

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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ON PUBLIC OPINION

PUBLIC OPINION is variously defined as the opinion of the general public on matters which affect the whole community. It is the collective opinion of the people of a society or state on an issue or problem, and reflects desires, wants and thinking of the majority of people. In the formation of public opinion people's participation is in different capacities and in different degrees, and that in turn determines the value of public opinion. Thus, the English author William A. Mackinnon defined it as “that *sentiment* on any given subject which is entertained by the best informed, most intelligent, and most *moral* persons in the community.” He distinguishes between public opinion and “popular clamour,” which he described as “that sort of feeling arising from the passions of a multitude acting without consideration; or an excitement created amongst the uneducated; or amongst those who do not reflect, or do not exercise their judgment on the point in question.” John Locke considered that besides *divine* and *civil* law, man was subject to the law of opinion or reputation, which he considered to be of the highest importance, because dislike and ill opinion of others can force people to conform in their behaviour to social norms.

In the earlier times, kings used to disguise themselves and mingle with the lay people, to know public opinion about their governance. Alternatively, they sent their spies for that purpose. In *Ramayana* there is the well-known story of Lord Rama, who was in exile for

14 years, along with his wife and brother, during which Sita was abducted by the demon King Ravana, who held her against her will. Ravana had never touched Sita, as he was under the curse that forbade him to ever touch a woman against her will. On his return from the exile, Rama sent out spies to know what the citizens of Ayodhya said about their king. When Rama realized that many people in the kingdom were unhappy, because he kept Seeta as queen, as they questioned Sita's purity after her long abduction, he exiled his wife, sending her to the hermitage of a rishi, to put at rest the doubt of his subjects regarding the character of his wife. There are diverse views as to whether Rama was justified in sending away Sita. It is justified by the argument that an ideal king has to put the interest of his kingdom and his subjects above his own interest, and set an example of detachment and justice.

However, "Plato found little value in public opinion, since he believed that society should be governed by philosopher-kings whose wisdom far exceeded the knowledge and intellectual capabilities of the general population," writes W. Phillip Davison, a sociologist. In Book VI of his *Republic*, Plato gives out an allegory to describe democracy which is based on the voice of the people, or the opinion of the majority. There is a large and powerful animal, which, when pleased, is happy and calm, but when displeased is angry and enraged. The untameable beast is public or electorate. The keeper of the animal in Plato's allegory are the Sophists who only want power, and may be taken to represent the political administration. The keeper learns by observation, what makes the animal happy and what displeases it, and takes that which makes the animal happy to be good, and what makes it unhappy to be bad. It is evident that a statesman, who himself does not know what is *really* good and bad, but frames his policies taking the public opinion to be an indicator of good and bad, will be mistaken.

Whether it is politics, religion, science or moral values, it is not always conducive to be guided by "public opinion." The Latin phrase *Vox populi, vox Dei*, or "The voice of the people [is] the

voice of God," is an old proverb. But as H.P.B. points out, "In our day, *vox populi* (so far as regards the voice of the educated, at any rate) is no longer *vox dei*, but ever that of prejudice, of selfish motives, and often simply that of unpopularity" (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 239). It may be because "public opinion" is not necessarily formed by a group of individuals, who think and reason for themselves, but by the people who are guided and swayed by the constantly changing religious or scientific views. A Master of Wisdom calls public opinion, "a double-faced Janus." Elsewhere, H.P.B. compares public opinion with a kaleidoscope, "in which the combination of figures change continually according to the movement of the hand holding it." Further, she points out that:

The notion of what is possible or impossible, prudent or foolish; suitable or unsuitable, depends on some leaders of science and fashion who cause that public opinion to rotate like a weather cock. That which we believed yesterday, we no longer believe today; and in both instances merely because the wind was blowing from a different direction. Even contemporary science, or rather its high priests, taught in the Middle Ages, all that today they deny, and believe today in that which they ridiculed in those earlier days.

"Public opinion" when it is not educated or aroused in the right direction, is seen to become a negative force. Public opinion or the views of the majority must be examined critically and impartially rather than obeyed blindly. One of the potent forms of fear is the fear of public opinion, which is the fear of being different or going against the accepted norms. Very few people dare to express and follow their convictions, defying public opinion. We are afraid to be ourselves because of the fear of being judged and criticized. We are afraid of being ostracized and isolated. For instance, many women continue to remain in an abusive relationship, tolerating domestic violence, rather than seeking divorce, for the fear of, "what will people say?" But on the other hand, good moral behaviour is often out of fear of society. For instance, often it is fear of public opinion

which leads one to refrain from having an extra-marital affair, or to resist the desire to put old parents in an old age home.

H.P.B. has a lot to say concerning the power of public opinion in influencing the social and religious life. She seems to suggest that even an occultist cannot afford to underestimate the power of public opinion. “The Theosophists and Occultists stand arraigned by public opinion which still holds high the banner of inductive sciences” (*S.D.*, I, 298). The knowledge of modern scientists is limited, not only due to imperfection of instruments used, but also because of their unwillingness to probe beyond the material realm. And yet, our present generation is led away by prejudice and preconceptions, so that the minds steeped in scientific materialism are not quite ripe for the reception of Occult truths. The occult ideas are opposed, also when public opinion is composed of what H.P.B. terms, “individual mediocrity,” which she describes as an invisible, intangible, omnipresent, despotic tyrant, and a thousand-headed hydra. There are several instances of ignorant masses labelling certain women with psychic powers as “witches” and then burning them.

Receiving every new idea without analysis and reflection could be as fatal as *a priori* rejection. To arrive at truth, it is necessary to analyze and question the philosophy underlying a religion. Somehow there is a feeling that to question the scriptures or religious authority is to be irreverent towards your religion and that religion is a matter of beliefs and emotions in which there is no scope or need for enquiry, questions or seeking of explanation. It is out of moral cowardice, out of fear of public opinion that we are reluctant to step out of the circle of wrong religious ideas, and continue to follow the beaten track. Our strong opinions, faith and beliefs are seldom the result of independent, deep thinking. “It is rare that men regard a thing in either its true or false light, accepting the conclusion by the free action of their own judgment. Quite the reverse. The conclusion is more commonly reached by blindly adopting the opinion current at the hour among those with whom they associate,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 39)

We are often torn between our own honest convictions and the fear of public opinion, based on slander and idle rumour. A Master of Wisdom gives sage advice as to one’s attitude towards public opinion.

Do not despise the opinion of the world, nor provoke it uselessly to unjust criticism. Remain rather as indifferent to the abuse as to the praise of those who can never know you as you really are, and who ought, therefore, to find you unmoved by either, and ever placing the approval or condemnation of your own *Inner Self* higher than that of the multitudes. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 22*)

His advice is to look within, and pay heed to the voice of conscience, and be guided by that inner voice, and when necessary, have the courage to go against public opinion and follow the inner conviction, after much deliberation. In his essay on “Civil Disobedience,” Henry David Thoreau poses the question: Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? Otherwise, why are we endowed with conscience? This applies to social and religious life, as well. They say that the majority is not necessarily right, as Jesus was crucified by the majority!

But there is a positive aspect of public opinion or the voice of the people. H.P.B. describes it as popular instinct, and says that it was “unerring and just” when left untrammelled, by priest-craft or scientific materialism. Thus, “*Vox populi, vox Dei* was once true, however erroneous when applied to the present priest-ridden mob” (*Isis*, II, 536). The German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel described public opinion as containing both truth and falsehood, and added that it was the task of the great man to distinguish between the two. One of the ways of keeping alive some truths in the minds of people, was by means of myths, legends, folklore, and traditions. We know that certain norms and views are traditionally passed on from one generation to the other. Some of it is baseless superstition, while others are based on truth. For instance, in India, people are reluctant

to shake hands. This is not an idle fancy or superstition, because every person has a magnetic exhalation. A person may be in perfect physical health, but his exhalation may be harmful for others who are sensitive to such subtle influences. These magnetic exhalations are more intense from the eyes, palms, fingers, soles of the feet, etc. Hence the reluctance to shake hands. “There are, then, both true and false ‘traditions,’ and it is possible to establish philosophical criteria for distinguishing between them. H. P. Blavatsky added that the subtle work of learning how to distinguish between the two is a vital prerequisite to advanced discipleship. In an intelligent society... Tradition can become the ‘cement’ of mutual assistance on the path of the Higher Self.” (*Theosophy*, Vol. 41)

Theosophy has to fight intolerance, prejudice, ignorance, and selfishness, hidden under the mantle of hypocrisy. Theosophical associations have the duty to uncloak vice and to do their best to redress wrongs, and this must be done by means of lectures or through theosophical journals and publications, says a Master of Wisdom. The underlying idea is to form public opinion in the right direction. There are examples in history of almost miraculous feats achieved when public opinion is aroused in a certain direction. “Revolutionary public opinion had transformed 13 North American British colonies into the United States of America. In France, public opinion had inspired both the middle classes and the urban masses and had ultimately taken shape as the French Revolution... which seemed able to sweep aside one of the most-entrenched institutions of the time—the monarchy,” writes W. Phillips Davison. Likewise, H.P.B. said that to abolish slavery first of all it was necessary that public opinion should admit that it was shameful to profit by the labour of one’s neighbour. To emancipate woman, it is necessary that public opinion should admit that it is shameful to regard her as an instrument of pleasure (*Lucifer*, July 1890). Public opinion formed along right direction can be the most powerful instrument for change and transformation.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT HOMA—A MYTHICAL BIRD

ACCORDING to a story in the Vedas, there is a mythical bird called Homa, that lives in the sky and never touches the ground. It is said to lay its egg while flying. Because of the height, the egg keeps falling for many days. However, the egg hatches before hitting the ground, and the hatchling continues to fall. This goes on for many days, and in the meantime the chick opens its eyes. It realizes that if it hits the ground, death is inevitable. Realizing this it gives a shrill cry and begins to soar upward into the sky, to be with its mother. It keeps going in an upward direction and does not look behind. The Homa, being a mythical bird, must symbolise many things.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, the Homa bird symbolises certain special class of people and their intense sacrifice and detachment. There are rare individuals who are born with God-consciousness, or with the awareness of being potentially divine. They only aspire to realize God. They never get enmeshed in the world, being possessed of extraordinary dispassion and detachment.

The Homa bird symbolises human beings, and its story is the story of human evolution. Our eternal home is up there beyond the sky, which is free from ego, greed, darkness or enmity, and where there exists only overflowing love for each other. Unlike the bird we do not open our eyes till we hit the ground, and are bruised both mentally and emotionally. We do not acknowledge the divine spark within us, and therefore miss out soaring upward, and instead descend into chaos and destruction. Kabir says, “Just as sesamum seeds contain oil, and fire is hidden in flintstone, so also our hearts contain the divine consciousness.” Both, awareness and inner awakening is required to realise our potential, break the shell and fly back into the sky. To fly back to our source, we must acknowledge the presence of the divine spark within, by means of an inward quest, through inner flight, writes Pratiksha Apurv. (*The Speaking Tree*, May 12, 2019)

Humanity is an emanation from divinity on its return path thereto, says H.P.B. Man is not born in sin. Man has not descended from a pair of Adam and Eve, nor from the Apes. H.P.B. argues that if it is maintained that modern man has descended from Paleolithic man who was very primitive, a cave-dweller, etc., then such a man could never have evolved such extraordinary ideas that were possessed by the ancients, even after millions of years of thinking and intellectual evolution. It is very important to accept, at least intellectually, that man is inherently perfect and potentially divine. The seeds of spiritual knowledge, art, science, agriculture and architecture exist in the divine nature of man, burnt into imperishable centre of his consciousness, by the Divine Instructors, 18 million years ago. These exist as *innate* ideas. Why do we not show forth this knowledge? We may understand it by the analogy of light surrounded by a glass covering. For the light to shine forth we need to clean the soot on the glass. The light of wisdom is covered by layers or sheaths or vehicles, which need to be purified. All growth, for it to be permanent, must be from within, and must be the result of one's own effort. We do not add anything new from the outside. There is only *unfolding* of what is locked up within, as potential.

Egg symbolizes immortality. A hen lays an egg, and from the egg comes the chick, which grows into another hen. Thus, an egg potentially carries within it a chick and a hen. But in its exterior, such potentiality is not evident. Man, too, is capable of becoming a God, but matter is like the shell of an egg. The chick has to break it. We have to transcend the limitations of matter, to be reborn. Each spiritual aspirant has "at the first step to take himself steadily in hand and put the bit into his own mouth; no one else can do it for him," which means to wage a war not only against one's vices, but also against one's habits, beliefs, pet theories and one's likes and dislikes. Interestingly, in Sanskrit, *Dwija* means twice-born and it is also the name given to all oviparous animals and birds. The "laying of the egg" marks the *first* birth, and when the chick comes out by breaking open the shell, it marks the *second* birth.

H.P.B. explains that one striving after spiritual perfection must have *three* births: (1) physical, from his mortal parents; (2) *spiritual* through Initiation; and (3) his final birth into the world of spirit—at death (*Isis*, II, 565). Spiritual rebirth "is the spiritual birth-right of every human being endowed with soul and spirit, whatever his religion may be," writes H.P.B.

A Homa bird that soars higher and higher in the sky, without falling down, may be taken to represent a human being who has become Karmaless. *Light on the Path* describes the inner state of such a being, and says, "He simply lifts himself out of the region in which Karma operates. He does not leave the existence which he is experiencing because of that. The ground may be rough and dirty, or full of rich flowers whose pollen stains and of sweet substances that cling and become attachments—but overhead there is always the free sky. He who desires to be Karmaless must look to the air for a home; and after that to the ether." Ether or Akasa is the plane of divine ideations. To fly skyward, towards one's spiritual home, requires disconnection from the earthly attachments, but not by running away from life, whether it is painful or pleasurable. One has to practice detached-attachment, and learn to be *in* the world, but not be *of* the world.

Some renounce the world and seek refuge in monasteries, ashrams and mountain tops, deserting duties of life. The fact is that it is difficult to attain true renunciation of action without right performance of action. The real meaning of the renunciation of action is that he must continue to perform the actions, but renounce desire and concern for the fruits of them, as also the feeling of doership (*kartabhav*), only then he lifts himself out of the region where Karma operates. Even in ordinary activities like sleeping, breathing, speaking, etc., the attitude is, "I am doing nothing," because one is identified with one's divine nature, which is not touched by Karma. "Neither *Atma*, nor *Buddhi* are ever touched by Karma," writes H.P.B. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 133)

A variant of Vedic Homa bird is the Persian Huma bird. In several

variations of the Huma myths, the bird is said to be phoenix-like, consuming itself in fire, and rise anew from the ashes. For ages, the symbol of symbols for rebirth has been the phoenix. It is a mythical bird of great beauty which is fabled to live for 500 to 600 years, then to burn itself on a funeral pile and rise from the ashes to live through another cycle of years. It is said that when it burns itself to ashes, one glowing spark, signifying the immortal spirit, remains, and from it new life is evolved. The immortal spark undergoes pilgrimage in the drama of evolution. A Kabalistic aphorism describes this pilgrimage thus: “A stone becomes a plant, a plant an animal, an animal a man, and man a god.” We can see that such a great sweep of evolution must necessarily involve not just many years but many lives. H.P.B. compares the cycle of Sidereal year in the cosmos with the cycle of initiation in man. At the end of the cycle of Sidereal year, of 25,868 years, all the heavenly bodies return to the same relative position with respect to each other which they occupied at the beginning of that period. Likewise, at the end of cycle of initiation, the ego regains its pristine pure state, after passing through metempsychosis and reincarnation.

The Homa bird is also considered to be closely related to Persian Simurgh or Simorgh, as also with Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, because Garuda is described as the Indian *phoenix*, the emblem of cyclic and periodical time. According to *The Theosophical Glossary*, in the Iranian legends Simorgh is endowed with oracular powers and was the guardian of ancient Persian Mysteries. Exoterically, it stands as the symbol of the Manvantaric cycle.

Every symbol, says H.P.B. “is a many-faced diamond, each of whose facets not merely bears several interpretations, but relates likewise to several sciences” (*S.D.*, I, 305). It applies to the symbol of Bird. In the Chaldean and Hebrew system a “Bird” symbolised an Angel, a Soul, a Spirit or a Deva, and a “Bird’s Nest” was a symbol of Heaven, which in *Zohar* represented God’s bosom. (*S.D.*, II, 203)

SPIRIT OF CHARITY

THE IDEA of charity—*dana* in Sanskrit—is generally associated with the benevolent act of giving one’s money or conferring a material benefit from one’s own resources to another in need of help or to what one considers as a worthy cause. All religions prescribe giving a portion of one’s earnings in charity to the needy as an obligatory duty in life. It is said that charity earns religious merit to the benefactor. In America centres of learning of excellence and internationally renowned universities have been established by wealthy philanthropists, thus contributing greatly to the progress of the nation and cause of education in general. There are such benefactors elsewhere too. Altruism is natural to human heart once one is free from narrow loyalties and sectarian interests.

Strange as it may seem to some that not all charitable deeds are productive of good, either to the benefactor or to the beneficiary. Often much harm comes from charities wrongly exercised, especially such as are sectarian in spirit. It is a deep moral question, inextricably involved as it is with the Karmic Law. Given the truism that the social conditions, and nature, character and circumstances of lives of individual, good or bad as they may be, are the exact outcome of their thoughts and actions, it is imperative that we must understand the nuances of the moral principles of right action so that the charities that we might do are productive of only good.

Foremost thing we must bear in mind is that it is not actions *per se* which are productive of good or bad results but the motive which propels us to commit the act. For instance, if in the mind of the benefactor there lingers a desire for personal benefit flowing to him from his charitable deed, such as, expectation of religious merit or desire for recognition and reward, or public acclaim, it vitiates the spiritual quality of his gift. Even when the motive is pure, in absence of spiritual knowledge, or wisdom, harmful results may follow benevolent deeds. Wisdom is spiritual discernment. Evil that results from gifts and charities made with mixed motives, merely as a slavish

observance of social custom, or with indifference, or scornfully, is portrayed in the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

But that gift which is given with the expectation of a return from the beneficiary or with a view to spiritual benefit flowing therefrom or with reluctance, is of the *rajas* quality, bad and partaketh of untruth. Gifts given out of place and season and to unworthy persons, without proper attention and scornfully, are of the *tamas* quality, wholly bad and of the nature of darkness. (XVII, sloka 21 & 22)

Good intention alone will not do. We meet with instances in everyday life wherein regrettable results have followed charitable deeds done with best of intentions. Not infrequently do we also meet with instances in which help extended to another with good intention brought out ingratitude and vicious quality which was not apparent before in the beneficiary. Very often large sums of money, raised from public contributions, and spent on projects by philanthropic organizations, with the intention of helping a section of society, have not had the desirable effect on the beneficiaries themselves, or caused detrimental effect on another social sector, or, which is more commonly seen, money sticking to the hands it passes through in the chain of delivery of benefits, the end beneficiary receiving just a trickle, causing discontent. Charities thus wrongly made result in generating more evil than those they sought to mitigate, adding thereby to the burden of national Karma. What is lacking in all such instances is not so much a want of good intention as lack of wisdom. The keynote of the right kind and the proper way of doing charity with wisdom and purity of motive is clearly taught in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which we will do well to study and try to practice:

Those gifts which are bestowed at the proper time to the proper person, and by men who are not desirous of a return, are of the *Sattva* quality, good and of the nature of truth. (XVII, sloka 20)

Therefore, the value of the charities we may do, or gifts that we

may dispense, do not lie in the material worth of the same, or the quantity, but in the attitude of mind made pure by unselfishness, and guided by spiritual wisdom. Jesus lauded the humble gift of the widow's mite, which was all that she had, as having more value than those of the rich men who were casting into the treasury from out of their surplus as "offerings of God." (*Luke*, 21)

We will do well to always remember and try to put into practice the age-old wisdom on the question of gifts and charities so that harmful results are avoided in extending help to another, but is productive of best results, morally and spiritually. Theosophy teaches us that we must act individually, and not collectively. There should be sympathetic rapport with the beneficiary. It is,

Personal exertion for others; *personal* mercy and kindness; *personal* interest in the welfare of those who suffer; *personal* sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles and needs. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 242)

Theosophy teaches that whatever money or other gifts that we may give to the needy assumes a thousand-fold greater power and effectiveness by our personal contact and sympathy with the needy. We are shown that the feeling of *gratitude does more good to the man who feels it*, than to him for whom it is felt. Let us always keep in mind the noble Buddhist precepts, in our walk in life, whenever we may happen to meet our fellowmen in distress to help whom has fallen to our lot under Karma:

"Never put food into the mouth of the hungry by the hand of another"; "Never let the shadow of thy neighbour (*a third person*) come between thyself and the object of thy bounty"; "Never give to the Sun time to dry a tear before thou hast wiped it." Again, "Never give money to the needy, or food to the priest, who begs at thy door, *through thy servants*, lest thy money should diminish gratitude, and thy food turn into gall." (*ibid.*, pp. 241-42)

What we have discussed in the foregoing are the moral principles which underlie works of *practical charity*. Yet there is a greater and

more potent kind of charity than this; it is the *charity of mind*. The superiority of the latter kind of charity is stated in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as: “the sacrifice through spiritual knowledge is superior to sacrifice made with material things” (IV, sloka 33). It is the charitable attitude of mind towards one’s fellowmen, whether good or bad, friendly or unfriendly, which one naturally comes to possess as one acquires knowledge of the *true Self*, of universal brotherhood, and of the inviolable laws of Karma and Reincarnation. In the light of understanding of these eternal verities we begin to sense the injustice and hypocrisy implicit in the act of anyone sitting in judgment over actions of omission and commission of others, which is the most glaring evil in human life. All great teachers warn us against this vice which does immense harm to the moral nature and well-being of not only the one who indulges in unwarranted condemnation and denunciation of others, but show how it vitiates the social well-being also. Jesus warns, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (*Matthew*, 7:1-2). We can never know, ignorant and imperfect as we are, Karma of another person upon whose acts we sit in critical judgment. It is, therefore, infringement of the just law of Karma and negation of universal brotherhood to slander, criticize or pass uncharitable remarks on actions of others; we thereby degrade ourselves and suffer Karmic retribution, as warned by the teacher. Hypocrisy is implicit in our uncharitable act of pointing finger of accusation at the faults of others that we ourselves are free from the defect. A little self-examination is sufficient to reveal to us that our complacent assumption was wrong, and that, on the contrary, the defect we saw in another, and denounced, is indeed our own which we unconsciously projected on the accused. We mostly remain serenely unconscious of our own faults and defects.

Easy it is to see the faults of others; difficult it is to see our own. One winnows others’ faults like chaff, but his own faults he hides even as a cheat hides a losing throw. (*The Dhammapada*, verse 252)

This is cant and hypocrisy which are the worst of human defects, warn the Teachers.

He who is given to finding faults in others and is ever censorious increases his own weaknesses. Far indeed is he from their destruction. (*The Dhammapada*, verse 253)

It is the same as the warning sounded by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that one ought to mind one’s own duty and that meddling in the duty of another is full of danger.

Not the unworthy actions of others, not their sins of omission and commission, but his own acts of omission and commission should one regard. (*The Dhammapada*, verse 50)

It is the parable of the mote and the beam of the Gospel: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (*Matthew*, 7:3)

A wise man refrains from condemning actions of others but attends strictly to his own duty and strives to overcome defects and weaknesses of his own nature, and tries to strengthen virtues.

The ethical practice of refraining from criticism of others does not imply refraining from criticism when duty demands it, or to look the other way when an innocent person is unjustly criticized in our presence. In all such cases criticism ought to be directed against the objectionable act, and not against the person committing the act. Wisdom consists in speaking directly to the person face to face, in the gentlest tone and manner, whatever one may have against him or her, instead of indulging in the ignoble act of backbiting. It is the Karmic duty of everyone not to encourage gossip and speaking ill of others in one’s presence, and to defend the innocent victim of slander or groundless condemnation. But it will be our duty to speak out and warn our fellowmen of the misdeed or *mala fide* intention of a person or persons, of which we may have knowledge, thereby preventing harm which may otherwise befall the many.

It is the charity of mind to always forgive those who may do us harm, and, in return, to harbour good-will towards our detractor,

and leave it to Karma, which unfailingly punishes the offender and rewards the victim of injustice, and make harmonious adjustment which redounds to the highest good of all concerned. If, instead, we take upon ourselves, in a spirit of vengeance, to punish the one who offended us, we would thereby generate a cause which will move the karmic law to reward the offender, and mete out retributive punishment to ourselves, in future life. It is not, therefore, difficult to see that violation of this law of our being, in our ignorance and presumption, which impel people in general, and even the state, to mete out retributive punishment to offenders. It is one of the moral causes of the terrible apparent injustice we see in society, wherein unworthy people happen to be in position of power and influence, which they misuse for their own selfish ends and to the hurt of many, and worthy ones languishing in obscurity. Wise statesmen, keeping in view the working of the Karmic law, will employ restorative and reformatory justice in dealing with offenders in the state instead of retributive justice.

We cannot recommend too strongly mercy, charity, and forgiveness of mutual offences. *Resist not evil*, and *render good for evil*, are Buddhist precepts, and were first preached in view of the implacability of Karmic law. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 198)

Teaching and living by the spirit of charity is the key to human happiness and progress of mankind to the next higher plane of being in the evolutionary march.

SET about doing good to somebody. Put on your hat and go and visit the sick and poor of your neighbourhood; inquire into their circumstances and minister to their wants. Seek out the desolate and afflicted and oppressed....I have often tried this method, and have always found it the best medicine for a heavy heart.

—HOWARD

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS STUDY, APPLICATION AND PROMULGATION—III

ABOUT U.L.T. meetings: We cater for newcomers and enquirers and keep them in mind when choosing textbooks for study-class work, in answering questions, etc. There are two factors of serious import to be considered: (1) The older student has to learn by his individual study the deeper aspects of the study-class assignment. How many older students study the assigned portion, prepare their own cross-references, etc.? They would learn lessons fresh and new by such an effort. But more: (2) they should keep in mind and especially in heart the fact that they should bring their own contribution to enrich the class. Even when they do not get the opportunity to speak, their preparation and silent thought keep them energized and their quota of service helps all the others, in different degrees. It is this which you will have to keep in mind. From your own Centre within you could and should ray out the help of knowledge and good will. Devoted aspirants can help the platform in a very real sense even though they may not be on the platform but be seated in the audience. Repetition for the newcomer will prove beneficial otherwise to the old student. There is this hidden side which so many miss out.

Silent study and reflection, secret self-discipline, and expressing these in real service whose influence is far-reaching and yet so nobly impersonal—this is the contribution which you can, and I know will, make to light up, to brighten up, our U.L.T. meetings. Who will know what you are doing? And yet what a profound influence that action of yours will have on those present! The mere presence of a well-intentioned person of sympathy is a great aid; how much more the aid of one who not only is well-intentioned and sympathetic but also takes pains to prepare himself or herself to radiate knowledge and light and peace and unity! Of course, you can and you should contribute something substantial at every meeting; you have been doing so without deliberate planning. Henceforth you will be doing it deliberately.

As you exercise along the right lines I indicated, you will see for yourself the purity or the richness of your own radiation. The light of thought and the radiating heart are the wombs of right speech. So, just do what you can and watch. What person is there whose mind does not get away from his own control? Let not there be any strain; a quiet, relaxed mind silently brooding on the Self, or better still on the Masters, will bring to the meeting a power from you of whose strength you yourself will not be cognizant. Be a centre of light and peace and devotion when you are at a meeting. Interest in mental study will follow. Try to think of H.P.B., our Guru, when your mind wanders. The image built with love and attention will do more than one thing—for you and for the meeting.

Of course, the task of promulgation is not easy: first there is the difficulty about preaching the Ideal when we fail to realize it in daily life through sustained application. Then there is the paucity of knowledge. Then the method of presentation has to be considered—how to put it across not for the minds but for the hearts of people—hearers or readers.

How to make our study class interesting to newcomers? It can be done through every item—the Declaration, the giving of the Fundamentals, the summary and even the reading. Preparation would do it. But, as I often say, one must “feel for the Cause.” It is inner faith in the Esoteric Philosophy and in Its Instructors, who embody It that produces the necessary result.

Of course, charges are levelled against us that we preach Theosophy but do not practise it; but is that altogether fair? X calls himself a Christian, but can we say that he is applying his religion? Mind, I am not excusing ourselves; we are trying, perhaps more systematically and strenuously than church-going Christians, ceremonial Zoroastrians, and so on. I must say signs *are* there that several of our students are doing something with themselves and are not merely engaged in studying and preaching Theosophy.

For our people, simply to listen to a lecture is not what we need or want. Each one making his or her own effort gains through it,

and the series of Sunday lectures not only are for the advantage of the public but are also to benefit the persons preparing them. From one point of view the latter is the most important for the future growth and work.

All questions should be answered directly so that they provoke thought and therefore more questions. We need not expand all the points very fully in the study class; you remember that in the *Mahatma Letters* as well as in H.P.B.’s articles and Crosbie’s letters the same thing is said. Will you keep this in mind because your answers would have been much appreciated by some people whom such a great deal of material might have confused.

The Echoes from the Orient is a difficult book for a study class because there are many things of an occult nature on which sometimes very awkward questions arise. The same is true of *The Key to Theosophy*. In my experience I have found that the best textbook for study is Mr. Judge’s *The Ocean of Theosophy*. He wrote *The Ocean of Theosophy* as well as his *Epitome of Theosophy* for the joint work of a study class. He confined himself entirely to philosophical propositions and, therefore, it becomes a practical and very useful textbook.

(To be continued)

THE A B C OF Theosophy should be taught all the time, and this, not only for the sake of outsiders, but also for the sake of the members who are, I very well know, not so far along as to need the elaborate work all the time. And it is just because the members are not well grounded that they are not able themselves to get in more inquirers....If the simple truths practically applied as found in Theosophy are presented, you will catch at last some of the best people—real workers and valuable members.

—W. Q. JUDGE

GARBHA-SANSKAR—EDUCATION IN THE WOMB

THE SANSKRIT term “*garbh*” refers to the foetus in the womb. *Sanskar* means educating the mind. *Garbh-sanskar* means educating the mind of the foetus. Traditionally it is believed that a child’s mental and behavioural development begins taking shape as soon as it is conceived and that it can be further influenced by the mother’s state of mind during pregnancy. Can babies learn while still in the womb of their mother? To answer this we must first know whether the foetus in the womb of the mother is impressionable.

Traditionally, it is believed that if, during pregnancy, the mother remained largely in a state of fear, for some reason, the child born is timid, and if the mother was under the circumstances wherein, she had to be courageous and bold, the child born is bold. It is even believed that the state of mind of the parents at the time of conception is also very important. Swami Shri Savitanand gives an example of a couple who fought a lot during first few months of pregnancy of the wife. Since the mother had conceived and carried the child in such a state of mind, it could have an adverse effect on the child. Hence, it was suggested that the couple should chant certain *mantram*, few minutes every day. They did not pay heed to this advice. The child born was extremely hot-tempered and stubborn.

We are reminded of the incident in the *Mahabharata*, wherein two wives, Amba and Ambalika, of King Vichitravirya could not conceive. After his death, his mother sent for her first-born, Rishi Veda Vyasa, and asked him to father children on the widowed queens of Vichitravirya, for the purpose of obtaining an heir to the throne of Hastinapur. It seems that Ved Vyasa had come from years of intense meditation, and as a result, he looked very unkempt. Hence, when he approached Amba, she closed her eyes in fear. Vyasa told her mother that because she closed her eyes during the time of conception, the child would be born blind. As a result, the child that was born was blind Dhritrashtra. When Ved Vyasa approached Ambalika, she turned pale with fear, and as a result her son Pandu

was born with a pale appearance. Later, a maid was sent by Amba to Ved Vyasa, who received him with reverence and devotion, and the child born to her was the wise Vidura.

The ancient tradition suggests that it is important to observe physical, mental and psychic purity for several months by way of preparing for conception. There are auspicious times indicated by the positioning of the planets, and those who can foresee it, are able to make use of it. We see this in the story of the birth of Ved Vyasa, also known as Krishna Dwaipayana. Sage Parasara is considered to be one of the great authorities on astrology. It is said that once Parasara came to know that a child conceived at a particular *Ghatika* or moment of time, would be born as the greatest man of age. At that time, he was travelling in a boat. He spoke to the boatman about nearing of this auspicious time. The boatman offered his daughter in marriage to the sage, and through their union Ved Vyasa was born.

Research is being done to study how the emotional state of the mother during pregnancy can have long-term effect on the psychological development of her child. Scientific studies have shown that maternal stress, depression or anxiety, affects the foetus, during foetal life and also during early childhood. However, it is felt that more research is necessary to ascertain the mechanism by which this takes place.

Theosophy has a lot to say on the impact of mother’s imagination and emotion on the formation of the physical body of the child in the womb, through the astral body. Theosophy teaches that the physical body of the child is built on the astral form or *linga-sarira*. “The model for the growing child in the womb is the astral body already perfect in shape before the child is born.” Once we accept the existence of the astral form upon which the physical body is built, the phenomenon of the mother’s imagination affecting the child in the womb, becomes easy to understand. Mr. Judge explains that “the growing physical form is subject to the astral model; it is connected with the imagination of the mother by physical and

psychical organs; the mother makes a strong picture from horror, fear, or otherwise, and the astral model is then similarly affected.” Thus, if the mother strongly imagines that her child may be born legless then, in the early stages of growth, her ideas and imagination have the power of acid or a knife to cut off or shrivel up the astral leg of the child growing in her womb. In the absence of the astral model, no physical leg is formed, and the child is born legless.

“The fact that the mother can control the appearance of her unborn child was so well known among the ancients, that it was the custom among wealthy Greeks to place fine statues near the bed, so that she might have a perfect model constantly before her eyes,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 384). In our own times, it is a common practice to hang pictures of healthy babies in a pregnant woman’s room. H.P.B. gives several examples to show how violent maternal emotions are often reflected in visible and permanent disfigurement of the child. She narrates the case of a Judge of an Imperial Court at Saratow, Russia, who covered left side of his face to hide the mouse-mark, which was the image of a perfectly-formed mouse on his cheek. As explained by him, his mother had a strong aversion for mice, and that she went into premature labour on seeing a mouse jump out of a box. (*Isis*, I, 391)

During pregnancy, women become particularly receptive to influences of the astral light, which assists them in the formation of the child and constantly presents to them the images of the forms with which it is filled. It is thus that sometimes very virtuous women have offspring bearing unmistakable resemblance to someone other than her own husband. The creative faculty of imagination can fashion the coming child into whatever form she likes. The image of the object, making a strong impression on the mother’s mind, is instantly projected into the astral light. Her magnetic emanations then attract and unite themselves with the descending current which bears the image upon it. It rebounds, and re-percussing more or less violently, impresses itself upon the foetus. “The kabalistic use of the pentagram can therefore determine the countenance of unborn

infants, and an initiated woman might give to her son the features of Nereus or Achilles, as well as those of Louis XV or Napoleon” (*Isis*, I, pp. 395 and 398). This might explain the Germanic face of a child born to Asian parents settled in Germany or a black offspring born to white parents.

Mr. Judge suggests that we carry pictures and images in our aura, which include pre-natal impressions, which are not always developed into memory but await appropriate conditions. Thus, it is quite possible that something we remember later in life, might be owing to the impression made on the aura, while in the womb. “Each child emerges into life the possessor of pictures floating about and clinging to it, derived from the mother; and thus, you can go back an enormous distance in time for these pictures, all through the long line of your descent.” These pictures await the hour of development. (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 171)

It is claimed that the Puranas and the Vedas have many references to the prenatal education or *Garbh Sanskar*. In Ayurveda, Sushruta, the father of surgery, states that the unborn child’s mind starts developing by the fifth month, while Confucius the Chinese philosopher stated that the foetal environment can determine a child’s behaviour. Some of the personality traits and emotional problems can be traced to experiences in the mother’s womb, writes Anuradha Sahu (*Life Positive*, March 2019). Indian legends are replete with stories of prenatal influences. For instance, there is the famous story of Abhimanyu in the *Mahabharata*. When Arjuna’s wife was pregnant with their son Abhimanyu, the child in the womb heard his uncle, Lord Krishna explain to his mother the details of how to penetrate the *chakravyuha*, a particular war formation, which was an effective form of defense. The army would be arranged in the form of a circular grid and would then challenge the enemy to break the grid. However, even before Krishna could finish telling her how to come out of the *chakravyuha*, she fell asleep. As a result, when as a young warrior Abhimanyu fought the Kurukshetra war, since he had learnt only half the technique, while in the womb, he could

penetrate the *chakravayuha*, but was unable to come out of it. This may perhaps be explained on the basis of impressions retained in the aura of the foetus, which later develop into memory, when conditions are appropriate. Moreover, in these mythological incidents, the souls in question are highly evolved souls, and therefore, may be quoted as an evidence for the possibility of learning in the womb.

If the concept of learning in the womb is viewed scientifically, various studies have proved that the baby inside the mother's womb responds to outside stimulus. According to an article that appeared in *Scientific American* (July 2015) sensory awareness and learning start in the womb, as has been proven by measuring electrical activity in the developing brain of the foetus. A foetus begins to hear between 24 to 27 weeks. It is a well-known fact that fetuses learn general features of their native language, such as, rhythm and intonation. But two studies in 2013 confirmed that they also pick up distinct words and syllables, writes Ferris Jabr.

However, there are differing opinions whether one should attempt to actively stimulate the development of the baby in the womb. It appears however that the ancient tradition of *garbha sanskar* aims at influencing the child *spiritually*, while in the womb. Hence, it is recommended that the pregnant woman should take care of her physical, mental and spiritual health, by paying attention to her diet, by reading scriptures, chanting mantras and slokas, listening to good and elevating music, engaging in prayer and meditation, during her pregnancy. It is interesting to consider that even the foetus or baby in the womb may have an influence on the mother, something inferred by the change brought about in the mother, in terms of preference for certain kind of food, as also, at times, in the inner state. *Light of Asia*, describes the state of Queen Maya (the Buddha's mother) when she dreamt that a six-tusked white elephant had entered her womb, indicative of a high soul, saying, she woke up, and "bliss beyond mortal mother's filled her breast."

APHORISMS ON KARMA—SOME REFLECTIONS

II

APHORISMS 1 and 2 were considered in the previous issue. A brief outline of Aphorism 3 was also given. Aphorism 3 says: "*Karma is an undeviating and unerring tendency in the Universe to restore equilibrium, and it operates incessantly.*" Karma means action. It is not difficult for us to perceive that there is no cessation of action or motion in the boundless space in which universes are born, progress and disappear, to be reborn, like the revolution of seasons, incessantly. Cycles of birth and death of worlds have been going on without beginning, and will go on endlessly in the future. As the universes are in incessant action, so is every thing and being in every universe. Modern science has observed and recorded this fact on the physical plane. Therefore, there is nothing, not a speck of dust or an atom, which is at rest but incessantly changing, transforming and progressing in an ascending scale of higher order of life and action. We have seen earlier that there can be no Karma, or action, unless there is a being to make it or feel its effects (Aphorism 1). It means that incessant motion in the universe is not random and purposeless but caused by action of embodied beings of various grades of development in the universal evolutionary progress. Thus, there is design and purpose in every phenomenon in nature, however trifling it may seem. It is therefore evident that the universe is embodied consciousness and that the whole of nature evinces a progressive march towards a higher life—beginning with elemental, progressing through mineral, vegetable, animal to the Man stage and thence to supra-human stages, ending in absolute perfection possible in each of the series of universal manifestations. This grand sweep of evolution—individual, racial, planetary and universal is governed by cyclic and Karmic law—which, as already said, is set in motion by the action of beings.

"Karma is the unerring law which adjusts effects to cause, on the physical, mental and spiritual planes of being. As no cause

remains without its due effect from greatest to least, from a cosmic disturbance down to the movement of your hand, and as like produces like, *Karma*, is that unseen and unknown law *which adjusts wisely, intelligently and equitably* each effect to its cause, tracing the latter to its producer. Though itself *unknowable*, its action is perceivable,” writes H.P.B. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 199). Thus the incessant, unerring, undeviating tendency in the universe to restore the harmony which is disturbed, caused by action of beings, tracing each effect to its cause, by which beings causing the disturbance feel good and evil effects, is comprehensible.

Aphorism 4 says: “*The apparent stoppage of this restoration to equilibrium is due to the necessary adjustment of disturbance at some other spot, place, or focus, which is visible only to the Yogi, to the Sage, or the perfect Seer: there is therefore no stoppage, but only a hiding from the view.*” This aphorism seems to suggest that though normally the law works towards adjusting the effect to its cause, sometimes, it appears to us that such adjustment has not taken place, and that the law has failed to restore the equilibrium. Thus, for instance, in a given life we set into motion many good and bad causes, some of the effects of which we experience in that very life. But for almost all of us it happens that we die even before we are rewarded or punished for many good and bad causes set in motion in that life. This may appear to be “stoppage of restoration of equilibrium.” For example, when we do not see a wicked person suffering the effects of his ill deeds till his death, there is a feeling that there is no justice in the world, because that person seems to have gone scot-free, in spite of all his evil deeds. The same holds good for the good karma which may not have been rewarded.

The aphorism points out that in all such cases there is only an *apparent* stoppage of restoration of equilibrium. In reality, those causes which were created in this life, and for which no consequences were experienced, have now become *sanchita* or stored up karma. This appears to us as stoppage of restoration to equilibrium. But, in reality, there is no stoppage; *the necessary adjustment of disturbance*

is now going on at some other spot, place, or focus, which is visible only to the Yogi. There are many reasons for such an apparent stoppage of Karmic adjustment. One such event is due to the death of the body, as everyone has to die some day. When the body dies, there appears to be *stoppage* of restoration to equilibrium of Karmic causes through that body, in that life, but actually, the focus of balancing of causes and effects has shifted to post-mortem states. Mr. Judge writes: “We are making causes every moment, and but two fields exist for the manifestation in effect of those causes. These are, the objective as this world is called, and the subjective which is both here and after we have left this life. The objective field relates to earth life and grosser part of man....The subjective has to do with his higher and spiritual parts. In the objective field the psychic impulses cannot work out, nor can the higher leanings and aspirations of his soul.” (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 118)

Each day we generate psychic energies by our aspirations and dreams, and since we do not live them out, these are stored in *Manas*, and they find their expression in the after-death state called *devachan*. The Ego remains in *devachan* for a time exactly proportioned to the psychic impulses and higher aspirations generated during life. “The dream of *devachan*,” lasts until karma is satisfied in that direction, says a Master of Wisdom. It is in *devachan* that there is an assimilation of the essential experiences of the life just ended. “That part of us which could not bloom under the chilling skies of earth-life bursts forth into flower and goes back with us to earth-life stronger and more a part of our nature than before.” (*ibid.*, p. 122)

However, before entering the state of *devachan*, the Ego goes into another subjective state called *Kamaloka*. Here, there is separation of the Ego from the lower principles, the grain from the chaff, which process is prolonged in case of very wicked people, wherein the Ego is detained in that state for a long time. Normally, earth is our hell, where most of us experience suffering for our bad thoughts and deeds. But some souls might find themselves in awful

conditions in the *Kamaloka*. “This leads me to the conclusion that the very lowest and worst hell must be a condition of the mind, and that it must have place out of a body, and hence be a stage or degree of *Kamaloka*,” explains Mr. Judge (“*Forum*” *Answers*, p. 107). Here again, we see, partial adjustment of effects for the bad or wicked causes generated during the life just ended.

Thus, there are some causes produced by the person, which are compensated during life with adequate effects, and there are those causes, for which effect is experienced in post-mortem existence. But apart from these, all the other causes produced by the personality are undying and cannot be eliminated until they are compensated by their legitimate effects. These unadjusted “causes will follow the reincarnating Ego, and reach it in its subsequent reincarnation until a harmony between effects and causes is fully established.” (*The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 174)

In *Answers to Questions on The Ocean of Theosophy* (p. 155), we read that just as for an individual, after death, there remains Karma yet to be adjusted, which await the return of the Ego in another body, so also, there remains unadjusted Karma of masses of people at the end of a *Manvantara* and *Mahamanvantara*. Mr. Crosbie explains that though the tendency of Karma is to always restore equilibrium, there is no complete readjustment at the end of each cycle of existence. “There must always be for any evolution effects not yet adjusted. . . . At the end of a manvantara, then, there may be said to be a period of assimilation, rather than one of entire adjustment,” before the whole of mass of people continue their evolution in a new *manvantara*, which is analogous to the apparent stoppage of Karma of unadjusted causes of a person when he dies. Thus, what appears to be “stoppage” of the restoration to equilibrium at death, is only suspension of flow of Karmic effects through the body for the time, and the process of restoration of disturbed equilibrium is resumed when appropriate conditions are furnished in the next or another earth life of the Ego under Karmic Law.

In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* (pp. 57-58), Mr. Judge refers to

delayed karma and *unspent affinities*. Those who long for peace and bliss perform special ceremonies, certain kind of sacrifices, penances, prayers and actions, as prescribed in the sacred texts, as a result of which a long stay in the heaven-world, for incalculable periods of time, is ensured. However, the risks involved in taking such a course are numerous and great. Says Mr. Judge: “So the man may in this life perform ‘special ceremonies’ and conform to texts and doctrine, attaining thereby the reward of heaven, and still have left over a quantity of that ‘mysterious power of meditation’ unexpended; and what its complexion is he does not know.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 66)

At death, only a small portion of the incarnated consciousness unites itself to the divine nature, and goes to *devachan*. A large portion of our mind which was involved in lower propensities and worldly pursuits is left behind as mental deposits or unexpended Karma. This force of unexpended Karma and unspent affinities, which assert themselves, is called the *mysterious power of meditation*. It is also called *the line of life’s meditation*, or that on which our heart was set. People who perform ceremonies and rituals to obtain the reward of heaven world do not realise that they still have a large quantity of unexpended Karma. It includes the numberless affinities engendered in past lives which result in our being born in company of those with whom these affinities were created in the past. On account of prolonged stay in heaven world, there is delay or temporary *stoppage* of restoration to equilibrium of these Karmic causes till rebirth, while, during the state of apparent stoppage, another set of causes are working themselves out by providing him the pleasures of the heaven that he worked for during life.

In the qualifications for Chelaship listed in the book *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, we read that the one aspiring to become a true disciple will not cause to deflect or avoid the course of the law of Karma by prayer or propitiatory exoteric ceremonies. It shows that if the prayer or ceremony is efficacious, the person will not experience the

consequences of his actions, just then. We then have yet another case of *delayed* Karma wherein the readjustment of karmic causes is delayed or postponed temporarily, as the law cannot be dodged. Mr. Judge says, “To imagine we can escape from any cause connected with us is to suppose that law and order desert the manifested universe” (*W.Q.J. Series No. 22*, p. 17). This may also apply to people who resort to *mind-cure* techniques of healing. Mr. Judge explains that except for the cases where the disease had its roots in very strong imagination of the person, in all other cases, such practices of *mental healings* have the effect of forcing back the seeds of disease to their hiding place, inhibit their development and prevent their exhaustion. They are forcibly dragged back, only to lie waiting once more for their natural expression in some other life. Thus, there is only a postponement of disease to some future day.

“Not even the greatest of Yogis can divert the progress of Karma or arrest the natural results of actions for more than a short period, and even in that case, these results will only reassert themselves later with even tenfold force, for such is the occult law of Karma and the Nidanas,” writes H.P.B. (*H.P.B. Series No. 32*, p. 34)

(To be continued)

THE MOVING Finger writes; and having writ,
 Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
 Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

—OMAR KHAYYAM

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

CAN humans survive on breath alone? It seems there is an energy present in the air which can be accessed through breathing, and that energy is variously known as *prana* in India, *chi* in China and *ki* in Japan. Just as a vegetarian is sustained by vegetables, the one who lives off breath is called a Breatharian. The term breatharian comes from the ancient word, “*anedia*” which means eat very little or none at all, writes Rishi Rathod. Elitom El-Amin, raised in Ohio by African-American parents, is a Breatharian, and has been teaching, for the past 15 years, the ancient art of sustaining the body, mind and soul on nothing but *prana*. In an interview with Rathod, he says that he was overweight, and started by fasting once a week, and then moved over gradually to fasting twice and then thrice a week, till he came to the stage of no eating. It was a slow and long process. “It has been nineteen years now that I have not depended upon food for my survival,” he says. However, he admits that when occasion demanded he has had a bowl of soup or juice, and even eaten food on some weekends.

We know about *prana* but how many live on prana? Very, very few, and that is because we are turning only to the external and the material. “Those who have accessed *prana*, have realised that you do not really need food to have energy. There are other sources of energy available to us. [It is] just like using solar energy after having used coal, oil and electricity,” says Elitom. His mission is to educate people about how living like this is possible by consistently doing meditation, fasting and some yoga, writes Rishi Rathod. (*Life Positive*, May 2019)

Inedia is Latin for “fasting” or breatharianism, and it is the belief that food, and in some cases water, are not necessary for survival, and that humans can be sustained by only *prana* or vital life force. Since sunlight is considered to be the main source of *prana*, some practitioners believe that it is possible for a person to survive on sunlight alone. Breatharianism is considered a deadly pseudoscience

by scientists and medical professionals, and several adherents of these practices have died from starvation and dehydration.

Hindu religious texts contain account of saints and hermits practicing *breatharianism* or “Sustenance through Light” in modern terms. In recent times, we had an instance of a 64-year-old Gujarati mechanical engineer, Hira Ratan Manek, who survived only on boiled water and sunlight for 411 days. In an article that appeared in *The Times of India* (August 27, 2002) it was stated that American scientists were investigating the feat, in the hope that they could develop a technique to enable astronauts to go without food for long periods. The subject was physically active and carried on all normal activities during this fast.

Theosophy teaches that such feats of fasting are not uncommon among yogis and ascetics. The rationale of such phenomena is given to us in a succinct statement in the *Supplement to The Theosophist* for December 1883 (p. 32): “*Akasa* is the mother of all phenomena and the source of nourishment of him who knows how to use it.” Elsewhere it is stated by H.P.B. that in India, a certain swami would be seen by the villagers to be sitting in the same posture and on the same spot, and apparently as well without food and water for whole weeks, as if he were made of stone instead of human flesh and bones. “Yogis and ascetics are not the only examples of such protracted fastings; for, if these can be doubted and sometimes utterly rejected by sceptical science as void of any conclusive proof—for the phenomenon takes place in remote and inaccessible places—we have many of the *Jainas*, inhabitants of populated towns, to bring forward as exemplars of the same. Many of them fast, abstaining even from one drop of water for *forty days* at a time—and survive always.”

In the article, “Elixir of Life,” we are told how man can, through discipline and purity, both physical and mental, gradually reduce his intake so as to be able to subsist first on fruits and milk, and then give up even that to derive nourishment from the Ether (*Akasa*).

Anandibai Joshi was the first Indian woman to become a doctor, who obtained her doctor’s degree from Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, United States. Who was she and how was she shaped by her time? Her biography, entitled, *A Fragmented Feminism: The Life and Letters of Anandibai Joshee*, written by Meera Kosambi, has been edited and published by her friends, as per the author’s dying wish, and is due for release in August 2019. Although before this, the life of Anandibai has been memorialised in many biographies, Marathi novels and films, Meera Kosambi has challenged the popular narrative that Anandibai was entirely shaped by her husband Gopalrao Joshee. She takes a fresh look at all the available material, especially the letters written by Anandibai, and sees her as a woman who had her own agency and independent thought.

Anandibai was born in Pune in 1865. Her mother was very strict and a great disciplinarian. Kosambi explains that such behaviour was not uncommon during that period, and may have been resorted “to stamp out all traces of a free spirit from a girl’s psyche, lest she suffer cruelty at the hands of her in-laws.” As was the tradition, at the age of nine, she was married to Gopalrao, who was seventeen years her senior. He insisted on educating her, as he believed in the reform movement, led by the educated among Maharashtra’s upper castes. The couple moved from city to city, till they arrived at Calcutta, from where, at the age of 18, she sailed for America. At that point, Anandibai had learnt six new languages. However, initially, she had resisted her husband’s efforts to educate her. It was only when she became a mother at the age of 12, and lost her 10-day-old son, that she took to education. Kosambi feels that it is this experience that might have nurtured in her a dream to become a doctor. Having lost a child and unable to conceive again, she saw a dire need for women doctors, because at that time, many Indian women would prefer to die than allow a male doctor to touch them.

In the course of time, Anandibai grew into an independent thinker, saw the need for women’s movement, especially one for

widows, and supported women's education. She lived with Theodocia Carpenter and her husband, at New Jersey, who helped her to get admission to Women's Medical College. She returned to India in 1886 to join a university in Kolhapur, where she hoped to train other women. But she was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and died at the age of 22. "Kosambi uses the term 'fragmented feminism' to describe the mix of the traditional and the modern in Anandibai, which perhaps stemmed from her nationalistic ideas...and her pride in her culture," writes Dipti Nagpaul. (*Eye, The Sunday Express Magazine*, June 9, 2019)

It is rare that one comes across an absolutely impartial biography. Knowingly or unknowingly, the authors tend to be either favourable or unfavourable and hence fail to do justice to the person. All the same, incidents in the person's life, when interpreted correctly, can help to get an insight into the character and also the times in which the person lived. Biographies of thinkers, philosophers, reformers, and pioneers, never fail to inspire us.

It is interesting to note that Anandibai was a member of the Theosophical Society, and when she sailed for New York, that event was mentioned in an article that appeared in *The Theosophist* (Vol. IV, No. 8, Supplement, May 1883). We read: "She goes to America with the object of studying medicine. We hope that profiting by the grand privileges and facilities afforded to women in America, our brave sister may achieve there the greatest success.... It is with a well-warranted pride that we say here that this act of courage—which can hardly be appreciated by Western people unacquainted with the merciless caste system and *Zenana* rules of India—is very much due to the influence of Mrs. Joshi's husband, one of the most liberal-minded and intellectual Brahmins we know of, as one of the best friends and members of our society. We are proud indeed at the thought, that the first Brahmin lady, who thus becomes practically the pioneer of the great national movement now stirring public opinion in favour of the education and certain legitimate rights for the women of India—is a Fellow of our society. We cannot

recommend her too warmly to the sympathies and best fraternal feelings of all our American Theosophists, and hope and pray that they should render the poor and brave young exile every service, and help her as much as it is within their power."

How to make relationships last? For the youngsters of our times, "relationships and career" are the two most important things in life as they are seen to bring security, contentment and purpose in life. Yet, many are seen struggling to maintain healthy relationship with their partners. We live in the world where we throw away things easily. "If there are problems, end it; if there is hardship, look for someone better. We are becoming a culture of quitters," writes "Daaji" Kamlesh D. Patel. We need to learn to value longevity and commitment, and in order to sustain that outlook we need emotional intelligence and maturity in relationships. Since our lives are guided by feelings and aspirations which stem from the heart, we can begin by learning to listen to the heart. "Heartfulness" meditation helps to fine-tune the heart with the mind. Heartfulness practices allow us to master our emotional responses in daily life, endow us with basic life skills and enable us to deal with problems such as loneliness, inability to find real purpose in life, inability to concentrate, stress, money issues, and so on.

The four core Heartfulness practices are: Relaxation, Meditation, Mental Detox and Connection With Your Centre. These in turn helps one to follow the behaviour pattern which makes for healthy, happy and fulfilling relationships. It includes *aiming for harmony*, which means one avoids unnecessary arguments and puts harmony before "being right." One sees the need to listen and pause. It is important to cultivate calmness and listen carefully in order to appreciate the other person's point of view, but also, one must learn to listen with the heart to grasp what is communicated beyond words. Tension in a relationship is a warning bell indicating the need to change, and having mastery over one's emotions and responses. Rather than expecting others to change, try to see what *you* can do. Every night,

before going to sleep, it is a good exercise to reflect and find out how many times we hurt others, even unknowingly, and to resolve not to do it again. “Life is not about running away from problems, but facing them head-on with a cheerful and peaceful attitude, and growing together in the process,” writes Kamlesh Patel. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, June 24, 2019)

Good human relations have the power to alter the world. But we have to admit that human relationship is undergoing a radical change. Keeping in mind the spiritual perspective can go a long way in building a healthy and cordial relationship with every person who comes into our lives. Our parents, brothers, sisters, partners all come to us under karma. 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. Instead of giving up, when we endeavour to deal with an especially difficult child or a partner, we learn something, and pay off our karmic debt, to some extent. *Light on the Path* suggests: “No man is your enemy: no man is your friend. All alike are your teachers.” Towards those who are hostile to us, if we practise charity, kindness, and love, then this tendency of enmity will be one-third lessened in every life. On the other hand, if we continue to be hostile, we put off the “day of reconciliation” by three more lives.

Buddhism teaches that it is important to establish contact with our positive and negative emotions. They speak of four wholesome emotions, which include *maitri* or *metta*, meaning loving kindness or friendliness; *karuna* or compassion; *mudita* or sympathetic joy and *upeksha* or *upekkha* meaning tranquillity or equanimity. These are four Buddhist virtues which are recommended to be developed by every person, endlessly, and without limit. There are four meditational practices connected with cultivation of these qualities or attitudes. The detachment and serenity experienced during hours of meditation, penetrates one’s whole life, leads to selflessness and permits one to look upon life impersonally.