

## A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

RIGHT Livelihood or *Samyak Ajivika* forms one of the steps in the eightfold path suggested by the Buddha to those who desire to be free from suffering and bondage. *Samyak Ajivika* is also translated as “perfect” livelihood. How should one make one’s living? How should one acquire wealth? The work we do and the attitude with which we do it play an important role in our spiritual development. The Buddha’s advice has been that the way of making a living should be righteous and should cause no harm, directly or indirectly to other living beings. Traditional explanation of right livelihood involves a list of jobs which one must avoid. These are: Dealing in weapons, dealing in living beings, which include slave-trade, prostitution and also raising the animals for slaughter, working in meat production and butchery, and lastly, dealing in intoxicants and poisons, such as, alcohol and drugs. That is because dealing in any of these trades involves violation of the five basic precepts, which are to be followed by even a novice in Buddhism. These precepts are: Not killing, not stealing, not misusing sex, not lying, and abstaining from intoxicants.

Besides indicating the trades in which one should not deal, the Buddha mentions some of the negative qualities which does not constitute right livelihood. “And what, monks, is wrong mode of livelihood? It includes trickery, cajolery, insinuating, dissembling, and rapacity for gain upon gain.”

Our society and economy are far more complex today than in Lord Buddha's time, so that the injunction of "right livelihood" has far deeper implications. For various reasons, every country is faced with the problem of unemployment. A Master of Wisdom writes that the "struggle for life" or the "struggle for existence" is the most prolific parent of most woes and sorrows, and all crimes. There is a struggle to keep the body and soul together at any cost. If one does not steal or beg, then one has to earn one's livelihood by some means. For the uneducated there is only menial work, if they are lucky. It is not always easy these days to get even a steady menial job. For many labourers, such as construction workers, there is only seasonal work. When one has to worry about from where, and how one's next meal is going to come, one is not likely to be concerned with "right" or "perfect" livelihood, though it all depends upon how awakened is the ego experiencing the struggle for existence. Moreover, it is our collective responsibility, as a society, to create opportunities for employment.

However, those who have choice of job, profession or career can be mindful of their choice. Sometimes we may be pursuing what appears to be right and honest livelihood but we might be asked to take bribe or cheat others in order to boost profits, etc. If we find that our company indulges in such practices we may decide to quit. As a lawyer one should not knowingly take up the case of a guilty party, because then one would break the precept of "not lying." We must also not take up a job or profession which tends to create craving in others. For instance, the professions of modelling and advertising fall in this category, which indirectly boost consumerism.

Today, however, people make their living by practices which border on being immoral. What is more difficult to deal with is to detect unhealthy practices within noble professions. For instance, recently there were reports exposing thriving market of illegal abortions in Beed district of Maharashtra, in India. Reports show that a certain hospital and its doctors prospered on strong nexus between the administration and the sex determination-abortion

industry. The state and the local administration seem to be equal partners in this crime with the doctors. That hospital is known as a den for killing baby-girls—thanks to preference in India, for male child over female child. Such reports have brought to light the flourishing industry of illegal abortions and female foeticide. The doctor concerned is said to charge very high fees for abortions. Police investigations revealed that the doctor possessed 40 bank accounts, 120 acres of land, and deposits of over rupees one crore! (*The Times of India*, June 7, 2012)

Another vulnerable area is that of organ transplant. Organ transplant requires "live" donors as well as organs retrieved from fresh cadavers. In India, for instance, safeguards are available through the Transplantation Act of 1994 *banning the sale* of live organs. It is not effective enough, in spite of the fact that all such centres are required to have an "Authorization Committee" to review the donors and to ensure that the donation is done out of altruistic reasons and not for commerce. A startling exposure of "Kidney Trade" in Chennai, a city of India, was published, as a reprint from the Journal of the American Medical Association, in JAMA-India (February, 2005). It gives a detailed report on "Economic and Health Consequences of Selling a kidney in India." It was based on a scientific survey done by qualified Indian physicians, in January 2001, covering 305 individuals (discovered after a search) who admitted to having *sold* their kidneys in that city's private clinics about six years earlier. Of these, 305 eligible "sellers"—euphemistically called the "voluntary donors"—almost all respondents (94%) had sold their kidneys to pay off personal debts. Most respondents reported deterioration in their health status after the donation. Similar reports and conclusions on kidney transplant donors are available in other international medical Journals, like the *Lancet*, especially regarding the global traffic in human organs.

There is the occult principle that occult or spiritual knowledge must not be taught for money, nor should one teach or exercise occult arts in exchange for money. This principle must be borne in

mind while choosing one's means of livelihood. Mr. Judge differentiates between the present-day mediums who demand money for communicating with the dear-departed ones, and the vestal virgins of Greece, and other places, which were pure mediums. The latter answered questions put to them regarding the future, but *demand*ed no money in return. Money and gifts were bestowed by the questioner of his own free will. Today, the astrologers and clairvoyants demand huge sums of money for predicting future, so also some of the healers, gifted with the art of healing, have made "healing" their profession.

Right livelihood is very much a social issue, because it affects not only the individual but the entire society. Many forms of livelihood are perpetuated following the demand-supply equation. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist teacher, writes: "To practice Right Livelihood...you have to find a way to earn your living without transgressing your ideals of love and compassion. The way you support yourself can be an expression of your deepest self, or it can be a source of suffering for you and others...We should be awake to the consequences, far and near, of the way we earn our living."

The way we do our work and our attitude towards it is also important. We must be able to apply other steps of the noble eightfold path as we earn our living, and thus create a friendly and peaceful work atmosphere. For instance, we should be able to apply *sila* or morality, *Dhyana* or concentration, and *Samadhi* or meditation, to our work situation. Being completely focused and thus practicing mindfulness in our job, being compassionate and co-operative with our colleagues, using gentle speech "which causes no anxiety," even as a superior in the office, are some of the steps which constitute right attitude towards work. Next to family life, workplaces are real testing grounds, where we meet people of diverse temperaments, and in trying to adapt to our work situation we learn co-operation and gain moral strength.

There must arise in our hearts the feeling of belonging towards the institution for which we work, and the feeling that through the

job we perform, prominent or otherwise, we are serving the whole of humanity. "If the intention is to play a useful role in society in order to support oneself and to help others, then work one does is right livelihood," says S. N. Goenka, a Vipassana teacher. This attitude is lacking today. We seem to be working only for the money. Young Americans today are more choosy about the jobs they accept, and also they change jobs more frequently. To this generation, loyalty between employer and employee is a bygone past, writes Phyllis McIntosh. One of the most significant trends in the United States is the disappearance of long-term loyalty to an employer. Young people recognize that changing jobs is the fastest way to advance in both salary and responsibility. "People are seeing their friends and family going through layoffs, terminations and acquisitions, so they are saying, if companies are going to do that, I am going to look out for myself," remarks Flato, Vice President of research and consulting at Vault. Since computers perform routine tasks, skills like inventiveness, empathy, ability to think big, are in demand. Young Americans today, are searching for meaning in their jobs, and they want jobs where they can make a difference in the world, writes McIntosh. (SPAN, May-June 2009)

Unfortunately, not only is there a brain-drain, but very few are able to find their calling and say, "I am doing what I always wanted to do." Many experience a lack of job satisfaction. It is not always that one gets a job in line with one's education. By being in a place which matches our inner longing and skills we can give our best contribution to the world. This could be one of the reasons for frequent changing of jobs. But many times the reason for change is better salary and perks, sometimes irrespective of job satisfaction. Should we not discipline ourselves to love what comes to us under Karma?

Right or Perfect Livelihood is emphasized in Buddhist philosophy because it affects economic, social and spiritual aspects of our collective existence. Since we spend greater part of our waking life in earning our livelihood it has an important effect on our whole

being. If we do something for seven or eight hours a day, five or six days a week, fifty weeks a year, and if we do it for twenty or forty years, it is not surprising that it leaves a mark on us, writes Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher. Could we imagine the mental state of a person who works in a slaughterhouse, killing twenty or thirty times a day, year after year? We are able to appreciate that without some measure of Right Livelihood we can make very little spiritual progress. It would be a good idea to change one's livelihood, if it is found to be inconsistent with one's spiritual ideals. Those occupations, which include working in advertising industry and producing luxury goods that people do not really need but have to be persuaded to buy, must also be classified as wrong livelihood. If a Buddhist person finds himself in a profession, where work involves a lot of mental strain, so that he becomes tense and cannot meditate, then he should try to find a work of a less stressful nature. Perfect livelihood is following a true vocation where there is no difference between one's work and one's play, writes Sanghrakshita.

In the kind of society we live today, it may not always be possible to practice "perfect" livelihood. For instance, a farmer may have to use insecticides, and a public health worker may be called upon, now and then, to kill rats, mosquitoes and the larvae, and so on. But we may constantly endeavour to grow in *Dhamma* as we perform our mundane duties. *Sila* and *Dhyana* must go hand in hand. What we do at the workplace will affect our concentration, and conversely, our daily meditation must make us better employees. We should be able to bring about peace and harmony in our workplace.

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WHOEVER you are, there is some younger person, who thinks you are perfect. There is some work that will never be done, if you don't do it. There is someone, who would miss you, if you were gone. There is a place that you alone can fill.

—JACOB M. BRAUDE

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE LESSON OF THE PLAIN PATH

"IT WAS a very high mountain that was facing the Traveller and his heart sank as he listened to the rising wind which was already beginning to toss flurries of snow about the rocks. "Yes," thought he, "I am here of my own free will, on ardent quest of what is adventurous and exhilarating. I could have kept to humdrum ways if I had wished. But this!—this stern glory of the heights—has always secretly allured me."

"Are you sure of that?" asked a voice.

The Traveller saw a Hermit standing earnestly observing him. He was a venerable man, upright, and his keen eyes belied his white locks.

"You read my thoughts," countered the Traveller.

"Say, rather," replied the Hermit, "your heart. In this barren place, in the course of many years, my gaze has necessarily turned inward."

"Then you see there a lifelong yearning for adventure," quoth the Traveller. "I am come to scale this mighty mountain, for only so can my heart be at peace."

"Are you sure?" inquired the Hermit as before. "Do you indeed feel no counter-attraction? Would you not at this moment prefer, say, the warmth and sweetness of some fair garden, where you might be at rest and indulge happy thoughts, feeling no call to action?"

"Certainly not," said the Traveller. But even as he spoke, his face changed. "Stay!" he added. "You sow seeds of uncertainty. It might be—yes, admittedly it might..." As the words passed his lips he found himself reclining in a flowery sunlit bower with a chorus of bird-song in his ears and a delicious lassitude pervading his limbs.

"Ah, what bliss!" he sighed contentedly. "This indeed is the fulfilment of desire. Now I know beyond all doubt that the true instinct of my being is to live at ease in beautiful surroundings and muse tranquilly, leaving the strenuous world to go its own way."

"Are you sure?" asked a voice.

Somehow, it did not surprise the Traveller to find the Hermit watching him. It seemed as natural to see him there among the roses as on the icy mountain track.

"I am indeed," said the Traveller firmly. "I feel it innate in me to lead a quiet life. If I have ever thought otherwise, why, then I was in error. What a blessing to come to an understanding of oneself before it is too late!"

"You do not regret what you may lose?—those mighty mountains never to be scaled by you? The acclaim accorded to others for feats which might have been your own will not cause you to repine?"

"Not in the least," said the Traveller heartily. But a sudden shadow passed across his face. He glanced around the garden and then closed his eyes to it. "If only," he murmured, "that vision of wild untrodden ways and that sense of challenge would fade utterly!"

"Look again," said the Hermit quietly, "and make up your mind." Opening his eyes, the Traveller found himself back in the desolate snowy mountain fastness.

"What is this?" he cried angrily. "Are you playing some trick on me? I have read books about the Orient, let me tell you. Would you mock me with illusions?"

"There is no need my son. You yourself are the past-master of illusion. And paradoxical though it seem, you are at the same time its bond-slave," the Hermit answered solemnly.

"Word-spinning!" scoffed the Traveller. "Come, be honest if you can, my good sir. Am I here or am I there in that garden? Pray tell me where I stand."

"Willingly," said the Hermit. "Would that all men would make the same request! Look now. It is granted. Look my son. Look upon Reality."

The Traveller gazed about him. Neither mountain nor garden met his eye, but a wide tract of country with a small narrow path running through it. Upon this path he stood beside the Hermit. A single star was shining overhead.

"Look upon Reality!" repeated the Hermit. "Look upon the path

which it is your earthly lot to tread. That is all that is assigned to you—a pilgrimage. But oh, my son, is it not enough? It was but illusion," pursued the old man, drawing nearer and laying a kindly hand upon the other's arm, "illusion, that dire source of many ills, when your heart seemed set upon adventure. Illusion again when the sensual delight of that fair garden seemed, briefly, the *summum bonum* of life. Your true desires were hid from you. Had it not been so, could you have turned in such short time, with words so positive and yet so contradictory, from one extreme to the other? Therefore it is well that you had not the choosing of your lot but entered this bewildering plane of being under Karma. Neither mountaineer nor sybarite, you are simply, under Karma, a pilgrim. And does a pilgrim need aught save a path? This, my son," concluded the Hermit, "is Reality."

"I begin to understand," said the Traveller. "So this that now lies before me is Reality. A path, a plain path, with no mirages, rosy mists, or illusions."

"But leading ever on," said the Hermit. "Leading—yonder!" And he pointed, as it seemed, into infinity.

The Traveller's eyes followed his outstretched finger, and the expression in their depths was one of quiet resolution. He no longer looked excited or self-complacent. For some minutes he stood gazing in silence.

"Do you see an ending to the path?" asked the Hermit.

The Traveller answered "No."

"Do you see anyone who looks like a guide, or a possible companion?"

"I see no one," was the Traveller's reply.

"Yet you are content to go forward simply because it is your path?"

"I am content," said the Traveller.

A smile illumined the Hermit's venerable face. "Go, then, my son," said he, "with my blessing."

The Traveller stepped forward with no further farewell.



The evening star shone down upon him as he fared upon his way.

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In the East the life of man is held to be a pilgrimage. Man is an Eternal Pilgrim. As soon as we become aware that life is for the evolution and emancipation of the Soul, we begin to take evolution into our own hands. Till the time we are firmly established in spiritual life, we never know what it is that we want. One of the obstacles in the path of a spiritual-aspirant is doubt and indecision. Buddhism mentions ten fetters to be broken by the aspirant who endeavours to reach enlightenment. One of the fetters which the aspirant needs to break very early in his spiritual journey is *vicikitsa* or skeptical doubt, which is the doubt or indecision of a person who wants to sit on the fence, and waver all the time, without any commitment. A person may feel that he is ready for the life of a mendicant and thus may go to the mountain or a monastery, only to find that he is still attracted to sense-life.

Spiritual life is necessarily an extension of ordinary life. We begin to tread the “Path” that leads to perfection and enlightenment, from where we are placed by Karma. Are we impatient to be lifted up to higher, spiritual planes while we detest the dreary routine of the daily duties? The way lies through small, plain duties of life. We meet our Karma in our daily duties and we are tested in our performance of those duties. True spiritual life involves interacting with and concern for people. If we have obtained true knowledge, it is our duty to “strive to lighten the burden for some struggling soul.” If we are looking for some difficult test or some difficult trial then we would be disappointed. “If you desire to labour for the good of the world, it will be unwise for you to strive to include it all at once in your efforts. If you can help elevate or teach but one soul—that is a good beginning, and more than is given to many.”

## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA IMPURITY-III

10. *Easily lives one who is shameless, bold after the fashion of a crow, and is a mischief-maker, a slanderer, is arrogant and corrupt. (244)*

11. *Hard is the life to live for one who is modest, who always seeks for what is pure, who is disinterested, unassuming, chaste and has insight. (245)*

TO THOSE who desire to live righteously, the Buddha points out that life is difficult for one who is modest, seeks for what is pure, who is disinterested, unassuming, chaste and has insight. This is because their past Karma begins to precipitate much more quickly and in larger measures—trying, testing and tempting them. Also, having resolved to live righteously, their own conscience makes it very difficult for them to go back to old evil ways. Only those without scruples, who are mean-minded, corrupt and arrogant, could live an easy life, as their inner god, their conscience has been completely silenced. It is very difficult to live with such people. It is like swimming against the current.

12-13. *He who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who, in this world, takes what is not given to him, who consorts with another man's wife, who is addicted to intoxicating drinks—he, even in this world, digs up the very root of his own life. (246-247)*

A true Buddhist is expected to observe Five Precepts or *Panchashila* and take the Three Refuges, namely, in the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. The Five Precepts prohibit a Buddhists from (1) Destroying Life, (2) Speaking untruth (3) Taking what is not given (4) Abstaining from sexual misconduct. (5) Taking intoxicants. The first rule enjoins us to refrain from taking life. In *Light of Asia* we are told: “Kill not—for Pity's sake—and lest ye slay the meanest thing upon its upward way.” As there is life in everything, when we

destroy life, we are hindering the progress of that entity. This is one reason why capital punishment is wrong. When we execute the criminal, we deprive him of the opportunity to give up his evil ways in this life. Therefore, in the *Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. writes that “Human Law may use restrictive not punitive measures.”

In the article “About Killing Animals,” Mr. Judge explains that in order to live, some amount of killing is inevitable. In the air we breathe and water imbibed there are millions of microscopic lives, which are living, moving beings, as much as animals. When we draw them in, they are destroyed. Shall we therefore stop living? The whole life is a battle, destruction and a compromise as long as we are on the material plane. As human beings we have to keep on living while in our destructive path millions of beings are hourly put to death. But killing for fashion, for sport, for experiments, etc. are not essential to our life and must be avoided.

Great emphasis is placed in the Jaina philosophy on non-killing. The Jainas avoid eating food after sunset. They are strict vegetarians. They are careful not to stamp upon ants or insects while walking on the road, and their monks even wear a piece of cloth around mouth to avoid inadvertent intake of tiny lives. This is good so far as it goes. But there is also “killing” of another sort—killing another’s reputation, aspiration, hope, etc.—which we are sometimes guilty of. A true Buddhist is expected to be vigilant about these.

Abstaining from speaking the untruth is only a small part of control of speech. One must also abstain from harsh speech, slander and senseless and frivolous talk. In Occultism, speech is regarded as an act. Mr. Judge’s admonition: “Let us use with care those living messengers called words” must always be kept in mind.

Taking what is not given to you by another, and what belongs to another, amounts to theft. Non-stealing is another important rule that a true Buddhist must follow. It includes not only the material things but also thoughts and ideas of another. Taking credit for creative and innovative idea of another is also a kind of theft. Scheming and plotting to extract secrets of another is also theft.

Abstinence from sexual misconduct. Such a rule is enjoined upon monks and nuns. If a man even looks or even thinks of another’s wife in a lustful manner, he is said to have committed adultery. For the lay devotees who might be married, the rule expects abstinence from any kind of indulgence in sexual desires on certain days which are considered to be sacred. In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 295-296), H.P.B. gives us occult explanation for practice of purity and celibacy. She points out that there is close connection between Spiritual Seership and the physiological purity of the Seer. Celibacy and chastity is a *sine qua non* rule and condition of regular *chelaship*, or the development of psychic and occult powers. The “third eye” was once a physiological organ, but later on became atrophied, owing to the gradual disappearance of spirituality and increase of materiality, such that the Spiritual nature was extinguished by the physical. H.P.B. goes on to point out that during human life the greatest impediment in the way of spiritual development, and especially to the acquirement of *Yoga* powers, is the activity of our physiological senses. Sexual action is closely connected, by interaction, with the spinal cord and the grey matter of the brain. The normal and abnormal state of the brain, and the degree of active work in the *medulla oblongata*, reacts powerfully on the pineal gland.

It is easy for us now to understand why in addition to abstinence from sexual misconduct, the person is expected to avoid intoxicating drinks. Intoxicants cause disturbance in the brain, which becomes an obstacle to spiritual seership. Leave alone spirituality, even at ordinary level, drugs and drinks confound our judgment. In a scientific experiment when a driver was asked to drive the truck between the two poles placed apart at a distance, he could do it smoothly. He was asked to repeat the feat after having increasing number of drinks while the distance between the poles was consistently reduced to make it impossible for a truck to pass through. And yet, with increasing number of drinks, the driver grew more and more confident about his ability to drive through the poles! Drugs put the brain in abnormal state in which one has psychic

visions from the astral plane which are mistaken for the spiritual visions. Moreover, the person has no control over what he sees, and is not able to understand and interpret what he sees in that state.

The five rules help the ordinary person to avoid evil and encourage him to follow basic moral principles which would prepare him to walk the spiritual path in this or some future life. Having undertaken the vow to observe these rules, constant vigilance is necessary to remain true to one's vow and not fall prey to temptations.

14. *Know this, O man, "Not easy of restraint are evil things." Let not greed and wrongdoing bring you to grief for a long time. (248)*

15. *Men give according to their faith or according to their pleasure. Therefore, he who frets about food or drink given to others does not enjoy peace of mind either by day or by night. (249)*

16. *But he in whom that feeling is destroyed, rooted out, he enjoys peace of mind by day and by night. (250)*

Contentment is called the greatest wealth. Greed is opposite of contentment. This tendency shows up right from childhood. Children fight to have bigger piece, juicy piece or more expensive things. Unless it is controlled, greed can make us do things which are improper or illegitimate. We want to be treated differently in the matters which are close to our heart. *Light on the Path* points out: "The ordinary man expects, not to take equal fortunes with the rest of the world, but in some points about which he cares, to fare better than the others." Greed can only bring suffering and grief in the end. In a story, a man found a hen which laid one golden egg every day. It made him immensely rich. But he was not happy. He thought to himself that this waiting for the hen to lay one golden egg every day was painfully slow. He must kill the hen and get all the golden eggs by cutting open her body. He killed her only to discover that there were no golden eggs inside her body, and that he had even lost what he had.

The spirit of competition is further aggravated by advertisements.

Envy is a great vice which can work silently to corrupt our nature. It makes one feel that if I cannot have it, no one else must have it. Quite unconsciously, one begins to develop an evil-eye; bringing disaster to whatever object or person one looks at longingly.

Buddha was addressing the monks who were required to beg at only certain number of houses for food and eat whatever they got. If they got nothing on a day, they had to go without food on that day. Since men gave according to their understanding and whatever they pleased and since the monk had no control over their action, the Buddha asks him not to fret about the food or drink given to him or others. It is a mark of disrespect for the working of the law of Karma, which brings to us that which is strictly in accordance with justice. How on earth is this monk going to cultivate firm faith in the Law which enables him to say, "Thy will be done," if he frets even about simple things such as food or drink given to others? Describing the duty of the theosophist, H.P.B. writes that our duty is to drink without a murmur to the last drop, whatever contents the cup of life may have in store for us.

Epictetus said: "He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has." He asks us to behave like a gentleman or a lady at the banquet. Thus:

Remember that in life you ought to behave as at a banquet. Suppose that something is carried round and is opposite to you. Stretch out your hand and take a portion with decency. Suppose that it passes by you. Do not detain it. Suppose that it is not yet come to you. Do not send your desire forward to it, but wait till it is opposite to you. Do so with respect to children, so with respect to a wife...do so with respect to wealth, and you will be some time a worthy partner of the banquets of the gods.

*(To be concluded)*



## THE SYMBOLOGY OF LOTUS

FROM the times of the Vedas to the present day, the lotus flower has enjoyed great popularity. It has been referred to as the flower *par excellence*. Symbolically and allegorically, lotus flower occupies a place of prominence in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religion, art and literature. In the Vedas, lotus was regarded as the divine flower and symbolized purity and immortality, untainted by sin. Like the lotus leaf and flower, though floating on the waters, remain untainted by the water, a spiritual aspirant must be *in* the world, doing his obligatory duties, but not be *of* the world.

Similar idea occurs in the *Lalitavistara*, a Sanskrit work on life and doctrines of the Buddha, which says, “The spirit of the best of men is spotless, like the new lotus in the [muddy] water which does not adhere to it.” Lotus is one of the eight auspicious symbols of the Buddhist art. In esoteric Buddhism, lotus-bud or an unopened lotus flower represents the heart of a being before the virtue of the Buddha causes it to open and bloom. It is said that the Buddha after attaining to enlightenment, was inclined to remain silent. He thought that the Truth he had realized was so abstract and sublime that ordinary people were not going to see it, because their eyes were covered with dust of passion and ignorance. It would be better to remain silent. Just then, Brahma Sahampati, Brahma the Great God, appeared before him and requested him to preach the Truth, saying that there are a few who will appreciate the Truth. When the Buddha opened his eyes, he saw all beings, just like lotuses in a pond, in various stages of development.

We find the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, either holding a lotus or sitting on a lotus. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, remarks that if a Buddha figure is depicted sitting on a lotus flower, it represents a being on transcendental plane, where the lotus symbolizes severance of contact with the world. Moreover, Amitabha and Aksobhya represent archetypal and ideal Buddha-figures. They embody two principal aspects of Buddhahood,

represented by two emblems—the lotus flower and the *vajra* (thunderbolt). The lotus flower is soft, tender, delicate, as also, passive and receptive, and is the emblem of Amitabha. We might say that Amitabha Buddha is the embodiment of Love or Compassion aspect of the Ideal Buddha and of Enlightenment. The lotus signifies spiritual rebirth and spiritual growth. The *vajra* being active and dynamic, Aksobhya might be taken to be the embodiment of an aspect of the Transcendental Wisdom. In fact, Compassion (*Karuna*) and Wisdom (*Prajna*) are the very essence of Buddhahood.

*Chandogya Upanishad* explains the mystery of the presence of divinity in man by the following simile:

There is this city of Brahman—the body—and in it the palace, the small lotus of the heart, and in it that small ether. Both heaven and earth are contained within it, both fire and air, both sun and moon, both lightning and stars; and whatever there is of the Self here in the world, and whatever has been or will be, all that is contained within it.

Translators of commentaries on *Chandogya* by *Sankaracharya* point out that for the finite mind it may be difficult to understand the nature of Absolute and hence we are given a simile. Body of man is called the city of Brahman. In this city there is the Palace which is compared to the heart, symbolized by lotus, and which is one of the most important organs in the body. In the heart is present small ether—which is not limited in space by the size of the heart. That ether is the very *Akasa*, which pervades everything. Man is the microcosm of the Macrocosm. All the powers and forces are inherent in man. In the article “Through the Gates of Gold,” Mr. Judge mentions that the true heart of man is the focal point for spirit, for knowledge, for power; and that from that point the converged rays begin to spread out fan-like, until they embrace the Universe. Heart is the seat of Spiritual consciousness. Heart is the seat of life and the very *Brahman*. Like subtle, immaterial and all-pervading ether, *Brahman* too is subtle and omnipresent.

The One Reality, the Self, the very *Atman* in man resides in our heart. But we are unable to sense its presence now. Upanishads speak of the “knot of the heart,” which Mr. Judge in the article “Through the gates of gold” calls an “iron bar” which holds down the heart. It is the astringent power of self or egotism, or the sense of separateness. He says that it has many strongholds. As you progress, it becomes more and more subtle. From the obvious forms such as greed, envy, pride, etc., it may become love of power—not obvious power, but power of being consulted, expectation of love of one’s fellow beings for the good done to them, and so on. Two things are most difficult to conquer: sex and egotism. Egotism is last to go. This knot represents our delusions and false learning. It is like tying the lotus-bud with a string so that it cannot bloom. We need to remove the knot by knowledge of the Self.

Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, writes that we cannot force the process of spiritual development, which is like trying to forcibly open the lotus-bud with our fingers. We must follow the discipline and the steps on the Path. As Buddhists, the flower that we want to see blooming is the thousand-petalled lotus or *sahasrara-padma*. However, the thousand-petalled lotus comes into bloom with the development of Insight.

According to Hindu tradition, *Sahasrara* is the seventh and the primary *chakra*, also called crown *chakra*, situated at the crown of the head. *Sahasrara chakra* symbolizes detachment from illusion; an essential element in obtaining higher consciousness of the truth that one is all, and all is one. There is total surrender to the Highest within, and all life is aligned with the Divine Will. One experiences a feeling of oneness with everything.

In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 58) H.P.B. mentions that the lotus symbolizes Kosmos and also man. Lotus typifies the life of man and the Kosmos, because the roots of the Lotus plant are in the mud, while its stalk passes through the water, spreading its flower in the air above. The root of Lotus sunk in the mud represents material life, the stalk passing through the water represents astral,

psychic or mental life, and the flower floating on the water and opening to the sky is an emblem of spiritual being.

The soil in which the root of the Lotus is sunk must be rich to produce a bloom or a flower. Likewise, we need co-operation of the physical body, through which we can express our thoughts and ideals. The stage where the stalk passes through water may be compared to mental and psychic training. Our School or college education develops our minds and memories without much moral grounding. Even from scientific education we are not able to see those lovely lotuses, blooming and radiating forth their beauty and fragrance to all, but the minds sunk in materialistic thought. Even a spiritual aspirant can be way-laid, glamourised by the charms of psychic powers, forgetting the true aim.

In Buddhism, the lotus represents the true nature of beings, which rises through the earthly life into the beauty and clarity of enlightenment. Just like the lotus arises from the bottom of a swamp, so the ordinary human being has to rise above the swamp of hatred, jealousy, negative thoughts, transcending all the evil. Moreover, just as the lotus floats above the water, unsullied by the mud, yet remains connected with the mud through the roots, so also, the enlightened Buddha, who chooses the path of renunciation, remains in touch with misery and sorrow of the world.

There is the famous Buddhist *mantram*, “*Om Mani Padme Hum*,” translated as “O Jewel in the Lotus, I adore thee,” where the jewel represents the Ego, and the Lotus symbolizes the Universe. This *mantram* is the reminder of the indissoluble union of man with the Universe.

*Padma* or Lotus is also supposed to represent the creative power. H.P.B. explains at length the symbology of lotus and the Egg. It is found that the seeds of lotus contain in them miniature of the future plant, which means that spiritual prototypes of all things exist in the immaterial world before these become materialized on Earth. The seeds of all phanerogamous plants, such as Lotus and Oak, contain the plant in the embryo form. The idea underlying this symbol is the

emanation of the objective from the subjective, or the divine ideation passing from the abstract to the concrete and visible form. Lotus symbolizes the source of life. In the *Secret Doctrine* mention is made of *Matri-Padma* or Mother Lotus, which represents the womb or Universal matrix. *Matri-Padma* represents primordial matter before the beginning of the universe, in the pre-cosmic state.

H.P.B. mentions that from *Padma-Yoni*, “the bosom of the Lotus,” which is the Absolute Space, or the Universe outside space and time, emanates the Cosmos, which is conditioned and limited by time and space. Hence, Vishnu or Narayana is shown floating on the primordial waters, stretched on the blossom of Lotus. In the *Puranas*, Vishnu or Narayana represents the *ideal creator*, and from his navel issues a Lotus flower, from which issues Brahma, the *practical creator*. Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, rising from the bosom of waters, like Venus-Aphrodite from the froth of ocean, has a white lotus beneath her feet. It was during the churning of the Ocean of Milk—symbol of Space and of the Milky Way—that Lakshmi, Goddess of Beauty and Mother of Love (Kama), appeared on a Lotus, and holding another lotus in her hand.

The Guru’s feet are referred to as “lotus feet,” and so too, the mother’s and father’s feet. *The Ramayana* mentions that when Lord Rama was sent into exile in the forest of Janasthana, Ravana’s sister, Shurpa-nakha (Basket-nails) happened to spot footprints of Lord Rama, and she instantly fell in love with its possessor. We are told that the footprints of Rama were marked with the lotus petals.

It is said that a “blue lotus” burst forth just before the birth of Gautama the Buddha, and another before the birth of Tsong-kha-pa. *Nila Udumbara* or “blue lotus” is a lotus of gigantic size, and is regarded as a supernatural omen whenever it blossoms, for it flowers once every three thousand years (*The Theosophical Glossary*). Arhans and sages are rare and are born at midnight hour just like the blossom of the *Udumbara* tree, says *The Voice of the Silence*.

## SLEEP, DREAMS AND DREAMLESS SLEEP

### VI

BESIDES the advice to spend five minutes in relaxing oneself before falling asleep, we are advised to keep a notebook and a pen by the bedside to note down our dreams. On waking up in the morning, or on waking up from a dream, one must lie still and take a few moments to recall and reconstruct the dream which is otherwise likely to fade away.

It is important that we go to sleep with clear mind. H.P.B. mentions that the state of mind of a drunkard during sleep is not lucid. His sleep is worse than sleeplessness, during which everything turns and whirls round in the brain, wherein his imagination creates horrid and grotesque shapes in continual motion. One can infer that a person who takes tranquilizers must also experience an artificially induced sleep.

In *Transactions*, H.P.B. connects dreaming with exercise of imaginative faculty. What role does imagination play in dreaming and remembering? How does one use one’s power of imagination in day to day life? The Imagination is the picture-making power of the human mind. In the ordinary human being it has not enough training or force to be more than a sort of dream, but it may be trained. One of the powers of the trained imagination is that of making an image, says Mr. Judge. Since “dreaming” awake or asleep, involves pictures, we can see the connection between dreams and imagination. Probably, trained imagination allows for vivid dreaming and that in turn facilitates remembering of dreams. Pictures and scenes from the higher plane have to be remembered and understood through imaginative faculty. We can develop our imagination through exercise, such as “creative visualization” or “lucid dreaming”. Here, the person is asked to make the mental picture of various things such as an apple, a chair, a table, face of one’s sister, mother or a relative, etc. When we try to do this, we realize that it is difficult. Then, we are also asked to visualize moving things. We

can develop our imagination by visualizing what we would like to do. If we have hurt someone and wish to apologize, then we may visualize ourselves as going to the person and asking for forgiveness. If in spite of apology that person continues to behave rudely, we need to take this into account and further imagine how we are going to remain calm and friendly, and pacify the person so as to win him over.

In *Mettabhavana* meditation, we have to bring before our mind's eye the image of a friend, an enemy, a neutral person as well as our own self, and make our good wishes and kindly thoughts to flow to them. This requires creative imagination. Creativity and imagination are superior to critical thought. Mr. Crosbie writes that he used to look calmly and dispassionately at the very worst picture he could conjure up as happening to himself. He saw himself as alone, dishonoured, stripped of everything, and all that it entailed. He writes that those very things happened to him, but he went on undismayed, because he was prepared.

H.P.B. mentions that the brain is the instrument of waking consciousness and every *conscious mental picture* formed means change and destruction of the atoms of the brain. Our ordinary intellectual activities move along the well-beaten paths in the brain—we think in grooves—and it does not require sudden adjustments and destruction in its substance. But every new kind of mental effort calls for a change, carving out of new “brain paths.” If forced injudiciously, it may do serious physical harm to the brain. Perhaps, this might explain how exercise of imaginative faculty changes the quality of the brain enabling it to be receptive.

H.P.B. says Death is sleep. Lord Byron said that death is twin brother of sleep. In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. mentions three kinds of sleep: the dreamless, the chaotic, and the one with vivid dreams. After the dissolution of the body, the Ego is in one of these three states of consciousness in *devachan* or *swarga*.

The real man, the immortal Ego, after shedding the *Kamarupic* body, goes to another state called *swarga*, *devachan* or paradise. It

is the state where the Ego takes much needed rest. It is also a state in which the Ego, being free from the limiting circumstances of life in a physical body, is able to give full expression to its unfulfilled aspirations, and assimilates noble qualities so as to make them part of its nature. If the person has lived a morally pure life and loved arts, music, painting, mathematics, etc., for their own sake, then there is assimilation and development of these qualities, so that the ego comes back to the earth, enriched.

But the stay in *devachan* may be conscious or unconscious. It depends on the belief of the person in existence of the soul or surviving consciousness beyond death. It is stated that a person who lived a morally pure life and believed in the existence of soul or surviving consciousness—for him there will be *conscious devachan*. For such a person *devachan* is an idealized and subjective continuation of his earth life, where he feels himself to be the same person, Mr. X or Miss Y—but as an *ideal reflection* of the human being he was when last on earth, devoid of all the evil. Thus, the process of *conscious* expansion, development and assimilation is possible only for the person who has believed in survival of immortal soul after the death of the body. If we compare death to sleep, then one who believes in survival of the soul after death will be in the state of full consciousness—*like sleep full of vivid dreams*. On the other hand, a materialist who may be good, but has denied existence of soul or surviving consciousness, will not have *conscious devachan*. He will be plunged into a deep sleep without dreams, without consciousness, till he is born again. He is like a person who falls asleep during a long railway journey, missing many stations and then awakening without slightest recollection of the stations he missed, and continuing his onward journey.

The third kind of sleep is the sleep with chaotic or idle dreams. This state may be compared to the *kama loka* in which the animal man lives freely, giving expression to his animal propensities *without any control or constraint*. Hence, H.P.B. mentions that though death is analogous to sleep, there is a very great difference between the



two. In sleep there is still a connection between the lower and higher mind, however weak it may be, so that the higher nature is still able to guide the lower, animal man. But, once the body is dead, the animal man, or *Kama-rupa* is left to its own devices, without any control of the higher, because the Ego goes to *devachan*. H.P.B. says that our lower principles of passions and desires, and lower mind, are like wild beasts which are controlled by higher, divine nature. In the absence of the Master the animal runs off to the jungle. It takes some time for the animal to return to its natural state of wildness. However, the lower animal man, as soon as it is free from the control and guidance of the divine nature, lives like a wild beast without any restraint. Thus, while a tamed animal or a pet takes time to return to its true animal nature in the absence of its master when it is freed, the lower personal man *returns instantly* to its animal nature the moment such a control is lifted on account of its separation from the higher Ego. Thus, *during sleep*, the lower nature of man is like a person who is gross, materialistic animal but a sober man. But *after death*, the lower man is like a person incapably drunk, and hence unable to distinguish between various objects in his surroundings.

Thus, after death, due to separation from higher nature, the desire nature in man runs riot without restraint. A glutton is restricted from indulgence in gluttony by the limitation of his body, which cannot consume beyond a limit. But at death, in *kama-loka* there being no such limitation, his gluttony can express itself unchecked. After death, the Ego may remain in the *Kama Loka* for a few minutes to a few hours or few days and sometimes a few years depending on the force of inner conviction of good and evil. An average man does not stay in *Kama Loka* for very long. If a man has thought much of murder, cruelty, and all sorts of crime during his life, then, when he dies and his consciousness is on the plane of *Kama Loka*, which plane is full of such visions of black side, where he sees crime, gluttony, iniquities, lust etc., he is not shocked as he is used to it. Such a man may stay there for many years. But when an average

man, who had *occasional* thoughts of murder or rage or wickedness which revolted him and made him throw them out of his mind, dies, the same visions of black nature confront him in *Kama Loka*. When he sees himself participating in the murder about which he rarely thought when alive, the moral shock will be such that it wakes him up, and the Ego gets out of *Kama Loka* right away. This may also happen in dream. If there is something in the dream that revolts the moral sense of the person, it wakes him up immediately, as if he saw a nightmare. So, when a person who is not bad or sensuous by nature sees himself raping a girl, he would get a moral shock and awaken at once. Mr. Crosbie writes that most of the averagely good persons leave the *Kama Loka* almost immediately and go to *Devachan*.

As for the spiritually advanced persons, they are *conscious* after the death of the body, but in their case the Ego does not enter the states of *kamaloka* or *devachan*. In their case there are no impure desires which can form *Kamarupa*. Their ego does not need rest. In their case, the process of assimilation takes place while on earth. *Devachan* is an illusion, and since Adepts and initiates have risen above illusions, they have no *devachan*. Likewise, dream is an illusion, and since an Adept has overcome every form of illusion, no advanced Adept dreams. During sleep he paralyzes his lower nature and is completely free, living on a higher, more real plane.

Dreams play an important role in our evolution. Hence, it is necessary for us to learn to interpret these dreams. These nightly visions are like storehouse of accumulated wisdom. Our link with our higher nature in the waking state is through the *voice of conscience*, which checks us from doing wrong. So also in sleep, there is one more link to our higher nature. We must learn to take advantage of these nightly visions.

*The Voice of the Silence* compares the three states, sleep, dreams and dreamless sleep, with three halls of life. The first Hall is the hall of physical existence. It is the hall of ignorance or *avidya*. The second Hall corresponds to twilight, and astral or psychic regions. We are



unable to perceive things distinctly during twilight period. So also, in one's spiritual journey, as one passes through the psychic region, when one's astral senses are not fully developed, one is not sure of one's perception. There is also the danger of being enamoured by the psychic powers and thus losing sight of one's spiritual goal. The second Hall is called the hall of probationary learning. The last hall is the "hall of wisdom," in which one meets the guru, and is compared to dreamless sleep state.

Life is a dream. Once Chuang Tzu, a Chinese Philosopher said: "I dreamed I was a butterfly, flitting around in the sky; then I awoke. Now I wonder: Am I man who dreamt of being a butterfly, or am I butterfly dreaming that I am a man?" What should a king do who dreams that he is a beggar, to become a king again? He only needs to "wake up" to become king. To realize our true nature we need to wake up. Narsimha Mehta, a Gujarati saint poet, writes: "When I *woke up*, I could no longer perceive the world." One of the conditions for hearing the voice of one's inner God, mentioned in the *The Voice of the Silence* is: "When to himself, his form appears as unreal, as do on waking all the forms he sees in dreams."

(Concluded)

If people offer their help or wisdom as you go through life, accept it gratefully. You can learn much, from those who have gone before you.

But never be afraid or hesitant to step off the accepted path and head off in your own direction, if your heart tells you that it is the right way for you.

Always believe that you will ultimately succeed at whatever you do, and never forget the value of persistence, discipline and determination. You are meant to be whatever you dream of becoming.

—EDMUND O'NEILL

## 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:** Yama is generally described as the "god of death," in Hindu mythology. Is there any deeper significance, theosophically?

**Answer:** "A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion," by John Dowson, mentions that in the Vedas, Yama is the *god of the dead*. He is comparable to Pluto who rules over Hades, and with whom shades of the departed dwell. Thus, he presides over *Kamaloka*, the astral region. In the epic poems he is described as the judge of the dead. When soul quits the body, it enters the lower regions, and there the recorder *Chitra-gupta*, reads out his account from the great register called *Agra-sandhini*. After that the soul is sentenced to either ascend to the abode of the *Pitris* (Manes), or is sent to one of the twenty-one hells according to its guilt, or it is born again on earth in another form.

*Chitra-gupta* or *Lipikas* are agents in karmic dispensation. They are the Divine Beings, connected with Karma, for they are the Recorders or Scribes. They impress on the "invisible tablets of the Astral Light, 'the great picture-gallery of eternity' a faithful record of every act, and even thought, of man, of all that was, is, or ever will be, in the phenomenal Universe." The Egyptian tradition mentions forty "Assessors" who are supposed to be in the region of Amenti, and they read out the account of every soul's life from the heart of the dead, which becomes an open book before Osiris, the Egyptian equivalent of Yama or Karma. Similarly, the Hindu *Chitra-Gupta*, reads out the account of every soul's life from his register, called *Agra-sandhini*, which refers to Astral records (*S.D.*, I, 105-6). Since reward and punishment are in accordance with one's

Karma, Dr. Muir rightly points out that Yama is nowhere represented in the *Rig-veda* as having anything to do with the punishment of the wicked. Yama has many names descriptive of his office. He is called “*Mrityu*,” “*Kala*,” or “*Antaka*,” all of which signify death. He is also called *Dharma-raja* or “King of justice.” Mythologically, he was the father of Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandava princes, who was also called *Dharma-raja*.

Yama presides over death, and is also the Regent of the south quarter, and perhaps that is why a dead body is always placed with its head facing south. In the *Secret Doctrine*, (I, 128) H.P.B. mentions Planetary Spirits of various grades which rule destinies of men as also various departments of Nature. In the Hindu exoteric Pantheon they are the guardian deities who preside over eight points of the compass, and are called *Loka-Palas*, i.e., “Supporters or guardians of the World,” of which Indra (East), Yama (South), Varuna (West), and Kubera (North) are the chief.

A hymn speaks of Yama as the first of men that died, and the first that departed to the world of bliss, i.e., *swarga* or paradise or *devachan*. That is because Yama is the personification of third root-race in occultism. It is the race in which there was the separation of the sexes into male and female. It was also the race endowed with *consciousness* or *manas*. Without mind, there cannot be karma, and hence neither Heaven nor Hell. In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 609-610) H.P.B. compares Yama to Zoroastrian Yima mentioned in *Vendidad*, and both are supposed to represent first three races of man. Of these, the first two races never died, because they had no physical bodies but only astral shadows, which were sinless and hence *Karmaless*. Like the Phoenix, primordial man resurrected out of his old body into his new body. Each time, and with each new generation, he became more solid and more perfect.

Yama was the son of Vivaswat (the Sun) and Sanjana (or spiritual consciousness), and thus he is the brother of Vaivaswata Manu. *He had a twin-sister named Yami*. Yama and Yami are looked upon as the first human pair, the originator of the race. According to another

hymn, Yami was ever urging him to take her for his wife, in order to perpetuate the species. H.P.B. points out that it has a very suggestive symbolical meaning, which is explained in occultism. In fact, there are various such allegorical statements in ancient works which justify the esoteric teaching that Yama-Yami is the symbol of dual *manas* (mind), in one of its mystical meanings—the Higher and the lower mind. Probably, that is the reason why in the exoteric teachings of the Chino-Buddhists, the epithet of Yama-Yami is the “twofold-ruler,” and is regarded as representing both judge and criminal—the *restrainer of his own evil doings* (the higher mind), and the evil-doer himself (the lower mind).

In the Hindu epic poems Yama-Yami is the twin-child of Sun, of which Yama represents “lord of the day,” symbolizing the spirit in the East, while Yami represents the queen of the night—darkness or ignorance—and opens to the mortals, the path to the West, which is an emblem of evil and matter.

**Question:** Why is it that one feels more comfortable with animals than human beings?

**Answer:** We cannot make such a generalized statement because not everyone feels more comfortable with animals or prefers company of animals to human beings. There are those who dread animals, even pet dogs and cats! Then again, most of us certainly do not feel comfortable in the company of tigers and lions. There are animal-lovers who love to be with animals.

We have to admit that human relationship is undergoing a radical change. There are people who love animals more than human beings. They share a very deep and intimate relationship with their pets. Earlier, people felt kindness and pity for the helpless suffering of the animals, and were moved to protect them. But pets were never “close companions” as they are today. The animal-human relationship is undergoing change, which actually reflects the changing human-to-human relationship. Pets seem to be taking the place of friends, because finding a true friend, a close friend, is becoming increasingly difficult. Often there is not a single person

with whom one can share the deepest secrets, one's problems and weaknesses, without the risk of being ridiculed or the information being used against oneself. With the advent of nuclear families, even family bonds are weakening. Animals are found to be good companions because they are not at all demanding, nor will they do anything to break your trust. So, there are people who talk to plants and pets. It appears that when people are ill-treated or let down by other human beings, they tend to cultivate attachment for objects or animals, with whom they can share the innermost secrets of their hearts, and give vent to their feelings. This is an abnormal state. There are people who fall in love with dolls or are obsessed with computers. Psychologists feel that such cases stem from fear of rejection by other people. The objects accept you as you are, and so do animals.

Many studies have been conducted to find out the contribution of pets to human psychological well-being. It has been found that pets play a significant supportive role in reducing depression and loneliness by providing companionship. In some hospitals, pet dogs and cats are taken to visit wards for children and old people to cheer them up. Some of the women who suffered from physical abuse reported that their pets were important source of emotional support for them. Likewise, Alzheimer's patients who owned pets were found to have fewer mood disorders, and were less anxious. A sensitive pet instinctively feels the mood, pain or trouble of its owner.

Alarmingly more and more people are keeping pets to get over depression and loneliness. Pets seem to be taking the place of human companions. But, is keeping pets the right solution for weakening human bonds? Animals must be treated with love and compassion, but we need not make them our constant companions and much worse, attempt to humanize them. Occult philosophy teaches that when we link ourselves intimately with animal nature, we hold back our own human evolution, "animalizing" our own character.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Appreciation is life-giving and transformative quality. When our soul or psyche is planted in an appreciative environment it tends to naturally grow to its full potential. Appreciation is often used to create a happy, productive person instead of a social drop-out, as is done in the Babemba tribe of South Africa. When a person acts unjustly or irresponsibly, he is placed in the centre and all the villagers gather around him, and each villager speaks to the accused, recalling the good things he had done in his lifetime. During this ceremony, which often lasts for several days, all the positive attributes, good deeds and strengths of the accused are carefully recited, and at the end the person is welcomed back into the tribe.

Appreciation is the capacity to see the good in oneself, others, and in life. We are more prone to seeing negative instead of positive. Most of us would have experienced that our elders withheld appreciation because it would "spoil" us. Instead, our attention was drawn to our weaknesses with the hope that we would improve. But the fact is, "the more we are criticized, the less we grow. Under the constant onslaught of attacks, we become stubborn and defensive....The spiritual culture tells us that we create our own reality and the more we focus on the negative, the more we perpetuate it....Parents must recognize that if they want their children to be paragons of virtue they need to acknowledge and validate any sign they see of the acquired virtue," writes Suma Varughese. Appreciation is a nurturing and honouring energy, which tends to add to the self-worth of both the receiver and giver.

Sampoorna Garine, a psychologist and workshop facilitator says, "Appreciation is as important for the heart or the emotional centre as food is for the body. It opens up channels of joy and love for both the sender and the receiver, allowing a simultaneous experience of gratitude....I discovered the magical truth that the more good I saw in the other, the more good came into being." Irma Battig, a cranio-sacral therapist is of the opinion that we tend to treat better, what we

appreciate. Thus, our appreciation of Earth would make us conscious of the need to treat her well and with love.

Brahmaprakash Gaur says, “Appreciation is a spontaneous and natural outcome of spiritual growth. This brings a deeper understanding that everyone and everything is essentially divine and a reflection of God.” We should begin the appreciation journey with ourselves, by endorsing the good within us. “The more appreciation and love we lavish upon ourselves, the less we look to the outside world to give it to us. And a time will come when we will no longer mind if appreciation is withheld from us...for our inner appreciation will be in full flow, nourishing and nurturing us,” writes Varughese. (*Life Positive*, June 2012)

H.P.B. seems to emphasize the importance of appreciation when she advises, “To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one’s neighbour’s efforts.” But she also shows that ordinarily we lack the discrimination that leads us to praise or appreciate another person, just enough. It is true that there is deep-seated tendency in each of us to detect faults of another, rather than his good points. A teacher once brought to her students a huge white sheet of paper with a small black dot at the centre. She asked them to report what they could see. Her students almost unanimously declared that they could see a *black dot*. The teacher enquired rather disappointedly, “Can’t any of you see the big white sheet?” We are like that in our perception of others. As the Buddha says, our own faults we tend to hide, but those of others we tend to highlight. However, too much appreciation of oneself and of another may lead to complacency. We need to have a balance. There are times when it becomes absolutely necessary to point out the flaw or weakness in another’s work or character. Though one may bestow praise or appreciation on others around, a spiritual seeker gradually learns not to measure his worth based on appreciation of others. Since he is not identified with his personality, he is able to say, “Thy body is not Self, thy SELF is in itself without a body, and either praise or blame affects it not.”

A spiritual aspirant must not only learn to appreciate, but also to accept appreciation in humility, without being puffed up.

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What is true Prayer? A disciple asked his guru, “Do our prayers reach God?” The Guru replied, “You have not understood the purpose of prayer. Your prayer is a means for you to reach God! When a flower blossoms, it spreads its fragrance. The purpose of flower is to bloom, not to ensure that the fragrance reaches someone.” A prayer weighed down by demands is not a prayer at all. The sanctity of the prayer lies in desirelessness. Jalaluddin Rumi, a Sufi mystic, says to God, “My happiness lies in what pleases You. I don’t even understand what is good for me!” Any request to change the circumstances cannot be a true prayer, it would only be sheer begging.

Prayer is not mere repetition of words taught by someone else. Prayer is something which must arise spontaneously from one’s heart, and kindled from within. True prayer is like sleep or like love. Each one of us has the innate ability to love, so that if we “study” how to love, it will be artificial love. Likewise, we may prepare for sleep by making the bed comfortable, switching off the light and switching on the fan. All these help us in sleeping, but they cannot bring on sleep; sleep comes on its own. Similarly, we may prepare for praying by shutting ourselves in a quiet room, and trying to dig deep within, till one day a fountain of bliss springs forth.

“Prayer is a serene state of mind, and not mere chanting of a mantra for the fulfilment of a desire. Some pray in the belief that if you ask with faith, you will receive it....The moment desires are appended to a prayer, the wings of worship are clipped. Prayer is an inner dance, an expression of joy, a contented state of being,” writes Gurudevshri Rakeshbhai. (*The Speaking Tree [Sunday Times of India]*, June 24, 2012)



A prayer might be an expression of gratitude, a petition, a demand or a request. It could be uttered or silent, and may be offered jointly with others or privately. Prayer is generally considered to be a means of communicating one's problems, wishes and desires to the Almighty. Does an Omniscient God need to be told what should or should not be done? "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him," said Jesus.

H.P.B. points out that petitionary prayers kill self-reliance. When one considers oneself separate from God and prays to Him there is no merit in the achievement. In such prayers we are living in moral idleness, passing on our burden to God. Jesus recommends silent, unuttered prayer to one's Father-in-Secret. It is "Will prayer." To be answered or heard, prayer should be pronounced mentally and by one who knows how to make himself heard in silence, and it must be addressed to one's Father-in-Secret. Then prayer changes into "philosopher's stone" by the intensity of our aspirations. In such a prayer, the inner attitude is, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

In its highest sense, prayer is a meditation which is described by Plato as "the ardent turning of the soul towards the divine," and it is the unuttered prayer—not to ask for any *particular* good but for good itself, or *the Universal Supreme Good*. We are asked to remain silent in the presence of the Divine Ones, so that they can show us, by the light which issues from them, what is *intrinsically* good—and not what appears to us to be good.

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Indian Paranormal Society (IPS) set up by Gaurav Tiwari, which claims to be the only organized group in India that tracks and researches supernatural experiences, has 34 investigators, who use gadgets to monitor "strange phenomena," and to communicate with spirits. The gadgets used include digital EMF meters to detect the

electromagnetic field, laser IR thermometers to gauge sudden temperature changes, because spirits are said to absorb energy and thus cause changes in the immediate surroundings. They also use EVP recorders, which record disembodied voices. These gadgets are used to differentiate hallucinations from actual phenomena, and to prove the existence of paranormal forces. If an activity cannot be replicated in a lab or explained scientifically, we call it paranormal, says Tiwari. At times, preconceived notions trigger hallucinations. For instance, five teenagers were killed while driving in drunken state. One of the investigators was called upon the spot, few days after the accident, by the fishermen community near the area. The fishermen reported that they heard screams and wailings of young boys. After two days of investigation at the spot, the investigator concluded that it was the case of hallucination triggered by minds paralyzed by fear.

However, when there is a genuine case where the spirit is detected, they try to establish contact with the spirit through their gadgets. They try to show that the spirits are not always attempting to harm humans. Rationalists do not believe in the existence of spirits and ghosts. The Rationalists call paranormal investigators frauds.

"Paranormal science will only grow in the coming days....The main thing is to bring down the fear level," says Gaurav Tiwari. There are many educated, non-superstitious people who share the beliefs of these paranormal investigators. Though these investigators do not charge for the investigations, IPS has started professional courses. There is a course meant for the amateurs, in which basics of metaphysics, quantum theories, nature of spirits, and scientific approach to investigation is taught for a fee of Rupees six thousand. There is an advanced course meant for becoming a professional investigator, writes Ipsita Bhattacharya. (*The Times of India*, June 25, 2012)

Why do so many people believe in ghosts? Is there a psychological need to explain the unexplained? Ongoing international studies on the paranormal suggest that ghosts,



apparitions or spectres are not a fiction. It is said that ghosts flourish in the vicinity of the people who believe in them. Most of the time the apparitions seen are of the suicides and people who died a violent death, by accident or at the hands of others. In *Isis Unveiled*, (I, 69) H.P.B. describes apparitions of “unrestful ‘souls,’ hovering about the spots where they were murdered, or coming back for some other mysterious reasons of their own.” Often these apparitions are drawn to a particular spot by some attraction or association. Skeptics may scoff but proofs accumulate of the existence of an inner, unseen realm. H.P.B. writes: “The whole issue of the quarrel between the profane and the esoteric sciences depends upon the belief in, and demonstration of, *the existence of an astral body within the physical, the former independent of the latter.*”

According to a true incident, some people saw for several days, a man wearing blue suit trying to cross the road, at a place where a pedestrian was killed in an accident, while crossing the road. H.P.B. observes that when a person dies in violent death, the last thought of such a person may be so strong that the tragedy may be re-enacted a thousand times before the thought fades out. There is also an instance of the Air Force station being haunted by the headless ghost of a Royal Air Force pilot who was decapitated during the war. H.P.B. tells us that a sufficiently intense thought at the moment of death “becomes objective and under favourable conditions is very apt to be seen.”

But what is a ghost? The physical body of man is built on an inner model body, usually called astral body, which is electro-magnetic in nature. When a man dies, the soul slips out of the physical body, and goes on living in still finer bodies on a different plane of consciousness till there comes a time to take birth in new body. It is this astral body—an ethereal body without soul—with thoughts and desires of the former owner, impressed upon it, is what we call as *Kamarupic* (or astral) shell or ghost. There is nothing to fear from ghosts and there is certainly nothing to gain from thinking about them. The fear comes from not knowing what they are.