regard to Duty and the final imperative—the “what ought I to do?” there is equal need for Discrimination. “The actions to be performed are not any and every one. We are not to go on heedlessly and indiscriminately doing everything that is suggested. We must discover what actions ought to be performed by us and do them for that reason and not because of some result we expect to follow.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 128)

Lastly, living (or trying to) as students of Theosophy, we should “proceed to examine the great ideas in which so many of us believe, with a view of seeing how they may be applied in every direction. For if, instead of selfishly considering these laws in their effect upon our miserable selves, we ask how they apply everywhere, a means is furnished for the broadening of our horizon and the elimination of selfishness. And when also we apply the doctrines to all our acts and to all parts of the human being, we may begin to wake ourselves up to the real task set before us.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, pp. 3-4)

Such are some examples of the great value of Discrimination, and “if we try, as Krishna directs, to find the divine in everything, we will soon learn not to judge by appearances” and so have taken a big and vastly important step forward. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 109)

Thus endeavouring, we shall have—this is Mr. Judge’s final word of cheer for us—“the light of that spiritual lamp—be it small or great—which the Supreme Soul will feed and increase within us if we attend to its behests and diligently inquire after it.” (*Ibid.*, p. 5)

THE mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

—JOHN MILTON

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: If one is psychically sensitive or mediumistically susceptible, how is one to recover from this abnormal state?

Answer: There is higher and lower or psychic and spiritual aspect to mediumship or sensitivity. All of us are sensitive to changes in the atmosphere, to the needs of others, to the moods of others and so on, to a certain extent. A spiritual aspirant becomes more and more sensitive as he progresses. A disciple must suffer, must enjoy or endure, more keenly than other men, and yet he does not allow these to shake him from his fixed purpose, says *Light on the Path*. A person can become sensitive to other planes, which are normally outside the reach of the five senses.

The evolution of soul is possible because each is *inherently* a “sensitive point.”...The *Mahatma* is such a sensitive point, or soul, which has evolved to the stage where it can “thrill in response to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes.”...The “medium,” the “psychic,” the “sensitive,” is a soul that is *absorbed* by “every passing sensation.” (*Theosophy*, October 1934)

In other words, a psychically or passively sensitive person is sensitive to every passing sensation, while a Mahatma is sensitive to the thoughts and feelings and needs of every living creature. Similarly, a [psychic] “medium” is a person who allows other beings to influence him to such an *abnormal extent as to lose self-control* and has no power or will of his own to regulate his own actions. This relinquishing of self-control may be active or passive,

conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary. A person can consciously and voluntarily submit his will to another person, *or* an *idea* such as love, greediness, hate, etc. He can submit his will to his own higher nature and then be a great genius, a writer or a poet. H.P.B. calls this “mediatorship.” On the other hand, a person may be unconsciously influenced by his visible and invisible surroundings. In such a case he may become prey to evil entities and become a murderer, a drunkard, a thief, etc. He may commit actions under invisible influences that are not at all consistent with his character. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 13*)

H.P.B. describes such a “medium” as a “sick sensitive,” born with a peculiar organization. Mediumship may be (a) self-developed; (b) result from extraneous influences; (c) remain latent throughout life. Mediumship of this kind may be active or passive, repellent or receptive, positive or negative. “Mediumship is measured by the quality of aura with which the individual is surrounded. This may be dense, cloudy, noisome, mephitic, nauseating to the pure spirit, and attract only those foul beings, who delight in it...or it may be pure, crystalline, opalescent as the morning dew. All depends upon the moral character of the medium.” Mediumship is always marked by *passivity*. When a medium is perfectly passive, his own astral spirit may be benumbed or crowded out of his body and the body is occupied by some depraved entity, which is termed *possession* or *obsession*. (*Isis*, I, 487-490)

Since physical mediumship depends upon passivity, H.P.B. suggests, “*let the medium cease being passive*. Spirits never control persons of positive character who are determined to resist all extraneous influences” (*Isis*, I, 488). Often passivity is the result of wrong concentration practices like staring at a nail on the wall or the tip of the nose. When a person tries to develop the clairvoyant faculty without proper training, it results in passivity. Purity and goodness seem to work as shield for such mediums and sensitives. Such men as Apollonius, Iamblichus, Plotinus and Porphyry, radiated around themselves an atmosphere of divine beneficence

causing evil spirits to flee before them. The presence of such a holy mediator may help a person in his struggle to re-establish the control of his divine nature.

In the article “A Case of Obsession,” H.P.B. makes the following suggestion for the cure of obsession, which is equally applicable to cure “psychically sensitive” people:

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

Question: What is the occult significance of mummification?

Answer: Regarding the mystery of mummification, not much is known. According to one view, the dead body was considered to be an earthly home for the soul and therefore, had to be preserved. The inevitable decay of the bodies was therefore recognized as a disaster that would, if uncorrected, prevent the deceased from achieving eternal life. As a result, the whole art and science of mortuary was perfected through experimentation over generations and its secret was passed from father to son.

In the article “Hierosophy and Philosophy” Mr. Oxley puts forward the popular belief or explanation for mummification. He points out that the Egyptians taught the doctrine of Metempsychosis which states that the soul, after leaving the body, reincarnates into lower forms, so that at the end of 3000 years, it would return and be reunited with the body, which is carefully preserved through mummification. However, he observes that many mummies are older than 3000 years, but the soul has not returned to claim the body. In “Footnotes to ‘Hierosophy and Theosophy’” (*The*

Theosophist, July 1883), H.P.B. explains that the “mummy” is an objective, *empty*, symbolic form under which lies hidden a great scientific and occult truth. We are told that for 3000 years, more or less, the mummy goes on throwing off the invisible atoms or Life atoms of *Jiva* (the second principle), in spite of embalming or chemical preparation. These invisible atoms pass through all kinds of organized life forms. After that period of endless transmigration, when the Soul or the Ego reincarnates, these atoms are once again drawn back to the Ego, and they form its outer clothing or body, just as had happened earlier.

In *Isis Unveiled* H.P.B. explains that the apex of the pyramid “typifies the primordial point lost in the unseen universe from whence started the first race of the spiritual prototypes of man.” Each mummy, as it was embalmed, lost its physical individuality in one sense and symbolized the human race. It was placed in the pyramid in such a way as to facilitate the exit of the soul or Ego, which had to cross seven planetary chambers before escaping through the apex. Each chamber symbolized seven spheres as well as one of the higher types of physico-spiritual humanity. Every 3,000 years, the soul, representative of its race, returns back to that point of departure to continue its evolution into a more perfected spiritual and physical transformation. (I, 296-97)

In *The Esoteric Character of the Gospels*, H.P.B. gives the inner significance of mummification and quotes from G. Massey, who connects the Greek *Christos* or Christ with the Egyptian *Karest*, the “mummy type of immortality”:

The mummy-image was the preserved one, the saved, therefore a portrait of the Saviour, as a type of immortality. This was the figure of a dead man, which, as Plutarch and Herodotus tell us, was carried round at an Egyptian banquet, when the guests were invited to look on it and eat and drink and be happy, because when they died, they would become what the image symbolized—that is, they also would be immortal! This type of immortality was called the *Karest*...and

it was the Egyptian Christ. To *Kares* means to embalm, anoint, to make the Mummy as a type of the eternal.

The mummy (*Karest*) is wound in a seamless bandage (swathe) which is around 1000 yards long. It symbolizes the seamless robe of the Christ. In the Gospel it is said that Jesus rose again with every member sound, like the perfectly preserved mummy. But in the Egyptian original, the mummy transforms. The deceased says, “I am spiritualized. I am become a soul. I rise as a God.” Thus, the image of Mummy is the image of immortality in the tombs of Egypt.

HE is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

—ROBERT GRAVES

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Does man have an immortal soul? Does he need God and religion to save his soul? Are we mistaken in perceiving ourselves to be separate from our bodies? In the middle of the nineteenth century, psychiatrists sought to reconcile the contradiction between the existence of the immortal soul and the fact that injury, illness and old age can rob the individual of memory, personality and many other functions. “If much of an individual’s personality can be destroyed during life, the idea that it can survive death intact becomes less plausible.”

Recently a network of scientists, engineers and scholars have come together for promoting technological convergence through unification of diverse fields, such as, nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and new technologies emerging from cognitive science, to understand how the human brain creates the mind. These convergenists hope to use some of these technologies for recording, preserving and reanimating human personalities with the aim of ultimately creating “cyber-immortality.” “Cyberimmortality would require redefining human personalities as dynamic patterns of information, and human life as a process of evolution from material to computational plane of existence,” writes William Sims Bainbridge (*The Futurist*, March-April, 2006).

Already, consumer technology is available to offer digitized videoclips of the deceased, showing how the person spoke, moved, and acted during life. Current technology could also include an expert system—or decision support system—capturing much of the expertise of the individual in a manner that will be useful for coming generations.... Very soon, it will be possible to build a computer model of all your preferences, opinions, and mental associations, based on the convergence of advanced information technology with cognitive science and the more traditional methods of psychology and sociology....

Somewhat farther in future we can expect the development of rigorous means for recording and classifying all of a person’s perhaps 50,000 episodic memories—that is, memories of specific events and the feelings that accompanied them.

It is envisaged that artificial intelligence technology could improve to the point that archived personalities can communicate somewhat realistically with living people. “Research enabling you one day to archive and regenerate your memory, personality, and consciousness—giving you cyberimmortality—may meet resistance from religious groups arguing that the soul is a spirit, not a system,” writes Bainbridge.

“That man possesses an immortal soul is the common belief of humanity; to this Theosophy adds that he *is a soul*.” Theosophy differentiates between the *terrestrial* “I” and the *spiritual* “I” or the “personality” and the “individuality.” Individuality is the actor and personality is the “role” played by the actor. A long series of daily experiences strung together by a thread of memory which Mr. X calls “himself”—that are continually changing and evanescent—constitute the “personality.” That element in man, to which the feeling of “I am I” is due, is the *true* individuality referred to as Soul or Ego. Our spiritual “I” is immortal; but from a given personality it can carry away into Eternity that only which has become worthy of immortality. Hence it is said that our immortal soul collects from the personality, the undying qualities like love, goodness, etc., as a bee gathers honey from the flower. An initiate like Buddha can recall experiences of all his past lives and is called *Samma Sambodhi*. In fact, the immortal soul is compared to a thread and is called *Sutratma*, on which are strung, like pearls or beads, the experiences of all the past personalities.

Even if there has been loss or impairment of memory due to old age or illness, at the moment of death the man lives, as it were, his whole life over again. The scenes and pictures of the life just ended are impressed indelibly on the inner man, down to the smallest detail of even the most minute and fleeting impression. “No man

dies insane or unconscious, as some physiologists assert. Even a madman or one in a fit of *delirium tremens* will have his instant of perfect lucidity at the moment of death,” writes H.P.B. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 25*)

As for communicating with the personalities, we are told that the physical body is built on the astral body or design body, and that one of the qualities of the astral substance is to absorb all scenes and pictures and the impressions of all thoughts, and then throw them forth when the conditions permit. This astral body survives physical death and carries the record of all that ever passed before the person, when living. This, then, is nature’s way of “archiving” the personality. Such astral form is called Kamarupic or astral shell. Under appropriate conditions it throws out these impressions like a gramophone record or a well-trained parrot. That is what happens at séance rooms. In fact, such likeness of the dead personality is created, that we are fooled into thinking that we have communicated with our dear-departed one. Yet, it is not the *real* person.

One of the greatest maladies of modern life is loneliness. How many of us are happy to be on our own? Do we feel that we are complete in ourselves? We confuse loneliness and solitude. “Loneliness is the poverty of self, solitude is the richness of self,” says May Sarton. Solitude allows for introspection and insight; it is the key to enriching our lives and relationships, enabling us to return to our loved ones, renewed and replenished, writes Jamuna Rangachari (*Life Positive*, May 2006). Further:

Solitude is the joyful experience of one’s own self. It is the ability to spend time with our self in a state of completion and plenitude. When we are truly attuned to ourself, we need no one or nothing else. In the most essential way therefore, the ability to be with ourselves is testimony of our completion of a

journey. This is the journey all of us must pass through. It begins with the normal physical, emotional and psychological needs of the human condition. We look for love, for appreciation, for acknowledgement and understanding. We look for physical companionship and affection, and for security. We look for guidance and support, for someone to show us the way. We look for all these things outside ourselves. It is only when something shifts and we start locating the source of these things within us that the journey starts. Gradually, we crest these needs as we begin to increasingly experience inner love, inner security, inner strength. And with each turn of the screw, our friendship with ourselves deepens and we feel replete within ourselves, whole, perfect and complete.

The mystic traditions of Islam emphasize the need to be away from the activities of life and spend periods of time in quiet contemplation. In solitude, we really experience nature and avail of its teachings.

It is from silence and solitude that all acts of creation are born—works of art, music, writing and even scientific inventions. All artists, thinkers and philosophers have actively sought solitude. Thoreau writes, “I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.”

It is not easy to love peace and solitude for most of us who love the life of sensation and excitement. The ability to deal with and love solitude marks spiritual maturity. Says *The Dhammapada*:

Delightful are the forests to the Arhat; they charm not the worldly. There the passionless find delight, for they are not allured by sense-life. (Verse 99)

He who has tasted the sweetness of solitude and the flavour of tranquillity, he becomes free from sin and fearless, and enjoys the ambrosia of the Good Law. (Verse 205)

Sometimes life, the great teacher, drives us towards solitude, which *we* term loneliness, till we have learnt to deal with it. We are either separated from our companions, friends and relatives or

life snatches them away, one by one, driving us to lean heavily on to some other substitute. We might turn to reading books, making them our constant companions to fill the void. And then one day we wake up to find that even this solace is gone, as we have developed severe, perhaps incurable, eye problem. Life seems to take away all props, one by one, forcing us to seek our own company. Our success or failure to handle such situation would depend upon the extent to which we lived the life of detachment even while we were surrounded by our loved ones, and the comfort of books, art, music, etc. One of the qualities of a wise man is, “a want of pleasure in congregations of men.” (*Gita*, XIII)

In the process of spiritual development, help and guidance comes from the inner planes of being and to avail of it we must stop inner and outer chatter. “Silence thy thoughts and fix thy whole attention on thy Master, whom yet thou dost not see, but whom thou feelest.” We are asked to increase impersonal moments in our life—such as when we are lost in appreciating sunrise or sunset, in helping someone, and so on. *The Voice of the Silence* says: “Seek in the impersonal for the Eternal man, and having sought him out, look inward: thou art Buddha.”

Are some people really luckier than others, or is it all in their heads? It is both, writes Michael Shermer (*Scientific American*, April 2006). Luck is a state of mind. For instance, renowned baseball player Lou Gehrig after suffering the monstrous malady, Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, counts his many blessings and fortunes and considers himself the luckiest man on the face of this earth. Is luck more than a state of mind? Experimental psychologist Richard Wiseman, created a “luck lab” at the University of Hertfordshire in England to explore this question. He asks individuals to rank themselves on “life satisfaction scale,” *i.e.*, how satisfied they are with their family life, personal life, financial

situation, health and career. Lucky people were found to be far more satisfied in all the areas of their lives than unlucky or neutral people. On “personality scale,” lucky people scored significantly higher than unlucky people did, in the area of “extroversion.” For instance, lucky people smile twice as often and engage in more eye contact than unlucky people, leading to more social encounters generating more opportunities. In the area of “neuroticism,” that measures how anxious or relaxed a person is, lucky people were found to be more relaxed and hence could easily spot chance opportunities. Similarly, lucky people were open to new experiences in their lives. They are not averse to unpredictability and they tend to travel more and welcome unique opportunities. Lucky people expect good things to happen, but in the face of adversity, lucky people turn bad breaks into good fortune.

“Lucky” people are often those who are not anxious but display faith in the law. “Anxiety” puts an invisible obstacle in the path of what we want done. In the absence of anxiety, there is clarity of perspective and it facilitates to turn the tide in a favourable direction. Positive frame of mind, optimism and expectation all play an important role in obtaining the desired result. H.P.B. points out that “With expectancy supplemented by faith, one can cure himself of any morbid condition.”

While it is true that so-called luck or advantages are the result of Karma, whether they are conducive to spiritual progress or not is determined by the way we handle them. It appears that seldom have we the wisdom to use the advantages beneficently. As Mr. Judge writes:

It is quite true that we may often find persons surrounded with great advantages but who make no corresponding use of them or pay but little regard to them. But this very fact in itself goes to show that the so-called advantageous position in life is really not good nor fortunate in the true and inner meaning of those words. The fortunate one has money and teachers, ability, and means to travel and fill the surroundings with the works of

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art, with music and with ease. But these are like the tropical airs that enervate the body; these enervate the character instead of building it up. They do not in themselves tend to the acquirement of any virtue whatever but rather to the opposite, by reason of the constant steeping of the senses in the subtile essences of the sensuous world. (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 9)

HAPPINESS is like a crystal, fair and exquisite and clear,
 Broken in a million pieces, shattered, scattered far and near.
 Now and then along life's pathway,
 Lo! some shining fragments fall,
 But there are so many pieces, no one ever finds them all.

You may find a bit of beauty, or an honest share of wealth,
 While another just beside you, gathers honour, love or health.
 Vain to choose or grasp unduly, broken is the perfect ball,
 And there are so many pieces, no one ever finds them all.

Yet the wise as they journey, treasure every fragment clear,
 Fit them as they may together, imaging the shattered sphere.
 Learning ever to be thankful, though their share of it is small,
 For, it has so many pieces, no one ever finds them all.

—PRISCILLA LEONARD