

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 8, No. 11

March 17, 2017

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

THE QUEST FOR PERFECTION	3
FOOD FOR THOUGHT	9
ATMOSPHERE AND ACCIDENTS	
STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA	14
THE WAY OF CONTENTMENT—II	
SAKTI—SOME REFLECTIONS—I	18
REPENTANCE AND SELF-REFORM	24
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	28
IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY	32

THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA) PRIVATE LTD.

40 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020, India

email: ultmumbai@mtnl.net.in ♦ Phone : 22039024

website: www.ultindia.org

THE QUEST FOR PERFECTION

PERFECTION means to be “exact, without flaw, blemish or fault.” It also comes from the Latin word, *perfectus*, which means “complete.” Aristotle gives three shades of meaning of the term “perfect”: Perfect is that which is complete—which contains all the requisite parts; which is so good that nothing of the kind could be better; and thirdly, it is that which has attained its purpose. Thus, to Aristotle “perfect” meant “complete,” to which nothing needs to be added or subtracted. There are others who argue that if the world were perfect, it could not improve and so would lack true perfection, which in turn is dependent upon progress. Hence, Empedocles was of the view that perfection depends on incompleteness, since the latter contains the potential for development. Therefore, to strive for perfection, which we all do, in our respective fields of activity, is to change, to progress or to be better. We soon discover that the quest for perfection is an on-going quest.

In order to achieve perfection, we must be ready to recognize that we are imperfect in many ways. A person who is complacent and self-satisfied takes long in discovering his faults and weaknesses. It is said that there were people who came to Sri Aurobindo telling him of all they were capable of, all that they had done and all they could do, all that they had realized—and Shri Aurobindo would look at them very seriously and reply, “Oh! You are too perfect to be here.” It is very important to have a balanced perspective of

ourselves. It will not do if we are self-deprecating and judgemental about our own faults, and it will also not help to have a high opinion about ourselves. While we are quick to spot weaknesses and mistakes of other people we are reluctant to admit our own weaknesses.

Writing about her experience when she had gone to Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary at Rajasthan, India, Sudhamahi Regunathan mentions that her guide drew her attention to a small tree, almost a shrub, named Juliflora, and said, “This Juliflora is almost perfect and we do not want it in the forest. Perfection is for the Gods; we humans must learn to accept and show our weaknesses, for on that hinges our relationships.” He went on to say that people who do not show their weaknesses are difficult to live with. “When they show some weakness, they show they are human.” Others are able to relate to them, feel equal to them or superior to them, and at times even feel comfortable.

This may well be regarded as a profound observation of human nature. It is important that we pursue perfection only for our own selves, and not try to impose it on others and smother them by pointing out how imperfect they are! In fact, it should be our constant endeavour to find and highlight something praiseworthy even in the most simple, ordinary and imperfect person. Wabi Sabi philosophy is the characteristic feature of traditional Japanese beauty, which is all about seeing beauty in natural imperfection of life. It is in direct contrast with the Greek ideal of finding beauty in proportion and symmetry. Perfection arises out of imperfection when we are willing to learn from experiences which our imperfections bring.

We are all “work in progress.” If we are all imperfect, struggling to achieve perfection, we can aid each other in the process, by accepting others for what they are and focusing on the good and the perfect in another human being and highlighting the same. We almost always fail to see the good points in the other person but easily notice his imperfections or weaknesses. A teacher showed a class of students a white sheet of paper with black dot in the centre. She asked the class what they saw. The class unanimously answered,

“A black dot.” The teacher said that she was disappointed. “Could not any of you see the big white sheet of paper?”

It is the inner perception that takes us beyond the obvious and enables us to see the beauty and perfection beneath the apparent imperfection and ugliness. To the unveiling spiritual perception, Nature lifts veil upon veil, revealing the treasures and beauty buried in “her pure virgin bosom,” says *The Voice of the Silence*. The whole universe appears to be chaos to the senses but is cosmos (order) to the reason. Renowned American novelist, Richard Powell points out that Wabi Sabi acknowledges three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect.

While the quest for perfection is an admirable trait, perfectionism is considered a negative quality. Psychologists differentiate between excellence and perfectionism. In excellence, one enjoys one’s achievement while determined to do better, while in perfectionism one seems to be focused on how much one has not achieved. Experts feel that those in the grips of perfectionism are constantly focused on negative evaluation. It keeps people self-absorbed, engaged in perpetual self-evaluation, leading to frustration, anxiety and depression.

There seems to be nothing wrong with the desire for achieving perfection, as long as we do not allow the pursuit for perfection to be an obsession. Practice makes a person perfect. In some fields and some skills we are able to achieve perfection very quickly, since we have brought with us the aptitude or skill from similar endeavours in our past lives. But this is not always the case. Our aim should be to do the task on hand to the best of our ability, and find out ways and means of doing it better the next time. There is always a scope for improvement. When we are focussed on gradual improvement we are not anxious about achieving perfection, the ultimate goal, and yet a time comes when we succeed in reaching it.

In the Spiritual journey, to achieve perfection we must have before us the role model, an ideal, which gives us solace that what man has done, man can do. It is also important to know that these beings

also were once men like us and that they have faced and overcome the same weaknesses of their nature. *Light on the Path* says, “Each man has to accomplish the great leap for himself and without aid; yet it is something of a staff to lean on to know that others have gone on that road. It is possible that they have been lost in the abyss; no matter, they have had the courage to enter it.”

The whole aim of spiritual life is achieving perfection—in physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual nature. “Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” But we are also told, “Grow as the flower grows, unconsciously, but eagerly anxious to open its soul to the air. So must you press forward to open your soul to the eternal.” There must be no desire for growth, but willingness to follow the discipline, and work in harmony with the divine within. Then one develops into luxuriance of purity rather than hardening by the forcible passion for personal stature, says *Light on the Path*.

It is especially important in the spiritual quest for perfection to bear in mind that reaching the goal of perfection is necessarily a gradual process. Often people are mistaken into believing that just because they have accepted a certain doctrine whole-heartedly, therefore, they have also *realized* it. There is a great gulf between acceptance and realization of a doctrine. Mr. Judge writes that often people who have succeeded in achieving a certain amount of detachment begin to pretend that they have reached perfection in detachment from human affairs. In fact, they are often mistaken that detachment means being devoid of every human feeling. A little observation shows that such a person still carries within him peculiarities and defects pertaining to his family, education, nation, and to the race in which he is born. Spiritual progress can never be achieved by closing the gates of feeling. It is much better to be conscious of our defects and weaknesses than to entertain delusions of perfection, writes Mr. Judge. Perfect human development is the result of blending the head and heart.

This aspect has been beautifully described by Alok Pandey (*The Advent*, April 2009), observing that we might delude ourselves into

believing that we have gone beyond humanity because we no more feel love for others and we can exercise control and power over others by our superior faculties. But actually we have become inferior even to ordinary human beings. How can we love the Divine if we have not even known the human love? We also need to take care that we do not end up choosing the path of ego aggrandizement. “The titan takes all forms of austerity, even tortures himself to overpass the human limitations....His is a quantitative change, an increase of powers and capacities....But there is no fundamental change in the quality of his consciousness....He rejects humanity out of a sense of false superiority and pride.”

Often, the acquirement of psychic powers, the ability to understand abstruse metaphysics coupled with abstinence from drinks, meat, pungent or *rajasic* food, etc., deludes a person into thinking that he is a thing apart from other “inferior” men. It shows that only the desires of the lower plane have been conquered, and such a state may well be described as that of spiritual darkness. Spirituality demands progressive detachment and even equanimity, but it is not cold indifference or stoicism.

“Perfection is not achieved when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away,” said Antoine de St. Exupery. In the context of spiritual perfection, it is a profound statement because perfection is from within, without, achieved by cutting off the errors of the mind and other non-essentials. We are asked to keep the ideal before us of a *Mahatma*, because all of us have the “germs” of powers and qualities that a *Mahatma* has developed through training and experience. There is an ordinary person behind the mask of every superhero. We all have it in us to rise above our limitations. It is by ideating on the real nature of the *Mahatmas* that we get the direction for our own progress.

However, not all of us seek perfection. Jonathan Livingston is a seagull on a quest for perfection in flying—to acquire the ability to fly at low and high altitudes and with speed. Most seagulls bother to learn only simplest facts of flight that will enable them to get food

from the shore and fly back again. Jonathan Livingston was different from other gulls, for him flying mattered more than food. He was reprimanded that if he had to study and experiment it should be on how to get the food instead of on various ways of flying. When he wondered and enquired of his instructor why there were not many seagulls with them aspiring to touch perfection in flying, his instructor seemed to convey that Jonathan was a unique seagull and that the quest for perfection in something like flying is not a normal aspiration for a seagull. Jonathan was told about the difficulty of the task in these words:

You are pretty well a one-in-a-million bird. Most of us came along ever so slowly. We went from one world into another ...forgetting right away where we had come from, not caring where we were headed, living for the moment. Do you have any idea how many lives we must have gone through before we even got the first idea that there is more to life than eating, or fighting, or power in the Flock? A thousand lives, Jon, ten thousand! And then another hundred lives until we began to learn that there is such a thing as perfection, and another hundred again to get the idea that our purpose for living is to find that perfection and show it forth....Learn nothing [in this world] and the next world is the same as this one, all the same limitations and lead weights to overcome. (*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, pp. 53-54)

Perfect human development involves perfection of human nature so that “human man” can become divine man, and so that there is a perfect harmonizing of the divine with the human. “Not only is man more than an animal because there is a god in him, but he is more than a god because there is the animal in him.” Spiritual progress depends upon right relation of these two forces—animal and divine. We have allowed the animal to usurp the place of the god. Once we allow the god to rule the animal, we will be in possession of great force and power hitherto unknown to us, says *Through the Gates of Gold*.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT ATMOSPHERE AND ACCIDENTS

HUMAN intelligence is such that unless there is a contrast it does not understand. You know I have received hundreds of letters from people thanking me because they had been saved; but it is very, very rarely that someone writes to thank me because nothing has happened, you understand! Let us take an accident, it is already the beginning of a disorder. Naturally, when it is a public or collective accident, the atmosphere of each person has its part in the thing, and that depends on the proportion of defeatists and those who, on the contrary, are on the right side. I do not know if I have written this—it is written somewhere—but it is a very interesting thing. I am going to tell it to you....People are not aware of the workings of grace except when there has been some danger, that is, there has been the beginning of an accident or the accident has taken place and they have escaped it. Then they become aware. But never are they aware that if, for instance, a journey, or anything whatever, passes without any accident, it is an infinitely higher grace. That is, the harmony is established in such a way that nothing can happen. But that seems to them quite natural. When people are ill and get well quickly, they are full of gratitude; but never do they think of being grateful when they are well; and yet that is a much greater miracle! In collective accidents, what is interesting is exactly the proportion, the sort of balance of disequilibrium, the combination made by the different atmospheres of people.

There was an aviator, one of the great “aces” as they are called of the First [World] War, and a marvellous aviator. He had gained numerous victories, nothing had ever happened to him. But something occurred in his life and suddenly he felt that something was going to happen to him, an accident, and that it was now all over. What they call their “good luck” had gone. This man left the military to enter civil aviation and he was a pilot for one of these airlines—no, not civil aviation: he came out of the war but remained

with the military planes. And then he wanted to make a trip to South Africa: From France to South Africa. Evidently, something must have been upset in his consciousness (I did not know him personally, so I do not know what happened). He started from a certain city in France to go to Madagascar, I believe (I am not sure, I think it was Madagascar). And from there he wanted to come back to France. My brother was at that time governor of Congo, and he wanted to get back quickly to his post. He asked to be allowed as a passenger on the plane (it was one of those planes for professional tours, to show what these planes could do.) Many people wanted to dissuade my brother from going by it; they told him, “No, these trips are always dangerous, you must not go on them.” But finally he went all the same. They had a breakdown and stopped in the middle of the Sahara, a situation not very pleasant. Yet everything was arranged as by a miracle, the plane started again and put down my brother in Congo, exactly where he wanted to go, then it went farther south. And soon after, halfway, the plane crashed—and the other man was killed. . . . It was obvious that this had to happen. But my brother had an absolute faith in his destiny, a certitude that nothing would happen. And it was translated in this way: the mixture of the two atmospheres made the dislocation unavoidable, for there was breakdown in the Sahara and the plane was obliged to land, but finally everything was in order and there was no real accident. But once he was no longer there, the other man had all the force of his “ill-luck” (if you like), and accident was complete and he was killed.

A similar incident happened to a boat. There were two persons (they were well-known people but I cannot remember their names now), who had gone to Indo-China by plane. There was an accident, they were the only ones to have been saved, all the others were killed, indeed it was quite a dramatic affair. But these two (husband and wife) must have been what may be called bringers of bad-luck—it is a sort of atmosphere they carry. Well, these two wanted to go back to France (for, in fact, the accident occurred on their way back to France), they wanted to return to France, they took a boat. And

quite unexpectedly, unusually, right in the midst of the Red Sea the boat ran into a reef (a thing that does not happen even once in a million voyages) and sank; and the others were drowned, and these two were saved. And I could do nothing, you know, I wanted to say: “Take care, never travel with these people!” . . . There are people of this sort, wherever they are, they come out of the thing very well, but the catastrophes are for others.

If one sees things from the ordinary viewpoint, one does not notice this. But the associations of atmosphere—one must take care of that. That is why when one travels in groups, one must know with whom one travels. One should have an inner knowledge, should have a vision. And then, if one sees somebody who has a kind of small black cloud around him, one must take care not to travel with him, for surely an accident will occur—though perhaps not to him. Hence, it is quite useful to know things a little more deeply than in the altogether superficial way.

(Taken from, *Stories Told by the Mother*, Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.)

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Nothing in nature happens by chance. Everything that happens is the result of Law—eternal, immutable, ever active. God and Law are identical. The Law of Karma, which is described as the *Ultimate Law* of the universe, seeks to restore the disturbed harmony, bringing the effects back to the point of disturbance, like the ripples in the pond converge back to the place where the stone was thrown.

All our sufferings, including accidents, earthquakes, tsunamis, could be explained on the basis of Karma. None of us acts in isolation. We are all united on inner and invisible planes, and are continually affecting each other through our thoughts, feelings and actions. It is difficult to say what portion of another’s karma is *strictly of his own making*. As Mr. Judge suggests, “The indissoluble unity of the race demands that we should consider every man’s troubles as partly due to ourselves, because we have been always units in

the race and helped to make the conditions which cause suffering” (*Forum” Answers*, p. 55). Besides individual karma there is also collective and distributive Karma. It is under the collective aspect of karma that we suffer or enjoy by virtue of being part of the whole. Some people escape unhurt, in cases of accident, earthquake, fire and flood, while many lose their lives. We are affected in proportion to our contribution in precipitation of the disastrous situation.

It is under Karma that we come in contact with certain individual or individuals. Some individuals carry with them beneficent and pure aura or magnetic atmosphere, while others carry maleficent aura. The quality, *i.e.*, purity and impurity of the aura depends upon the moral character of the person. About such high and holy beings as Jesus, Apollonius, Plotinus, there gathered heavenly nimbus, or a cloud of pure magnetism, which was the result of their superhuman morality and sanctity. These holy men could exorcise obsessed individuals by their very presence. On the other hand, a person may be surrounded by dense, cloudy and impure aura, to which only foul beings and evil spirits are attracted (*Isis*, I, 487). The latter are likely to bring disaster wherever they go.

In the article, “Men, Karmic Agents,” Mr. Judge explains the special and technical sense in which the word “karmic agent” is used. He mentions that there are the people who are concentrators of the forces, who become instrumental in sudden and quick precipitation of Karma. There are those who are gifted or cursed with this power, by virtue of the kind of life led in the past. Adepts, on the other hand, possess such power of concentrating the karmic forces by training. It is a well-known tradition in India that when someone meets and talks with an adept, his Karma begins to precipitate faster than usual. There are accounts of people who had met by chance Yogis in the forest and telling them about a friend or a dear one at home, who was critically ill, and then on returning home finding that the illness had disappeared at the very time of the conversation. At other times, meeting with the adept would result in exhausting of a lot of unpleasant karma, once for all. Mr. Judge

observes that those who met the adept Zanoni, in Bulwer Lytton’s novel, soon showed in their affairs very great changes.

On the other hand, there are also those ordinary people, who have brought from their past lives, the power of concentrating Karma, and they continually bring to other people *sudden* good or bad effects, which would have otherwise spread over many days or years, surfacing in small events of life rather than in one big event. Mr. Judge points out that this should also explain the power of the evil eye. A person with the evil eye, is a Karmic agent, who brings about destruction or harm to a person or a thing by merely looking at them.

An “evil eye” is the destructive power of thoughts. Whenever we think, every thought coalesces with a unit of life-energy or “elemental.” An elemental is a colourless force or energy without any attributes, but when coalesced with thoughts, it acquires quality or colour. Electricity is a colourless force, but when it is passed through a rod, the rod gets charged and anyone touching it will experience shock. Just like a charged rod, these elementals carry bad thoughts to another person and cause him harm. Only when the person is pure—at the level of speech, body and mind—such bad thoughts are powerless. If an individual becomes a victim to an evil-eyed person, could it not be due to some karmic affinity between the victim and the malignant person?

I CAN tell you to find Those, who will show you the secret gateway that leads inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer. There is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through. There is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards, there is reward past all telling: the power to bless and save humanity. For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

THE WAY OF CONTENTMENT—II

THE THEOSOPHISTS have the supreme goal of reaching the state of the Mahatmas, who embody the Ancient Wisdom or complete Truth. The religious man who believes in a particular creed and follows the teachings of his own church or temple does not come under this classification. He does not belong to the path of the Theosophist, the path of the manifested, nor does he belong to the path of the honest seeker after truth, who if he really restrained his senses, and rejoiced in the good of every creature, would soon come to the conclusion that there is the Eternal Record, and soon find Theosophy. The religious man, as we know him today, is not a seeker after truth. He has simply accepted the teachings of his own orthodox sect or creed, as truth. But that truth is not real, it is something which satisfies the desires of his personal nature. This brings us to the next point.

Why is the path of the unmanifested, in the words of Krishna himself, so difficult to tread? Why is it more difficult than the path of the manifested? Because, while these honest seekers after truth are trying to find that truth, they constantly imagine and conceive their ideal of truth in terms of their own personality, in terms of their own relative knowledge and in terms of the weaknesses and limitations of their own lower nature. From this point of view, in *Kali Yuga*, we can really call the path of the unmanifested as the path of the personal, because the personality constantly interferes with the true vision of the soul, in the scientist and the artist. Truth to them becomes the expression, the manifestation of their own personal nature, and that is why it is so difficult for them to discover it unless they come to the recognition of Theosophy, the immemorial record. The personality acts on their vision exactly as coloured glasses would act on the vision of our own physical sight, *i.e.*, it throws on that path, and on all the discoveries, wonderful as they are, sometimes, the colouring of the personal nature, whereby they mislead them, leading to confusion and suffering.

How does a Theosophist try to protect himself from this great danger of the personal nature? When the student of Theosophy is really studying and consulting the immemorial record of his own philosophy, and endeavouring to apply those rules in his own life, he is made to find the light of truth in his own nature. That light which has come down to him through generations of perfected Seers, lights up his every word, deed, and thought, so that he cannot be dishonest with himself, for he knows exactly what his limitations, and weaknesses are, and he tries to control, purify and discipline his lower, personal nature. He constantly tries to purify his own vision in terms of the philosophy, thereby succeeding, in the course of time, in purifying his own personal nature to such an extent that his personality, instead of being a mask which hides the true spiritual soul, becomes a pure mirror which reflects the spiritual soul within every single human being, and reflects the knowledge which belongs to the Perfected Men.

In verse 41 of the Second Discourse, Shri Krishna refers to the path of spiritual life: “In this path there is only one single object, and this of a steady, constant nature; but widely-branched is the faith and infinite are the objects of those who follow not this system.”

This path of the spiritual soul in man must be one single and always the same for all beings trying to tread that path, for the spirit is that one principle which belongs to all, to the whole of humanity. But the path of the personality can be very different, is different. For, every single human being has his own personality, which is different from the personalities of other human beings. Truth is one and when the student of Theosophy knows already what the path is which will take him to the Truth, he is only following one single doctrine, but those who are still looking for the truth, and do not know where they are going to find it, can fall prey to many falsehoods, and we know there is an infinite variety of falsehoods in the world. This is what Krishna referred to in the second discourse.

The goal in the path of the manifested is very definite, and it is the Masters. Krishna again emphasizes what that supreme goal is in this twelfth discourse. In verses three to seven, he says:

Those who worship me with constant zeal, with the highest faith and minds placed on me, are held in high esteem by me. But those who, with minds equal toward everything, with senses and organs restrained, and rejoicing in the good of all creatures, meditate on the inexhaustible, immovable, highest, incorruptible, difficult to contemplate, invisible, omnipresent, unthinkable, the witness, undemonstrable, shall also come unto me. For those whose hearts are fixed on the unmanifested the labour is greater, because the path which is not manifest is with difficulty attained by corporeal beings. But for those who worship me, renouncing in me all their actions, regarding me as the supreme goal and meditating on me alone, if their thoughts are turned to me, O son of Pritha, I presently become the saviour from this ocean of incarnations and death.

Thus, in the seventh verse we are told that he who follows the Masters becomes really immortal, and is saved from the ocean of incarnations and death. Then in verse eight, he gives the very method, the explanation of the process which will enable every single one of us to attain the supreme goal if we so desire, and work in accordance with the immemorial record. That verse can truly be said to be the central thought around which we can build all of the other teachings given by Krishna in the whole of the *Gita*. It is the most important verse. The method had already been referred to, and we have spoken about it, but here the summation of that very method is given. It would be good to hear what the verse sounds like in the Sanskrit original, meaning exactly: "Place thy *Manas* on Me; cause thy *Buddhi* to enter into me; and then thou shalt without doubt dwell in me hereafter."

We must place our *Manas*, the Thinker, on the Living Ideal of the Masters. Then we must cause our *Buddhi* to pierce through the living Ideal to enter into the Master Himself. It implies that we have put all our thoughts, meditation and contemplation on the one Ideal and we have energized ourselves through the power of *Buddhi*, through the radiation and light from that one single ideal. When this

is done, we have become one with the Master, and the Living Master in our own nature is that Higher Self, *Atma* the Spirit. Thus, placing our *Manas* and *Buddhi* on the Master within, means uniting ourselves to *Atma*, the Spirit. Then there is the complete trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas*, and naturally when that union of the three higher principles of man is achieved, man can be said to have become a truly immortal being, a perfected being, a *Mahatma*, and that is why Krishna says that thou shalt without doubt dwell in me hereafter; thou shalt have become one of us, a *Mahatma*; thou shalt have entered within the being of the great Immortal Ones.

Buddhi has two definite faculties, or can manifest and express two powers—one, the power of pure reason, and the other, the power of compassion or altruism. When *Buddhi* shines through *Manas*, man can express pure reason, man can see all things in the Universe exactly as they are and through that vision he can give to each one of them its own proper value, so that all his reasoning is pure. When *Buddhi* has turned within and found *Atma* and has assimilated and absorbed the Universal Essence of *Atma* then another faculty expresses itself, and that is the faculty of compassion which, as the *Voice of the Silence* points out, is not really an attribute but is the Law of Laws within Itself. When the supreme vision which Arjuna experienced, comes to the man, his one single desire is to serve the whole of Humanity. He not only sees the whole of the Universe, but he sees that the one Law which animates the whole of the Universe is the Law of Compassion. He sees that there is nothing else for him to do but to work in harmony, to serve the whole of humanity, to bestow his labours and efforts on all men, both on the good and evil without making any distinction. The whole of the humanity, the whole of the human race has become his family and for the whole of it he is going to give up his complete life, not one, but all lives and incarnations. When this unity is attained, man sees himself in all things, and all things in himself.

(To be concluded)

SAKTI—SOME REFLECTIONS

I

GENERALLY, we use the word “Sakti” to denote energy or strength. A person of great physical strength is described as *saktiman*. But Sakti also denotes power, strength or force not only at the physical level but also at the mental, psychological, moral, and spiritual level. We speak of vitality or vital energy, which is life energy or *prana*, a specialized aspect of *Jiva*. As life pervades every particle of matter we might say Sakti or cosmic energy pervades everything in the manifested world. Thus, there is no inanimate, dead or inorganic matter. Esoteric science holds that nothing in nature is inorganic but that every atom is a “life,” writes H.P.B. She goes on to explain that minerals, plants and animals are but aggregate of atoms held together by the life-force. When this life energy becomes inactive in a stone, the particles of the stone lose their cohesive property, leading to disintegration of the stone. However, we cannot say that the life-force has entirely left the stone because it would still remain in each particle of the disintegrated stone in a dormant state. When the life-force is disconnected from one set of atoms, it is immediately attracted by some other set of atoms, and then in abandoning the first set of atoms it only transfers its *vis viva* or living power or energy of motion to another set. In other words, in the crumbled stone, the life-force remains as potential energy or latent life, while in the other set it manifests as Kinetic energy. Whether we are alive or dead, life energy is still there, as we notice maggots arising in the dead body. Life energy is described as *Prana-Sakti*, which is generally taken to energise all physical actions, organs and functions.

Generally, it is believed that when body becomes tired and depleted of vitality (*prana-sakti*) we fall asleep. But Theosophy gives just the opposite explanation. Accordingly, we are more full of life energy when we fall asleep, than in the morning. As this life energy exists around us like an ocean, and when we are awake the life

waves rush into the body with greater intensity every hour. Our power to resist is limited, and so we fall asleep. Children are unable to resist the current and hence they fall asleep quickly. In sleep, equilibrium is reached, because during sleep we *absorb* life energy instead of resisting it. While sleeping, the life waves adjust themselves to the molecules of the body; and when the equilibrium is complete we again wake up. Thus, during sleep, life energy is absorbed or assimilated by the healthy organs of our body and equilibrium is reached. The physical organs are rested and recharged. “If this periodical adjustment did not occur, the life current would destroy us. Any derangement of the body that tends to inhibit this adjustment is a cause of sleeplessness, and perhaps death,” writes Mr. Judge. Sakti worship or worshipping female energy forms a very primitive practice of Hinduism. *Devi Mahatmyam* or “Glory of the Goddess,” is a Hindu religious text that describes the Goddess as the supreme power and creator of the universe. It is part of Markandeya Purana. *Devi Mahatmyam* is also known as *Durga Saptashati* or *Chandi Path*, and as the name suggests, it contains seven hundred verses arranged in thirteen chapters.

In Hinduism Sakti is regarded as “Primordial Cosmic Energy” and represents primordial cosmic forces that move through the entire universe. Sakti is also regarded as the personification of divine feminine creative power, known as “The Great Divine Mother.” As mother, she is known as *Adi Parasakti*, *Maha Sakti* or *Parama Sakti*. *Adi Parasakti* is described as eternal limitless Power—power beyond this universe. She is active energy which creates and dissolves the universe. Goddess *Adi Parasakti* is considered to be the Supreme Spirit without form, *i.e.*, *Paramatman*.

We may probably compare *Adi Parasakti* with *Mulaprakriti*. In the article, “The Septenary Principle in Esotericism,” H.P.B. points out that the universal root-principle, *Mulaprakriti*, as undifferentiated cosmic essence is identical with *Parabrahmam*. However, when from passive *Mulaprakriti* it has become *avyakta* (an active evolver), it becomes (*gunavat*) or endowed with qualities, and becomes

Prakriti. In Sankhya philosophy *Prakriti* is said to be the ultimate cause of the world of objects, which is constituted of three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The three *gunas* are in a state of equilibrium in *prakriti*. Goddesses Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, etc. are said to be the *saguna* aspect of *Adi-parasakti*. It is also said that goddess *Mahasaraswati* is the first partial expansion of *Adi-parasakti*. She represents *Sattva guna* and is considered to be the *sakti* of Lord Brahma. *Mahalakshmi*, the second partial expansion of *Adi-parasakti*, represents *Rajo-guna* and is considered to be the *sakti* of Lord Vishnu. *Mahakali*, the third partial expansion of *Adi-parasakti*, represents *Tamoguna* and is said to be *sakti* of Lord Siva.

Metaphysically, Siva-Parvati, Brahma-Saraswati and Vishnu-Lakshmi pair, may be taken to represent, among other things, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* or Spirit and Matter. However, even before this differentiation or polarization into male and female, there is the stage of androgynous deity, known as *Ardhanarishwara* or “bi-sexual lord.” Esoterically, it represents the unpolarized states of cosmic energy, symbolized by *Brahma-prajapati*, Ormazd, Adam Kadmon, etc., in various philosophies. “Aditi is the mother of the gods, *Deva-Matri*, Eve is the mother of all living; they are the *Sakti* or generative power in their female aspect of the ‘Heavenly man,’ and they are all compound Creators.” (*S.D.*, I, 356)

Also, *Ardha-Nari* literally means half-woman, wherein Siva is represented as Androgynous, or half-male and half-female, a type of male-female energies combined. In *Ardhanarishwara* form the female aspect is not separated from the male aspect, but rather it is the energy of male which is not dissociated from him. Swami Krishnananda writes that the *Yoga Vasishtha* and *Vishnu Purana* try to describe this relation between Siva and Sakti, or Narayana and Lakshmi, by saying that it is like the relationship of sesame to oil which is immanent in it. As heat is inseparable from fire and sweetness is inseparable from sugar, so also, Lakshmi is inseparable from Narayana.

However, in manifestation, duality supervenes. The Manifested

Universe is pervaded by duality of spirit and matter. Spirit without matter, or matter without spirit would only be an empty abstraction. This concept is beautifully conveyed in the Sankhya philosophy. The evolution of the world cannot be due to the self (spirit) alone or due to matter (*prakriti*) alone. The activity of *prakriti* must be guided by the intelligence of *purusha* for the purpose of evolution. It is only when *Purusha* and *Prakriti* co-operate that there is a creation of the world of objects. If a blind man and a lame man co-operate, *i.e.*, if the lame man sits on the shoulders of blind man and guides him, then they can both get out of the forest.

In the article, “The Future Occultist,” H.P.B. points out that the union of *Siva* and *Sakti* is a purely allegorical account. *Buddhi* or Spiritual Soul in man (is *Prakriti* in the Universe), represented as “female,” because it is passive, and is the vehicle of *Atman* or Spirit. This *Atman*, when spoken of in relation to the entire Universe, is referred to as *Purusha*, and is depicted as active “male,” for it is the CENTRE OF ENERGY, acting through and upon its female vehicle. The union of the two produces the phenomenal creation. Thus, since the energy of *purusha* or spirit expresses itself through *prakriti* or female, all the goddesses, or consorts of gods, are worshipped as *Sakti*.

In man, likewise, *Atman* is the centre of energy, and when it functions through *Buddhi*, its passive vehicle, *Buddhi* becomes the passive female. But *Buddhi* in turn becomes male when it expresses itself through *Manas*, which then becomes the passive, female principle. Hence, the vehicle of the lower mind is necessary for the expression of the wisdom and energy of *Atma-Buddhi*, on our plane, otherwise, they are useless to the body of man. When the lower mind or incarnated mind becomes free from *Kama* or passions and desires, it becomes an organ of free will in man and the guide of highest mental faculties, writes H.P.B. There is a temporary conjunction of *manas* with *Atma-buddhi* when one gets a flash of intuition. This is because *buddhi* contains all the experiences right from the monadic stage, so that when *manas* is conjoined with *buddhi* it becomes omniscient.

The Theosophical Glossary defines *Sakti* as the active female energy of the gods; in popular Hinduism, their wives and goddesses; in Occultism, the crown of the astral light. It is the Force and the six forces of nature synthesized. It is Universal Energy. In Hinduism there is a group of seven mother-goddesses or *Saptamatrka*, each of whom is the *Sakti*, or the female counterpart of a god. They are *Brahmi* or *Brahmani*, power of Brahma; *Maheshvari*, power of Siva; *Kumari* of Kartikeya; *Vaisnavi* of Vishnu; *Varahi* of Varaha, the boar *avatar* of Vishnu; *Indrani* of Indra and *Chamundi* is the power of goddess *Kaushiki*, an aspect of goddess *Durga*. These various *Saktis* are creative energies that are inherent in and proceed from God and are personified as various goddesses.

Associated with various goddesses, as personifications of *Sakti*, is the concept of *Sakti Peethas* or seats of *Sakti*. Mythologically, these are places of worship consecrated to goddess Sati or Uma, the consort of lord Siva. The legend goes that once Siva's father-in-law Daksha was performing a sacrifice, to which Siva was not invited. However, Shiva's wife Uma was most anxious to attend it. But when she reached there, she was insulted by her father, so she voluntarily gave up her body. At Uma's death, Siva was immersed in grief. He picked up the remains of Sati's body and performed the celestial dance of destruction, across all creation. The other Gods requested Vishnu to intervene and stop this destruction, wherein Vishnu wielded his Sudarshana Chakra, which cut through Sati's corpse, so that various parts of her body fell at several spots all through Indian subcontinent. So, wherever the body parts of Sati fell, that particular location became a *Sakti Peetha*. At all *Sakti Peethas*, there are temples dedicated to Goddess Sati or *Sakti*, accompanied by her consort, Lord Siva, and are known by different names. There are fifty-one *Sakti Peethas* linked to fifty-one alphabets in Sanskrit.

Sakti Peethas are considered to be spiritually rich and energetic places. These are called *Bahya peethas* or outer, visible spiritual locations. There are *Antar peethas*, or energy centres in the body of

man, and the outer centres are but reminders of the inner, spiritual centres. There is also the third category called *gupta peetha* or secret energy centres, in which spiritual energies are not connected with any particular deity. Thus, sacred books are called *gupta peetha*, as they contain energy in the form of knowledge. The hearts of great devotees are also considered to be *gupta peetha*, as devotion in their hearts is itself a kind of spiritual energy.

Saktism or Sakta cult worship goddess *Sakti*. Saktism is inseparably related to Tantrik Hinduism. Tantra works are certain mystical and magical works, which deal with worship of female power or personified *Sakti*. *Devi* or *Durga* (*Kali*, Siva's wife) is the special energy connected with *sexual rites and magical powers, and is the worst form of black magic or sorcery* (*The Theosophical Glossary*). *Sakti* has two-fold nature, white and black, good and bad. In her beneficent aspect, goddess *Sakti* is variously known as *Uma*, *Parvati* and *Ambika*, and in her fierce and destructive aspect she is represented as *Kali* or *Durga*. As mentioned in the *Glossary*, the *Saktas* or worshippers of female power are also divided into two classes, the *Dakshinacharis* and *Vamacharis*, or the right-hand and the left-hand *Saktas*, or "white" and "black" magicians. The worship of the latter is most licentious and immoral. When Tantra works are taken literally without understanding their symbolism, then their practice leads to the worst form of black magic. However, if these works are read symbolically, they are full of wisdom. People of spiritual disposition worship *Sakti* as the Divine Will.

(To be continued)

YOU can solidify your character by attending to small things. By attacking small faults, and on every occasion, one by one. This will arouse the inner attitude of attention and caution. The small faults and occasions being conquered, the character grows strong.

—W. Q. JUDGE

REPENTANCE AND SELF-REFORM

IMPERFECT as the human nature is it is natural for us to err and make mistakes. It is again an innate human quality to feel pain or regret for acts of omission and commission. One feels in the inner conscience that one has committed a wrong. No man is devoid of the warning voice of conscience, obscure though it may be, since he is essentially a spiritual being encased in matter. Though his spiritual nature is obscured in this world by the turbulent passions of his carnal nature, the light of the divine spirit still survives in his consciousness as conscience, like a dim spark, and that is his only saviour and redeemer, if he but follows its behests in all conditions and circumstances. Yet, paradoxically, it is the very same conscience which many say they have obeyed as a justification for wrongs, even heinous deeds, committed by them. What crimes have not been committed in the name of god and truth in the history of religions! Instances are not wanting in everyday life, of questionable deeds being done by people mandated, as they say, by their conscience. This is because on the physical plane the material nature of man has always the upper hand over the spiritual. The response of man to the voice of his conscience, therefore, depends on his education which colours it. Biases of the mind, such as, religious bigotry, sectarian interest, parochial views, narrow nationalistic patriotism, cultural pride, the materialistic bent of mind, and so on, are all the result of one's education, and these distort and pervert the true sense of right and wrong coming from the conscience. A man of altruistic disposition, on the other hand, whose thoughts and actions have a basis in universal ideas, broad, just, unbiased, will be more true to his conscience, and is more likely to heed the inner warning voice, because the spiritual quality of his mind and nature harmonizes with it.

Such nobler impulses in people as regret and repentance for wrong done, desire to eschew evil ways and to turn over a new leaf in life, to redress wrongs done, etc., come from our higher consciousness.

Right kind of education based on universal ideas, and the habit of heeding and obeying the voice of conscience in all situations strengthens one's moral nature and makes it possible for the inner voice to be heard more clearly with least distortion. In such a case man improves morally and becomes a centre of beneficent influences which regenerate him as well as his fellowmen. The voice of conscience, on the other hand, grows more and more dim in the life of one who habitually turns away from the silent warning voice and follows the dictates of his lower nature. Such a man enters upon, what the Buddha calls, the downward course, and debases himself and his fellowmen, and all nature.

There seems to be a difference between regret and repentance. A man may feel regret over an act but may not make efforts to redress the wrong done, whereas the truly repentant tries to remedy the injustice of his wrongful action. Instances are not rare of individuals committing crime, and then moved by conscience repent and assume personal responsibility to mitigate the pain and loss suffered by the victims of their injudicious act. In the terrible carnage of communal violence during the partition of the Indian subcontinent a Hindu rioter, full of remorse for having killed a Muslim child in a fit of frenzy in Noakali riots, went to Gandhiji who was on a fast and confessed to him with sobs his sinful act, and sought his advice. Gandhiji counselled him to adopt an orphaned Muslim child, protect and bring it up as a parent, as a balm to his wounded conscience and as restoration, to some extent, the consequences of his unjust act. Hundreds of American people, moved by conscience, protested against and disapproved of America waging the Vietnam war, and adopted orphaned children of Vietnam, ravaged by American bombing. The Australian Prime Minister tendered a public apology in the country's parliament, on behalf of his countrymen, to the indigenous people for the wrongs done to them, and vowed never to repeat the historical wrong and extend to them equal rights and opportunities. These are instances of how, sometimes, a whole nation is moved by conscience and attempts to redress the wrongful acts

committed by it.

Thus we see that repentance is the innate quality of our inner self, an inner spiritual help ever at hand, by the aid of which we can learn from our mistakes, strengthen our moral nature, improve our character, and grow spiritually.

Repentance is an article of faith and a prescribed practice in every religion. But there is wrong repentance and right repentance. Wrong practices have come to prevail in some religions. For instance, it is believed in some Christian sects that absolution of sins is possible if the sinner makes a confession and repents. Some theologians hold the view that merciful God may forgive one's sins. Hindus believe that their sins are washed away if they bathe in river Ganga. Injustice implicit in these beliefs is evident. If the effect of the offence committed by a man against another were limited to the offender alone then, perhaps, there is some force in the belief. But the truth is that every thought, word and deed of ours is not confined to our individual self alone. It ramifies in all directions, affecting all beings throughout the universe, for good or ill, and none can escape the consequences which follow in the course of the restoration of the disturbed harmony. True repentance, therefore, consists in engaging in positive actions of the opposite kind productive of such good results as to have the effect of shortening, or even mitigating, the ill-effects of action which is repented.

There is another sort of wrong repentance which is positively harmful. It is seen that some repent over an act and continue to brood over it, which leads to constantly recurring regret, or even indulge in self-torture, in a bid to assuage the sense of exaggerated guilt. Mr. Judge explains the psychology of this sort of wrong repentance.

Regret is a thought, hence an energy. If we turn its tide upon the past, it plays upon the seeds of that past and vivifies them; it causes them to sprout and grow in the ground of the mind: from thence to expression in action is but a step. (*Letters that have helped me*, p. 20)

“Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost,” teaches the *Voice of the Silence*. The wise man who wishes to be free from the bonds of Karmic chains must learn not to dwell upon, and live over again in his mind and imagination, on the pleasures of past experiences, nor on the unpleasant ones with regret, but live in the present moment. The present is the unbroken continuance of the past and hence the present moment is the most important in mitigating the effects of past actions, and in shaping our future destiny. The past cannot be changed, nor can the effects, good or bad, of our past Karma, which are precipitating themselves at every moment in our lives, be prevented. But the power of the effects of past actions in binding the soul in the fetters of Karma can, and ought to be, prevented by us by acting with right attitude born of right knowledge. The freedom of the soul can be secured in no other way.

Then regret nothing, not even the greatest follies of your life, for they are gone, and you are to work in the present which is both past and the future at once. So then, with the absolute knowledge that all your limitations are due to Karma, past or in this life, and with a firm reliance ever upon Karma as the only judge, which will be good or bad as you make it, yourself, you can stand anything that may happen and feel serene, despite occasional despondencies which all feel, but which the light of Truth always dispels. (*Letters that have helped me*, pp. 18-19)

Thus, right repentance is an indispensable means for self-improvement, which consists in constantly trying to elevate our thoughts and acts every moment of our lives to harmonize with the dictates of the divine conscience. It is through mistakes that we learn and improve, by placing reliance upon the just law of Karma, and by seeking, and following the promptings of the Higher Self.

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: *The Bhagavad-Gita* mentions three paths to self-realization—of Knowledge, Action and Devotion. Depending upon our temperament we are attracted to one of the three paths. Can the person following one of the three paths hope to be brought to the other two paths?

Answer: The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a *Yoga-shastra*, as it teaches different ways to unite with God. This union can be achieved through action, devotion and meditation, as also through acquirement of spiritual knowledge. “To each temperament there is one road which seems the most desirable,” says *Light on the Path*. Thus, the intellectually inclined are readily drawn to the path of knowledge, and those seeking constant activity are likely to be drawn to the path of action. The path of devotion appeals particularly to those of an emotional nature. However, since these three paths are inter-related, none alone can take the aspirant more than one step forward.

Since the three paths are interconnected, sooner or later, a *sincere* seeker is bound to come to the realization of the necessity of following the other two paths as well. But we must emphasize the word “sincere.” Shri B. P. Wadia writes: “Mind-temperaments are numerous and provisions are made for each. It is like a buffet supper; twenty dishes are offered; we can eat what we find suitable for us. Some eat what is tasty and get pain; some sample all twenty dishes and very probably go away hungry, dissatisfied and full of complaints!” There are seekers who try out various philosophies and practices simply out of curiosity and there are those who move from one method or philosophy to another without giving enough time and energy to any one of them. Commitment is absolutely necessary. For instance, once we have decided, after due

deliberation, to follow a particular discipline, there should arise no controversy or conflict in our mind. Once settled, it must be like Pythagoras’ theorem, verified and accepted by an advanced mathematician. Before accepting the theorem he has tested it, and hence, does not verify every time he makes its application. Buddhism considers *vicikitsa* or “indecision” to be one of the fetters or obstacles to spiritual progress. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, explains that *vicikitsa* is an unwillingness to come to a definite conclusion. People waver; they like to sit on the fence; they do not want to commit themselves. One day they think in one way and another day they think differently. It is necessary to break this fetter and overcome indecisiveness.

However, the seeker who is sincerely committed to any one of the three paths, or for that matter a completely wrong understanding of the path, will be brought along the right lines. For instance, many sincere seekers have lacked the right understanding of *karma-sanyasa yoga* or renunciation of action. Many seekers have abandoned action, hoping to gain salvation. There are a great number of ascetics who remain inert, because renunciation of action is interpreted to mean complete abandonment of action. Some renounce the world and seek refuge in monasteries, *ashrams* and mountain tops, deserting duties of life. The fact is that it is difficult to attain true renunciation of action without right performance of action. When a seeker renounces action literally, by remaining inert or by shirking his duties, life after life, sooner or later, as Mr. Judge suggests, he is brought to clearness of sight that he must stop such renunciation and take up performance of action, by renouncing desire and concern for the fruits of them, as also the feeling of doership (*kartabhav*). Depending upon the intensity with which he had followed the previous practice, it might take few or many lives. We are also promised that in this process “he will be assisted by those minds whom he is sure to encounter, who have passed through all the needed experience.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 120)

Every sincere seeker, following only one of three paths begins to realize that he has begun to stagnate. Thus, the follower of *Jnana*

marga realizes that he may be a scholar but he is far short of achieving wisdom or intuitive knowledge or spiritual discrimination of good and evil, right and wrong. Then one becomes aware of the need to have a compassionate mind and an intelligent heart. Knowledge must be applied else it remains a mere head-learning and cannot be used effectively in helping others.

Devotion and action combined with knowledge leads to final wisdom. Knowledge and action are two wings that are necessary for the soul's ascent. As the actions grow more and more free from attachment, equal-minded and sacrificial in spirit, one becomes fitted to acquire higher and abstruse knowledge. But on the other hand, with the acquirement of knowledge the soul becomes firm in such desireless and sacrificial acts. We need to put into practice the spiritual teachings, because only then the quality of mind can change, making it porous to the influx from above.

As for devotion, in the absence of knowledge it remains some kind of emotional effervescence. Devotion is defined as an intense love of God. When this singleness of attachment is towards a personal god or a particular idol, then it degenerates into fanaticism. In every religion, we find that people love their own god, idols, and ideals and hate every other god and ideals. In the absence of right knowledge, the devotion that is developed is inferior. As against this there is *Para-bhakti* or supreme devotion. The *Gita* says that spiritual knowledge includes every action without exception and that it is to be obtained by means of devotion.

Question: Are *Rahu* and *Ketu* real planets? What is their inner significance?

Answer: *Rahu* and *Ketu* are not physical planets. They are called shadow-planets (*Chhaya-grahas*) as they have no material existence, but only position. They are also called the nodes of the Moon. *Rahu* and *Ketu* represent two celestial points at which the path of the Sun (ecliptic) and path (orbit) of the Moon around the Sun, intersect. In mythology, *Rahu* is the *Daitya*, whose lower part of the body ended in a Serpent's or Dragon's tail. He is supposed to have stolen and tasted a little bit of *Amrita*, the water of immortality, produced during

the churning of the ocean, making him immortal. The Sun and the Moon, who detected the theft, promptly informed *Vishnu*, who beheaded *Rahu* when *Amrita* was still at the throat level. *Vishnu* then placed the two parts of his body in stellar spheres, the upper portion of his body representing the Dragon's head and the lower (*Ketu*) the Dragon's tail; which two are the ascending and descending nodes. They are the two points in the sky, represented by two Planets, *Rahu* and *Ketu*, who now take revenge on the Sun and the Moon by occasionally swallowing them, which is an allegorical representation of eclipses. Solar eclipse occurs at the ascending node while Lunar eclipse occurs at the descending node.

If we take the Moon to represent a disciple or someone who reflects the light of truth, and reaches it to his fellow beings, and the Sun to symbolize the light of Truth, then, depending upon his level of development he will reflect more or less light. Also, so long as he is faithful to his task of reflecting the light impersonally, he benefits humanity, by removing the darkness of ignorance. But when he tries to put forward his own personality and begins to divert the attention of the people from the teachings to himself, he, without realizing, places himself between his followers and the light of truth, causing a moral and spiritual eclipse.

The fable had another mystic meaning, since *Rahu*, the Dragon's head, played a prominent part in the mysteries of the Sun's (*Vikarttana's*) initiation, when the candidate and dragon had a supreme fight (*S.D.*, II, 381). This is the fight between good and evil. The candidate for initiation personifies the sun, who has to kill all his fiery passions and wear a crown of thorns, before he can rise into new life and be reborn. In the Puranic allegory, when the eighth part of sun's rays were cut off, darkness was created around him and he became "*Vikarttana*," one who was shorn of his effulgence. *Vikarttana* represents the initiated neophyte. It refers to the process in Initiation, wherein the candidate touches the lowest levels of his consciousness and after facing and purifying it, he rises with fully purified consciousness.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

If spirits exist, it follows logically that spirit possession can also exist. Many a physical ailment can be healed faster if we released the person of attached spirits that may have taken accommodation in his body because of a weak aura or an untoward incident, writes Shivi Verma. What is spirit possession? After the death of the body, generally, souls go back to the spirit world. But unfulfilled desires, the family's attachment to them, a brutal or sudden death may stop the soul from moving on to the spirit world. Such marooned souls may possess another living human being who is at the same emotional or mental or physical frequency as theirs, explains Anshoo Srivastava, a past-life regression therapist. "The spirit has an electric and magnetic field just like human and animals, which can be measured by a ghost-o-meter, lecher antenna, or a dowsing rod," writes Anu Mehta, a master trainer of Meta health in India.

Who is vulnerable to spirit possession? Anu Mehta believes that spirit entities are like viruses and bacteria in the environment. If one has a strong immune system then one will not catch them, but the person with a weak immune system gets easily affected. Likewise, a weak and mentally and emotionally susceptible person is vulnerable to possession. "An entity will enter your body and make you do harmful things only if you already have such thoughts in your mind. So instead of blaming the spirit, introspect to detect what kind of thoughts you harboured to attract such spirits," writes Anu Mehta.

In spite of great similarity between symptoms of mental illness and spirit possession, there is a thin line of demarcation between the two, and hence it is advisable to take the patient first to a psychiatrist or a counsellor before going for a spirit healing session.

Prevention is always better than cure. One therapist recommends using the Bach Flower Remedies such as Crab Apple in the bath along with crystalline sea salt or Pakistani rock salt. Crystals like black tourmaline, labradorite, blue kyanite, tiger's eye are considered

to be useful in protecting one's aura. Ultimately, "the loftier our thoughts and ideals, the higher the beings we will attract to aid us in our growth, and the lower our thoughts and vibrations, the lesser the beings we will draw to ourselves," writes Shivi Verma. (*Life Positive*, February 2017)

H. P. Blavatsky mentions several cases of obsession, possession and exorcism in her book *Isis Unveiled*. The more passive a person is, the more he becomes suggestible. A time comes when that medium becomes perfectly and completely passive. It is then, as H.P.B. writes, "his own astral body may be benumbed and even crowded out of his physical body, which is then occupied by an elemental [or even the 'elementary,' *i.e.*, disincarnate spirit] who proceeds to use it as his own. But too often the cause of the most celebrated crime is to be sought in such possession....Spirits never control persons of positive character who are determined to resist all extraneous influences. The weak and feeble-minded whom they can make their victims they drive into vice" (*Isis*, I, 490). In India, one comes across several cases, especially of women, who in the state of religious frenzy claim to have been possessed by some god or goddess. Often they are possessed by only a *devata* or elemental spirit of lower order.

At times, what appears to be spirit possession is only the psychological state in the victim created by intense thoughts, feelings and desires of the dead. An intense thought is equally contagious, like the germs of infectious disease. Just as the thoughts of the living can so work as to affect and psychologize another mind, so also the thoughts of a dead person. (*The Theosophist*, January 1882)

A true exorcist is someone who is able to discern correctly the case of possession or obsession and is able to drive out the entity. Like the purity of mesmerizer in healing the sick, the purity of the exorcist is emphasized. People like Apollonius, Plotinus, Jesus, Prophyry, etc., had around them an atmosphere of such divine beneficence, created through superhuman morality and sanctity of their lives that they caused evil spirits to flee before them (*Isis*, I,

487). These evil spirits can be dislodged by a powerful and *pure* will. The best protection against negative forces and possession is a clear conscience and a feeling of good-will towards all, combined with the desire to benefit humanity.

Death of a near one is the ultimate irreversible problem, which all of us go through at one time or the other. Often such experience leads to creation of many types of negative emotions. While many of us allow these emotions to get the better of us, there are those who are able to convert these negative emotions into productive efforts, writes Dr. Shirang Bakhle. The author gives an example of a middle-aged couple who lost their only son in an accident. They did not allow their destiny to overpower their spirits, but instead decided to put their energies and resources to work by helping a number of unfortunate children in desperate need of help.

However, many of us continue to suffer for a long time in various ways, after a loss. In some cases, the survivors suffer from a guilt feeling of not having done enough, which might have avoided death, and then sadness turns into anger and frustration. Anger is often directed at other people for their perceived neglect, and thus creating bitterness among family members. Another major source of pain is the feeling of regret, “I wish I had spent more time with the departed person, when she/he was alive.” Some people get transformed by such feelings and become more appreciative of being alive and being with persons they love. It, then, seems wasteful to have petty fights with the loved ones.

The death of the person of a similar age triggers panic in some people, while others are reminded of undergoing a check-up, and in case the reports turn out to be normal, they are relieved of the fear of death. However, some people develop a dark philosophical attitude as a result of the death of a loved one. Such people start living in the shadow of death. The feeling is, “What is the use of all that we do, as we are going to die one day?” The author suggests that sixty

years of life-span of a person amounts to 21,900 days. Should we not be thinking of 21,900 days instead of “one day”? In the worry of that “one day” we miss out on living the life to the fullest for those 21,900 days. “Death is a reality and grief is normal. But we can allow the negative emotions to haunt and depress us, or, we can turn that energy to become better persons,” writes Dr. Bakhle. (*Weekend, The Free Press Journal*, February 26, 2017)

Victor E. Frankl wrote, narrating his experiences in the concentration camp, that everything can be taken from a man except one thing, *i.e.*, to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances. We not only learn through proper response to *our own* pain, which is one of acceptance instead of rebellion, but also through proper understanding of another’s pain. The extent to which we are willing to embrace and understand others’ suffering, to that extent we are made better able to cope with our own suffering. Very rarely there is genuine and deep concern at another’s loss, as if it were our own, and probably our incapacity to tackle our own suffering is in some way related to our lukewarm attitude when others suffered.

We are afraid of death because we are identified with the body and the personality, so that we fail to appreciate that death is not the end. At some point in one’s life meditation on death becomes inevitable. Thus, “What was it that you loved of this Being who has passed—the body? Or was it the Life, the Consciousness, the soul that used it? You knew that individual through all its changes of body, of which there were so many. This in itself is proof that it was not the body but something else you loved. And is that Soul which you loved now dead? How can you say so—you who persist through every change of form! That which lives and thinks in you is the ‘Eternal Pilgrim,’ for him there is no beginning and no end, however many changes of body and of mind you use. Nothing is ever lost. This losing of yours is nothing but loss of physical contact for a little while.” (*What is Death?*)

Religions all over the world have some concept of heaven and hell, and religious scriptures affirm that these places are real. However, the descriptions of these places are full of fancy and graphic imagery so as to be beyond human experience. Heaven is the abode of the gods for the immortal souls after death. Some scriptures describe it as the place of rest, an exalted spiritual state, full of divine communion with God. The English word “Heaven” is derived from the Old English word “heifon” which means “to cover,” thereby implying the location of heaven to be “above” or overhead.

The Hindu equivalent of heaven is *swarga* and they believe it to be situated in one of the mountains (Mount Meru) in Himalayas, and is called *Indra Loka*. By sacrifices and leading a virtuous life one can hope to go to *Swarga*, and even attain the status of *devas*. The Hindu version of paradise is governed by the rules of Karma. Christians believe that heaven or paradise is the domain of God and angels. All those who have died in a state of grace, after being purified in purgatory for small sins, go to heaven, where they enjoy perfect bliss. The Buddhist equivalent of paradise is *Sukhavati*, ruled over by the Buddha *Amitabha*, to be attained by devotion to *Amitabha*.

In the West, Hell is an eternal punishment from which there is no redemption. In the East, Hell is remedial and temporary punishment before rebirth, with a second chance to reform. The hell of the Hindus is called *Naraka*, and is not a place of permanent damnation, but of punishment, of torture and torment, which is temporary. It is a place to expiate evil Karma. In the Hindu scriptures one finds description of twenty one or even twenty eight different hells. Buddhism has seventeen types of hells of which *Avitchi* is the lowest and the worst.

Besides heaven and hell, the Christians have the concept of purgatory, which is considered to be situated nearer to Heaven. It is regarded as a temporary resting place for the souls who die in state of Grace, but are not totally free from all imperfections, and they undergo remedial punishment in purgatory. The unrepentant sinners go to hell, while the totally purified souls go directly to heaven.

Apart from the concept of hell, heaven and purgatory, the

Christians also speak of Limbo, derived from Latin “*limbus*” meaning “borderland.” It is the celestial location for the dead who have neither received Grace nor the punishment of Hell, writes K. R. K. Moorthy. (*Bhavan’s Journal*, February 15, 2017)

Heaven and Hell are states after death, and they are effectual states, based on the quality of life, or Karma of the person. There are various degrees of heaven and hell. The equivalent term for paradise or heaven, in Theosophy, is *Devachan* or *Devasthan* (the land of gods). *Devachan* is a *condition* or a *state* of mental bliss and not a locality. All the fanciful descriptions of heaven in the scriptures go to show that it is a state of perfect bliss, undisturbed by sorrow or anxiety. The immortal aspect in man, termed reincarnating Ego, or *Sutratma*, that survives death, enters this state called heaven, clothed in a celestial body, taking with it noble and undying qualities such as sympathy, love for the good, true and the beautiful. The state of heaven or *Devachan* is necessary for the rest and recuperation of the Soul, as also, for the assimilation of the experiences during earth life. It is the state of consciousness which allows for the expansion and development of unexhausted and unfulfilled thoughts and aspirations.

Besides *Devachan*, Theosophy speaks of the astral region called *kama loka*, the world or plane of desires. In a relative sense this world is an invisible astral realm, surrounding and penetrating our earth. *Kama loka* is the Christian “purgatory,” and is compared to a slag-pit, meaning a pit into which the waste material separated from the melted metals is dumped. It can be said that nature has provided a pit or space to discard the negative aspects or lower desires gathered during one’s lifetime. In *kama loka*, there is separation of the astral body, desire nature and lower mind from the higher trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* or the Real Man, which goes to *devachan* or paradise, after the separation. Mr. Judge explains that in view of many writers real hell is our earth, as it is here that we suffer the consequences of our evil actions.

Statement about ownership and other particulars about the magazine
“THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT” to be published in the first issue
every year after the last day of February

FORM IV
(See Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication: Theosophy Hall
40 New Marine Lines
Mumbai 400 020
2. Periodicity of Publication: Monthly, 17th of the month
3. Printer's Name: D. Parajia
Whether citizen of India: Yes
Address: Theosophy Hall
40 New Marine Lines
Mumbai 400 020
4. Publisher's Name: D. Parajia
Whether citizen of India: Yes
Address: Theosophy Hall
40 New Marine Lines
Mumbai 400 020
5. Editor's Name: D. Parajia
Whether citizen of India: Yes
Address: Theosophy Hall
40 New Marine Lines
Mumbai 400 020
6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the magazine and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital: Theosophy Co. (India) Private Ltd.
40 New Marine Lines
Mumbai 400 020
(A charitable Company)

I, Daksha S. Parajia, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

17th March 2017

(Sd.) DAKSHA S PARAJIA
Publisher