

Vol. 15

June 2023

Rs. 3/-

No. 2

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

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 15, No. 2

June 17, 2023

IS THEOSOPHY FOR ALL?

THIS QUESTION could be interpreted in two ways: Is the philosophy of Theosophy for all human beings irrespective of class, caste or religion? Is Theosophy only for the intelligentsia? When Upali, the barber, asked if he could become Buddha's disciple, the answer he received was, “Anyone can become Buddha's disciple if he observes the precepts.” Theosophy is for all who are willing to study the philosophy of Theosophy. Theosophy is for all because it is practical and therefore each one who takes the trouble to study its ethical aspect is bound to get solutions to problems of life. One may wonder, what is in it for me as a parent, as a student, as a teacher, as a businessman? Theosophy brings awareness in parents towards their duties as a householder; it enables a businessman to combine ethics with business and helps a teacher to impart education for life, by inculcating in children, self-reliance, altruism, mutual charity and the ability to think and reason for themselves. Theosophy is a scientific religion and a religious science. “No one is asked what religion he belongs to...because Theosophy can be practised by Christian or Heathen, Jew or Gentile, by Agnostic or Materialist, or even an Atheist,” provided they subscribe to universal brotherhood, writes H.P.B. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 1*, p. 5). In fact, Theosophy is not a Religion, not any “ism” but it is Religion itself, not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs, but gives a better understanding of the teachings of all religions. Hence, when a Hindu or a Christian

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undertakes its study, it makes a Hindu, a better Hindu; a Christian, a better Christian. Thus, if we consider Theosophy to be an Ocean, then in it, divers go deep to find the pearl of great price; fishermen catch fish, big and small; swimmers enjoy swimming in it and children paddle standing on the shore.

Theosophy is Divine Wisdom. Theosophy is a synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy. Theosophy is that ocean of knowledge which is shallow enough at the shore, so that it will not overwhelm the understanding of a child, but will give food for reflection to even the greatest minds. In giving the philosophy of Theosophy the Masters have broken the silence of centuries. “If Theosophical doctrines are to be of any benefit to the race, then they must be for all classes, poor and rich, cultured and uncultured, young and old. Some people think that these doctrines are really only comprehensible by the educated and cultured; but what has experience shown? The Theosophical propaganda has gone forward in the face of considerable opposition and coldness from the so-called better classes. Very true it is that the working, labouring classes have not pushed it, nor do they, as a whole, know a very great deal about it; yet that indefinite section of the population sometimes called the ‘middle class’ has been its great propagator and supporter,” writes Mr. Judge.

Though we say that Theosophy is primarily a path of knowledge, it does not mean that it emphasizes intellectual knowledge more than moral precepts but indicates that Theosophy does not subscribe to blind belief. Theosophy provides rational explanation of things. It is not for blind believers. The philosophy of Theosophy seeks to extend one’s horizon of knowledge and understanding. Science, with all its technologies and gadgets, has been able to bring comforts and pleasures, but does not bring lasting happiness.

“Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others,” writes Mr. Judge. Who are those that can be classified as the “ones who do not want Theosophy”? In the extreme form of doubt, there is complete non-receptivity. These non-believers may not even be ready to listen.

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If they listen, they may not be ready to judge its truth or falsehood. These are doubters with a completely closed mind. Perhaps Jesus had such people in mind when he said: “Do not cast your pearls before swine.” Shri B. P. Wadia puts it thus: “I would say, leave apathetic people alone after a single and simple effort. ‘There is knowledge on this subject in our Theosophy. Do you wish to know?’ According to the answer would be our next step—enthusiastic enquiry, doubting sarcasm, or flat denial, each has to be responded to with tact and patience and our reasoning has to be sweet. Our life, life alone, will awaken them and even then, often in diverse fashions of antagonism.”

In the *Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. mentions another category of people who are not receptive to Theosophy, and in fact, oppose Theosophical teachings, because “Selfishness is essentially conservative, and hates being disturbed.” Theosophy has been described as the philosophy of rational explanation of things. Some of the religious dogmas, rituals and ceremonies have been accepted because people want easy and quick solutions to their problems. Selfishness in the abovementioned statement means seeking and accepting the teachings which are advantageous to one’s self. It denotes a utilitarian approach to religion, philosophy and spirituality. This attitude has been summed up very well by Prof. C. S. Lewis when he writes, “We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it is there for emergencies but he hopes he will never have to use it.” Human tendency is to explore all the worldly and other-worldly means to escape from troubles and only as a last resort turn to rational explanation of things—the “why” and “how” of existence.

The priest class of every religion encourages the gullible devotees to perform austerities, sacrifices and ceremonies, to go on pilgrimages or to undertake fasts, promising in exchange heavenly or other-worldly rewards. It suits people because it is easier to practice rituals, penances and offerings than to understand and apply the deep moral, social and philosophical tenets of a religion.

“Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others,” also

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means that after explaining the philosophy of Theosophy if the person does not take the trouble to explore further then it is not for him. Thus, in quite a different sense Theosophy is not for all those who are not willing to make the mental effort or are not ready to overcome biases. H.P.B writes, “To the mentally lazy or obtuse, Theosophy must remain a riddle; for in the world mental as in the world spiritual each man must progress by his own efforts.” Shri B. P. Wadia puts it thus: “Theosophy can do nothing for people who refuse to open the window of their minds. Do they want light? Then they would turn genuine enquirers. They may shop around at many counters but if they are genuine enquirers, seeking answers to many questions, they are bound to come to the one truth which is in the Esoteric Philosophy....Wisdom is not easily acquired and time is needed; the priceless boon of learning truth has its own conditions and demands, and the price must be paid.”

In other words, even for those who are ready and willing to make a mental effort the task is not simple. “The taking up of these ideas is, a *new* mental incarnation, and we...have to evolve from the old estate and with great care gradually eradicate the former bias....Our former mental state is our mental moon, and has given us certain material which we must work over, for otherwise we attempt to go contrary to a law of nature and will be defeated,” writes Mr. Judge. The one who is taking up the Theosophical study is required to have patience with himself because there is a dual task of eradicating or adjusting the old ideas and understanding the new ideas. In apprehending the truth what comes in the way are limitations of our race inheritance and the ideas we held before coming to Theosophy.

Theosophy is *sui generis*, which means “of its own kind,” or “in a class by itself,” and therefore “unique.” The Theosophical ideas are not necessarily those with which we are even somewhat familiar. Hence, when they are taken up for study, it is like “a new mental incarnation,” or being born again at the mental level. In understanding theosophical ideas, we have to make some adjustments inside us. We have to first build the foundation of certain ideas before

we can understand deeper ideas. We recognize the need for giving up superficial and inattentive methods of thought and also the need to make our desires centre upon the ideas we wish to understand. Mr. Judge observes that some people are unable to grasp the philosophy of Theosophy because they hold onto their own ideas. They seek to read new books on Theosophy, instead of re-reading a few old books. There is a need to touch the mind of the author. Even when someone says that he has mastered a certain book, a closer examination reveals that actually, only that which coincided with their previous training and line of thought has been grasped.

Though, the race mind may be receptive to spiritual ideas, there is a difference between passive and active reception of new ideas. Receiving every new idea without analysis and reflection could be equally fatal as *a priori* rejection. In the *Friendly Philosopher*, Mr. Crosbie mentions that “every change is preceded by a rapid rehearsal of previous processes in evolution. It seems to me that we might use this in our own mental processes.” H.P.B. explains in the *Secret Doctrine* (II,188) how in the development of human form, there is rapid rehearsal of previous processes. In a span of nine months or so, the developing embryo quickly passes through all the stages which it had passed through as monadic essence in the process of evolution. This process of rapid rehearsal applies to every change, which we can take advantage of in our thought process. We should not accept any new idea at once without the “rehearsal of previous processes” with respect to the new idea. If there is a ten-story building, we do not jump from the tenth floor to the ground floor, but go down, step by step. We do not destroy the old and get the new one, but build further with the material of the old. We have to go step by step. It is the old story of the Dublin City Hall. They passed a resolution: Resolved, that the city needs a new city hall; Resolved, that we will construct a new city hall; Resolved, that we occupy the old city hall until the new city hall is completed. That is what we must do. We must occupy old “ideas” while we are renovating them.

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The philosophy of Theosophy is iconoclastic and necessitates coming out of one's comfort zone. Iconoclasm relates not only to the breaking of images, but also to attack cherished beliefs, which include dogmatic and narrow concepts of God, life, heaven and hell. One may desist from giving the right ideas in place of dogmas and false beliefs out of the fear of causing pain. But "the day of man's childhood as an immortal being has passed away. He is now grown up, his mind has arrived at the point where it must know, and when, if knowledge be refused, this violation of our being will result in the grossest and vilest superstition or the most appalling materialism....Tell the truth, but do not force it. If even a pious soul should lose the historical Jesus Christ and see instead the glorious image of the Self in every man, that were a gain worth all the pain the first rude shock might give....The change from dogma or creed to a belief in law and justice impartial will bring perhaps some tears to the soul, but the end thereof is peace and freedom," writes Mr. Judge.

While it is true that Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others, it must not be understood that those who do not *want* it are not in *need* of it. "It is life and its sorrows that destroy our peace, and every human heart wants to know the reason why," writes Mr. Judge. The philosophy of Theosophy is able to explain the cause and cure of sorrow and the *apparent* injustice on the basis of the twin doctrines of Karma and Rebirth. Whenever people suffer, whether it is poverty, disease or ill-treatment, they feel that there is no justice in the world. The Doctrine of Karma is that of Responsibility, and the Doctrine of Reincarnation is that of Hope. The Law of Karma, described as an all-seeing, impartial, just and merciful Law, brings reward for good actions and punishment for bad actions. Our concept of merciful law is the law that *excuses* our wrongdoings and allows us to escape the ensuing consequences. The "mercy" aspect of the law of Karma is unlike man-made laws; it gives us innumerable opportunities to improve. Karma is justice. We may hide in the cave or at the bottom of the sea, but it is not

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possible to dodge Karma. Karma is action and reaction. However, this reaction is not mechanical but takes into account the motive, the inner state of the person and the weight of his past Karma.

It is possible to suffer in this life as a result of our actions in some prior life. Thus, a good man who suffers now must have been guilty of disturbing the harmony by some wrong action in one of his past lives. Likewise, the bad person who *appears* to go scot-free *now*, will reap the consequences and suffer in some subsequent life. If someone is working hard to overcome one of their weaknesses, then they have the hope that if not in this then in some subsequent life they may be successful in achieving the goal, because “No efforts, not the smallest—whether in right or wrong direction—can vanish from the world of causes,” says *The Voice of the Silence*.

When one sincerely believes in these doctrines one spontaneously abstains from vice and follows virtue, and that is what happened with masses of people who had adopted Buddhism; its practical effect could be seen “by the smallness of the percentage of crime amongst Buddhist populations,” writes H.P.B. When the erroneous belief that God orders our life, putting some of us in favourable and others in miserable situation, has been replaced by the understanding of the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth, it enables every individual to desist from resorting to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, to cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge the karmic consequences. Then, truly, they can say, “It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

“In all kindness of heart, we will do the best we can with anyone who desires to learn. For those who expect principles and methods to conform to their personal prejudices we can do nothing, however much we might desire to. Yet there is always hope that a little Theosophy may work as a leaven which will wear away or displace existing prejudices, and for this, time must be allowed,” writes Mr. Crosbie.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE STORY OF MY LIFE—II

HELEN Keller's autobiography clearly brings out how difficult the life of a deaf and blind person is. She had many hurdles in her life but she never let them stop her from following her dreams and also made it possible for others with similar handicaps to accomplish their dreams in life. According to Mark Twain the two most interesting characters of the nineteenth century were Napoleon and Helen Keller. Keller felt that those who could see and hear did not seem to value their senses enough. In the article "Three Days to See" by Hellen Keller that appeared in the January 1933 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine, she wrote: "It is human, perhaps, to appreciate little that which we have and to long for that which we have not, but it is a great pity that in the world of light the gift of sight is used only as a mere convenience rather than as a means of adding fullness to life." According to her, those who have not suffered impairment of sight or hearing seldom make the fullest use of these faculties, "taking in all sights and sounds hazily, without concentration and with little appreciation." If, even for a few days, in the early part of one's life, one were to suffer the loss of sight and hearing, "then darkness would make one more appreciative of sight and silence would teach him the joys of sound."

Senses are used by our bodies to get information about the world around us. Senses are often called powers and faculties, and in Sanskrit they are designated as *Indriyas*. There are five *Jnanendriyas* or five powers of perception or cognitive senses, which act like the entrance doors, bringing in the data. They are the means of knowing and hence called *Jnanendriyas*. Senses and organs produce sensation, when they contact external objects. For instance, when we put ice cream on the tip of our tongue, the tongue reports that it is cold and sweet, but it is the mind that intervenes and says, "I like it, I want more of it." Thus, senses are connected with sensation—painful as well as pleasurable. "It is sensation we desire, else we

would with one accord taste of the deep waters of oblivion, and the human race would become extinct” (*Through the Gates of Gold*, p. 4). *Light on the Path*, a mystical treatise, says that our idea of empty space is total darkness with the absence of everything. For most of us, this is a horrifying experience. If it lasts for a long period of time, it implies annihilation. “But it is the obliteration of one sense only; and the sound of a voice may come and bring comfort even in the profoundest darkness.” Even in pitch darkness, we are still able to hear some noise like the rustling of the leaves or the sound of insects, which proves comforting. However, when one is faced with absolute silence in addition to absolute darkness, one hungers for some sensation, so much so that “a painful one would be as keenly welcomed as a pleasant one.” Experimentally it has been found that when a person is kept in a dark room so as to be deprived of the sensation of sound and sight, the feeling of suffocation was experienced, and the subject asked to stop the experiment. Thus, a mere absence of sensation becomes a terrible strain.

Also, the loss of a single sense makes us restless, especially because, the loss of one sense affects the working of some other sense. For instance, the senses of smell and taste are physiologically related, so that the loss of sense of smell deeply affects the sense of taste. Someone who intermittently lost and gained her sense of smell reported that only when her sense of smell returned, she could taste the food properly. “We so take for granted the rich aroma of coffee and sweet flavour of oranges that when we lose these senses, it is almost as if we have forgotten how to breathe,” lamented the woman. (*A Natural History of the Senses*, by Diane Ackerman, p. 41)

Blindness or the loss of sight makes a person thoroughly helpless. Likewise, deafness gives a person a feeling of complete isolation. Ackerman points out that most people prefer to lose their hearing rather than their sight. Yet, people who are both deaf and blind often lament their loss of hearing more than their blindness. Hellen Keller, for instance, said, “Deafness is a much worse misfortune. For it means the loss of the most vital stimulus—the sound of the voice

that brings language, sets thoughts astir and keeps us in the intellectual company of man. If I could live again, I should do much more than I have for the deaf. I have found deafness to be a much greater handicap than blindness.” (*A Natural History of the Senses*, pp. 191-92)

Hellen Keller’s most popular stories described what it was like to rely on touch and smell instead of sight and sound. She could tell, by smell, what building she was passing, when it was time to eat, when it was raining, or when the grass was being cut.

She felt that if through mere touch she could derive so much pleasure, how much more beauty must be revealed by sight. She writes in her article “Three Days to See,” that if, by some miracle, she was granted three “seeing days” then she would divide the period into three parts. She expresses her wish to first see the people whose kindness, gentleness and companionship made her life worth living. She would study the face of her teacher, Ms. Sullivan “and find in it the living evidence of the sympathetic tenderness and patience with which she accomplished the difficult task of my education. I should like to see in her eyes that strength of character which has enabled her to stand firm in the face of difficulties, and that compassion for all humanity which she has revealed to me so often.”

As for her friends, she writes that she can only “see” the outline of their faces through her fingertips, and also detect laughter, sorrow, and many other emotions. “But I do not know what it is to see into the heart of a friend through that ‘window of the soul,’ the eye.” “It is a truth, that, as Edgar Allan Poe said, the eyes are the windows for the soul, the windows of that haunted palace in which it dwells,” writes H.P.B. Eyes not only reveal the emotions of joy, pain or hatred, they also reveal the inner character of the person and also of animals.

We read: “Look into the eyes of any living creature and you touch its soul. The dog seeks from yours something which he dimly feels and would fain comprehend. There is a look in his brown eyes as he fixes them upon yours, which is not there at any other time, which he fixes upon no creature except man, and which no animal

but the dog is able to give....As we look into the limpid fluorescent depths of a horse's eye...we feel its pathetic patience...an intelligence which is moral rather than intellectual, and we receive the impress of an instinctive nobility and unselfishness.... Greed and limited shrewdness gleam from the small eyes of a pig, and when we see the like in a human being—we know what to expect.” (*The Path*, Vol. IX, June 1894)

All the senses are differentiated forms of touch. Perhaps one way of understanding it is that every physical sense functions primarily on the basis of vibrations coming in contact with the sense organ and producing some sensation; “touch,” in that sense may be considered the first and primary sense. Touch is a sense with unique functions and qualities, and frequently combines with other senses. Saul Schanberg, a neurologist who experimented with rats at Duke University, has found that licking and grooming by the mother rat actually produced chemical changes in the pup; when the pup was taken away from the mother, its growth hormones decreased.

Helen Keller was blind and deaf, but her remaining senses were finely attuned. “When she put her hands on the radio to enjoy music, she could tell the difference between cornets and the strings. She listened to colourful down-home stories of life surging along the Mississippi from the lips of her friend Mark Twain....Despite her handicaps, she was more robustly alive than many people of her generation,” writes Diane Ackerman. Her sense of smell was especially acute. Through her sense of smell, she used to become aware of a coming storm, hours before any sign of it was visible. She found that babies did not have unique odours, like the adults. She described masculine exhalations to be stronger, and more vivid than those of women. “In the odour of young men there is something elemental, as of fire, storm, and salt sea,” said Keller. H.P.B. remarks that when a person is deprived of one or more senses, then it is compensated by greater development of other senses. A blind person recovers his sense of sight through touch and hearing. So also, a deaf person seems to hear through eyes, by looking at the lips and mouth of a speaker. (*S.D.*, I, 534)

There are those whose perceptions range beyond the five senses and they are called “sensitives.” They have developed astral senses. The *real* centres of sense organs for seeing, hearing, etc., are within the astral body. The powers of seeing, tasting, smelling, hearing and the sense of touch are all in the astral body. The astral body is the *design body* or model body on which the physical body is built. The physical sense organ would be useless if the corresponding astral sense organ is damaged. Often, in congenital blindness or deafness it is the astral organ, which is damaged so that even if the physical eye or ear may be normal and uninjured, the person is not able to see or hear.

Normally, this astral body is inextricably interwoven with the physical body, cell for cell and fibre for fibre, like the fibres of a mango in the pulp. Ordinarily, it is difficult to demarcate the inner and outer organs. But when a person begins the practice of concentration in earnest, the inner, astral organs gradually begin to awake and separate from the outer. Then the person begins to duplicate his powers, *i.e.*, he can use physical sense organs to function on the physical plane and the inner, astral organs to function on the astral plane.

Paul Bach-y-Rita, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin, has been carrying out research to show that our senses are interchangeable. He feels that our brain is adaptable, and hence, it is possible to “rewire” any of the five senses. He fitted an electrode and a camera on the tongue of a person, who was blindfolded. That person reported that he could see with his tongue. Bach-y-Rita feels that sight and touch are interchangeable and so also hearing and touch. We can swap any two senses. He has been devising a system which can help Navy people who work underwater, to find their way in murky water through their tongues, while their eyes are free to perform other tasks.

Occultism explains these phenomena by saying that physical sense organs are not the real organs of perception. The real centres of perception are in the astral body. Every sense pervades every

other, there being only one sense acting through different organs of sensation. Normally, any perception that is beyond the five physical senses is described as the sixth sense. Often the phenomena occurring due to the interchangeability of senses are erroneously attributed to the functioning of the sixth sense, for instance, when a clairvoyant is able to read a letter blindfolded. But even in this, it is only the astral senses which are behind the physical that comes into operation. Hence, the clairvoyant may be able to read the letter blindfolded, but he will not be able to read the letter which has not been written or received. Strictly speaking, the sixth sense pertains to a higher plane of intuitive perception and premonition.

“The whole scale of senses is susceptible of correlations,” writes H.P.B. Vedic Aryans were quite familiar with mental correlations of “sight” and “hearing.” In the *Vedas*, the words “sound” and “light,” or “to hear” and “to see,” *are always associated*. The Hymn X, 71, verse 4, mentions a party of friends who are trying to emulate each other in singing, and in that one group is described as *Akshavanta*, or “one furnished with eyes,” while the other group is characterized as *Karnavanta*, or “one furnished with ears.” Now it is easy to understand that the singer has a *good ear for music*. But how does one understand “good sight for music”? H.P.B. explains that probably the hymn refers to days when *sight* and *hearing* were synonymous terms, so that sound could be *seen* and *heard*. (*H.P.B. Series No. 19*, p. 12)

Many years ago, *Harper's Magazine* mentioned the tribe on an island in the South Seas which had virtually lost the art and habit of speaking and conversing. They could understand one another, and see plainly what each other thought. If we were able to see each other's thoughts objectively as did the people of the said tribe, everybody concerned would simply know the truth and would not be deceived. In earlier races, there was, as it were, a telepathic transfer taking place. It is as if the whole of humanity consisted of clairvoyants and sensitives. Telepathy is closely related to clairvoyance, which is the ability to see with the inner senses, pictures and images in the astral light or in the mind of another.

Once we accept the correlation of senses, we are able to appreciate that all our senses are, to a certain extent, interchangeable. Interchanging of senses would enable the clairvoyant to *see* sounds. H.P.B. points out that if a clairvoyant were to see a person playing a piano, he would *see* the sound as plainly as you would hear it. And if he blocks his ears and thereby inhibits normal hearing, he would still be able to detect every note and modulation far more distinctly than he would by the ordinary sense of sound. He will be able to *see* it at a distance even though he is unable to hear it. Interestingly, the deaf poet, David Wright, wrote that his world, though it has little sound in it, “seldom *appears* silent,” because his brain translated movements into a gratifying sense of sound. “I take it that the flight of most birds, at least at a distance, must be silent... Yet it *appears* audible, each species creating a different ‘eye music.’” (*A Natural History of the Senses*, p. 192)

In the magazine *Theosophy* (Vol. 11, pp. 495-496), the case of one Ms. Huggins is printed. At the age of ten, she began losing her sense of sight and hearing and completely lost them within a year. Having reached the age of reason before the disabilities set in, she could hear others by using auditory apparatus by touching the diaphragm with her finger tips or by her fingers touching the throat of the speaker. She said that she could not hear the sounds but could *feel* them. Similarly, she could determine as many as thirty different colours by her sense of smell. The article concludes by saying that all the senses are *astral*, distinct from the physical *organs*, and are *interchangeable*.

In fact, “Occultism teaches that physical man is one, but the thinking man septenary, thinking, acting, feeling, and living on seven different states of beings or planes of consciousness, and that for all these states and planes the permanent Ego has a distinct set of senses,” writes H.P.B. (*Transactions*, p. 73)

(*Concluded*)

AVARICE—GREED FOR MONEY

AVARICE is the sin of the business world. When people speak of doing good business, they mean large and lucrative business. The pleasure of the businessman consists in his profits. The more money he makes out of his business the more successful a businessman he is considered to be. No great attention is paid to how he makes his money. “Truth is impossible in business”; honesty is not the best policy—it is said. Again, avarice and exploitation go together; the more a person is covetous the greater his efforts to make money by hook or by crook. He cares not whom he exploits and to what extent. The way out of this difficulty, which may well be called the psyche of capitalism, is to find its *Nous*. The ideal of serving the community should be substituted in place of making money. The Hindu god of wealth, Kuvera, is said to possess three legs, so that he can rush about the marts and the ports of the world, increasing his store of sparkling gems and shining metals; but one additional leg has cost him twenty-four teeth, for he is reported to have only eight! Teeth symbolize the power of digesting and assimilating experience; Kuvera is so busy amassing wealth that he has neither time nor inclination to do anything else. But there is another peculiar feature about this god, who is also known as *Ratna-garbha*—“the womb of jewels.” Among his close friends is Shiva, the Patron Saint of Yogis, the Regenerator. Wealth debases most men, but it has the power to raise them, provided in pursuing Kuvera they find him in the company of Shiva and reflect upon the meaning of that friendship.

In modern civilization the psyche of wealth has played terrifying havoc; earth is robbed of metals and oil which are used to spread death among human beings; food is destroyed while men and women and children go hungry; general poverty stalks the land while “money is cheap” and the coffers of the banks are full. Socialism of the ordinary political variety will not transform society though there be transfer of power to produce wealth and to use it for exploitation.

The soul of human service should replace the greed which energizes men. Trade brings comforts and conveniences to hearths and homes—or ought to. The petty shopkeeper as well as the merchant-prince should trade not only as a means of livelihood and to amass wealth, but also to serve the community. No doubt, a labourer is worthy of his hire, but not much more than his hire; and this equally applies to the *vaishya* as to the *shudra*, to the commercial magnate as well as to the drudge.

The service of the community should be the objective of every profession, every craft, every art. “This is a big order,” we hear the worshipper of Mammon exclaiming. Milton makes Mammon a fallen angel, but he could be made to rise. Filthy lucre can be transformed into a shining jewel of service. As long as the human race lives on earth, its bodies will have to be fed and clothed, its minds will have to be trained and educated, its hearts will have to be enlightened, its homes will have to be furnished and beautified. Only a few can live as ascetics; the majority should learn to live in calm content enjoying bounties of Nature, physical and super-physical; for if they do not, they are apt to run into the sensuous life of gross hedonism.

Here is a line of thought which the student of Theosophy will do well to reflect upon. In earning his livelihood as clerk or shopkeeper, as a professional or a merchant, he can and should make the service of the community his aim.

Some say the world will end in fire,
 Some say in ice.
 From what I’ve tasted of desire
 I hold with those who favour fire.
 But if it had to perish twice,
 I think I know enough of hate
 To say that for destruction ice
 Is also great
 And would suffice.

—ROBERT FROST

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS
BODY AND HEALTH—III

THANK you for your letter which I have read with close interest and sympathy for your continued pain and weakness. The ways of our Karma are always hard to follow with our lower minds and feelings, for the bodily elementals which suffer pain and enjoy pleasure seem to interfere with our highest wishes for the Work and our deepest feelings of helpfulness. Yet we know that nothing does happen without a cause and even the pain has its message of freedom from the past through fulfilment in the present. All I can say to comfort you is: Keep on like the brave soul you are, shouldering your heavy burden with complete faith and trust in those Great-Souled and Compassionate Ones to whom we are devoted and who will give us all that is possible. While you are so weak try to relax your mind and let the assimilation of our great philosophy which you have studied in past years play its beneficent role on your personal consciousness. So, while great and beneficent Karma keeps you in the body you still are a comfort to those around you, and however little you are able to do, you are still a “witness” on this earth.

As for the future and the present pain and weariness, my dear friend, place your will in the hands of the great Will and surrender and trust, with your thought on the Work which is our Work from the past to the future, for all times. And look forward to your next life and the re-meeting with old friends. As age progresses more and more, comfort comes in remembering Mr. Judge’s first meeting with H.P.B. We all take on where we left off and in between we are in Masters’ keeping. I suffer for and with you and hope sincerely that the cause of your pain may be found and relief be given to you. But it is one of the difficulties of human life that we can never bear pain of another. All we can do is to send you loving thoughts and strength and say again, try (though we know how difficult it is) to find a centre within your consciousness which can squeeze out of the pain the life-essence of freedom.

You have suffered great pain and no doubt there has been mental anguish; but, taken aright, every ache becomes a purifier and more—an uplifter. And so, if you utilize the period aright you will emerge from your illness not only better in body but also stronger in soul. You must, however, guard against undue haste in coming out of your convalescence. Work will not gain from such haste, nor will your own inner unfoldment. You have but one duty at present—to get strong in body, to gain clearer mental perceptions. Nothing else matters, for nothing else is your duty. Give your body the chance it now so *deserves*. Having survived such abnormalities, it deserves compensation at your hands and you, the Ego get a fine chance of acquiring a purchase on the new lives, the new Builders, who are now active. So, try to maintain mental serenity, mental contentment. Do not give one minute to the notion that time is being wasted while you are taking it easy. Mental gentleness towards the brain and the body, especially the aching and injured parts and organs, is needed. Builders require their own time for construction and you cannot force their pace without irritating them, spoiling their work and delaying your complete recovery. Just think not about when you can get up, get out and get to work. Let the Builders take their time—it may look long to you—but in the end you yourself will be the gainer. What you may gain in speed now you will lose in permanency later; so be wise and remember the Self is the friend of the self and self can become its own enemy.

You are already through with an ordeal and it is very good that you were able to go through it in the right spirit. The coming period of convalescence will be more trying, especially if it is a little prolonged. Do not allow yourself to be tempted away from the course of prudence and hasten to do this and that after a few days. Take advantage of what has happened and give your neglected body a good chance to renovate itself. Driving the body is not wise as pampering it is not wise. All of us have to learn to make it our friend and there are opportunities which well taken cement friendship—of this type or any other kind. So, take it easy. You will be doing it

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more naturally if you go on recalling the truth to your consciousness that during bodily ailments, when the corpus is at a low speed of functioning and when as a consequence the mind is freer from the knots of the brain than ordinarily, the Ego gets a better purchase on the entire bodily system; the quieting of the cerebrum makes the Ego's work on and with the cerebellum a little more effective. So, your immediate *duty* is not to be impatient to get to work, but to relax and recuperate fully and thoroughly, thus avoiding any kind of complication and any kind of relapse. If through this seemingly evil experience you will (and you can) develop inner calmness to balance your outer enthusiasm you will never regret the pain you have been undergoing. So, retain calmness, go slow in the matter of outer movements, hold fast and let Nature and Karma complete their cycle—these bring pain so that real healing may follow.

(Concluded)

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear—
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

—PERCY SHELLY

SAINT EKNATH—LIFE AND TEACHINGS

II

SHRI KRISHNA was aware that Eknath loved him dearly and continued to make his offerings to God with feelings of reverence. Krishna takes the form of a Brahmin and comes to Paithan asking people to guide him to the house of Eknath, describing him as the noble *Vaishnava* who devotes himself with great reverence to the worship of Shri Krishna and continually gives feasts to the Brahmins. He tells Eknath that if he gave him clothes to wear and food to eat, he would serve him and diligently perform every task he was asked without giving way to laziness. He was called Shrikhandya, who served Eknath for 12 years doing all kinds of jobs for him and his wife Girijabai.

Meanwhile, a Brahmin, who had performed many austerities, reached the city of Dwarka with the desire to meet Shri Krishna. In his dream, this Brahmin was instructed by the wife of Shri Krishna that Krishna was not in Dwarka but in Paithan in the house of Eknath, employed as his servant by the name Shrikhandya.

According to one version of the story, when this Brahmin reaches Paithan, he comes across a servant, Shrikhandya, who was going to fetch water from the river. When the Brahmin enquired of him the whereabouts of Eknath he pointed at a house. Eknath receives the Brahmin with great joy and asks him the purpose of his visit. The Brahmin tells him that he has come to meet God. Eknath tells him that God is everywhere, in everything and in all creatures. The Brahmin says that he has heard such philosophy before and he is eager to *see* God in the form or *saguna* aspect. He conveys to Eknath that God has been residing in his house as a servant, Shrikhandya. When Eknath calls out for Shrikhandya there is no answer, though Eknath's wife has seen him enter the worship (*puja*) room. Then Eknath enters the worship room along with the Brahmin and prays intensely to Shri Krishna. At last, the room gets lit and Krishna appears before them and blesses them both.

Once, Eknath invited the Brahmins on the occasion of his father's *Shradh*, saying, "Tomorrow is my ancestors' day. Please come and feast." Eknath's wife prepares elaborate meals with the help of Shrikhandya and another servant. The Brahmins go to the river for bathing. When Eknath returns home after having his bath, he happens to hear the conversation of a Mahar (an outcaste) couple, who were sweeping the portion near Eknath's house. The wife tells her husband that "some nice food is being cooked. But such food is not for people like us, so let us move on." When Eknath conveys his intention of inviting the outcaste couple for the feast, his wife, who was extremely pious, suggests that they should invite all the outcastes with their children. Soon, the place was filled to the capacity and Eknath, seeing the Lord in his guests, served them lovingly. Eknath, though he was born in the midst of orthodox Brahmins, held on to his principles and never made a difference between castes. He never discriminated on the basis of caste, colour, sex or age, as he firmly believed that God exists in all. After enjoying their food, the outcastes exclaimed, "Blessed is your action, O Eknath. You have indeed made us feel happy. We shall remember you all our lifetime, as the merciful *Vaishnava*." When they leave, Eknath's wife has to cook again, to feed the Brahmins.

However, when the Brahmins who had gone for a bath learn that Eknath has feasted the outcastes before them, they refuse to attend the feast. Those, who were well-versed in the *Shastras*, go to Eknath's house and tell him that he has set up an evil custom and neglected the duties of a Brahmin. Eknath tries to explain with folded hands that the food prepared for the Brahmins was smelled by the outcastes, making it impure, according to the belief of the Brahmins, and hence, it was given away to outcastes. After that, the place was cleaned and fresh food was prepared for Brahmins. However, the Brahmins refused to have any food that was served to them *after* serving the outcastes. They ex-communicated Eknath. Shrikhandya, the servant, tells Eknath not to feel dejected, but to prepare the leaf-plates for the feast. After laying the leaf-plates Eknath invites his

ancestors and is surprised to see them there. He begins to serve them food. The Brahmins standing outside the door have been observing it all. They go home silently, reflecting that Eknath is no ordinary man. However, their pride and limited understanding do not allow them to admit that they were in the wrong. They decide on their way home that the next day they will ask Eknath to undertake penance so that he could remain in his caste. The next day, the Brahmins make him undergo penance in accordance with the rules of the Vedas, for the fault he has committed. Eknath himself insisted that so long as Shri Krishna was his mother and father, he could do nothing wrong. (*Stories of Indian Saints*, pp. 176-181)

In the eighteenth chapter of the *Gita* Shri Krishna clearly declares that castes were to be determined by disposition and predominant qualities rather than on the basis of the birth. It is the sin of separateness which is getting reflected in the claim of superiority based on the distinction of caste, class, unique creed and all the other barriers that divide man from man. “Untouchability” is not a stigma that attaches itself to any specific set of people, as it is present everywhere, in varying degrees and in varying forms, such as racial prejudice or religious exclusiveness. If we wish to overcome the evil of caste and class distinction, each one of us must examine our hearts and minds, and just as was done by Saint Eknath, we must show the way, by treating all human beings equally, recognizing spiritual equality based on the presence of the divinity in all and the fact of the interdependence of the members of the human family. We should reject any and every claim of uniqueness, superiority or exclusiveness.

Students of Theosophy have before them the shining example of Damodar K. Mavalankar, a victorious disciple of the Masters, who, although born in the family of the Karhada Maharashtra caste of Brahmins, courageously stepped out of his caste, nearly 150 years ago. The reasons for his action have been expressed in the article, “Castes in India.” He admits that before contacting Theosophy he had practised his religion without understanding. The study of

Theosophy enabled him to pierce through the dead letter and see clearly the underlying spirit in the religious books.

He writes, “Our actions must...be such as will make us worthy of our existence in this world, as long as we are here, as well as after death.” He found that being born in a Brahmin caste he was forced to observe caste distinctions which led to hatred for people of other castes, just because they were born in a different caste. The truth is that a person must be respected for his qualities and not for his birth. He says that the ancestors who originally instituted the caste system based it on the inner qualities of a person, and not on heredity. There are several instances in the ancient sacred books in which not only *Kshatriyas* but even Mahars and Chambhars, who are now treated as the lowest people, were made and regarded as Brahmins, and almost worshipped as demi-gods, for their inner qualities. To regard all human beings as brothers, irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, sex and nationality, is an essential part of religion. In adhering to caste distinction, he felt that he was acting immorally, and so he stepped out of his caste, almost living up to the precept, “There is no religion higher than Truth!”

“The ancient castes performed duties which, were the outcome of their several natures, and were so recognized by all. There was no pride of caste nor jealousy and there existed an ideal community of mutual helpfulness; hence, the duties of the castes were ‘determined by the qualities which predominated in each,’” writes Mr. Crosbie. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 234)

Ironically, just after Eknath had feasted the outcastes and for which act of demerit the Brahmins had asked him to undertake penance, something happened which shocked the Brahmins. A Brahmin from Trimbakeshwar (a place in Nasik, Maharashtra) whose entire body was covered with leprosy sores, arrives in Paithan and asks the Brahmins where he could find Eknath. They pointed out a person in the river, saying that the person undergoing penance in the river was Eknath. They ask the Brahmin leper why he wished to meet Eknath. He replies that while he was performing austerities at

Trimbakeshwar, Lord Shiva appeared to him in a dream and said that at Paithan there is a devotee of Vishnu, called Eknath. He has feasted a great many of the outcastes on the day of the ancestor ceremony. He has accumulated *punya* or merit for this holy deed. “If you go at once to him and if he will give you a part of his merit, your leprosy will go away.” After this dream, he decided to go to Paithan to meet Eknath. The Brahmins were astonished to hear this. They protest, saying, “In which *shastras* is it written to keep aside the Brahmins and feed the outcastes first?” The leper enters the waters of river Godavari and tells Eknath about his dream and what Lord Shiva has told him. Eknath says, “I will give you what you desire,” and he pours water upon his hand. Instantly, that Brahmin’s leprosy gets cured. The Brahmins are astonished and feel ashamed. They tell Eknath that just as the ocean does not need to go to sacred bathing places, so you do not need a penance. After this incident, they willingly accept gifts from Eknath. Some reviled Eknath and some praised him, but Eknath was always full of joy, unaffected by praise or blame. (*Stories of Indian Saints*, pp. 181-183)

Contrary to the understanding of the orthodox Brahmins, the act of feeding the outcastes, when looked at in the spiritual light, turned out to be an act of merit. This incident highlights the qualities of a true Brahmin. The Buddha says: “*Him I call a Brahamana who here is above the bondage of merit and demerit, who is free from grief, free from passion and who is pure*” (*The Dhammapada*, Chapter 26, verse 30). A true Brahmin rises above the conventional way of treating actions and events as good or bad. There is a calm acceptance of whatever Karma brings to him. He does not perform actions or refrain from them because they may bring him merit or demerit; he performs them because they must be done—guided by spiritual insight. It is precisely because he performs all his actions by renouncing interest in the result and also the feeling of doership (*kartabhav*) that he is able to transfer the merit of good actions accruing to him.

Eknath was truly a *samadarshi*, mentioned in the *Gita* (V, 18),

who looked with an equal eye upon a Brahmin—endowed with spiritual knowledge and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog and even an outcaste because he had identified himself with the *Brahman* or *Atman* (divine essence) and was able to see *Atman* in all things and did not differentiate on the basis of name and form. We see this reflected in another incident in his life. Before leaving Kashi, a place of pilgrimage in North India, Eknath fills a pot of water from the river Ganga so that he might offer it to Lord Rameshwaram in the South, as was the custom. However, when he and his followers reach the banks of the river Godavari, they experience unbearable heat. They hear the braying of a donkey who was suffering due to want of water. The river was yet far away as one needed to cross a long stretch of hot sand. Eknath, who is moved to pity, pours all the Ganga water into the mouth of the donkey without pausing to reflect. When the astonished followers asked, “What shall we offer to Lord Rameshwaram?” Eknath replies, pointing at the donkey, “This is my Rameshwaram.”

Eknath’s son Hari Pandit was well-read but proud. He does not approve of his father popularizing the scriptures in the Marathi language rather than in pure Sanskrit. He wishes not to offend him and hence he gets ready with his wife and children to leave for Kashi. He tells his father: “I cannot bear to hear you vulgarising the scriptures and by my leaving, we shall both be happy.” Four years passed but Hari Pandit did not return to Paithan. Then Eknath promised his son that he would not read the *Puranas* in Marathi but that Hari Pandit should expound them in Sanskrit. The son then returns and holds discourses in Sanskrit. As time passes, only a few attend his discourse, till at last none come to listen to him. Meanwhile, an old woman who desired to feed one thousand Brahmins but did not have enough money for the same invites Eknath, whom she considered worth one thousand Brahmins, to come to her house for a meal. Eknath goes to her house along with his son, Hari Pandit. They were served food on plantain leaves. After they have finished eating, Eknath requests his son to remove the used plantain leaves so as not to trouble the old lady.

Hari Pandit obligingly bends down to remove his father's leaf, when he finds a second leaf below the first. When he removes them both, he finds a third leaf, and so on, till he has removed one thousand leaves. Suddenly, Hari Pandit's eyes were opened. "His father who touched prohibited food from outcastes, and spoke in the language of the people, Marathi, made people understand the beauty of the Sanskrit works, and was alone worth a thousand learned Brahmins whereas he, Hari Pandit, with his pedantic set of values based on his narrow knowledge, had reached nowhere." He falls at his father's feet seeking forgiveness. Eknath blesses him and says that though he has learnt all the *Shastras*, he lacks humility, and that is why he could not interpret them effectively. He possesses intelligence but he lacks devotion. (*Saints of Maharashtra*, pp. 127-29)

The Voice of the Silence asks the disciple to make pride and self-regard bond-maidens (servants) to devotion. True devotion is the complete surrender of the personal self to the Divine Self. Knowledge and devotion must go hand in hand. Mr. Judge gives the example of Jacob Boehme and of many ignorant men who had no access to books and yet, they had perceived by their inward sense the real truth of things. "The reason is that these men have attained to devotion, and thereby cleared away from before the eye of the soul the clouds of sense whose shadows obscure our view of truth. I do not despise learning; it is a great possession; but if the learned man were also devoted one in the sense of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, how much wider would be the sweep of his intellection no one can calculate" (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 75-76). When a person combines knowledge with devotion, he has the philosophy to guide his steps, and is prevented from being dragged down, again and again, by the weaknesses of the race to which he belongs.

(*To be continued*)

TREE OF LIFE

IN THE religious traditions of every country from the remotest antiquity, the image of the Tree was used as a symbol of universal Being and evolution. The mystery of the origin of the universe, its constitution and relation to man, evolution and destiny of both, are all represented in the Tree symbol, called the Tree of Life.

The *Ashwattha* tree is an ancient symbol of the Tree of Life of India. It is called by the Buddhists the Bodhi Tree, the Tree of Wisdom and Knowledge, as it is under this tree that the Buddha attained enlightenment. Yggdrasil was the name of the tree of the Universe, of time and of life in the pantheon of the ancient Scandinavian people. The Babylonians had their World Tree or the Tree of Life whose roots, trunk, and boughs encompassed the nether regions, the earth, and the heavens, respectively. The Banyan tree of India produces roots above, which descend to the earth, strike roots, and then ascend heavenward again, symbolizing the involution of spirit into matter, and the evolution of spirit from matter back to its original purity. The triple leaves growing from, and united to, the common stalk of the Palas tree (*Beautia monosperma*) symbolizes the essential unity of the three-fold manifestation of the universe, as Spirit, Soul and Matter. The dark Cypress tree was the World-Tree of the Mexicans, which is now with the Christians and Mohammedans the emblem of death, peace, and rest. Sycamore was the Tree of Life of Egypt and Assyria. Haoma was sacred to Persians (now Parsis). All these ancient tree emblems have profound meaning, to know which in entirety is to have attained to highest summits of knowledge and perfection. We can, however, at our level, glean some insights into some aspects of ancient cosmology and psycho-spiritual mysteries, from a study of the exposition of it in the Esoteric Philosophy given in *The Secret Doctrine*, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

The symbol of the Tree of Life given in the Zohar (meaning, *Light*), the oldest extant treatise on the Hebrew esoteric religious

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doctrine, for instance, is very suggestive. The mighty Tree of Life, it is said, reaches the heavenly vale, and is hidden between three mountains; from where the Tree ascends above and then descends below; and that this Tree is revealed during the day and hidden during the night. The three mountains are the immortal divine upper triad—*Atma, Buddhi, Manas*—in the principles of man; the Tree ascending above and re-descending below, signifies the Adept's knowledge aspiring heavenward, and then reverting to his Ego on earth. The Tree is revealed during the day and hidden during the night means that it is revealed to the mind enlightened by the Light of the Higher Self, and concealed to minds enveloped in darkness of Ignorance—*Avidya*. (*The Secret Doctrine*, II, 216)

The Tree of Life, *Ashwattha*, depicted in the fifteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is the reverse of that given in the Zohar in that its roots are above and branches below. It comprehends in its profound symbolism the whole of cosmic and anthropic mystery.

The *Ashwattha* tree is said to grow with its roots above and branches below. Adverbial phrases *above* and *below*, of course, convey in metaphor the verity that the universe exists as an invisible eternal Idea in the universal mind, which is One, manifests as a visible differentiated manifold non-eternal material universe.

Branches of the *Ashwattha* spreading forth some above, some below, and its roots manifesting in the region of mankind, suggest spiritual, psychic, and material planes, which are in essence One. This is the Macrocosmic Tree of Life. The roots of it ramifying in the region of mankind which are said to be connecting bonds of action is suggestive of the Microcosmic Tree, representing mankind growing under the former, perpetuating itself by cycles of reincarnation through connecting bonds of action—Karma.

Its form is not understood by men because of the tendency in mankind of identifying oneself with the personality, which veils spiritual perception of the nature of self, which results in

men mistaking appearances as real. But it can be known, as said in the subsequent verses in the same chapter, that those who have developed the Eye of Wisdom perceive the true Self.

The tree has no beginning or end, because Universal Spirit (Deity), wishing, so to speak, to know Itself, evolves this universe by reflecting the Idea of what is to be in its Mind on its own essence, in never-ending cycles of manifestation and non-manifestation, garnering vast experience and knowledge from each cycle, symbolized by the Celestial Dragon of Wisdom. Furthermore, at the end of each manifestation, in which are borne in mighty cycles, beings of various grades of development, from the most ignorant to the Emancipated and Enlightened, always leave behind at the end of each, an unadjusted collective Karma, which causes by the law of cause and effect another stream of manifestation to go forth, each such manifestation taking place on a higher plane based on the knowledge and experience gained from the previous cycle. Therefore, cycles of going forth and reversion of the universe—the Tree of Life—is depicted as having had no conceivable beginning nor an imaginable end.

The idea that the *Vedas* are the leaves of the Tree of Life symbolizes the fact that in this vast evolutionary scheme, at various stages of human progress, portions of Universal Divine Knowledge and Wisdom which underlie the universe as Abstract Wisdom, are promulgated by the Wise Ones to mankind in every country from time to time which constitutes religious philosophy, or *Veda*, of each. As these formulations over a time become corrupted, they are reinterpreted and re-promulgated periodically, like the tree seasonally renewing its leaves.

The roots of the *Ashwattha* tree “which ramify below in the region of mankind,” and which are said to be the connecting bonds of action, represent terrestrial man, symbolized as the Microcosmic tree. In the Tree of Life, dwells the Serpent of Eternity, a symbol of absolute Wisdom, Mahat, and in the latter, the Microcosmic Tree, its reflection, dwells, the serpent of manifested Wisdom, Manas,

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conscious Ego, the connecting link between Divine Spirit and Matter or earthly personality, heaven and earth. Man is that Tree itself (*S.D.*, II, 98). In this beautiful emblem is comprehended the indissoluble union between the threefold universe and the threefold man.

Manas is divine Ego, a ray of Mahat, but when incarnated, it becomes dual—the Higher Immortal Individuality and the Lower Mind constituting mortal earthly personality in a close embrace of, and constantly deluded by, the principle of Kama, passions and desires. Endowed with Manas, man is a moral being, having to choose at every moment, in every situation of his earthly life between the voice of the divine Individuality, or allowing himself to be swayed by the animal passions of his lower self, reaping thereby good and evil experiences of Karmic action through endless reincarnations.

The terrestrial life of man is the microcosmic Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil that grows under the Macrocosmic Tree of Life Eternal—Higher Self. It is the Karmic destiny of the Thinker, Man, to progress by his own self-effort by assimilating lessons from good and evil experiences produced by his own actions through many ages, leading, at last, to a realization of non-separateness of his Being, the Microcosm, with, BEING, the Macrocosmic Tree of Life, and that this ever-changing manifested cosmic organization to be the Great Illusion—*Maha Maya*—and that he himself to be none other than changeless Universal Spirit—*Atma*—beyond the veil of *Maya*, “the Primeval Spirit from which floweth the never-ending stream of conditioned existence.” Thus, by grafting the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” on the “Tree of Life” man attains emancipation and perfection.

THE Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word *crisis*.
One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity.
In a crisis, be aware of the danger—but recognize the
opportunity.

—RICHARD M. NIXON

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

The grapevine is a single vine that supports many branches bearing many grapes. We read about the symbology of vine and branches in the *Gospel According to St. John* (Chapter 15: 1-17), which says that Christ is the vine and God is the gardener. The followers of Christ are the branches that are united to him and produce fruit. But those branches that do not bear fruit are cast away. Thus, the unproductive branches are separated as they are likely to infect the whole tree. Likewise, people who obstruct the efforts of the followers of God will be cut off from His life-giving power. On the other hand, fruitful branches are cut or pruned so as to promote their growth. Likewise, God sometimes disciplines the followers to strengthen their faith and character.

In subsequent verses Christ says that if you abide in me and I abide in Him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. To remain in Christ means believing that he is God's son and receiving him as saviour and continuing to believe the Gospel. When a vine bears "much fruit," God is glorified, for it is He that sends rain and Sun so that it is a moment of glory for the Lord to see the harvest in the barns, mature and ready for use. It also gives us an idea that God is glorified when people have an intimate relationship with Him and they begin to "bear much fruit" in their lives.

If we maintain a consistent relationship with Christ, so that our lives are interwoven with his, then in both favourable and unfavourable circumstances, the joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us level-headed. Just as Jesus loved and died for us, we can practise sacrificial love by listening, helping, encouraging and giving. "As we remain in the 'true vine,' our hearts can be filled with overflowing love and our feet firmly set on the pathway to freedom," writes Andrew Rodrigues. (*The Times of India, The Speaking Tree*, May 10, 2023)

The first two verses of the fifteenth chapter of the *Gospel*

According to St. John read: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” A symbol can be interpreted in many ways. H.P.B. interprets the symbols of vine and branches in terms of human principles. She explains that *Atma* in man is the “Husbandman,” *Buddhi-Manas* or Spiritual Ego is the Vine, while the animal (Vital) Soul, the *personality* or the lower *manas* is the “branch.” H.P.B. explains that Husbandman is the Symbol for the infinite, impersonal Principle, while the Vine stands for the Spiritual Soul, *Christos*, and each branch represents a new incarnation. The compound of *Buddhi-Manas*, cemented by *Atma* is unconditionally immortal but the soul of man, (*i.e.*, the *personality*) *per se* is neither immortal, eternal nor divine. At every rebirth, the Higher *Manas* sends out a Ray to function through the body and this ray may be called the “incarnated mind.” The incarnated mind, functioning through the body, is in essence, identical with the Higher, Divine Mind, but when it incarnates it forgets its divine origin and becomes of dual nature. The incarnated mind or *manas* can choose to turn towards the higher, divine aspect or gravitate towards *Kama* or passions and desires. That aspect of the mind which clings to *Kama* is dissipated with it in *Kama-Loka* after death. We lose a portion of the incarnated mind at the end of every life. However, that aspect of the mind which seeks guidance from the divine nature and listens to the “Voice of Conscience,” becomes part of the divine or the Higher Ego. It is called the “aroma” of the personality, which gets assimilated by the Higher Ego and becomes immortal. In every incarnation a fresh ray of the *manas* is launched. In every birth, the portion of the incarnated mind that is assimilated in the Divine Ego, is the “branch that abideth in the Christ, the true Vine (Higher Ego),” and “beareth fruit.” The aspect of mind which gets entangled in worldly, personal affairs, desires and weaknesses, “abideth not” in the “true Vine,” and hence becomes a withered branch, and is cast away. At the end of every incarnation a portion of the incarnated mind or soul is lost. In rare

cases, the *entire* incarnated mind can be lost. Such beings are called “lost souls.” These are “the withered branches” mentioned by Jesus as being cut off from the *Vine*. The loss of soul can occur in extremely depraved and wicked people, or in crass materialists. H.P.B. speaks of *spiritually dead* people whose only delight is in material and intellectual pleasures without care for humanity.

The pure part of *Manas* which is united to *Buddhi-Manas* is the bridge or *Antaskarana*. Thus, it is through our noble deeds and high aspirations we make permanent connection with immortal *Buddhi-Manas* or the higher *Manas* and attain final reunion with it. However, the complete union cannot take place while there remains a single taint of matter, *i.e.*, single evil tendency in us. Also, this connection can never be ruptured completely as long as there remains even one potential spiritual deed. The *Antaskarana* gets destroyed only when one shuts out the divine light by his persistent evil tendencies, life after life, becoming a “lost soul” or a withered branch.

If the “branches” of the grapevine abide in the “Vine” then they will bear fruits (grapes) and from grapes is produced wine. Sufis point out that material wine intoxicates and helps to forget sorrow, but the right knowledge and right living is like Spiritual Wine which produces spiritual ecstasy and union with the divine.

In our day-to-day life we frequently experience feelings of frustration, nervousness, anger or disappointment. Research of several years has shown that our emotions affect our well-being and that positive mental state leads to better health, which includes a reduced risk of heart disease and even a greater chance of living longer, while the negative mental state “activates our stress response; over time, this can lead to anxiety, depression, heart disease, or addiction.” However, new research shows that we must not judge our negative emotions as bad or inappropriate but, in fact, learn to accept them because ignoring or avoiding negative emotions could be harmful for mental health.

It is not our negative emotions which bring about harm but rather our reaction to them. A study published earlier this year has shown that when we label our emotion as “bad” it contributes to our negative feelings and such judging of emotions leads one to dwell on the negative feelings for longer periods of time. The negative feelings pass more quickly when people have a neutral response to them.

In a study conducted with a large number of participants it was observed that reframing one’s thoughts after experiencing a negative emotion could prove conducive to better mental health. For instance, imagine being at a retirement party and receiving a last piece of cake that slips from the plate and falls on the ground. Instead of feeling embarrassed and frustrated because one was looking forward to dessert, one can reframe the thoughts and tell oneself that not being able to eat that piece will help to observe one’s diet.

Likewise, study has shown that suppression of negative emotions leads to poor mental health. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist, said, “What you resist, persists.” It is “crucial to realize that negative emotions are part of the human experience... Learning to accept all feelings—even difficult feelings such as anger, sadness and disappointment—is an important life skill,” say researchers at “The Bronfenbrenner Centre for Transitional Research” at Cornell University. (*Psychology Today*: Top Posts, May 12, 2023)

Whether we realize it or not, the “ability to accept” is not only an essential virtue but, at times, a necessity, which keeps us linked to reality. Acceptance is recognition, or becoming aware. There can be no self-improvement, so long as we are not aware of our negative emotions, weaknesses and wrong habits. When our attention is drawn to our mistakes and weak points, we either brush them aside or are eager to justify. Each one of us has some subtle faults and peculiarities, which we fail to become aware of, even during self-examination. When others make us aware of them, we must be willing to accept and work on them. Acceptance should come easy for one who knows that “this too shall pass.”

Negativities or impurities such as anger, envy, fear, greed, vanity, etc., affect the astral body and consequently, the physical body. Anger has an explosive effect on the astral body, it ruptures it and breaks it into pieces; fear shrivels it up; envy makes it dull and cloudy; vanity leads to illusion from which anger and envy arise. Purification of the astral, inner man is a painstaking and gradual process in which one cannot afford to become slack.

The Buddhists are of the view that besides practicing mindfulness, it is important to establish contact with our positive emotions. There are 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 tranquility or equanimity, which must be developed by every person, endlessly, and without limit. There are four meditational practices connected with cultivation of these qualities or attitudes.

“Being grateful for all that silently works in our lives, and ignoring what does not, will reverse our default state of ignoring what works, and resisting what does not,” writes Suma Varughese, from her personal experience. She writes that when she could not sleep for three consecutive nights, she asked her friends for prescriptions for a good night’s sleep. She received many suggestions of which a few were implemented and they worked. She realized that getting a good night’s sleep was indeed a blessing. All of us enjoy hundreds of blessings which we take for granted, until we meet someone who does not have it. It is just like that boy who cried for shoes until he met one who had no feet. The author says that when she heard of a friend who had her intestines and liver operated on for cancer, she expressed her gratitude that she only had to suffer some sleepless nights. We are compelled to feel gratitude for all that we have when we see some of those people at traffic signals: men without limbs; malnourished women carrying tiny babies; street urchins running around with scanty clothes, and so on.

We should consider ourselves lucky if we can read, if we can walk, talk, breathe, eat and sleep. For, all these are great blessings. She recalls the incident wherein her uncle's entire family suffered on account of food poisoning and was hospitalized except their son; he cheerfully said that he was thankful to God that there was at least one person who was not affected and could look after them all! It was heartening to see him find something good even in a hopeless situation, writes Suma Varughese. (*Life Positive*, May 2023)

The feeling of gratitude is an inseparable part of spiritual life. Thanksgiving reminds us about the process of giving Thanks, which could be felt, acknowledged, written or expressed through a kind act. It is a good practice to maintain the Gratitude Journal, in which, every day, before we go to sleep, we can write down five things for which we are grateful. We could begin by making a list of five people to whom we are thankful, followed by five physical abilities, five possessions, five modern-day inventions, and so on. We could also be thankful for the good moral qualities developed as a result of suffering and adversities. Thankfulness puts everything in a fresh perspective, allowing us to see the blessings all around us, writes Marguerite Theophil. Catherine Athans, a teacher of metaphysics and a life coach, based out of Los Angeles, writes that when we learn to be grateful for little things in life, we would find that things and events we had been wanting for long, begin to appear in our life simply, miraculously. "Gratitude ties in beautifully with the state of living a full, abundant life."

We should consciously try to feel grateful for everything life brings, both joys and troubles. We must be thankful for the difficult times because they teach us hard lessons and make us grow. We must be thankful for our limitations because they give us opportunities for improvement. We must be also thankful for adversities and challenges because they could build our strength and character. With an attitude of gratitude, we can turn our troubles into our blessings by giving the right response to the situation.