

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

MARRIAGE is regarded in all religious traditions as a sacred relationship, a divine covenant or agreement and a sacrament. During marriage ceremony it is impressed upon the couple that marriage is a sacred bond and that they should not seek to dissolve it for trivial reasons or on personal and selfish grounds. Both the bride and the bridegroom are made to realize that by entering this sacred relationship they have accepted to fulfil certain obligatory duties.

Ancient Hindu literature identifies eight forms of marriage, of which four types of marriage were considered proper or religiously appropriate marriages, as they contain vows from vedic scriptures and where both the bride and the groom commit to each other and share responsibilities of families. Among inappropriate but acceptable forms of marriage were *Gandharva* marriage, wherein the couple live together out of love, by mutual consent, and is entered into without religious ceremonies—may probably be compared to present-day live-in relationship. The other is *Asura* marriage wherein the daughter is married off in exchange of money. The other two marriages which are considered not only inappropriate but also religiously forbidden, are *Rakshasa* marriage when the girl was forcibly abducted against her and her family's will, and *pisacha* marriage, where the man forces himself on a woman while she is in drunken or drugged or unconscious state.

The Sanskrit word for marriage is *vivah*, which etymologically

means “to lead away” (the bride from her father’s house), as also, “to support or to sustain.” The chief object of marriage is the performance of *dharma* or duty relating to the *Grihasta Ashrama*. No Hindu marriage is completed unless the ritual of *saptapadi* is completed by the bride and the groom together. *Saptapadi* literally means “seven steps.” *Saptapadi* involves taking of seven vows or seven promises by both the bride and the groom. These vows are taken as the bride and the groom walk around the sacred fire, the fire serving as the witness to the ritual of seven vows. The bride and the groom pledge to acquire knowledge, happiness and harmony by mutual love, respect, understanding and faith. They pledge to share each other’s sorrow and happiness. In the last vow they promise to be true and loyal to each other, to take care of each other in any circumstances throughout their life, and to remain companions and best of friends *for the lifetime*.

The wedding vows that are exchanged by man and woman in a Christian marriage are similar in nature. Thus, the groom says, “I, Mr. ‘X’ take thee Ms. ‘Y’ to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, *till in death we part*, and with this ring I thee wed, and with my body I thee honour, and pledge my faithfulness.” These vows can be taken mechanically so that within a few weeks of marriage these vows are broken, forgetting what one had promised! When these vows are not taken with understanding the couple does not know what exactly they are promising to do.

It is interesting to note that expressing his views concerning marriage, St. Paul says, “*It is good for a man not to touch a woman*. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication (immorality), let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.” H.P.B. says that Theosophy does not preach against marriage. A person who desires worldly life and is ready to “take the risks of that lottery where there are so many more

blanks than prizes,” should marry and settle down, for marriage is the only remedy against immorality. It is only when a person reaches a high stage in his spiritual development, when he has no worldly desires, and is ready for practical occultism, which requires complete purity of motive and of magnetism, that celibacy or *brahmacharya*, in thought and deed, is absolutely necessary. Chastity is the means whereby vital energy or *Prana* can be conserved and directed towards the higher planes of consciousness.

Shri B. P. Wadia points out that in married life of a *Grihasta*, man and woman must try to realize that true union is the contact of mind with mind, of heart with heart, of soul with soul—where the wife regards the husband, not as a possession but as a partner, where the husband treats his wife not as his personal property, but as a companion—and where both help each other to tread the Path of Nobility. Marriage is the union of two souls for the purpose of propagating of the species, but if in its place, there is only a union of male and female bodies, then marriage becomes merely a brutal act, which lowers man and woman to a level lower than that of animals.

Marriage provides the foundation for building of the home. Mr. Judge writes that when a suitable mate is found, a man should marry and settle down as a householder, bringing up a family with right views and high purpose. He contributes a service to humanity, who leaves behind children that can emulate his altruistic life. The alchemical process of transforming animal man to human and then to divine takes place, to a considerable extent, in the crucible called Home, its building begins when two people marry and settle down. Their natures may be compatible or vastly different. But herein is the great opportunity to learn adjustment and co-operation. Great lessons of adaptability could be learnt. Taking advantage of the closeness of relationship, each could influence the character of the other. “It is a familiar saying that a well-matched couple ‘grow together’ so as to come to a close resemblance in features as well as in mind,” writes a Master of Wisdom.

Closely related to the institution of marriage is the institution of

family. Family is a great school where lessons in true love, unselfishness and sacrifice are learnt, and when practised in an ever-expanding circle, it could finally include the whole human family. If both the partners share high aims then they can lead a morally pure life and exemplify filial piety and marital fidelity. “If you choose, you may make your home one of the most important centres of spiritualizing influence in all the world,” writes a Master of Wisdom. The institution of Marriage forms the foundation for the Householder state. In India many sages voluntarily and deliberately, entered the householder state, so that they might set the example of building the Home after the true spiritual pattern. The institution of human family provides the pattern for the building of the State, writes Shri B. P. Wadia. Confucius said that “those who would order their national life must set about ordering their home life....When the individual families have learned kindness, then the whole nation has learned kindness. When the individual families have learned courtesy, then the whole nation has learned courtesy.”

As the article, “On Philosophical Anarchism” (*The Theosophical Movement*, September 1958) suggests, family, tribe, community, nation, etc., are all playgrounds for the unfoldment of the individual. Each of these institutions has certain virtues that the individual, passing through it, must acquire. He, as a soul, repeatedly takes birth in that environment till he acquires the virtues afforded by that institution. All the time the individual is learning how to co-operate—in the family with a few, in the tribe with a few more, as a member of a nation with many, and finally as a human being, with all. But slowly, as he has finished taking the necessary experience and imbibed the necessary virtues afforded by the institution, he begins to extricate himself. For instance, the inclination to marry and settle down would be less strong, when lessons of family life are learnt, and there would be genuine desire to practise celibacy.

Marriage is a sacred institution and a sacred bond. In most religions we find that during marriage ceremony both man and woman take a vow to remain faithful to each other for the whole life. Marriage is

treated as a solemn, sacred bond, not to be broken easily, at least not for trifling reasons. Our birth in a particular family is determined by karmic affinity. Marriage is not just relationship between two people, but between two families, and that also is determined by karmic affinity. Marriage gives an opportunity to fulfil the karmic debts and work out the collective karma engendered in previous lives. Marriage involves adjustment primarily between two people—husband and wife. But for the bride, in many cases, marriage means adjusting to a new environment and new family.

In the earlier times, in Hindu society, there was no concept of divorce or legal separation. Once married, it was futile for a girl to think of returning back to her parents, as the doors of her parents’ home were closed forever. In case she was ill-treated or even tortured by her husband and his family, or if the husband indulged in extra-marital affair, most women suffered silently, and the weak committed suicide to escape the misery. Marriage was seen as not so much of a choice but as destiny; a commitment that extended to several lives. Hence, divorce or separation was looked upon as something sacrilegious involving severe karmic consequences in the subsequent lives. We find similar view expressed in the Bible: “Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (*Mark*, 10:9). However, in Hindu society, only men had the choice to marry another woman on the grounds of infidelity, childlessness, and like reasons.

Thus, in the earlier times, and for women born in certain religions, there was no option but to carry on with unhappy marriage, which in a sense had become their destiny. Destiny is only the working of certain powerful causes, so that no action of ours or any other karma can avert or modify the result. For such Karma we can say, “What cannot be cured, must be endured.” In such cases, the best course would be to experience the effects with right attitude. Instead of complaining or grumbling there must be acceptance or resignation. Even in modern times, often one is unable to take divorce, either because the husband is unable to pay large sum of money demanded

by wife as alimony, or because it is forbidden by one's religion, or out of concern for the emotional well-being of the children. It is as if one is destined to fulfil the karmic obligations.

However, "acceptance" should not be equated with passivity and helplessness. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power. Under Karma, a woman is not expected to remain in an abusive relationship, or with a husband who is not faithful to her. However, separation or divorce must be sought as a last resort. Not only when we love someone but also when we hate someone, we could be thrown into a closer relation with that person in the next life, say, as a wife, husband, brother, son, etc., thus giving us an opportunity to understand and deal with that person. Every attempt must be made to resolve differences, to adjust to each other's idiosyncrasies and temperament. Many couples seek help of counsellors. There are women who spent several years, getting for their husbands the necessary treatment to free them of the addictions of alcohol or drugs. It is for each couple to decide when the relationship has reached the point beyond repairs, and for the individual to decide if he or she has exhausted every possibility to keep the marriage intact. In an abusive relationship, when the woman who suffers reaches her threshold point, seeking divorce seems a much better alternative than resorting to suicide. Every effort must be made to preserve the sanctity of marriage, doing the very best in one's power to reach a compromise or solve the problem instead of trying to escape through divorce. When one tries to shun karmic obligations, by running away from the situation, one makes the debt heavier.

It is difficult for an ordinary person to know whether in seeking and obtaining divorce one has left the karmic debt unfulfilled. In some cases, it may be possible that divorce marked an end of karmic obligations. "He who knows what is the ultimate division of time in this Universe knows Karma. For all other men Karma is in its essential nature unknown and unknowable."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT ONE WOMAN'S VISION

[Abridged and reprinted from *The Path*, Vol. VI, for May 1891.]

ONE who had read a legend somewhere repeated it to me thus from memory:

"There was a Greek woman who being visited by spirits in the guise of two Chaldeans, was endowed by them with transcendent powers and superhuman knowledge, and she was able to behold at once all the deeds that were done in all lands beneath the sun, and was raised high above all human woes and human frailties, *save only Love and Death*. The woman dwelt alone with the stars and the palms and was content. Then one day a tired wanderer came and asked her for a draught of water to slake his thirst and lave his wounds, and she gave it, and, giving, touched his hand, and one by one the magic gifts fell from her, and the Chaldeans came no more! In all the vastness of the universe she only harkened for one voice, her eyes were blind to earth and heaven, for they only sought one face. She had power no more over minds of men or the creatures of land and air, for she had cast her crown down in the dust and had become a slave, and her slavery was sweeter than had ever been her strength—sweeter far—*for a space*. Then the wanderer, his wounds being healed and his thirst slaked, wearied. He arose and passed away; she was left alone in the silence of the desert—but never more came the Chaldeans." Thus ran the tale; it seems unfinished and I am moved to finish it.

When the woman had made fair progress and attained to power, it was her right to be tested by the gods. Now we are most tested by Love and by Death.

So, as the tale runs, she was left mourning in the desert. She called upon the Chaldeans and their powers, which she had shared; but power comes not at call. She cried then to death; but death comes not quickly to those to whom he comes as a friend. She could not die. In all the world there was left to her only her love; this she

could not slay. Her great love impelled her, and she arose, thirsting for one more sight of that distant face. She passed from the palms and limpid water over the burning sands, and, all unseen, her guardian spirit and the spirit of her Ray went with her.

Thus she came into the world, and seeking saw on every hand sin, misery, disease, death, shame and bitterness. Failing to find him whom she sought, she asked herself, “What if he be wretched as these?” And her heart swelled with pity at the thought, she strove more and more to help the suffering, to clasp the imploring hands that clutched at her gown—all for his sake. Learning to love them so, she hoped to forget that master love for one, and hoped in vain, for human love is strong and tests us as a sword. At last she cried to all the gods, “Let me see him once, and die.” So strong the cry, the inner heavens rung with her demand; on it she staked her all, and drew from Karmic powers, in that one gift, all that they held as treasure for her in many a life to come. Her guardian spirit hid its face, but the spirit of the Ray, the Watcher, saw unmoved.

So she beheld her lover. The man had changed. The fret of life had worn him. His sphere was dimmed by a dark, inpouring tide that coloured all his deeds, impeded his higher aspirations, and mysteriously sapped his life, by him unseen, unknown.

“Call back that evil tide!” she said. And then again, “What is it?”

Her guardian spirit could not answer for tears. “It is thy love, whose strong barrier resists and impedes the law. Hark to the discord of his sphere,” said the Watcher, the spirit of the Ray. The woman uttered a moan of pity and of shame. “He is changed. Dost thou love him still?” asked her guardian spirit. “Better than ever I love and long to comfort him,” she answered.

“Behold,” said her guardian to the Watcher, “how strong is this love, now purified by pain. Shalt thou not deliver the woman?” The unmoved Watcher spoke. “When the man came to her in the desert, did she speak to him of the starry Truths of the darkness? Aye, I know that she spoke, but her words were forms devoid of life while her voice—their carrier—cooed the notes of love. Aye, I

know that she tended him in tenderness and pity, but did she not ask reward, the reward of his love? What free gift asks a great gift in return? She only asked to serve, sayest thou? Know, in heaven’s high hosts are thousands who wait through the passing of cycles for permission to serve, and sometimes ask in vain. Accepted service is the gift of gifts in the power of the Divine. Saw she his soul-spark yearning for freedom from personality and separation? Under that crust which is the outer man, saw she his inner self, the radiant, imprisoned, awaiting a deliverer? No. She saw but her own reflection, the mirrored flame of her own desire. The imprint she stamped upon him faded, for his guardian spirit stood near. Then the radiant one within impelled him from her. Life bore him away. He passed on to other scenes, dragging after him, unknown but not unfelt, the dark and ever-lengthening chain of her recalling thought. The woman loved herself, so loving love; she to whom power was entrusted by the gods cast it, for self, aside.”

“Ah! Say not so!” the guardian spirit cried. “Was no pure flame behind the smoke; no living germ within the husks of love?” “Look!” answered the Watcher. As the woman gazed, spellbound, she saw, above her lover, a shape of superhuman beauty, one of a band of mighty ones, interlinked, interdependent, all in one and one in all, the immortal hosts, the higher selves, the higher self of man. Seeing the loved one thus transfigured, thus translated, a cry of joy broke from her lips. “He is free!” she cried.

Then the Watcher bent above her, while the guardian spirit held his breath. “Shall he become as one of these and pass beyond thee? That place is one which men themselves attain. By fortitude; by duty; by self-sacrifice; by entire acceptance of the law; he may attain. Or wilt thou—O caviller at the law, constructive of thine own desire, destructive of the universal trend of things—wilt thou detain him on the way?”

“Why may he not go with my love?” she asked.

“With thy *love*, yea; for *love* makes free what it loves. But not with thy *desire*. The law has parted you in the flesh; who shall

withstand that law and not be broken? But love coheres, inheres, and knows not space, nor time.”

The woman bent her head. From her heart a wild complaint arose. But she had seen the glorious vision; she longed to see her beloved on that way, the path of law. “Set him free,” she said. “But if thy desire recall him — ?” asked the Watcher.

“Hast thou forgotten, Stainless One, or hast thou never known, that true love loves the better self, the shining ideal? I was blind, but now mine eyes are opened. I give him to his higher life, that life which is the law. And I — I bless the law, though it deny me, because it sets him free.”

“As she spoke, something seemed to break in her heart. Before her swept the great, blinding, glorious vision of a freed humanity, lifted upon the sorrows of such as she, lifted by the very force of woe endured, into that shining host. “I love the world,” she cried, “for all is one.” Upon the face of the guardian spirit there shone a great joy. “Thou hast conquered by love,” he said. “There remains only death for thee to meet and to subdue.”

The Watcher spoke, “Nay; death is overcome. The only true death is the death of self. She lives for all, her powers reclaimed, for the power of powers is universal love.” Thus runs the tale of truth. If woman knew her power to uplift, before the eyes of man, she, loving thus, would teach man how to love, and freeing him, retain him forever in the higher bonds that knit all souls to Soul.

—JASPER NIEMAND

“He who loves, lives. He who loves another, lives on earth. He who loves others, lives in heaven. He who silently adores the Self of all creatures lives in that Self: and It is eternal peace,” writes a Master of Wisdom. Mutual love—to love and be loved in return—is the most common expression of love, which brings happiness that comes and goes. Earthly love means attachment to persons, but

that love can and must become stepping stone to higher love. “For even as love crowns you, so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth, so is he for your pruning,” writes Kahlil Gibran. “Love is an Initiation,” says the sage in *From the Book of Confidences*, and adds, “Never can true Love be ministrant where [there] is exclusiveness—where happiness is sought for two alone; never where [there] is sense of possession, be it of body, mind, soul, of house or wealth.”

Our affinities save and also damn us. Often, past affinities may draw us into friendship with a person, who could be the cause of our downfall. On the other hand, through past affinities, one person can help to hasten the spiritual progress of another. The article, “Living the Higher Life” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 34*) mentions that in case of two people who might have shared a deep bond in the past life, such as that of husband and wife, in some subsequent life, when they are born together under karma, the affinities may not develop *at the same time* in both him and her, so that the attractions for him are developed in her, while the attachments for her are not developed in him at the same time, then the result might be that she pines for him, and sends her passionate darts. If the arrows do not kindle corresponding passion in him, then for the time being they frustrate his achievements in other directions. That appears to be the case in the above story, wherein the woman is shown the vision that her passion or love tinged with personal desire, for the man she loves, seems to have proved hindrance in his higher life, impeding his higher aspirations. The vision induces her to sacrifice her intense but personal love so that he could be free to live the higher life.

We can purify our desires, step by step, beginning with killing out the desire for the things of matter, since these can be enjoyed only by the separated personality. The second step is to overcome subtler desires such as those for power, knowledge, happiness, fame and even love, when passion is transformed into compassion, developing a universal love for all that lives and breathes.

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

ALTRUISM—TRUE AND FALSE—I

THE THIRD CHAPTER of the *Gita* deals with the subject of Action, the teachings of which we should be able to apply in our own life, for we are all interested in action. The title of the Discourse is “Union with Action,” or “Karma-Yoga.” Before taking up the question of Karma or action, we should recall the propositions already explained by Krishna in the previous discourse. Krishna started by telling us that there is One Universal, Impersonal Principle called the Universal Self, or the One Self, which is to be found in all objects in this manifested world, and also in man himself. Further, Krishna explains that this One Self shows itself differently in different objects. How, in the world of phenomena, it showed aspect after aspect, and presented the aspect of the conception of differentiation, but how man, by attending to his own duty in the right way, by uniting himself to the One Self in his own heart, and detaching himself from the lower nature, can attain to the knowledge of that Self. The key-note that has already been struck is within that phrase, “the rightful performance of action,” and that such a performance of action, which is really the performance of duty in the proper way, will give man the knowledge of the Self. This is the idea that Krishna is going to elucidate for us in this discourse.

He reminds us of the fact that we all must engage in action, whether we want to or do not want to. We are involuntarily urged to act. Therefore, the renunciation of action cannot mean that we are to stop acting, for that is absolutely impossible, as long as we exist, and we have already learned that we are immortal beings. Therefore, trying to be inactive on one particular plane does not imply that we can stop acting. On the contrary, it clearly indicates that the very effort we are making to keep ourselves inactive on one plane must mean intense activity on another plane. Therefore, since it is absolutely necessary to act, and impossible to refrain from action, we must realise that it is through action that our own salvation can

be gained. At first this seems a very simple proposition, but it really conveys a tremendous spiritual signification. For, if we have to perform action, then we must find the mode of action, the particular means whereby our action can lead us to the knowledge of the Soul. We must find out how our action is going to make of us free, emancipated beings, instead of binding us to the phenomenal world through the idea of separation.

The first fundamental concept is that we all have to act. But as Krishna explains, each one acts according to his own nature, and since all human beings are different in their natures, all human beings may find different modes of action. There are then, different kinds or types of action, and in this discourse Krishna really describes for us three definite types of action and evaluates the value of those types of action.

The first type of action is rooted in the desire nature, and which is energised by that principle of *Kama*, desires and passions, and that action, as Krishna showed in the last discourse, leads man to his own destruction. If man turns only to the inclinations of his senses, he will find arising of desire in his own nature. If we have allowed the senses to go on their own, and if our desires have tried to follow the senses, then we have anger in our own being and after we have encountered anger or *krodha*, we find that the next step on the downward path is delusion, and after delusion we find we lose our memory of past things and knowledge, and after that the loss of *Buddhi* and hence the spiritual discrimination, which leads to complete destruction.

Arjuna asks once more the same eternal question, “What is it in man that propels him to commit certain actions against his own will, and Krishna has to explain once again that it is this fire, *Kama* or desire which envelops everything in this universe and which is very difficult for us to overcome, for, it not only surrounds our senses and lower appetites, but it goes further. It can really attack and overcome our thinking principle, our reason, and then the principle of discrimination or intuition, and therefore, the result is that it clouds

the Lord in the body; then Krishna gives the remedy.

Since the whole trouble in following that *kamic* action starts with the senses, we begin at the very outset by *restraining the senses*. As explained in verse 41 of the Discourse, we should begin by controlling our senses and then slowly and gradually purify our nature, then, we will not act in terms of our lower desires and inclinations. We will not do the action because we like that particular action, nor try to run away from a particular action we dislike, but we will act in terms of duties. Krishna says, perform those duties which are necessary, those which are your own *dharma*, without any concern whatsoever for the results that will accrue from the performance of this duty, and this gives us the second type of action. It is the performance of duty.

The first is the *kamic* action, following the inclinations of our own lower self. The second is *dharma*, or the strict performance of duty. Then we act without any concern as to our own desire nature, as to the reward that will come from this particular duty. But here we encounter immediately a tremendous difficulty, for the question comes up, how can we recognize duty? It is well to say each one must begin by performing his own duties, but we all know it is very difficult to distinguish what is duty and what is not duty in our own life. The first advice of Krishna is comparatively easy to follow, for from past experiences we have ourselves acquired the knowledge and understanding that if we will follow the lower tendencies, those tendencies rooted in the lower pole of our own nature, we will encounter passion and delusion. We all know through experience that there are certain things fundamentally wrong. We call them our own weaknesses, and we recognise them, hence we can very easily begin to fight them with the understanding, and if we do not fight them, we are going to find our own destruction. That is the first struggle that man has to encounter in his own life, the fight between the ideal and the tendency that he finds rooted in his lower nature, the tendency which impels him to commit, over and over again, the mistakes he has already recognized as being mistakes, as being

weaknesses and blunders.

Now the recognition of our own weaknesses is, of course, the first step before we engage in this fight in an intelligent way, but it does not mean it is going to be an easy one. We find that since we have allowed the tendencies to grow strong and take deep root, the moment we want to fight them and avoid following the old tendencies and inclinations, they become, so to speak, stronger, they come up to the surface, and we simply have to fight and fight until we kill those tendencies in ourselves. It is then, a tremendous fight, but at the stage of development at which we have arrived, we are all in a position to recognize, appreciate and therefore, to guide in our own life intelligently. But when it comes to the second proposition, not only to avoid the *kamic* actions, but to begin to perform action in terms of duty, then we really are puzzled. There are certain things we know are necessary, those we know must be our duties in this particular incarnation, but there are so many things that appear as duty, and yet we are not sure they are duties, and then we find out after committing mistakes that after all they were our duties. At this confusing stage, we find that things and problems present themselves as conflicts of duties.

Technically speaking, from the point of view of metaphysical truth, there cannot be such a thing as conflict of duty, and therefore, there must be some way whereby we can find out what is our duty. Krishna says, there is a way, and we can all apply that very rule and begin to live the spiritual life whatever our state in evolution, or the condition in life. Now what is the simple rule? Krishna says, perform those things that you do recognize as your duties, and all of us have certain things in our life which we know to be our duties—begin to perform these duties in a particular fashion. If you follow that particular method of discharging your obligation, you will find that knowledge, spiritual understanding, is going to grow spontaneously, from within yourself, and that which appears today as confused, is going to be very clear indeed; you are going to get understanding, correct perception, and complete intuition on the

problems and puzzles of your own life today.

Now that peculiar fashion whereby we can perform our duty and gain knowledge to perceive our further duty, to understand the next step in our life is the offering of these duties as sacrifice, instead of performing our duties simply because we have understood that they must be performed, instead of having towards these duties a sense of obligation which makes us feel it is irksome and burdensome task. Let us try to perform these duties in a cheerful spirit and attitude of mind, *i.e.*, as offerings on the altar of our own Higher Self. And if we perform the duties that we know and recognize as sacrifices, in course of time, we are going to have further enlightenment. Our own principle of *Buddhi*—spiritual discrimination—is going to throw its light on our path, and we will recognize clearly and definitely all things that today confuse us. That is indeed a simple thing that all of us can begin to apply and practice, and it is the only way to gain spiritual understanding, the only way that we possess to gain knowledge, not through extraordinary study and extraordinary intellectual ideas on subjects, but by the performance of our duties as sacrifices to the divine within.

Thus, there are three classes of action, the three modes of action that Krishna expounds in this Discourse: the action rooted in the principle of desire and passion, *i.e.*, the *kamic* action; the action which is the performance of duty for the sake of duty, as an obligation, and that we call *dharma*-action, the action that has *dharma* as its motive; and then the third class of action, which is sacrificial action, or *Yagna*-action, the motive of which is sacrifice, and, of course, spiritual sacrifice implies joyful sacrifice.

Let us remember that the first type of action, the *kamic* action should be entirely eliminated from our own lives, though the task may be difficult at first to follow. It is wrong to think that by gratifying the lower desires we finally get satiated. The only way to get any results from our *kamic* nature is to kill out, slay, all those *kamic* propensities by fighting them until they are eradicated, and transmuted. We know that if we have given way to one or another

weakness of our character, such as impatience or irritability, without trying to fight, it is going to upset us to such an extent that we will not be able to perform the very simple duties of life. Hence *kamic* action must be eliminated, else they will lead us to inner destruction.

The other two types, *Dharma* and *Yagna* (sacrificial) actions, should go hand in hand, for the spiritual principle we are to apply is performance of duties as sacrifice. Further knowledge will come to us and we shall be able to see other duties in front of us, and again, because we have further knowledge and see these duties, they will again be offered as sacrifice, and further enlightenment will come, and so the two go step by step, and hand in hand, and the performance of the one will help in the performance of the other. Both are necessary and should not be separated. *Dharma* should be performed as *yagna* action, and then no confusion will exist.

These three types of action or threefold classification in terms of action can be expressed as bad actions, good actions and spiritual actions. The Student of Theosophy distinguishes as much between the good and the spiritual action, as the ordinary man does between the evil and the good one. The evil one is rooted in *kama*, the lower nature, and takes man away from his Higher Self into the world of delusion, separation, and division. The good action is rooted in the idea of the performance of duty, or fulfilment of one's obligations. But unless we begin to offer those duties as sacrifices, we cannot gain spiritual merit. The good man performing his "duties as duties," is very different from the spiritual man performing those self-same duties, because the duties do not change, but it is the attitude in which they are performed which changes.

(To be concluded)

THAT man alone is wise who keeps the mastery of himself.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

AGNI—THE GOD OF FIRE

I

THE TRINITY of the modern Pantheon, namely, Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Shiva, the destroyer are but reflection or copy of the original Vedic trinity, Agni, Vayu and Surya, who respectively preside over earth, air and sky. Agni is the God of fire in the Vedas, the oldest and the most revered of the Gods in India. Agni is not only one of the three great deities, but also all the three at once, because Agni represents triple aspect of fire, which are described as terrestrial fire, the atmospheric fire and the heavenly fire. In fact, Agni is said to appear in the heaven as the sun, in the atmosphere as lightning or air (*Vayu*) and on earth as terrestrial fire. Fire is one of the most ancient and the most sacred objects of Hindu worship. Agni is considered to be the mediator between men and gods, and the protector of men and their homes, and a witness of their actions. He conveys to the gods the prayers and oblations of their worshippers, and brings down the gods from the sky to the place of sacrifice. Hence, Agni is invoked at all the solemn or auspicious occasions, such as, marriage, death, etc. Agni is one of the most prominent of deities of the Vedas. More hymns are addressed to him than to any other deity.

In art, Agni is portrayed as a red man with two flaming heads, one benevolent and the other malevolent. Benevolent fire nourishes, gives warmth and light, and sustains life. In its benevolent aspect Agni is welcome in every home. Before the emergence of Siva as one of the Hindu Trinity, Agni was the god of destruction, and was feared and revered by the worshippers.

There are various accounts of the origin of Agni. He is considered to be the son of Brahma, and then he is named, Abhimani. He is considered to be a son of Dyaus and Prithvi. When he is considered to be the son of rishi Kasyapa and Aditi, he becomes one of the Adityas. In later writings he is described as a son of Angiras, the king of the Pitris, or ancestors of mankind. Agni is known by many

names, such as, *Chagaratha* or “he who rides on a ram”; Vahini, or “he who receives the burnt sacrifice”; *Vitihotra* or “he who sanctifies the worshipper” and *Saptajivha* or “he who has seven tongues.” He is also called *Vaiswanara*, the son of *Viswanara*, the Sun.

The Secret Doctrine (I, 126) mentions planetary spirits, as the informing spirits of the stars and planets. They not only rule the destinies of men, but also, various departments in Nature. In the Hindu exoteric Pantheon they are the guardian deities who preside over eight points of the compass, or eight cardinal points, and are called *Loka-Palas*. They are the supporters, rulers and guardians of the world. Thus, Indra presides over East, Yama over South, Varuna over West and Kuvera over North. *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion* by John Dowson mentions that Agni is considered to be one of the eight *Loka-Palas*, being the guardian of south-east quarter or *agneya disha*.

Agni appears on earth as terrestrial fire, which constitutes one of the five elements or *Panchamahabhutas*. There are four major elements—earth, water, air and fire, which are made up of tiny “lives” or elementals. These elementals are called “nature spirits.” The elementals are the soul of the elements. Thus, we have *Gnomes* or earth-elementals, *Undines* or water-elementals, *Sylphs* or air-elementals, and *Salamanders* or fire-elementals. Our body is made up of *panchmahabhutas* or five elements. As a result, not only our physical body but also the astral body is made up of “lives” or “nature spirits.” Corresponding to astral body in man there is astral light in nature, which continually influences us. Eliphas Levi, a Kabbalist, points out that pregnant women are, more than others, under the influence of the astral light, which assists in the formation of the foetus (*Isis*, I, 395). In the article “Kabbalistic Views on Spirits,” H.P.B. quotes the views of Paracelsus and Eliphas Levi, who suggest that the astral currents entering the body of the pregnant woman carry with them various types of elementals and help in the formation of the astral body of the child.

At the birth of a child, these elementals influence the four

temperaments in a child. Thus, the element of the gnomes predominates in melancholy persons; the salamanders in the sanguine; the undines, in the phlegmatic; the sylphs, in the giddy and bilious. In *The Theosophist* (August 1883), H.P.B. gives an explanation of the invulnerability to fire, of western and Hindu mediums, who can handle burning coals, red-hot iron and walk through the beds of blazing fire, unscathed. She points out that some of these mediums are not only able to handle fire without being injured but also are known to have laid burning coals on the heads of non-mediums, as also on paper and books, without injuring the person or property. This is because the medium contains an unusual proportion of fire-elementals in their constitution. Thus:

The explanation...is that the fire-proof individual is a medium for these fire elementals, and contains in himself an unusual proportion of Salamandrian properties, the result of an abnormal combination of elemental forces in his foetal development. Normally, a human being contains the elementals of all the four kingdoms in almost equal proportions, any slight preponderance of one or the other determining the so-called “temperament.”

In the body, Agni is represented by the eyes and by the digestive fire. In the *Gita*, Shri Krishna says, “Becoming the internal fire of the living, I associate with the upward (*prana*) and downward breathing (*apana*), and cause the four kinds of food to digest” (*Gita*, XV). The Fifteenth Chapter of the *Gita* speaks of the Supreme Spirit which abides in the body of living beings as *Vaishvanara*. The Eternal Reality is expressed as all-pervading Life, which manifests Itself as the “digestive fire” (*Vaishvanara*), which assimilates the food that we eat. The four kinds of food include the food that is masticated, swallowed, sucked and licked. This fire digests all kinds of food—vegetarian, non-vegetarian, cooked and uncooked. There are five *pranas* or vital energies, which are the external agents for the performance of any action. They are like ambassadors of the Ultimate Reality. The food that we eat is digested by the action of

five *pranas*, namely, *Prana*, *Apana*, *Samana*, *Vyana* and *Udana*.

The digestion of food takes place in the stomach (*jathar*) and in Ayurveda the fire in the stomach is called digestive fire or *jathar-agni*. In addition, there are thirteen other *agnis* that work together in the digestive process. First, the food is metabolized by the main digestive fire, which breaks down the food. Next it is metabolized by the five elemental fires located in liver (*bhut-agnis*), which help to screen toxins and ensure that the food is transformed into healthy body tissue, and finally seven *dhatu-agnis*, located in the seven tissues, help transform the food into their respective tissues. When we eat food, it is converted into the *rasa* (nutritive fluid) and from there it is transformed into *rakta* (blood plasma), and in a sequence converts to *mamsa* (muscle), *meda* (fat and connective tissues), *asthi* (bone), *majja* (bone marrow), and finally, *shukra* (male and female reproductive fluid).

The digestive fire could be in four possible states: *Sama-agni* which reflects balanced metabolism, *Vishama-agni* reflecting irregular metabolism, *tikshna-agni* reflecting hyper-metabolism, and *manda-agni* reflecting slow metabolism. According to Ayurveda, a *dosha* is one of the three bodily humors that make up one’s constitution. The names of the three *doshas* are *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. Each *dosha* is a synergy of two *Mahabutas* (elements) and interestingly enough—each receives its specificity from these elements. The elements—ether and air combine to form *vata*. Fire and water form *pitta*, while water and earth constitute *kapha*. *Vata*, the first *dosha*, when out of balance will give rise to *vishama agni*, and cause an erratic digestion, creating irregularity in appetite, indigestion, etc. *Pitta*, is the *dosha* that creates *tikshna agni* when out of balance. It causes an excessive release of acids and enzymes and can cause hyperacidity, gastritis, diarrhea, and eventually lead to ulcers or colitis. *Kapha* is the *dosha* when out of balance, can cause *manda agni* or a dull and slow digestion.

Chhandogya Upanishad says that the food that is eaten is divided into three parts: Its grossest part becomes waste; its middle part

becomes flesh; its lightest part becomes Mind, and hence when the disciple was made to remain without food for fifteen days, he could not remember any of the teachings. Likewise, waters that are drunk are divided into three parts: The grossest part becomes waste; the middle part becomes blood; the lightest part becomes vital Breath.

The sage also explained that our hunger and thirst is the result of the action of three elements—earth, water and fire in our body. We feel hungry because the physical food is dissolved or liquefied by the element of water and its essence is absorbed in the system. We feel thirsty because the water (element) in our system is absorbed or dried up by the fire element within us. Thus, food is liquefied by water, and water is absorbed by fire, and what is left is energy. Thus, the root of what one eats is in the Waters, while the root of what one drinks is in the Radiance or Fire, and the root of Fire is in the Real Self. There is an absorption of the grosser element of the earth into the water element, the water element into the fire element and the fire element into the ultimate Reality which is called *Sat*.

Though fire burns both pure and impure things, it is itself not polluted. This is conveyed by a story in the *Mahabharata*. A woman named Puloma was betrothed to a demon; Sage Bhrigu, seeing her beauty, married her according to Vedic rites, and carried her off secretly. The demon, by the aid of Agni, discovered the bride's hiding-place, and took her away to his home. For rendering the demon this assistance, Bhrigu, cursing Agni, said, "From this day, you shall eat everything, pure and impure, indiscriminately." Agni asked Bhrigu why he had cursed him, seeing that by speaking the truth he had simply done his duty; and reminded him that "when a person is asked a question, and intentionally speaks what is false, he, with seven preceding and seven succeeding generations, is cast into hell; and that he who withholds information is equally guilty." Agni protested saying that the curse was unfair and disappeared from every hearth. The cosmos went dark and cold. Brahma coaxed him back. Bhrigu consented to modify his curse, by saying that Agni, no matter what he burned, would remain pure and that

everything he burned, both pure and impure, would be purified. Thereupon, Agni returned back.

In this connection we may recall that Parsees, who hold fire to be sacred, object to the Hindu method of burning the dead body, as corrupting the purity of fire. However, in the scientific method, the flame does not touch the body, as the body is placed in a retort, like a clean oven with bronze doors. The gas furnaces heat the air to a very high temperature of 2800 degrees, which carries off as gaseous substance, everything except bones. This dessication of the body by intense heat is in line with the ancient Iranian practice, of exposing the corpse to the direct rays of the sun to bring about the drying-up process (*The Theosophical Movement*, November 1933). Occultism for its own reasons favours cremation. H.P.B. wrote:

There are occult reasons why cremation should be an imperative necessity, and all Theosophists should gladly welcome and hasten the day when this "purification by fire" will be an accomplished fact. (*Lucifer*, May 15, 1890)

There are five kinds of Agni (fire)—*Kala-agni* (the fire of time), *Ksudha-agni* (the fire of hunger), *Sita-agni* (the cold fire), *Kopa-agni* (the fire of anger) and *Jnana-agni* (the fire of knowledge). Fire destroys or burns away the fuel to ashes so also anger, time, and knowledge figuratively reflect the destructive aspect of fire. The fire of anger, as the *Gita* suggests, ultimately leads to loss of memory, discrimination and loss of all. We are all afraid of time, which snatches away things and people most dear to us. Krishna too, says, "I am Time matured, come hither for the destruction of these creatures" (*Gita*, XI). The Fourth Chapter of the *Gita* says that there is no purifier in the world to be compared to knowledge, which reduces all actions to ashes, as when actions are performed with understanding or knowledge, they make a person free from their binding force.

(To be continued)

LEARNING TO SERVE PATIENTLY

BECAUSE of the Law of Attraction-Repulsion or Karma, many receive the privilege of contacting Theosophy. Among such, there are only a few whose interest outlasts their initial curiosity. Fewer still have the courage and the perseverance to endure the impact of the living power of Theosophy, and make of that power the vital energizing factor in their own lives.

This fact is neither surprising nor discouraging to the convinced students of Theosophy, for they realize that such a phenomenon is inevitable in *Kali Yuga*, when there is a decline of virtue and an insurrection of vice and injustice. Soul-Wisdom does not appeal to the head-learner who holds fast to a belief in the supremacy of the mind. The Good does not attract the hedonist, who aims at experiencing sense delight. No wonder that “among thousands of mortals a single one perhaps strives for perfection.” Earnest students of Theosophy who strive for perfection are only a handful; they repeat the old question: “O Teacher, what shall I do to reach to Wisdom? O Wise One, what, to gain Perfection?” They also repeat to themselves the answer: “Seek this Wisdom by doing service, by strong search, by questions, and by humility.” In the spiritual life, we live by principles and rules of the Wisdom-Religion in contradistinction to the ordinary life in which desire-impulses play with the mind and the heart. The mind has to be developed through strong search and questioning, the heart by service and humility.

Service is the first requisite. But what kind of service shall the student-server engage in? Is it monetary charity in the material world, or feeding the hungry, or sharpening the dull or ignorant brain? *The Voice of the Silence* teaches (p. 14): “Let thy Soul lend its ear to every cry of pain, like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun.” The pains of fellow-men seen in our own walk of life have to be relieved, not indirectly through the agency of others, but directly, through personal exertion energized by personal interest in the welfare of those who suffer. This is our duty.

But, how shall we determine that the cry is the cry of pain? How to distinguish between the real cry of pain and the cry of feigned fatigue and hunger, of self-pity, a laziness masquerading as illness, of greed? What is real pain with which the candidate for light has to attune his being? Through personal interest in the sufferer we learn this art of attunement with human suffering. But discernment comes slowly and the cry of the great pain is drowned in the tumult of noises made by selfishness, greed and craving.

“Humanity’s great pain” is the womb of all pains of body, of mind and of morals. To remove that pain is the true service of humanity. It is the bread of Wisdom which relieves the wretched desolation of the suffering personality. Therefore, real service is to “Point out the ‘Way’”:

Give light and comfort to the toiling pilgrim, and seek out him who knows still less than thou; who in his wretched desolation sits starving for the bread of Wisdom and the bread which feeds the shadow, without a Teacher, hope or consolation, and—let him hear the Law. (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 40)

But in order to teach, we ourselves must first learn. The aspirant has to learn to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting, to distinguish between sense-delight and soul-bliss, to separate head-learning from soul-Wisdom. To doctor the ills of mankind we must *learn to diagnose correctly*. Therefore the mind must be activated to search strongly and question freely, and to listen with sensitivity.

To seek knowledge we must possess the spirit of enquiry and must search diligently and with patience. The student of Theosophy has a great deal to learn from the example of the modern scientist so ardent and thorough in his search for facts. He questions nature repeatedly and when the answer is wrested from her he questions again. Books of genuine Theosophy, from the Vedas thousands of years old to *The Secret Doctrine*, are like Nature. They contain answers to all problems and the reward of the seeker-questioner is

commensurate with his ardour and perseverance. But unlike the modern scientist, for the student of Theosophy the instruments for acquiring spiritual knowledge are within himself and therefore his ardour and perseverance have to be applied not only in study but also in personal living, in purifying the mind with which he seeks and the tongue with which he questions. Again, unlike the modern scientist, the student of Theosophy is not seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge but for its beneficence to others, for the moral upliftment of all. As he overcomes self-deception he also overcomes the deceptions of the world, and thus he is able to render soul-service.

Humility is an important requisite. "Be humble, if thou would'st attain to Wisdom." Humility enables the student-server to come out from among the crowd of head-learners and join the band of the Elect, who are learners of "The Doctrine of the Heart."

The greatest foe to humility is the feeling that one possesses something that is absent elsewhere. Desire for name and fame is ensouled by this feeling. Desire to shine by the light of one's own knowledge is also ensouled by this feeling. We have to cultivate the attitude that arises from the assimilation of the truth that there is nothing new under the sun. Even the human errors, crimes and sins of today are but repetitions and reflections. The sum-total of Truth and Wisdom is what it was, and so it will ever be. Humility distils the essence of Wisdom from the flowers which grow in the garden of Theosophy. Some wear the flowers for a while and then throw them away. Others learn the art of distilling this essence and, preserving their fragrance, say, "Thus have I heard," in practicing Theosophical ethics and in spreading Theosophical philosophy.

When by service, by strong and questioning search, by humility, one has lived in the company of the Holy Writ, the Record of Theosophy, the Wise who see the essence of things, communicate the secrecy of that Wisdom which is incommunicable save from the lips of the *Guru* to the ear of the *chela*. Such was the promise made in the days of old, and it works its miracle even today.

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: It is said that the pursuit of astral sciences, such as, alchemy, involves dealing with the elementals and other entities, and hence carries the danger of psychic and moral degeneration. But if the study and practice of Alchemy and the like has behind it some harmless motive, such as, the scientific attitude of search for occult truths, would it still bring about degeneration of the seeker after knowledge?

Answer: We may attempt to understand this in the light of very little information available in our literature regarding elementals. Concerning the nature of elementals we are told that they are centres of force or energy, without moral character or tendencies, but which are acted on by human thought, which endows them with form and intelligence. In India they are described as *Gandharvas*, *Devas*, and so on. They are unconscious, automatic and photographic. Mr. Judge mentions that in the earlier ages when humanity was comparatively pure and innocent, the elemental world was more friendly to man because it had not yet received unfriendly impressions. But as man became more and more unfriendly to the creation around him, the elemental world began to be influenced in the like manner, and started paying back by reacting to the harmful thoughts and actions of humanity. The elemental world, being unconscious force reacts upon humanity exactly as humanity acts towards it. Hence, as long as mankind does not cultivate brotherly feelings towards the whole of creation, the elementals would lack the impulse to act for the benefit of mankind, writes Mr. Judge.

In the light of the above, it appears that even if it is a purely

scientific pursuit, dealing with the elementals is likely to produce adverse effect. In more than one place it is stated that dealing with elementals of certain class is dangerous, unless one is protected, or is an Adept. For instance, Mr. Judge mentions that in case of “consulter with familiar spirits,” there is communication with powerful nature-spirits (elementals) of either fire or air element, which are sometimes friendly and sometimes unfriendly. They use inner senses of a person and make available to him knowledge which he cannot acquire in ordinary way. More or less, it is like a hypnotizer paralyzing the physical body and awakening the inner man. However, these nature-spirits are devoid of conscience, and they mainly act on and influence the lower nature of man, and hence, over a period of time, the moral qualities of that person are paralyzed (*W.Q.J. Series No. 21*, pp. 6-7). In *Isis Unveiled* (I, 495-96) H.P.B. mentions four classes of wicked elemental spirits which are used by sorcerers for the purpose of taking revenge. These vicious elemental spirits can strike men and cattle with sudden illness and death. Mr. Judge mentions that when an Adept performs phenomena it is with the aid of, or by disturbing the elementals, and when these elementals are excited they precipitate here and there, and enter the sphere of the unprotected persons, producing troubles, by accelerating the karmic consequences (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 145). It appears that unless guided and protected by the *Guru*, it is better not to deal with elementals.

Though clear conscience and purity of motive and character could act as a shield against evil influences from the elemental world, one cannot be sure of the character of someone who is considered to be “truly good and conscientious man.” Though initially, one may start with harmless motive, that motive can degenerate, especially if the person begins to discover some of the secrets of controlling the elementals. “Masters already know the characters of all who in any way approach to a knowledge of these forces, and They always judge whether such a man is to be aided or prevented,” writes Mr. Judge. In fact, the Masters preserve and prevent the secrets of

the elemental world from being known, because it could be misused, in the absence of absolute purity and altruistic aim. For instance, it is stated that there are elemental beings guarding the treasures, and if someone were to know the secret of controlling the elementals—which could be communicated by sound and colour—then they would use that knowledge to get large sums of money or gold, which would be used for living a luxurious life. It is quite likely that a section of occultists keep a watch on the section of people who are engaged in the direction of research, and then the moment any mind(s) is found to come close to the secret regarding elementals, they might throw pictures of some social reform or some other invention before the eyes of this person so as to side-track him. Or, they might throw his mind into a rut. Masters are not working to make known the knowledge concerning the elemental world, but to make humanity more humane and altruistic.

Question: Theosophical philosophy seems to suggest that doing the work we dislike to do helps in eliminating the personal element, in clearing up of Karma and in clarification of the Sheaths. What does it imply?

Answer: Whatever comes to us contains in it a lesson for us. It contains in it the very thing we need; whether it seems hard, troublesome, or pleasant. It is by doing what comes to us under Karma that we can get rid of personal element. Likes and dislikes arise from personality. Mr. Judge tells us that the essence of eradicating personal element lies in doing the things we dislike to do; it helps in developing “spiritual will.” There is the personal will of a strong-willed or stubborn person, moved by intense personal desires for bringing about wished for ends. But development of *Spiritual Will* requires that we willfully accept what life brings to us without a murmur. When we are ready to sacrifice the personal nature, it loosens its hold on the higher, so that all the power and force of the divine nature becomes available.

An example is given to show how the personal nature may be starved by doing what we dislike to do. If we were planning to read

some book of our interest on a Sunday afternoon, and if a person, known to be a bore, comes along to speak to us, we may try to avoid meeting him or grumble because we do not like to drop the plan we have made, and we do not like to be bored by such a person. Both these are purely personal considerations, and ideally, we should be willing to drop the book, at once, and attend to that person.

As to the “clearing up of karma and clarification of sheaths,” we can refer to the article “Sheaths of the Soul.” There are seven sheaths of the soul through which our soul has to work, two of which are physical body and astral body. All these sheaths are made up of lives or atoms, and through them the soul receives sensations and also transmits messages to the body. Sensations and impressions created by our thoughts, feelings and actions are stored in the sheaths. When the soul incarnates it attracts back to itself these physical and astral atoms. If the person had indulged in psychic development without proper training, those atoms are drawn to the Ego, and give birth to an irresponsible medium. Likewise, in some life if a person was burnt, all the sheaths are so thoroughly impressed by that experience that in the next life he will instinctively stay away from fire; and we call this instinctive fear of fire. These sheaths need to be purified or clarified through right thoughts, feelings and actions. Through our likes and dislikes we give *kamic* impression to the atoms of the sheath. It appears that by doing the irksome work these atoms are cleaned and are ready to receive higher impulse.

When we dislike a person, a place or a piece of work, we create attachment by the opposite. When we dislike work we create a negative bond or attachment through dislike. Karmically, we will come across same or similar work till we learn to accept it without aversion or attachment. In doing a particular kind of work, some aspect of our nature is disciplined, and it brings to the surface some of the skills and faculties connected with that work, which were hitherto lying dormant.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Change is the only constant. “Can I be held responsible for the things I said or did 20 years ago? In some ways, I am a different person today. But in many significant ways, I remain the same,” writes Vinita Nangia. For those who seek to evolve, life and its experiences force to introspect and change, while the rest stand and stagnate. Though most of us change in looks, manner of dressing, etc., only a rare few undergo intrinsic change of mind and heart. It seems somehow easier to change from positive to negative, so that we hear of genial and gentle people becoming indifferent, as also, generous spirited becoming self-centred. It does require great effort to give up bad habit, and hence the instances of people changing from negative to positive are rare, and most of the time such transformation happens after a big shock or a momentous moment of self-assessment.

Such examples are rare but they are admirable and inspiring. We have several instances of the same. The mass destruction and death after the battle of Kalinga transformed Emperor Asoka from a conqueror and destroyer to a philanthropic administrator and spiritual propagator. There was similar soul-changing moment in the life of murderer-dacoit Ratnakar (Valiya Koli) that changed him into Valmiki Rishi, who wrote the epic *Ramayana*. Using will power and power of choice these people were able to wipe out their past identities, and superimpose new identities. The struggle involved in bringing about the transformation adds a depth and profundity which is missing in those who have always been good. Nobody is an irredeemable reprobate. Redemption is possible through repentance and readiness to change. The call and need for change must come from within to be effective and lasting. Life teaches us lessons which we should learn and internalize. However, the Tall Poppy Syndrome ensures that people pull down the redeemed, using their past to judge their present and predict their future. However, everyone has the right to turn over a new leaf, writes Vinita Nangia. (*Times Life*,

Sunday Times of India, June 22, 2015)

It is a profound truth that while we change in our personal aspect, we are unchanging in our spiritual aspect. In each one of us, there is a changeless “I,” which has been the witness to all the changes in conditions, ideas, feelings, from childhood up to the present time, and that is what gives us the sense of identity and continuity, from birth to death, and beyond.

Spiritual growth involves continual change, from one state to another. A good man must recognize the need and feel the urge to change. For those of us who are satisfied with our present state, spiritual life is irrelevant. More often than not, what jolts us out of this complacency is some painful experience. For others, however, such a turning point is sometimes brought about through extreme indulgence in pleasures, as sooner or later a point of satiation is reached, waking us up to higher possibilities. A man of virtue can fetter himself into one groove, “one changeless fashion of life in matter.” On the other hand, it is sometimes possible for a great sinner or an extremely sensuous person to reach complete degradation, and to rise, phoenix-like, to proportionately greater heights. People do change, and hence, we must be ready to take a fresh look at the person every time we meet him.

There is often resistance to change because it involves moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. But all growth involves change and pain. Change implies destruction and regeneration. Spiritual growth involves transformation of passion into compassion. If the aspirant resists change from fear of the suffering it entails, he invites stagnation. H.P.B. explains:

Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage. (*S.D.*, II, 475)

Change implies impermanence. The Buddha says that “All conditioned things are impermanent.” Things and pleasures of the

world are as fleeting as the scene or pattern formed in a kaleidoscope. One of the causes of suffering is impermanent nature of things.

Freedom has two sides, Freedom from and freedom to. You have to be free from any situations and attachments that tend to bring you down or hold you back. You have to be free to express your true potential. “As a child, I would ask myself why the adults around me were so complicated and weighed down by their own decisions....Much later, I understood that the sense of freedom of the seagulls was probably connected to their closeness to being as natural as possible....They were just being themselves,” writes Ken O’Donnell. Jean-Jacques Rousseau recommended going back to nature, saying, “Man is born free but is everywhere in chains.” One of the greatest paradoxes is that freedom is part of the original nature of the soul itself. Before we come to the physical dimension we have no thoughts and no relationship with anyone or anything. In that sense we are originally free.

Being mindful, wise and aware in the use of our thoughts, words and actions, and leading a morally pure life, we have to free ourselves from the wheel of birth and death. Jesus said that truth sets us free. “Being true to myself, to my deep inner qualities and to my relationship with the Divine, will automatically show me how to remain free while doing things and interacting with others,” writes Ken O’Donnell.

The Koran says that God gave intelligence to angels and appetites to animals, but to human beings he gave both intelligence and appetite. “We develop what we think is intelligence and get into all sorts of bondages. We obey our appetites and become prisoners of the objects of our senses. Like birds holding onto the branches of trees we pray to God to free us from whatever mess we have succeeded in creating for ourselves. The Divine looks back at us and says, the branches are not holding on to us, we are holding on to them,” writes O’Donnell. (*Purity*, June 2015)

We are all aware of political or economic or social freedom pertaining to the physical plane. Freedom in its true sense does not mean liberty to do what one wishes without any consideration for others; it is rather spiritual freedom, freedom from the bondage of a hundred chords of passions and desires and sense inclinations. In order to weave his freedom, man has to rise above the lower, personal nature, and has to cultivate the divine virtues so as to close up completely the three gates of hell, *kama-krodh-lobha*, or desire, anger and greed.

Lord Buddha tells us: “Ye who suffer! Know ye suffer from yourselves,” but adds, “Within yourselves deliverance must be sought; each man his prison makes.” This depends very much upon the individual’s understanding of his own nature, his relationship with the divine source as well as his knowledge of nature and nature’s laws. We have freedom of choice, but we have used that freedom to choose those things which have consent or approval of the majority around us. A really free man lives according to the dictates of his own conscience. A really free man has unfolded his divinity to such an extent that he is able to live with other men and women without interfering with their lives.

We can obtain freedom from the wheel of birth and death by renouncing *kartabhav* or doership, as also, interest in the fruits of action. We, then, cease to offer individual focus where the Karmic consequences could return.

Are the “philosopher’s stone” and “elixir of life” of the alchemists, myth or reality? The alchemists spent a good deal of time searching for “philosopher’s stone,” which is supposed to be a substance that would work as a catalyst in the conversion of base metals like lead into silver and gold. One of the aims of the practice of alchemy was also the production of the elixir of life or *amrita*. This was made with a little part of the philosopher’s stone in a powdered form and dissolved in liquid so that it could be drunk. It was supposed to

restore health of the body and confer immortality. Both “philosopher’s stone” and “elixir of life” were originally symbolic concepts for the means by which individuals might be united with the Divine.

Although the lay people of the time looked upon alchemy as magic, today we scoff at it for we know that lead and gold are elements whose atomic structures are different and no amount of chemistry can alter that. And yet, *Chrysopoeia* or the artificial production of gold is not a pseudoscience. Today scientists are able to create one element out of another with atom smashers, particle accelerators and nuclear reactors. According to *Scientific American*, more than 30 years ago nuclear scientists at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California succeeded in producing small amounts of gold from bismuth, which is a metallic element adjacent to lead on the periodic table. “If any alchemist were around now, it would probably be his turn to regard nuclear science as magic, writes Mukul Sharma.

The alchemists have not been able to produce the elixir of life either, but science has succeeded pretty well as far as anti-ageing is concerned. The average lifespan today is almost three times of that in the 15th or 16th centuries, and living longer implies slowing down of ageing process. As for immortality, the futurist Ray Kurzweil predicts that the next generation will probably be the last one to die, and seems to suggest that death is not inevitable. Science is not far away from creating full blown life, writes Mukul Sharma. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, June 22, 2015)

Philosopher’s stone and elixir of life are not just allegorical (applicable at spiritual level) but physical realities. The elixir of life can prolong life and renew youth. If the circulation of fluids in man is stopped, it can result in stagnation and death. If the alchemists had discovered some chemical compound that can keep these channels of circulation in the body unclogged, it should prevent decay and death. There are mineral springs, bathing in which is supposed to cure disease and restore physical vigour. Why should

there not be chemicals in the bowels of the earth that can restore youth and prolong life? Jennings asserts that the elixir was produced out of the secret chemical laboratories of nature by some adepts. (*Isis*, I, 503)

Alchemy is studied under three aspects—cosmic, human and terrestrial. Terrestrial alchemy is concerned with transmutation of base metals like lead into pure gold. There is alchemy going on in the bowels of the earth, bringing about transmutation of base metals into gold. Nature produces diamond out of charcoal under tremendous pressure. H.P.B. points out that once science agrees that the elements known to science existed in the beginning in the igneous mass, it is possible to accept the existence of a certain Universal Solvent [Alkahest], postulated by the alchemists, by which all composite bodies are resolved into the homogeneous substance from which they were evolved. It is this homogeneous substance which is called pure gold, or *summa materia*. The occultist-chemist, spurning the gold of the mines, gives all his attention and directs his efforts only towards transmutation of lower, animal nature into divine nature.

Interestingly, an article that appeared in *Sunday Times of India*, (June 1, 2008), mentions that on one of the walls of the Birla temple in New Delhi, there is an unusual inscription. It is an account of the alchemical experiment carried out in 1942 in the presence of many witnesses, of making 1 *tola* [11.66 grammes] of gold from 1 *tola* of mercury. A similar inscription in Varanasi's Birla temple, mentions an experiment of making 18 kilogram of gold from Mercury. The reason for keeping the inscription on the walls of Birla temple is to make people aware of the vast alchemical knowledge possessed by ancient Indian rishis, who knew the secret of converting mercury into gold. There are plenty of references in ancient Indian texts to this kind of alchemy. Researchers explain such conversions on the basis of low energy nuclear reaction, popularly known as cold fusion, *i.e.*, a nuclear reaction taking place at room temperature.