

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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HOW SHALL WE PRAY?

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

—*Matthew 6: 6*

WHAT is prayer? It might be an expression of gratitude, a petition, a demand or a request. It could be uttered or silent, and may be offered jointly with others or privately. Prayer is generally considered to be a means of communicating one's problems, wishes and desires to the Almighty. Whether one believes in an anthropomorphic God or considers IT to be an Omnipresent and Omniscient principle, all alike are tempted to engage in purely petitionary prayer, asking God to grant this wish or avert that disaster. Does an Omniscient God need to be told what should or should not be done? “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him,” said Jesus.

Millions of people recite prayers for the earthquake to stop or for the rain to fall, but the earthquake continues and so does dry phase. The efficacy of prayer is a very tricky question. In his essay, “The Efficacy of Prayer,” Prof. C. S. Lewis narrates the instance when he went to his regular saloon for a hair cut. On seeing him, the barber said that his prayers were answered as he had been praying that Prof. Lewis would come for a haircut that day.

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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Apparently, the barber was badly in need of some money that he thought of borrowing from Prof. Lewis. The latter remarks that one cannot rigorously prove a causal connection between the barber's prayers and his visit to the saloon, and that it might only be telepathy or even coincidence! What sort of evidence would prove the efficacy of prayer? How do we know that the thing prayed for was not going to happen anyway? Prayer is a request and hence it may or may not be granted. "Words without thoughts never to heaven go," says the King in Hamlet. Hence mere verbal repetition does not constitute prayers, otherwise a team of properly trained parrots would serve as well as human beings, observes Prof. Lewis.

Some prayers *seem* to be answered, but more often than not, it is due to strong faith *or* due to intensity of thought and desire. For instance, Mr. Judge points out that in India, when help is needed for some orphanages, they pray to some patron god and help comes. He explains that what happens is that strong and constant faith carries the thoughts of the prayer into receptive minds and they are then moved to action. When prayer is offered to formless and unseen God, one's faith is not too firm. In case of idol-worshippers, the image of Virgin Mary or Krishna helps to arouse strong and constant faith.

Our intense desire may strike like Vulcan and another person may do that which *we* desired to do. Our thoughts are, more often than not, like soap bubbles and they do not travel very far. Our good thoughts must be sustained. Some people think even about the most trifling things from the higher plane of thought, so that their thoughts are more intense than the thoughts of ordinary men, and by that very intensity, they acquire the power of creation, says H.P.B.

H.P.B. points out that petitionary prayers kill self-reliance. In *The Key to Theosophy*, an enquirer says that by his own strength he was unable to conquer any passions or weaknesses, but when he prayed to Jesus Christ, by *His power* he was able to conquer. To this, H.P.B. replies that often Christian Science, hypnotism and

mediumship also produce positive results, but then the subject can claim no merit. For instance, when a hypnotizer helps the subject to overcome his habit of lying or drinking, by suggestion, there is no merit in it for the subject. There would have been an addition to the good Karma of the subject, had *he made personal effort to reform*, of his own free will—which would involve great mental and physical struggle, says H.P.B. (*H.P.B. Series No. 9*). Similarly, when one considers oneself separate from God and prays to Him there is no justice or merit in the achievement. Would you pay the labourer you hired to work in your fields a full day's wages if you did most of his work for him, while he sitting under an apple tree prayed to you to do his work? In such prayers we are living in moral idleness, passing on our burden to God. (*The Key to Theosophy*)

Jesus recommends silent, unuttered prayer to one's Father-in-Secret. It is "Will prayer." Will prayer is not petitionary prayer, where the prayer is uttered and addressed to some extracosmic God and more often than not it is a request for fulfilment of personal wish, desire, etc. These purely verbal supplications can never reach the divine. In a prayer, that which prays is the personal self and that to which the prayer is addressed is the Divine nature or Individuality. Unless these two are *consubstantial* in nature, no communion can take place. Hence the need to purify the personal nature so that it is brought nearer to the Divine. This is what seems to happen in Will prayer. To be answered or heard, prayer should be pronounced mentally and by one who knows how to make himself heard in silence and must be addressed to one's Father-in-Secret. Then prayer changes into "philosopher's stone" by the intensity of our aspirations. Describing will prayer, H.P.B. writes:

It is a mystery rather; an occult process by which finite and conditioned thoughts and desires, unable to be assimilated by the absolute spirit which is unconditioned, are translated into spiritual wills and the will; such process being called "spiritual transmutation." (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 67-68)

In such a prayer, the inner attitude is, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” There is no personal or selfish element and yet it is finite good that is desired. It seems that for a brief space of time the mind is unfettered and becomes one with the divine and hence it is as if the potentialities and powers of the divine nature become available and we find our thoughts and desires being translated into action. Hence, it is then no longer a prayer but a command. But if there is no purity then we may send up waves of purely personal desires towards our divine nature, which may produce disastrous results.

In an article on “Misunderstood Biblical Traditions,” (*Theosophy*, Vol. 50), it is suggested that we have to be careful while praying, because, “prayer, in any of its forms, is a double-edged sword, a dangerous art, which, depending upon its use, may become either a blessing or a curse.” If deep within there are latent motives and desires which are not of a pure nature, they get intensified during prayer. It is like sunlight, which falls on both good seeds and weeds and helps in the growth of both. So, when we indulge in prayer, without completely purifying our nature, there is a danger. The rationale of prohibiting group-prayers or public prayers is explained thus:

Sunlight is power—pure, impersonal, omnipotent—and so is God-light. The forces of Spirit...can as readily kill as cure. Foolish is the man who places himself and others, indiscriminately under its colourless though powerful rays. When the farmer prays for rain, he is not foolish enough to suppose (even if he thinks he will get it) that it will fall only upon *his* land and not upon his neighbour’s, however uncooperative or even wicked the neighbour may be....What reason, then, has the conductor of group prayer to believe that he can call forth the rays of Divine Light *only upon the good* which is resident in the hearts and minds of all those present, and not upon the evil? One reason, perhaps, why public prayer is not advocated in the Gospels is that the ordinary praying

man is not wise enough to discern what lies latent in the minds and hearts of all those who participate. And if these hidden potentialities cannot be known, how can one afford to take upon oneself, the responsibility for their intensification? Just as the rays of the morning sun cause to grow every seed, whether useful or poisonous, that lies waiting in the earth, so the rays of a “Divine Light,” invoked through prayer, intensify and cause to grow all desires, loves, hates, ambitions and jealousies. Jesus evidently was not willing to assume responsibility of this kind, which, in all probability, was the reason he “went off to himself” to pray.

If one would know the part played by *desire* in prayer, let him read and try to understand *Mark*, 11: 24-26, where it is stated that “what things soever ye *desire*, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” ...What can this mean but that the power of the Creative Spirit, flowing down through the *matrix of desire*, will bring to pass in due time every good or evil thing envisioned?... *Desire* is one of the most potent forces in the universe. Intensified by the power of the Spirit within, its potentialities for both good and evil are almost unlimited. Unless a person can say “Thy will be done” *and mean it*, from the very depths of his heart, he had better leave prayer alone. (*Theosophy*, Vol. 50)

In its highest sense, prayer is a meditation which is described by Plato as the ardent turning of the soul towards the divine, and it is the unuttered prayer—not to ask for any *particular* good but for good itself, or the Universal Supreme Good. We are asked to remain silent in the presence of the Divine Ones, so that they can show us, by the light which issues from them, what is *intrinsically* good—and not what appears to us to be good. In this sense, it is not desirable to pray for the speedy recovery of the ill or for any other *seeming* good. In the eyes of the Law of Karma, perhaps the good consists in allowing the karmic effects of our past thoughts and deeds to work out. We pray for this or that *particular* good to happen, because we do not have before us the larger picture.

Extensive research is being undertaken and millions of dollars are spent on study of the biological effects of meditation and prayer on the brain and on disease. Experiments in this direction have shown that although prayers are a source of comfort for family members and the patient, it is not always true that those prayed for fared better than those who were not.

Sorrows and difficulties come to us under Karma and the Law of Karma works impartially, unerringly and righteously. It cannot be caused to deviate from its course by prayer or any propitiatory ceremony. It is useless to pray to any finite gods, who, being embodiments of the Law of Karma, would never contravene the Law. Hence, Buddha advises, “Seek nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn, nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruits and cakes; within yourselves deliverance must be sought.” H.P.B. asks us to replace useless prayers by meritorious deeds. Where should a student of Theosophy look to for power to subdue his passions and selfishness? The answer is, “To his Higher Self, or his God, and to his Karma.”

Self-examination is a “prayer” we must practise, every day, before going to sleep. We are asked to impartially review all our thoughts, feelings, words and deeds of the entire day. We are asked to note our weak as well as strong points without trying to make excuses or explain away our mistakes and blunders, resolving to make amends the next day. Such prayer keeps us from accumulating further bad Karma.

IN all activities of life, from the most trivial to the most important, the secret of efficiency lies in an ability to combine two seemingly incompatible states—a state of maximum activity and a state of maximum relaxation.

—ALDOUS HUXLEY

U.L.T. DECLARATION

IN the United Lodge of Theosophists, it is H.P.B.’s Teachings of Theosophy, a gift from Those behind her, that are promulgated, and these Teachings provide its ethical and metaphysical basis. Few, perhaps, realize that in the Five Messages sent by her to the American Theosophists from 1888 to 1891, H.P.B. laid down the pattern for practical Theosophical work, applicable not only to the U.L.T. as a whole, but also to the individual associates making up the various centres.

Robert Crosbie, it is generally known, drew up the U.L.T. Declaration, using statements from the writings of William Q. Judge. Many ideas in the Declaration can, however, also be traced to the *Five Messages*, as this article attempts to show. H.P.B. wrote those messages not only for the American Theosophists assembled in Convention, but also laid down the general lines of Theosophical work for our era. Her ideas are as alive and as important today as they were then, perhaps more so because of the cycle in which we find ourselves at present.

In the first paragraph of the Declaration we are told that the U.L.T. “does not concern itself with dissensions or differences of individual opinion,” because if it did, this would stand in the way of that “profounder conviction of Universal Brotherhood” upon which all successful Theosophical work must be based. In the *Five Messages* (p. 16), H.P.B. wrote much the same: “...in order that we may be able to effect this working on behalf of our common cause, we have to sink all private differences.” And, further (p. 17): “‘UNION IS STRENGTH’; and for every reason private differences must be sunk in united work for our Great Cause.”

This shows how important is this unity of which all speak and which is so difficult of achievement. H.P.B. goes on to say that though many Theosophists wish to work hard, “the price of their assistance is that all the work must be done in their way and not in anyone else’s way.” This could be a reason why the Declaration

sets forth that the U.L.T. is not interested in “dissensions or differences of individual opinion,” and why its work is based solely on the Fundamental Principles of the philosophy of Theosophy.

In the next clause of the Declaration we find an amplification of the same idea, when we are told that there is not the “time or inclination to take part in side issues.” Would not those “side issues” also be a matter of “individual opinion” and lead to dissensions? This applies to U.L.T. as a body, but any associate, as an individual, if he has the time and opportunity, should do all he can, be it ever so little, to alleviate the misery and suffering he finds around himself. It does not mean we must go far afield; often we find all we can near at hand, perhaps even in our own homes. In line with this H.P.B. wrote (p. 8):

We are the friends of those who exercise practical charity, who seek to lift a little of the tremendous weight of misery that is crushing down the poor. But in our quality of Theosophists, we cannot engage in any one of these great works in particular. As individuals we may do so, but as “Theosophists we have a larger, more important, and much more difficult work to do.”

What is that “larger, more important, and much more difficult work”? The U.L.T. Declaration states that our work and end is

the dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the philosophy of Theosophy, and the exemplification in practice of those principles, through a truer realization of the SELF; a profounder conviction of Universal Brotherhood.

In other words, we have to begin to work in and upon ourselves. We have to train, as *Five Messages* suggests (p. 9),

the animal-man to be a human man; and when people have learned to think and feel as truly human beings should feel and think, they will act humanely, and works of charity, justice, and generosity will be done spontaneously by all.

We shall then have achieved that “profounder conviction of

Universal Brotherhood,” will have realized the real basis for “charity, justice, and generosity.”

This idea is carried further in the Declaration when it is said that all those may be regarded as Theosophists “who are engaged in the true service of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, condition or organization.” This is a restatement of what H.P.B. has said in *Five Messages* (p. 8): “Theosophists are of necessity the friends of all movements in the world, whether intellectual or simply practical, for the amelioration of the condition of mankind.”

It is this idea which suggests what H.P.B. terms the unsectarian nature of Theosophy, and it is embodied in the Declaration in the following words: “*The true Theosophist belongs to no cult or sect, yet belongs to each and all.*”

None of this can be achieved by any individual associate, or by any centre of the U.L.T., which, after all, is made up of associates, unless there is a solid foundation or basis for action and thought, and until, in H.P.B.’s words (p. 13), Theosophy is made “a vital factor in our lives.” In other words associates have “to make it real, to weld its principles firmly into their lives—in short, to make it their own and treat the Theosophical Society [the U.L.T.] as if it were themselves.”

If Theosophy can become a “vital factor in our lives,” then naturally others will gradually become interested in it, and will, as the Declaration points out, “desire to fit themselves, by study and otherwise, to be the better able to help and teach others.”

In *Five Messages* (p. 4) H.P.B. expresses the same idea thus:

...each man should strive to be a centre of work in himself. When his inner development has reached a certain point, he will naturally draw those with whom he is in contact under the same influence; a nucleus will be formed, round which other people will gather, forming a centre from which information and spiritual influence radiate, and towards which higher influences are directed.

When we consider these few quotations from *Five Messages*, we realize that the years that have elapsed since they were written have not changed their relevance and significance. They show the unique position of H.P.B. as the direct and faithful Agent of the Masters, a channel between Their world and ours. It follows that all she has written can be taken as Their teaching. The unbroken link is thus traced from the Masters, through H.P.B., to William Q. Judge, who from the first saw the “plan” and went on with the work; from him to Robert Crosbie, who assimilated and exemplified both the letter and the spirit of the “plan” in forming the U.L.T. and drawing up its Declaration. We can keep this link unbroken by loyalty to H.P.B. as the Teacher, and by bearing in mind the following words, written by her just 23 days before she left her body:

“Be Theosophists, work for Theosophy!” Theosophy first, and Theosophy last: for its *practical* realization alone can save the Western world from that selfish and unbrotherly feeling that now divides race from race, one nation from the other; and from that hatred of class and social considerations that are the curse and disgrace of so-called Christian peoples. Theosophy alone can save it from sinking entirely into that mere luxurious materialism in which it will decay and putrefy as civilizations have done. In your hands, brothers, is placed in trust the welfare of the coming century; and great as is the trust, so great is also the responsibility. (*Five Messages*, p. 31)

THE millions are awake enough for physical labour; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, one only in a hundred million for a poetic or divine life.

—THOREAU

HEALTHY MIND IN HEALTHY BODY

I

HEALTH is the condition of being sound in body, mind, and spirit, although generally it is taken to mean freedom from physical disease or pain. To be healthy means to be in a wholesome state. The word health is derived from the old English word “hal,” which means whole. The subject of health is very important. No one knows the importance of good health better than someone who has just recovered from illness of some kind. The Buddha calls health the greatest of gifts. We realize how precious that gift is when we are trying to set right our fractured leg or to heal a kidney or heart disorders, or malfunctioning of any part of our body. It is indeed a gift of Nature to man. We borrow from Mother Nature the five elements (*panchamahabhutas*), which compose our body, and return them back to Nature at death. Death is inevitable, no matter how carefully we use the body-mind instrument. However, the average life span may be prolonged, if desired, by proper observance of the laws of health.

Body is a powerful instrument for the purpose of soul evolution. Man really *is* a soul, the inner man, the thinker, the chooser and the witness who uses the body to go through various experiences and learn. Body is like a car or a horse, which will help us reach our destination. It is essential that we keep it in fit and running condition. The cycle of life involves birth, growth, decay and death. Body is like a complex machine with its own systems and sub-systems working in close co-ordination and co-operation with one another. Each system is composed of a certain set of organs, working in a coherent manner. Organs themselves are composed of cells, which have their own intelligence and memory. Each cell exactly knows its role and function. Each system works in harmony with every other system to produce a healthy state of physical body. Disruption, disharmony, imbalance of any kind leads to an unhealthy state of the body. When a cell or an organ deviates from

its defined role, when it works disruptively, disease sets in. It is a signal that things are not in order and that the body's defence system is now working overtime to restore harmony. Mr. Judge has this to say:

Health of the body as a whole depends on the integrity of all its parts, and more especially upon their harmonious association and co-operation. A diseased tissue is one in which a group of individual cells refuse to co-operate, and wherein is set up discordant action, using less or claiming more than their due share of food or energy. Disease of the very tissue of man's body is neither more nor less than the "sin of separateness." (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, p. 16)

Body has its own heredity and its own limits. Unless it has been trained through regular and steady discipline, such as that undertaken by sportsmen and athletes, it will not be able to repair excessive wear and tear. Studies show that there is a direct linkage of illness and death to our present lifestyles. Some of the young executives use their bodies as if they were in some car race, not realizing that their bodily car was not built for such purpose. The result is a grand crash or sudden stoppage, premature retirement from active life through heart attack or nervous breakdown or even death. Luckily, we are becoming more and more health conscious—realizing the importance of right diet, exercise and hygiene. There is greater awareness of ill effects of junk food, and social awareness of serious effects that follow from indulgence in alcohol, drugs and smoking. Some countries are even trying to control these effects through legislation. While most of us are aware of various health hazards, we tend to neglect health care until it is almost too late. Then there are those who go to the other extreme and worship the body as the end-all and be-all of our existence.

We need not be obsessed or become excessively health conscious. It is best to observe moderation. The *Bhagavad-Gita* recommends moderation in eating, recreation, exertion, sleeping and waking. *Gita* classifies food into three categories—*Sattvic*,

Rajasic and *Tamasic*. *Sattvic* food is that kind of food, which increases length of days, vigour, and strength, which keeps one free from sickness, leads to tranquillity of mind and contentment—food which is savoury, nourishing, of permanent benefit and congenial to the body. *Rajasic* food is too acid, excessively salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning, and causes unpleasantness, pain, and disease. *Tamasic* food is stale food—tasteless or rotting and impure. We see, therefore, how food has direct effect on our physical as well as mental health. However, more than food itself, we should pay greater attention to our thoughts, because unhealthy thought-food will do us greater harm. For, after all is said and done, no matter what we eat, each body extracts from any kind of food only that which conforms to the inner nature of the possessor of the body, and that nature can be changed only from *within*. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 223)

We desire to live on. We cling to life and try to find ways and means to increase the life span. Early detection of disease, medication, knowledge of laws of hygiene and proper living has indeed increased the life span. However, death finally claims the man. From birth to death, a continuous process of destruction and rejuvenation goes on in our body. Old cells die and new ones take their place. Organs are made of millions of cells. Cells themselves are made up of millions of infinitesimal lives. There are also present in the body microbes, bacilli and bacteria, which themselves are composed of more minute lives, which include "fiery lives." The mystery of physical life and death is hidden among these infinitesimal "lives."

It is a well-known fact that the physical body of man undergoes a complete change of structure every seven years, and the process of destruction and preservation is the result of the alternate function of the fiery lives as "destroyers" and "builders." As builders, they restrain the destructive tendency of the microbes in the body. They do this by offering themselves as sacrifice to microbes to provide them vitality and compel them to build up the material body and

its cells. The fiery lives become “destroyers” when that restraint is removed and the microbes seeking vitality from healthy cells of the body run riot as destructive agents. Thus, during the first half of a man’s life, *i.e.*, for around thirty-five years, the “fiery lives” are indirectly engaged in the process of building up man’s material body; life is on the ascending scale, and the force is used in construction and increase. After this period is passed, the work of destruction and decrease commences. The process of destruction has been corroborated by Pasteur, thus:

The cells of the organs, when they do not find sufficient oxygen for themselves, adapt themselves to that condition and form ferments, which, by absorbing oxygen from substances coming in contact with them, ruin the latter. Thus the process is commenced by one cell robbing its neighbour of the source of its vitality when the supply is insufficient; and the ruin so commenced steadily progresses. (*S.D.*, I, 263)

Thus, there are two important cycles. There is a cycle of renovation of the body every seven years. Another cycle is that of building and consolidation followed by decline and death. Care of health has to commence at an early age. With good health built up in the first half of life, man is in a much better position to deal with declining phase. For most of us, the early part of life is carefree existence—fast life and fast food. It is only after the age of forty, when our health reports show high cholesterol level and other problems, that we are forced to slow down.

There is also a science of life energy itself. It shows us how important it is to have proper sleep to remain alive and healthy. Life is a universally pervasive principle. The earth floats in the ocean of life. It also permeates every being and every object on it. The animal tissues absorb it according to their more or less morbid or healthy state. From birth to death, each living being is regulated, strengthened and fed by it. An infant lives because the combination of its healthy organs is able to absorb the life all around it in space,

and is put to sleep each day by the overpowering strength of the stream of life, since the preservers among the cells of the youthful body are not yet mastered by the other class—the destroyers. When we are awake and active, we resist the flood of life-current into our body. When it overpowers us, when we are too full of life, we fall asleep. During sleep, equilibrium is restored. Speaking on the role of life energy and what happens during sleep, Dr. B. W. Richardson, F.R.S. says:

It holds the nervous system throughout in perfect tension during states of life...It accumulates in the nervous centres during sleep, bringing them, if I may so speak, to their due tone, and therewith raising the muscles to awakening and renewed life. (*S.D.*, I, 538)

That there is a close interrelationship of body and mind is now an accepted fact. Anger leads to increase in blood pressure, trembling, faster pulse rate, and respiration. Psychosomatic disorders resulting from stress may include hypertension, respiratory ailments, gastrointestinal disturbances, migraine and tension headaches, pelvic pain, impotence, frigidity, dermatitis, and ulcers.

(To be concluded)

WE all walk in mysteries. We are surrounded by an atmosphere of which we do not know what is stirring in it, or how it is connected with our own spirit. So much is certain, that in particular cases we can put out the feelers of our soul beyond its bodily limits, and that a presentiment, nay, an actual insight into the immediate future, is accorded to it.

—GOETHE

LAO TZU'S "TAO TE KING"

II

THE practical implication of *yin* and *yang* is that in manifestation duality supervenes. Light and darkness, good and bad, pain and pleasure, are the world's eternal ways. Hence, when we look at something we must know it to be only one pole or aspect of the whole. The sage always takes into consideration the relativity of things.

There is a same mutual relation between existence and non-existence in the matter of creation; between difficulty and ease in the matter of accomplishing; between long and short in the matter of form; between high and low in the matter of elevation...between before and after in the matter of priority. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 126)

Take anything in manifestation and we shall find that it is not possible for us to grasp a thing completely by considering only one aspect. The sage always looks at things, recognizing relativity and polar relationships. Unless you know the opposite, *i.e.*, bad, mean, low, you cannot properly understand its opposite, *i.e.*, good. Therefore Chuang Tzu asks: Shall we not follow and honour the right and have nothing to do with the wrong? Shall we not follow those who secure good government and have nothing to do with those who produce disorder? Such a course we will not be able to pursue. Why? The answer comes from Lao Tzu:

If you would contract, you must first expand. If you would weaken, you must first strengthen...If you would take, you must first give. This is called the dawn of intelligence [subtle wisdom]. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 129)

Knowing that the Tao is a continuous interplay between the opposites, it is suggested that whenever one wants to achieve

anything, one should start with its opposite. In other words, to know how to expand, it is necessary to understand contraction, and so also to strengthen a thing we must know its opposite, *i.e.*, the process of weakening. To untie a knot we must know how it was tied. So also, it is true of good and evil. We must understand vice, instead of turning away from it in horror.

Light on the Path says that the vices of men become rungs of the ladder [of spiritual progress], one by one, as they are surmounted. The same book also suggests that seek the Way by testing all experiences and that does not mean yielding to seductions of the senses, but weighing, testing and observing them and waiting with the patience of confidence for the hour when they will affect us no longer. Thus, while applying moral principle we must take into account both the poles.

Te is generally translated as Virtue, and the compound *Tao-Te* means "moral philosophy." Lao Tzu speaks of two kinds of morality or virtue—superior and inferior. Superior *Te* is, in fact, hard to distinguish from the Tao, *i.e.*, superior *Te* is Tao. In other words, moral principles stem from the very being of man. As Mr. Crosbie says, "True morality rests in an understanding and in a realization of man's own spiritual nature, and must of necessity flow from it, irrespective of all kinds of conventions." A Holy Man has no virtue other than superior *Te*. He does not practise virtue with the intention of earning merit, or with any ulterior motive or expectation of reward. The man of inferior virtue takes pride in the virtues, and practises them with the intention of earning merit or earning name and fame. When virtue is not practised for its own sake it may give rise to the feeling of self-righteousness. It is of such inferior virtue that Lao Tzu says, "By never failing in virtue" man moves away from the Tao. Hence, *Light on the Path* points out that though the virtues of men are steps on the ladder, virtue alone can create but fair atmosphere and happy future and make us good people but not spiritual. Buddhism mentions ten fetters that bind a man striving towards enlightenment. One of them is *Silavrata-paramarsa*, *i.e.*,

grasping ethical rules and religious observances as ends in themselves, whereas, they are only means to an end. Hence, Lao Tzu writes:

When the Great Tao falls into disuse, benevolence and righteousness come into vogue. When shrewdness and sagacity appear, great hypocrisy prevails. It is when the bonds of kinship are out of joint filial piety and paternal affection begin. It is when the State is in the ferment of revolution that loyal patriots arise. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 127)

C. Spurgeon Medhurst points out that benevolence and love in the family, and loyalty and faithfulness in the State may be taken for granted during normal conditions, like the ceaseless beating of the heart. Hence, special mention of love and loyalty indicates disease. Benevolence, righteousness, filial piety, paternalism, loyalty, devotion, etc., tend to degenerate when the Tao, the Great Ideal, recedes from view. "Woe to that captain who, when navigating his vessel into port, allows the various lights and sounds of the harbour to turn his attention from the flashing signals of the lighthouse....Although in themselves true, these moral qualities, when substitutes for the Tao, become false."

In other words, when we lose sight of the common divine origin of man and consequent human solidarity, acts of benevolence and righteousness, instead of being spontaneous would be done deliberately, and even ostentatiously, to hide non-spirituality. Virtue is then only a veneer that hides lack of true spirituality, and it will further degrade into rituals and ceremonies. "When people have learned to think and feel as truly human beings should feel and think, they will act humanely, and works of charity, justice, and generosity will be done spontaneously by all," writes H.P.B. When humaneness, generosity and love are practised towards a restricted few, we fail to rise above the ordinary goodness. Even love for wife and children becomes a *barrier* to Occultism because so long as the heart is occupied by thoughts and concern for the little group

of *selves* near and dear to us, what percentage of love will remain to bestow on humanity? *The Voice of the Silence* says, "To live to benefit mankind is the first step. To practise the six glorious virtues is the second." It is Unity and Brotherhood that gives direction to the practising of virtue. Hence, Lao Tzu writes:

The man of superior virtue is not virtuous, and that is why he has virtue.

The man of inferior virtue never strays from virtue, and that is why he has no virtue....

When people abandon the Tao, they resort to Te; when they abandon humanheartedness, they resort to righteousness; when they abandon justice, they resort to rites. The rites are a mere husk of loyalty and faith and the beginning of anarchy. (*Lao Tzu and Taoism*)

When the highest of the virtues, humanheartedness, becomes *conscious* activity limited to particular objects, it is degraded, giving rise to still more degraded virtues, such as, deliberate generosity, righteousness and finally ritual-mindedness, writes Max Kaltenmark. (*Lao Tzu and Taoism*)

On the other hand when a man spontaneously practises virtue for its own sake, a protective shield gets created about him, making him invulnerable. There is harmlessness within him that inspires harmlessness in others around him. He becomes like a child, harmless but full of strength or spiritual energy that flows from spiritual and moral integrity. Lao Tzu compares the man established in virtue with a new-born baby. Thus:

He who trusts his abundance of natural virtue is like an infant newly born, whom venomous reptiles will not sting, wild beasts will not seize, birds of prey will not strike. The infant's bones are weak, its sinews are soft, yet its grasp is firm. All day long it will cry without its voice becoming hoarse. This is because the harmony of his bodily system is perfect. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, pp. 101-102)

Another important Taoist concept is that of Void or nothingness, which Lao Tzu conveys through the following imageries:

Thirty spokes unite in one nave; the utility of the cart depends on the hollow centre at which the axle turns. Clay is moulded into a vessel; the utility of the vessel depends on its hollow interior... The utility of the house depends on the empty space. Thus, while the existence of things may be good, it is the non-existent in them which makes them serviceable. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 127)

As Max Kaltenmark explains, the Void is efficacious because like the hub of the wheel, a vessel or a house, it is a receptacle. The image of the 30 spokes converging toward the empty space of the hub is often used to symbolize the virtue of the ruler who attracts all creatures to his service. It is the virtue of Sovereign Unity which brings order to the multiplicity of things around it. But, it also suggests that when one is "empty," *i.e.*, purified of all passions and desires, pride and wrong notions, one is fully inhabited by the Tao.

Buddha makes a similar suggestion when he says, "Empty the boat, O Bhikkhu, when emptied, it will go lightly." So also, one has to unlearn, in order to learn. Unless we are emptied of wrong ideas, like the teacup full to the brim, it is difficult for the teacher to impart right concepts. There is also the implication to see the intangible and invisible behind the tangible and visible—being aware of the individuality behind the personality, and above all, being aware of the invisible essence behind the visible, tangible universe. One Reality is the noumenon of all the noumena which must underlie all phenomena and give to them whatever shadow of reality they possess, but which we are not able to cognize at our level. An example is given to understand this. The atoms of gold scattered throughout the substance of auriferous quartz may be imperceptible to the naked eye of the miner, yet he knows that they are not only present there but that they alone give his quartz

any appreciable value. The relation between noumenon and phenomenon is similar to that between gold and quartz. But whereas the miner knows what gold will look like when extracted from quartz, we at our level cannot form any conception of the reality of things as separated from the veil of *Maya* which hides them, *i.e.*, we are able to grasp only its manifested aspect. (*S.D.*, I, 45)

(*To be continued*)

WHEN desire is for the purely abstract—when it has lost all trace or tinge of "self"—then it has become pure.

The first step towards this purity is to kill out the desire for the things of matter, since these *can* only be enjoyed by the separated personality.

The second is to cease from desiring for oneself even such abstractions as power, knowledge, love, happiness, or fame; for they are but selfishness after all.

Life itself teaches these lessons; for all such objects of desire are found Dead Sea fruit in the moment of attainment. This much we learn from experience. Intuitive perception seizes on the *positive* truth that satisfaction is attainable only in the infinite; the will makes that conviction an actual fact of consciousness, till at last all desire is centred on the Eternal....

Both will and desire are absolute *creators*, forming the man himself and his surroundings. But will creates intelligently—desire blindly and unconsciously. The man, therefore, makes himself in the image of his desires, unless he creates himself in the likeness of the Divine, through his will, the child of the light.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

THE LURE OF THE ABNORMAL

THE *Bhagavad-Gita* (literally, the *Gita* or Song of *Bhagavan* or Lord) is the book of instructions which teaches the practice of *Buddhi Yoga*. It gives guidance as to how each event in life is to be met and how each step upon cautious step is to be taken on the path of knowledge and divine wisdom. Nowhere in the treatise does Krishna urge his disciple to develop abnormal powers, whether they be physical, psychic or spiritual. The goal of human evolution is not attained by their acquisition. The entire trend of the teaching is towards the blending (*yoga* or union) of mind and soul and the final assimilation in the Supreme. This union and final assimilation is an end by itself. It is not taken as a means for obtaining powers. These but follow upon and are a natural outcome of attainment. Arjuna too does not ask for nor covet powers for the averting of the conflict, nor for the obtaining of victory. He desires only such instructions as will quieten his inner turmoil. All his questions are directed towards that end.

Krishna as the Guru, the Asylum and the Friend of Arjuna imparts the divine wisdom. Commencing his discourse with the teaching about the immortality of the Self and the spiritual and imperishable roots from which the mortal man springs, he recites the excellences of the Supreme and reveals the divine universal form with all its resplendent effulgence, the imprint of which will remain with Arjuna for all times. But that is all. Even the demonstration of his Universal Form comes not as a display of a phenomenon but as a legitimate sequence of the Instructions which preceded it and also as a corrective to Arjuna's previous blindness in failing to see the presence of the Lord in all things and everywhere. Krishna does not give to Arjuna the fabled glance by which Kapila made a mountain of ashes of King Sagar's 60,000 sons, nor does he protect Arjuna's son from being slain, nor yet does he make Arjuna immune to death and the other risks of war.

He does not use his supreme power to reduce the Kurus to ashes, nor does he depute such powers to his devoted disciple. Divine powers are not so used.

For centuries man has chronicled the manifestations of abnormal powers and forces, dubbing them divine or diabolical to suit his own prejudices. Their range is vast, and some are so stupendous as to cause men to disbelieve their existence. But they are there and can be awakened and directed by the perfected will of man. When the student sees these powers exercised, he may get so awed by the manifestations as to start paying homage to the operator. Under the dangerous spell cast by the phenomenon, he may treat the person through whom such power manifests as the chosen one of God, and abandoning previous vows of loyalty, proclaim himself the disciple of the new-found teacher. Many a student thus falls by the wayside, unable to lift his gaze beyond the range of the encircling spell which obsesses his mind and numbs his discrimination. *Isis Unveiled* treats of phenomena and their rationale and proves by facts piled upon facts that there are no miracles in nature. What the ordinary person calls miraculous is the effect of a law that at the particular time and for the particular individual was hidden or non-comprehensible. Clairaudience, clairvoyance, telepathy, mind-reading, apportation, and all the other phenomena now clubbed together under the appellation of extra-sensory perception were considered miraculous only a hundred years back.

The student has to understand the basic fundamentals that lie at the root of the Ten Items of *Isis Unveiled*. He may pass over them lightly, but then it would be at his own risk. The truths which these items give out are the immunizing agents that will protect the student against the glamour of the abnormal. Each phenomenon which he sees or which is brought to his notice can be understood by one or the other key which these Ten Items provide.

Theosophy postulates that Nature is triune and that so is man. The triune man provides the key which fits the lock of Nature and opens its mysteries. Each of the three great divisions has its own

sub-divisions which have their own respective planes of consciousness, their own sensory instruments of perception and their own powers and potencies depending upon the subtlety or grossness of the substance in use. So vast, so complex is the realm of nature that even in regard to the matter with which we are familiar our humanity has not reached to the knowledge of all the subtler forces that reside therein.

The three broad divisions of nature and of man are: the physical, the astral or psychic and the spiritual. The first two divisions are in a constant state of flux. They are perpetually changing and are for that reason perishable. It is only when man succeeds in merging himself in his spiritual nature that he becomes an immortal entity. The forces that reside in the spiritual aspect cannot be reached by the physical perishable, nor yet by the perishable psychic. The perishable natures must for all time remain ignorant of the spiritual. Further, they cannot be used to mount to the spiritual. The forces that reside in the spirit are not for showmanship, nor for the gaping laudation of the multitudes. When one rests in the spiritual, the desire either to possess the powers or to glory in their use and demonstration is gone. Therefore is it written for the disciple that the power he shall covet is that which shall make him appear as nothing in the eyes of men.

Those who love to parade their virtue or their knowledge may by that very act be judged to be without access to the powers of the spirit. This must be so because the quality of impersonality which is the essence of the spirit precludes the exercise of force for ends lesser than spiritual. Persons who worship the evil powers or the elemental spirits or the ghosts of dead men put themselves out of the pale of the spirit as do others who profess one religion or the other and favour one sect or creed as opposed to others. Spirit is one, indivisible and impartite. It cannot be reached nor its powers drawn upon by the mortal and warring aspects of men.

The powers that an Adept can acquire are so vast, so ludicrously impossible to the ordinary mind as to invite ridicule at their very

mention. Some of these powers will be found enumerated by Patanjali. They exist, but the stress is not on their acquisition but rather on the fact that they are met with on the way and should not be allowed to divert the aspirant from the ultimate goal. A knowledge that such “impossible” powers exist will rob the lesser powers of much of their glamour.

No force in nature or in man is inherently good or bad. Forces or powers are colourless—even those of the physical plane. It is the motive which propels the force to action that can make it white or black, benign or malignant. To be white, the force has to be directed by one who at operation time is as impersonal as the sun, wind or the ocean swell. So functioning, the man can protect large multitudes. The acts which such a man performs are in harmony with Nature’s laws and with what has been called the fixed arithmetic of the spheres. This rules out any use of power—however trivial—for self-glorification, pleasure, the wonderment or the confusing of others, or for gain to oneself, one’s nation, family or group. It *ipso facto* precludes the seeking of a reward or the doing of harm to anyone, even though he be the vilest and the meanest of mankind.

When the student comes across persons who operate the lesser known powers, his initial reaction often is that the possessor of these must be very close to perfection. Here would be a teacher fit for him because he displays his superiority over those who merely preach. Phenomenalism appeals to the emotions, makes the mind captive, and the man reduced to this condition willingly surrenders his will to that of another. Thus, though he may have studied the Ten Items of *Isis Unveiled* (II, 587 *et seq.*) and can recite them backwards, he is liable to be glamoured at the sight of flowers and medallions produced from nowhere, or at the correctness of information about events occurring at the very moment at places continents away. Coming in contact with a medium, he may stand enthralled when he is told that his long-lost relative is by his side and is calling him by a nickname which perchance he had himself

forgotten. These are hours of great danger and there will be no angel by his side to ward it off.

Phenomena beyond the threshold of the normal do occur. *Fakirs* and *Sannyasis* have been known to produce them in such abundance as to appear as minor gods in the eyes of gaping multitudes. Diseases have been known to have been cured on the instant by magnetic passes, by breathing upon the patient and by other unorthodox means. But the production of even the most baffling of phenomena is no indication of any advancement on the spiritual path. The path shown by the Masters of Wisdom is a very special path. It demands from the aspirant altruism and the giving up of anything that life can offer as a loving sacrifice at the altar of human advancement towards the higher life. Many a student moves away from this path because he finds no glamour in Theosophy, while in the degree of his emotional tendencies he finds himself carried away to sit at the feet of phenomenalists, mediums and holy men. Holiness gives powers; it throws a halo of sanctity around the person and those who come close to such an one may feel the warmth of that achievement. But it does not breed volunteers for selfless service in other and more troublous centuries when the forces of goodwill have to be marshalled to protect multitudes from the evil intentions of those who may be called masters in evil. *Kali Yuga* has yet several hundred thousand years to run, and the iron age as it proceeds will have troubles in plenty for the unwary and for the weak of heart.

The switching from one teacher to another, the abandoning of one system for another, once a firm declaration of adherence is made, leaves a scar or wound in the inner make-up of the person. It may become a sore and will in time fester and putrefy. This is the wage of a *volte-face* on the planes of soul and spirit. The pledging of one's troth, the declaration of one's undying fidelity is no light matter. Once given, it remains as a covenant for life and lives.

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: What is respect? Need we obey our elders and do everything they suggest just because they are older in age? Does disobedience mean disrespect?

Answer: To respect someone means to honour or hold him or her in high esteem. We are asked to respect our parents, elders, teachers, spiritual instructor (Guru) and so on. One of the ways in which we can show our respect is by being obedient, being polite, by not back-answering, etc. Respect becomes, at times, a form of gratitude. We are indebted to our elders in many ways. Our parents have given us the body through which the soul can gain experience. Besides our parents, many "elders" have contributed in bringing us up, by providing not just physical care, but even emotional support. As a child cannot think and decide for itself, parental guidance in early years, at least up to the age of seven, is of utmost importance. As the child grows up, a certain amount of independence is acquired, yet emotional support is still needed. But now the child or the young person must be encouraged to think for himself/herself, while parents and elders may continue to give *advice*, especially when they find children going astray. Elders and parents are not infallible, but having learnt from their mistakes they might be prompted to advise in order to prevent the young ones from repeating the same mistakes. Hence, by and large, if parents are worthy of respect, children will automatically respect them, especially in matters where superior knowledge is needed. However, *demand*ed respect will not last long.

There have always been conflicts between generations because of the “generation gap.” In the recent past, areas of conflict have increased. For instance, we observe an increased pace of change, especially in life-style, over the last fifty to seventy years. As the world around changes, youngsters cannot help but go along with the change, or else risk being singled out. Marriage is one of the major issues on which disagreement between older and younger generation is likely to arise. The youngsters may not want to marry, or to marry by their own choice, etc. The elderly respect the institution of marriage, and not without reason. There are things obviously harmful, such as indulgence in alcohol and drugs, smoking at a tender age, etc., which if indulged in unchecked could lead to ruin. In such cases, elders feel it their duty to prevent the young from making wrong decisions and ruining their lives.

Respect could never mean *blind* obedience. Even a great Spiritual Teacher like Buddha never insisted that people must accept his teachings without questioning. We must have reverence or respect for the scriptures and spiritual instructors but should not obey them blindly. Many people make the mistake of thinking that we should not question our religion. Even Job, in the Bible, asked questions of God. Hence, we must hear out our elders patiently, but we must always question them if the course of action suggested does not appeal to our reason, and it is their duty as elders to give us satisfactory explanation. No person has the right to force his opinion on another. We must show enough respect to analyze their advice. Elders must be open to discussion and at times be ready to revise their opinions, views, beliefs, etc. For instance, if the elders have accepted their religion as a “revelation,” without reasoning or questioning, then it is quite likely that the younger generation may not be ready to follow their advice in religious matters. Such is also the case with customs and traditions. When it comes to ethics and morals, there are self-evident truths leaving very little scope for argument.

After showing all the *pros* and *cons* of the situation, the elder

must leave the final decision to the youngster, and the latter must be ready to bear the *full consequences of his/her decision*. In other words, there must be mutual respect.

Every child is an old soul in a new body, having its own destiny to fulfil in the midst of the family with which he is karmically linked. Often, parents are projecting their unrealized ambitions on their children and thus vicariously satisfying their unfulfilled desires and ambitions. Each child has a unique “soul-background,” character, temperament and capacity from its past lives on earth. Like gardeners, parents should preserve a balance between “nature” and “nurture,” and help the normal development of the child who happens to take birth through them, under Karma. Children are our salvation. Parents would do well to remember Kahlil Gibran’s words:

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you.... You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.... Seek not to make them like you.

Question: What is the purpose of the “institution of religion”? Is it valid in this day and age?

Answer: Looking at the state of religions today, it is only natural to ask, “Is religion necessary, when what we have been left with today is only ‘institutionalized religion’”? Most religions of the world have their founders and prophets, who taught ethics as well as metaphysics. As long as the prophet-reformer or the Teacher was on the scene, his teachings remained pure. In most cases, these teachings were transmitted orally and were reduced to writing only after the death of the Teacher. It is at this stage that there is found to be conscious as well as unconscious corruption of the original teachings, with gradual shift from the study and application of

ethics to rites, rituals and ceremonies. Brahmins and priests and purohits, instead of being true interpreters of the scriptures, not only misinterpreted and interpolated them but gained prominence only in relation to the performance of rituals and ceremonies. God, instead of being the Omnipresent, Omniscient, Immutable and Impersonal Principle, came to be regarded as a person, who must be propitiated and worshipped and from whom favours could be asked.

Besides emphasizing rituals and ceremonies, the priest class began to present the ethical principles as commandments and dictates, instead of self-evident truths. To continue their hold over the masses, in certain religions, doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation were rejected and a series of dogmas came to be introduced. As a result, today religion plays a major role in dividing man from man. But it is not the priestly class alone that is to be blamed. How many people want the truth? How many of us are ready to suffer the consequences of our actions? Do we not look for a quick and easy solution to our problems and are only too happy to offer a scapegoat for our sins? We look for ceremonies to dodge the law of Karma.

Then again, God as a principle becomes too remote and most of us are looking for a relationship with God—one who would comfort, forgive, and condone our sins. The situation is the same today as was many years ago. In fact, the seeds of these “sacerdotal” religions had been sown from the time of the Fourth or Atlantean Race, before which humanity was of One lip (language) and One Religion. H.P.B. points out that people of the Left Path—those who misuse knowledge and powers for their own selfish purposes—having “inaugurated the birth and evolution of the sacerdotal castes, have finally led the world into these exoteric religions, invented to satisfy the depraved tastes of the ‘hoi polloi’ and the ignorant for ritualistic pomp and the materialization of the ever-immaterial and Unknowable Principle.” (*S.D.*, I, 503)

However, no Rishi, no Buddha, no Mahatma, no Prophet, ever tried to establish a religion. Each one of them has protested against

mere mechanical performance of rituals and ceremonies, explaining the underlying significance. When Buddha saw a person scattering rice in four directions, to ward off evil, he asked him to permeate the four directions with loving thoughts. At his thread ceremony, even as a child, Guru Nanak, the spiritual teacher of the Sikhs, questioned the priest as to the significance of wearing the sacred thread. When he was told that wearing of the thread will purify him and will entitle him to perform any rite, social or religious, he said that all who wear the thread are not found to be pure. Then he explained the underlying significance to the priest in these wise words: “O Pandit, from the cotton of compassion spin out the thread of love. Make the knots of purity, truth, and self-control. Let the mind remain concentrated on that thread. The thread never breaks, never needs to be changed, never can be lost. Revere those who wear such a thread.” (*The Brotherhood of Religions*)

Every prophet-reformer taught a Way of Life, a Way to Wisdom and Brotherhood and that is the function of true religion. Some of the rituals and ceremonies have profound inner significance—being relics and shadows of the mysteries of initiation. Buddha compares religion and religious scriptures to a boat, which must be discarded once it has served its purpose of helping you cross the river. Even as we go to temple, church, or mosque and say our prayers, or perform *puja*, etc., we must be aware that these are only crutches and that we resort to them to fill the spiritual vacuum in our lives. But sooner or later we must outgrow them. We all need *true* religion, such as defined by Mr. Crosbie:

True religion must give us a basis for thinking, and consequently, a basis for acting; it must give us an understanding of nature, of ourselves and of other beings. Religion is a bond uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs—binding not only all Men, but also all Beings and all things in the entire Universe, into one grand whole.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

What is mindfulness? Does it imply paying attention to an experience—experience of eating an orange, or watching one’s grandchild play, and appreciating those moments of joy? It appears that “mindfulness” has deeper meaning, being an essential component of the path to liberation. It is precisely because we are not mindful of things as they really are that we lack clear understanding of suffering and its causes. In the *Vipallasa Sutra*, the Buddha described four basic ways we misconstrue our experience—known as the four distortions of mind because things are grasped in a way that is opposite to how they actually are. We have to be mindful of the opposites of the four distortions—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, unattractiveness, and selflessness. Thus, (1) We have to be mindful of the transient nature of people and things because only then can we deal gracefully with old age and with the death of our dear ones, recognizing the impermanence of the body. (2) Being mindful that things that bring pleasure also bring problems—such as, promotion entails longer working hours, a perfect partner may leave us, and so on. It is elimination of afflictive emotions and actions based on them that can give lasting happiness. (3) We need not be distressed at aging, but learn to be joyful with wrinkled skin, sagging muscles, gray hair, etc. (4) The real “I” or self is not in the body or mind. We form an image of ourselves that is not wholly correct. For instance, we are not inherently ugly, beautiful, talented, inadequate, lazy, stupid, or any such thing we attribute to ourselves. When we fail to realize that the conditioned existence is devoid of true selfhood, we fall under the sway of craving, fear, hostility, anxiety, resentment, arrogance, and laziness. Mindfulness of these four distortions gives us courage and ability to oppose our habitual, self-centred ways and makes us aware that other beings around us are also seeking happiness, and that in turn arouses the desire for altruistic works. Thus, mindfulness leads to liberation, writes

Thubten Chodron, an American-born Tibetan nun. (*Utne Reader*, January-February, 2007)

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhist philosophy refer to Suffering, the Cause of suffering, the Cessation of suffering and the Noble Eightfold Path or the Way that leads to cessation of suffering and to enlightenment. The seventh step of the Eightfold Path is described as “Perfect awareness” or “Perfect mindfulness.” There are levels and levels of awareness. In *The Dhammapada* we are asked to be watchful or mindful of bodily-irritation, speech-irritation and mind-irritation. However, the first step of the Eightfold Path is *Samyak Dristi* or “Perfect Vision,” *i.e.*, continually being mindful or aware of three characteristics of conditioned existence. It means being aware that (1) Conditioned existence is suffering, (2) Conditioned existence is impermanent and (3) Conditioned existence is devoid of true Selfhood. *The Dhammapada* says:

Continually grows the glory of that man who is wakeful and mindful, whose deeds are pure, whose acts are deliberate, who is self-controlled and who lives according to law. (verse 24).

Pilgrimages are in vogue, especially with modern Europeans, marking the dawn of new spirituality. More and more people, believers and non-believers alike, are going on pilgrimages, so that new pilgrimage routes are being opened and old ones are revived. For a long time, Americans and Europeans regarded pilgrimages as an exercise “for the simple folk.” In 1986, the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho walked the ancient religious road from the French border to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. In those days hardly 450 people made this pilgrimage in a year and today that many do it daily. Pilgrimages have always been looked upon as voyages of self-discovery. Each is a “transformative journey to a sacred centre,” says Phil Cousineau, author of “The

Art of Pilgrimage.” Pilgrimages are good metaphors for life, as they revive the real values, such as, learning to live a simple life, not carrying too much luggage, etc. “Keep Santiago”—your symbolic or literal destination—“in mind, but enjoy the road,” says Coelho. Father Cesare Atuire describes pilgrimages as the experience of believing and walking together and as voyages of discovery. “It is precisely the way such journeys promote feelings of solidarity while stimulating solitary meditation that attracts many of the new pilgrims, including those who believe that they have no faith,” write Edward Pentin, Barbie Nadeau, Jose D. Pacas and Joanna Chen. (*Newsweek*, April 30, 2007)

Pilgrimages are constant reminders to humanity that each one of us in our essential aspect is an “Eternal Pilgrim.” Like sparks from the great fire, humanity is an emanation from divinity on its return path thereto. “The whole of India is dotted with...sacred shrines, to which pilgrimages are made,” writes Mr. Judge. These holy places are like “Spiritual Seminaries.” The Adepts founded these places in order to keep alive in the minds of the people the inner significance of pilgrimage. Moreover, it is asserted that at most of the famous places of pilgrimage there is an Adept, who is ready to guide and give spiritual insight to all pure-hearted pilgrims visiting the place.

However, these pilgrimages are a symbolic representation of the life of man from birth to death, and also that of the eternal pilgrim from the beginning to the end of a Manvantara, or period of evolution.

We may say that the journey accomplished merely with one’s feet is travelling, but when the heart participates and guides it, it becomes a pilgrimage. To be a true pilgrim, we should first know and understand the divine purpose of life and our place and duty in this world, else we would end up becoming wanderers instead of pilgrims. All through the pilgrimage, one should not lose sight of the goal, the destination.

Some microbes search for food following its smell, and when such clue is missing, they tend to wander randomly, coming back to the same spot again and again. However, a species of amoeba seems to possess a rudimentary form of memory that keeps it from walking around in circles. By tracking the motion of a particular species of amoeba, namely, *Dictyostelium discoideum*, a kind of slime mould, researchers Edward Cox and Liang Li of Princeton University have discovered that the amoeba tends to remember its previous steps. The movement of the amoeba is by extending protruberances, called pseudopods, from the cell wall. How does the amoeba know where it has been before? Li says that formation of a pseudopod leaves a temporary “scar” in the cell’s structure, so that the next pseudopod will emerge from a different part of the cell and proceed in a different direction and thus avoid repetitive movements. (*Science News*, March 31, 2007)

During H.P.B.’s time, works of some German physiologists pointed to cases of consciousness and positive discrimination—one is almost inclined to say *thought*—in the amoeba or animalculae, known to be microscopical protoplasms. L. Cienkowsky observed that a certain amoeba hunted only for spirogyra among a number of other aquatic plants, rejecting every other food. This naturalist never saw it take any other food, and it never touched any of the numerous plants placed by Cienkowsky in its way. “The way of acting of these monads during their search for and reception of food is so amazing that one is almost inclined to see in them *consciously acting beings*,” writes Cienkowsky. As observed by a physiologist, when poisons are injected directly into the blood, lymphatic cells allow for selective absorption and separate out the poisons that reappear through the intestinal walls (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 20*). Every cell and atom has consciousness and hence memory and intelligence. Several physiologists in H.P.B.’s time went so far as to accept *free-will and consciousness* in the simplest protoplasms.

An Australian scientist, Professor Roger Short, a reproductive biologist at the University of Melbourne, is of the view that we must put an end to the age-old tradition of cremation, which leads to release of carbon dioxide, and contributes to global warming. We may, instead, choose to be buried in a cardboard box under a tree so that our decaying bodies would provide the tree with nutrients and also convert the carbon dioxide into life-giving oxygen. However, critics point out that burials not only take up a great deal of space, but embalming fluids or radiation therapy (during life), can contribute to contaminate groundwater with mercury, arsenic and formaldehyde. (*The Times of India*, April 20, 2007)

Primarily, cremation facilitates quick disposal of the physical body and it is *comparatively* a more hygienic method. Moreover, it helps in quick separation of psychic body or Kamrupic shell from the physical body and thus gives the astral body a chance to dissipate quickly.

Mr. Crosbie has this to say:

The death of the body means a return of the “lives” of the body to their respective elements. In cremation this return is immediate. The Ego then has no point of physical contact and is free to work out and assimilate the last life lived...When considered from every point of view, cremation is beneficial. There is a psychological effect from it, too, on those who are left behind; for as soon as the cremation is completed the bereaved at once feel that release. (*Theosophy*, March 1929)

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)

STAGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

ALTHOUGH it is not apparent at first sight, the subject of instinct, reason and intuition is connected very closely with that of who, where and what God is. Study of these three faculties may indeed help us to answer the question being asked: “Is God dead? Certainly the idea of God as a personal being, the creator of all, the arbiter of man’s destiny, “loving” yet “despotic,” has to a great extent died out. But, for many, no other idea has filled the gap thus left in their thinking and in thier knowledge of the purpose of life.

The idea of God that Theosophy advances is that of an impersonal, all-pervading Deity lying at the root of all manifestation and extending also beyond it. If we try to seek Deity in the known things of life we shall get some grasp of it, but we have to bear in mind that our idea of Deity will grow as our understanding of life grows, until we arrive at the stage when we realize what is expressed in the following extracts:

The ever-unknowable and incognizable *Karana* alone, the *Causeless* Cause of all causes, should have its shrine and altar on the holy and ever untrodden ground of our heart—invisible, intangible, unmentioned, save through “the still small voice” of our spiritual consciousness. Those who worship before it, ought to do so in the silence and the sanctified solitude of their Souls; making their spirit the sole mediator between them and the *Universal Spirit*, their good actions the only priests, and their sinful intentions the only visible and objective sacrificial victims to the *Presence*. (*The Secret Doctrine*, I, 280)

The “Parent Space” is the eternal, ever present cause of all—the incomprehensible DEITY, whose “invisible robes” are the mystic root of all matter, and of the Universe. (*Ibid.*, I, 35)

What is DEITY but Consciousness, Life, Universal Mind, and all else in manifestation? We are told that Universal Mind is omniscient; Matter is universal; Spirit is all-pervasive.

It seems to complicate matters when we read that

there is no plane in the whole universe with a wider margin, or a wider field of action in its almost endless gradations of perceptive and apperceptive qualities, than this plane [of mentality] which has in its turn an appropriate smaller plane for every “form,” from the “mineral” monad up to the time when that monad blossoms forth by evolution into the DIVINE MONAD. But all the time it is still one and the same Monad, differing only in its incarnations, throughout its ever succeeding cycles of partial or total obscuration of spirit, or the partial or total obscuration of matter—two polar antitheses—as it ascends into the realms of mental spirituality, or descends into the depths of materiality. (*S.D.*, I, 175)

There are stages of instinctual mental, and purely abstract, or spiritual consciousness. (“Psychic and Noetic Action”: *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

We have therefore to note that there are at least two lines of evolution proceeding simultaneously—one the evolution of physical form with organs, and the other the evolution of consciousness or mentality, or the power to react to life. From the cohesive power of the mineral comes the flexible plant with the power of sensation. From the plant life comes the animal which develops the further power of instinct. And, when we come to man, we find in him the additional power of reason, and later of intuition.

To help us to see the relationship between evolving life and the organism through which it expresses itself, careful reflection on what is said in *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. I, p. 425, is required. The whole passage is important, but here we shall quote certain sentences which deal with instinct.

Instinct is the universal endowment of nature by the Spirit of Deity itself...Instinct, as a divine spark, lurks in the unconscious nerve-centre of the ascidian mollusk, and manifests itself at the first stage of action of its nervous system as what the physiologists terms the reflex action. It exists in the lowest classes of the acephalous animals as well as in those that have distinct heads; it grows and develops according to the law of

the double evolution, physically and spiritually; and entering upon its conscious stage of development and progress in the cephalous species already endowed with a sensorium and symmetrically-arranged ganglia, this reflex action, whether men of science term it *automatic*, as in the lowest species, or *instinctive*, as in the more complex organisms which act under the guidance of the sensorium and the stimulus originating in distinct sensation, is still one and the same thing. It is the *divine instinct* in its ceaseless progress of development.

We have therefore to see animal instinct as a development from cohesion and sensation to the condition where a suitable physical organ has been evolved to respond to the profounder aspects of the Universal Mind, however unconscious it may as yet be. But we must remember that behind all this there must be an intelligence of some sort working.

This instinct of the animals, which act from the moment of their birth each in the confines prescribed to them by nature, and which know how, save in accident proceeding from a higher instinct than their own, to take care of themselves unerringly—this instinct may, for the sake of exact definition, be termed automatic; but it must have either within the animal, which possesses it or *without*, something’s or someone’s *intelligence* to guide it. (*Ibid.*)

The transition from the animal to the animal-man and then to man himself, and finally to the super-man is gradual. In the transition from unself-conscious choice and automatic action to self-conscious decisions and will-inspired action we lose something of the power of instinct and depend on reason. “Reason,” says H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 433), “the outgrowth of the physical brain, develops at the expense of instinct...reason avails only for the consideration of material things; it is incapable of helping its possessor to a knowledge of spirit.” Again, reason is “the product of the reflective faculties—denoting judiciousness and human intellectuality” (*Ibid.*, I, 432). It is the faculty of understanding gained by analysing and

building on premises to reach conclusions. Hence it can never be infallible, for the premises may not be accurate. Reason is “the slow development of our physical constitution, an evolution of our adult material brain” (p. 425). In the tentative progress of the finite reason, “the god-like nature of man is often utterly engulfed, whenever he shuts out from himself the divine light of intuition.” (p. 434)

Reason alone, even if care is taken to see that our premises are accurate, brings us to a point where we can go no further. We find our conclusions at a dead-end; they differ from the conclusions of others and do not make a united whole. Reason starts with isolated facts. But there are in reality no isolated facts. All is one UNITY.

As one writer put it: “It is the higher synthetic mind only which can have the understanding of the universals. Even that higher mind does not succeed in its task if it is unaided by the apperception of the intuition, which is the energy of the Heart.” And apperception, according to the dictionary, is the mind’s perception of itself as a conscious agent; an act of voluntary consciousness, accompanied with self-consciousness; the assimilation of a new sense-experience to a mass already in the mind.

Great Nature once more steps in and the brain becomes an instrument of a higher power than reason. This is spiritual intuition, “intimately connected with the ‘third eye,’ which mythological tradition ascribes to certain races of men” (*S.D.*, I, 46 fn.). Man is now able to sense the Universal Mind which is omniscient; he understands things as they are; he sees clearly. Now he can reason from these premises and his conclusions will fit in with other conclusions until he sees the Universe as one Whole, every part mathematically arranged and geometrically perfect. When this condition becomes permanent, he reaches the stage of super-man. He is no longer a creature through whom the Universal Mind unconsciously functions, but he is in an instrument, not of reason, or instinct, or sensation, but of the DEITY in Nature, the Omniscient Mind. Various verses from *The Voice of the Silence* will arise in

the mind and help to give us a glimpse of what this means.

We shall end with a quotation from Plotinus. He taught that

human knowledge had three ascending steps: opinion, science, and *illumination*. He explained it by saying that “the means or instrument of opinion is sense, or perception; of science, dialectics; of illumination, *intuition* (or divine instinct). To the last, *reason is subordinate*; it is absolute knowledge founded on the identification of the mind with the object known. (*Isis*, I, 434)
