

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

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“THE LIGHT OF ASIA”—BUDDHA, DHAMMA AND POETRY

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IN Oscar Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Grey*, which is the dark drama of a soul almost lost and at the last minute reprieved, there is a moment when a kind friend gives to the hero a copy of *The Light of Asia*, saying that it may save him, as it is the life of a good man.

Within the Theosophical tradition, *The Light of Asia* occupies a definite place. So great was H.P.B.’s appreciation and respect for this book—which is a long poem—that she mentioned in her will that if her students and friends wished to come together and remember her on her death anniversary, they should read from two books—*The Bhagavad-Gita* and *The Light of Asia*. Gandhiji said, “I read *The Light of Asia* with even greater interest than I did the *Gita*. Once I had begun it, I could not leave off.” Oliver Wendell Holmes, the great American author, said, “It is a work of great beauty, it tells a story of intense interest which never flags for a moment. Its descriptions are drawn by the hand of the master with the eye of a poet. Its tone is so lofty that there is nothing with which to compare it but the New Testament. It is full of variety—now picturesque, now pathetic, now rising in the noblest realms of thought and aspiration.” Such was the response to *The Light of Asia*, which was originally published in 1879. Edwin Arnold writes in the Preface:

I have sought, by the medium of an imaginary Buddhist votary, to depict the life and character and indicate the

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philosophy of that noble hero and reformer, Prince Gautama of India, the founder of Buddhism. (p. ix)

Thus, the poem is put in the mouth of an imaginary devotee of the Buddha, who tells the story of Buddha's life, expressing his reverence for him. It is this imaginary devotee, who says at the end of the narrative:

Here endeth what I write
Who love the Master for his love of us.
A little knowing, little have I told
Touching the Teacher and the Ways of Peace. (p. 238)

Thus, it is not a claim to the full statement of Buddha's teachings. Again, in the Preface, the poet humbly submits that he has depicted only what he has been able to absorb from the Buddhist traditions and that his purpose is to convey the lofty character of the Buddha and general purport of his doctrines. Thus:

As to these latter there has arisen prodigious controversy among the erudite, who will be aware that I have taken the imperfect Buddhistic citations much as they stand in Spence Hardy's work, and have also modified more than one passage in the received narratives....

In reverence to the illustrious Promulgator of this "Light of Asia," and in homage to the many eminent scholars who have devoted noble labours to his memory, for which both repose and ability are wanting to me, I beg that the shortcomings of my too-hurried study may be forgiven. It has been composed in the brief intervals of days without leisure, but is inspired by an abiding desire to aid in the better mutual knowledge of East and West. (pp. xiii-iv)

Edwin Arnold seems to suggest that it is impossible to appreciate the life and teachings of the Buddha, unless one enters the Oriental point of view—the Western point of view would prove inadequate and inappropriate. The Oriental point of view has been absorbed by him completely as is shown in the following:

(1) A living sense in his mind that though we are talking about something that happened on earth, there are other *lokas* or worlds

which coexist and intercommunicate with life on earth. Human beings are not alone. Hence the mention of Buddha's being born again for men. Why *again*? The answer is along strictly traditional lines:

Below the highest sphere four Regents sit
Who rule our world; and under them are zones
Nearer, but high, where saintliest spirits dead
Wait thrice ten thousand years, then live again;
And on Lord Buddha, waiting in that sky,
Came for our sakes the five sure signs of birth,
So that the Devas knew the signs, and said
"Buddha will go again to help the world." (pp. 21-22)

In other words, Buddha's story begins, not on earth, but in the realm where the Regents sit. It is comparable to *Maharajahs* and *Lipikas*, mentioned in *The Secret Doctrine*—the beings that are protectors of mankind and are the agents of Karma. Buddha's coming again to earth is in keeping with the spiritual tradition that suggests that great Beings on other planes have concern for human beings on earth and hence they incarnate on earth, from time to time.

(2) The poet depicts nature as always something living—which responds to what happens at deeper levels of human life. There is the description of Queen Maya (Buddha's mother) who is about to have a baby, standing in the afternoon under a Palsa tree in the palace-grounds, and the tree bends down to make a shade for her. "The conscious tree bent down its bows to make a bower about Queen Maya's majesty." When a great spiritual event happens in human life, the whole of nature on the higher planes responds. Again there is similar description when Buddha arises from that meditation which produced the enlightenment. It is the description of joyous nature with birds and animals sharing in that joy.

When Buddha is sent to a teacher, he could recite far beyond what the teacher knew, but he is still respectful. Buddha's teacher, Sage Viswamitra, prostrates himself before the prince and says:

[Thou] art Teacher of thy teachers—thou, not I,
Art Guru. Oh, I worship thee, sweet Prince!

That comest to my school only to show
 Thou knowest all without the books, and know'st
 Fair reverence besides. (p. 32)

The poet brings home the culture of the Orient, which teaches that the pupil should not be disrespectful to the teacher—even in thought.

The compassion of the Buddha for the dumb creatures comes through in the incident where his cousin Devadatta shoots down a flying swan with an arrow and claims that the bird must belong to the slayer. And Buddha argues:

Say no! the bird is mine,
 The first of myriad things which shall be mine
 By right of mercy and love's lordliness.
 For now I know, by what within me stirs,
 That I shall teach compassion unto men,
 And be a speechless world's interpreter. (p. 35)

When the courtiers could not settle the issue of the hurt swan, a great ascetic appears and decides the issue in favour of the Buddha. When the King wants to make a present to him, he is nowhere to be seen. The poet writes:

And someone saw a hooded snake glide forth—
 The gods come oftentimes thus! (p. 36)

There is an allusion to the symbology of the snake. A full initiate [a wise man] is called a "Naga," a "Serpent" and a "Dragon" in esoteric philosophy.

When the Buddha goes out of the palace for the first time, he sees a sick man, an old man, etc. Buddha asks his charioteer Channa:

But shall this come to others, or to all,
 Or is it rare that one should be as he? (p. 76)

When he sadly speaks of it to Yasodhara, she becomes sad too, and says, "Hath not my Lord comfort in me?" And the reply that the Buddha makes, shows that his imagination has grasped the

human situation as a whole. It suggests that it is not as if man does not sometimes have happy days, but that they are always under the shadow of an end. After seeing the pitiable sight of a dead man, the Buddha speaks:

The veil is rent
 Which blinded me! I am as all these men
 Who cry upon their gods and are not heard...
 They cannot save! I would not let one cry
 Whom I could save! How can it be that Brahm
 Would make a world and keep it miserable.
 Since, if, all-powerful, he leaves it so,
 He is not good, and if not all powerful,
 He is not God. (pp. 91-92)

In these few lines, the poet reveals Buddha's teachings, his character and the criticism of the personal god idea, which is a great hindrance to the spiritual life. If there is sorrow, there must also be a cure for it. The philosophy of the quest and the determination with which he left the comforts of the palace are expressed beautifully in a few lines by the poet.

In this long poem, Buddha, Dhamma and poetry are seen to fuse completely. During the quest, when he visits the court of King Bimbisara, he stops the animal-sacrifice, and teaches the philosophy of Karma in a few lines saying that each one has to answer for his wrong deeds. Thus:

Alone, each for himself, reckoning with that
 The fixed arithmetic of the universe,
 Which meteth good for good and ill for ill,
 Measure for measure, unto deeds, words, thoughts;
 Watchful, aware, implacable, unmoved;
 Making all future fruits of all the pasts. (p. 141)

"The fixed arithmetic of the universe," is the poetic expression of the Law of Karma that cannot be caused to deviate by any form of propitiation.

When the Buddha was nearly fainting—after indulging in wrong ascetic practices—he asks a low-caste shepherd boy to give him

milk. The boy gives it by making the goat stand near the fainting Buddha, milking it directly into his mouth. But they are only a few drops and Buddha asks him to give the milk in his own vessel, which the boy refuses to do, saying that he was a low-caste boy. And Buddha spoke, emphatically denying the validity of the caste system:

Pity and need
 Make all flesh kin. There is no caste in blood.
 Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears,
 Which trickle salt with all; neither comes man
 To birth with tilka-mark stamped on the brow,
 Nor sacred thread on neck. Who doth right deed
 Is twice-born, and who doeth ill deeds vile.

(p. 152)

The description of Mara tempting Buddha at the final moment—coming to him in the shape of his wife Yasodhara, and Buddha’s insight, during the middle watch of his meditation is again a terrific piece of poetry.

And when the Buddha returns home after his enlightenment, wearing a yellow robe and with a begging bowl in his hands, his father asks him why he, the prince, is dressed so. Buddha’s reply shows that he belongs to the race of the Buddhas and that there have been Buddhas before him and there will be Buddhas after him. Thus:

“It is the custom of my race...
 Not of a mortal line,
 I spake, but of the descent invisible,
 The Buddhas who have been and who shall be
 Of these am I, and what they did I do.” (p. 203)

It is in “Book the Eighth” that the Doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation, the *Panchshila*, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path have been expounded in detail.

DUAL NATURE OF MIND

II

H.P.B. explains the dual nature of mind thus:

In its very essence it is THOUGHT, and is, therefore, called in its plurality *Manasaputra*, “the Sons of the (Universal) mind.” This *individualized* “Thought” is what we Theosophists call the *real* human EGO, the thinking Entity imprisoned in a case of flesh and bones. This is surely a Spiritual Entity, not *Matter*; and such Entities are the incarnating EGOS that inform the bundle of animal matter called mankind, and whose names are *Manasa* or “Minds.” But once imprisoned, or incarnate, their essence becomes dual; that is to say, the rays of the eternal divine Mind, considered as individual entities, assume a two-fold attribute which is (a) their *essential* inherent characteristic, heaven-aspiring mind (higher *Manas*), and (b) the human quality of thinking, or animal cogitation, rationalized owing to the superiority of the human brain, the *Kama*-tending or lower *Manas*. One gravitates toward *Buddhi*, the other, tending downward, to the seat of passions and animal desires. (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 181-2)

The above quotation points out that mere intellect is a hindrance to spirituality, unless man understands the very purpose of life. A person on the road to self-discovery knows that the purpose of life is to allow our Godhead to manifest here, while we are in a body, *i.e.*, to allow the Divine Will to prevail. However, the Higher *Manas* cannot influence the lower as long as it is immersed in a personal life of sense-gratification and self-aggrandizement. Hence, although omnipotent on its own plane, the higher is quite helpless on our plane. Thus:

The “Higher EGO” cannot act directly on the body, as its consciousness belongs to quite another plane and planes of ideation: the “lower” *Self* does: and its action and behaviour depend on its free will and choice as to whether it will gravitate more towards its parent (“the Father in Heaven”) or the “animal” which it informs, the man of flesh. The “Higher Ego,” as part

of the essence of the UNIVERSAL MIND, is unconditionally omniscient on its own plane, and only potentially so in our terrestrial sphere, as it has to act solely through its *alter ego*—the Personal Self. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

Why is the Higher *Manas* unable to act on this plane? Higher *Manas*, a *Manasaputra*, has its being on its own (*Arupa*) plane. In each incarnation, it sends out a ray, which has to incarnate in a vehicle, that is an already differentiated astral substance. The moment it incarnates in such a vehicle, it is completely shut off from its divine parent. Yet, this ray, the lower *Manas*, is one in essence with the Higher *Manas*. Hence, H.P.B. states that the fate of incarnated consciousness standing on “*Antaskarana*” will depend upon whether it will be pulled down by *Kama* or pulled upwards towards its divine parent *Atma-Buddhi*. When it is pulled down by *Kama*, man becomes worse than an animal, while in conjunction with the divine parent, man becomes a god. This is allegorized in the Bible, when Jesus Christ was crucified between the two thieves—representing two aspects of mind. In the allegory, one thief

railed on him, saying, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise (*The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Chap. 23, verses 39-43)

H.P.B. states in *Transactions* that “Whenever we remain deaf to the Voice of our Conscience, we crucify the *Christos* within us” (p. 69). In *The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom*, Sri Shankaracharya says:

Therefore mind is the cause of man’s bondage, and in turn of his liberation; when darkened by the powers of passion it is the cause of bondage, and when pure of passion and darkness it is the cause of liberation. Where discernment and dispassion

are dominant, gaining purity, the mind makes for liberation; therefore let the wise man who seeks liberation strengthen these two in himself as the first step. Mind is the name of the mighty tiger that hunts in the forest glades of sensuous things; let not the wise go thither, who seek liberation. (Verses 175-77)

Further, H.P.B. describes what happens when mind is influenced by intellectual knowledge and selfishness in the following words:

Great intellect and too much knowledge are a two-edged weapon in life, and instruments for evil as well as for good. When combined with Selfishness, they will make of the whole of Humanity a footstool for the elevation of him who possesses them, and a means for the attainment of his objects; while, applied to altruistic humanitarian purposes, they may become the means of the salvation of many. (*S.D.*, II, 163)

The transformation of intellectual mind into the spiritual mind involves several steps: (1) To become aware of the limitations of our Lower *Manas*. (2) To understand the purpose of life—which is not only to live to benefit mankind but to allow the God within to act *outwardly*—to manifest its powers in terms of universal love and compassion to all that lives. (3) To acquire right knowledge in order to equip ourselves to be of service to humanity.

To help us to conquer the personal self, H.P.B. states that we should free our Lower *Manas* from the clutches of *Kama*. Man can then activate his Free-will and *Buddhi*. When he succeeds, he will become more than a man—a *god*. Then, we will be able to listen to the song of Krishna within. *Venugopal* and *Muralidhara* are among Krishna’s names. *Venu* and *Murali* mean flute. *Venugopal* means one who plays the flute. *Muralidhara* means the holder of the flute. Flute has nine holes; so too, the body of man is called the “nine-gated city.” When we are able to attune our heart and mind and synchronize our body to the melody of Krishna, then we shall succeed in producing a grand symphony.

(*Concluded*)

MYTHS AND SYMBOLISM OF TREES

Every one of these symbols is an embodied idea—combining the conception of the Divine Invisible with the earthly and visible.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

WHAT is a symbol? A symbol must be contained in the idea or ideas that it is intended to represent, writes Mr. Judge. A symbol of the house could never be a boat or a wing of a bird, but “it must be an actual part chosen to represent or stand for the whole.” The word “symbol” is derived from the Greek word meaning “to throw with” or “to throw together.” A symbol is a visible representation of an idea. “To be a just and correct symbol, it should be such that the moment it is seen by one versed in symbolism, its meaning and application become easily apparent.” (*The Heart Doctrine*, p. 149)

Every symbol must have a deeper meaning besides the obvious one. In fact, H.P.B. observes that each symbol has at least seven keys to its interpretation—physical, astrological, geometrical, metaphysical, psychological, allegorical, cosmological, etc.

What does a tree symbolize to *us*? Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, narrates that while taking a walk with a Nepalese friend in Kalimpong, they came across a magnificent pine tree with a smooth trunk and the mass of deep green foliage. He could not help exclaiming: “Isn’t that a beautiful tree!” The Nepalese friend replied, “Oh yes, it is a beautiful tree. There’s enough firewood there for the whole winter.” Sangharakshita remarks, “He did not see the tree at all. All he saw was a certain quantity of firewood” (*Vision and Transformation*, p. 137). This shows that each one of us sees a thing from his/her own perspective, which is, mostly, materialistic, superficial, and utilitarian. We see plants and trees all around us and our day-to-day experience shows that some of these trees provide food, shelter, flowers, medicines, wood, etc. But are we ever aware of any deeper significance? Now and then, some poets intuitively grasp and convey the symbolic aspect of

the trees.

In the poem, “No More!”, Alfred Tennyson, a great lover of nature, writes of a wild weed flower, growing all alone by the banks of a brook:

Oh, sad no more! Oh, sweet *No more!*
Oh, strange, *No more!*...
Surely all pleasant things had gone before,
Low buried fathom deep beneath with thee, NO MORE!

Like this flower, the present state of any of us is only a *part* of the total existence. There is an immortal aspect or Ego clothed in the present form, but the present form has arisen from, has behind it and is backed by, past experiences—good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant—of which we have little or no memory. A large and essential nature of each one of us remains hidden. Both man and universe have their roots in eternity. There is immanence of God in the infinitesimal atom and the vast system. This is well brought out by Tennyson in his little poem:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

We observe that the life cycle of a tree begins with a seed that gives rise to a tree, a flower and a fruit, which in turn gives back the seed. A universe comes into existence and goes out of existence, periodically. Just as a seed gives rise to a new tree and has within it the entire tree, potentially, so also, on dissolution, the universe is held as solution in suspension in space—in the *Laya* centre—like the salt dissolved in water, which crystallizes on heating. This *Laya* centre is like a seed from which a new universe comes into existence at the dawn of every *Manvantara*—period of activity—and its energies are drawn back into the *Laya* centre at the time of dissolution or *pralaya*. Similar is the case with humanity. Manu represents humanity. There are 14 Manus in every *Kalpa*. A *root*

and a *seed* Manu appear at the beginning and the termination of the human period on any particular planet. *Seed-Manu*—appearing at the close of a period of activity—represents the fruition of humanity and carries the seed for future humanity, *i.e.*, the seeds for the human races of the forthcoming Round. (*S.D.*, II, 307-8)

The life cycle of the tree symbolizes the Law of Karma: “As you sow, so shall you reap.” Thus:

“A harsh word uttered in past lives, is not destroyed but ever comes again.” The pepper plant will not give birth to roses, nor the sweet jessamine’s silver star to thorn or thistle turn.
(*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 37)

But the causes of our actions, like the seeds of a tree, remain hidden, always making us wonder, “What did we do to deserve such a fate”? Sir Edwin Arnold expresses it thus in *The Light of Asia*:

That which ye sow ye reap. See yonder fields!
The sesamum was sesamum, the corn
Was corn. The Silence and the Darkness knew!
So is a man’s fate born.

Every form in our universe is a reflection of something existing in the invisible world. Plato called it an archetypal world that contains ideas or paradigms of all forms on our plane. Every form that we see is an embodied idea. Plato considered lower types (forms) to be concrete images of higher, abstract images. The meaning and the mission of any object in nature can be understood only when we are able to understand the higher abstraction which it ensouls, and of which it is a representative and a symbol on earth. (*Studies in “The Secret Doctrine,”* Book II, p. 55)

There are certain plants and trees that were specifically used as symbols to convey some deep truths. For instance, the Lotus plant is a very ancient symbol for both Kosmos and man. The Lotus plant grows up through the water, having its roots in the mud, and spreading its flower in the air above. “The root of Lotus sunk in the mud, represents material life, the stalk passing up through the

water typifies existence in the astral world, and the flower floating on the water and opening to the sky is emblematical of spiritual being.” The Lotus flower represents the abstract and concrete universe and symbolizes the dual creative power in Nature. It is said that the seeds of the Lotus (and of all phanerogamus plants) contain, even before they germinate, perfectly formed leaves and miniature shape of what one day as perfected plants they will become. “This typifies the fact that the spiritual prototypes of all things exist in the immaterial world before those things materialized on Earth” (*S.D.*, I, 57-8). Even before the objective universe comes into existence, the ideal or abstract forms or prototypes of all objective things exist in the archetypal world.

Similar to the Lotus plant, there is a special significance attached to the *Ashwattha* tree, the ash tree, the Banyan tree and many more. Thus:

From the highest antiquity trees were connected with the gods and mystical forces in nature. Every nation had its sacred tree, with its peculiar characteristics and attributes based on natural, and also occasionally on occult properties, as expounded in the esoteric teachings. Thus the peepul or *Âshvattha* of India, the abode of Pitris (elementals in fact) of a lower order, became the Bo-tree or *ficus religiosa* of the Buddhists the world over, since Gautama Buddha reached the highest knowledge and Nirvâna under such a tree. The ash tree, Yggdrasil, is the world-tree of the Norsemen or Scandinavians. The banyan tree is the symbol of spirit and matter, descending to the earth, striking root, and then re-ascending heavenward again... The sycamore was *the* Tree of Life in Egypt, and also in Assyria. It was sacred to Hathor at Heliopolis; and is now sacred in the same place to the Virgin Mary. Its juice was precious by virtue of its occult powers, as the Soma is with Brahmans, and Haoma with the Parsis. “The fruit and sap of the Tree of Life bestow immortality.” A large volume might be written upon these sacred trees of antiquity, the reverence for some of which has survived to this day, without exhausting the subject.
(*The Theosophical Glossary*)

(*To be Concluded*)

OVERCOMING DEFECTS

PARENTS work tirelessly to rid their children of their unwholesome habits. Adults struggle to throw off their deeply ingrained negative tendencies. Then there are those who wish to walk the spiritual path and hence follow the injunctions of the scriptures to eschew evil and cultivate virtue. Still others are compelled to pay attention to the serious warnings of their doctors in the face of a fast deteriorating health condition to get rid of deadly habits. Reasons may vary, but the goal is the same: to get rid of shortcomings, vices, defects or bad habits.

But what is the origin of our vices? We start with innocent purity of our childhood and grow up learning and imbibing customs, culture, manners, religion, ideas and values from our environment. Hunger, thirst, sleep, desire to procreate, desire to love and be loved are fundamental to survival of our species. But in man, these drives acquire special power. His desires drive him on to seek pleasurable sensations and avoid painful experiences. In his incessant effort to *relive* and intensify pleasures, he systematically diminishes their value without knowing it. Man's habits have their roots in his thoughts, backed by desires and will.

Thought is the real plane of action. It may start as an impulse of a young person to have his first smoke or a drink. It could be a desire for a piece of sweet by a diabetic person, or a wish of any individual to avoid some irksome duty. Thoughts have power of reproduction. They return, deriving their strength from our attachment or revulsion, bringing to our mind vivid pictures of the pleasures to be had. If we entertain them, we succumb. When a person has his first smoke or a drink, or a piece of forbidden sweet, or neglects to do his duty, he does not realize that having given way once, it is much easier and perhaps more pleasurable to give in again the next time. These impressions return to us periodically, growing stronger with every success. Until at last, we become slaves to our habits and then we are helpless. Each thought, as it evolves, combines with a few or many "lives," called elementals, and forms

an entity. This thought-entity, then, has a life of its own and there is a close affinity between these entities and their creator. They return to him again, as it were, to remain alive by the force of his mental energies.

How does it all begin? It may have its roots in the tendencies brought over from our past lives. It could be the result of bad company or bad books, movies and advertisements. Our imagination is set aflame by these contacts. That is the reason why *satsang*—good company—is important. Unless we have good grounding of right values, external influences have power to shake us. The Buddha says:

Think not lightly of evil, saying, "it will not come unto me." Even a water-pot is filled by the constant falling of drops of water. A fool becomes full of evil if he gathers it little by little.

Think not lightly of good, saying, "it will not come unto me." Even a water-pot is filled by the constant falling of drops of water. A wise man becomes full of goodness even if he gathers it little by little. (*The Dhammapada*, Verses 121 and 122)

Having succumbed, a sense of regret may follow. Why, oh why did I let it happen? We feel shame, regret, and remorse for the time being and resolve not to fall prey again. All the while, the little thought-entity laughs impishly. Little do we know that having fallen once, checking ourselves next time is going to be more difficult. When the same thought returns, it also brings along the memory of the pleasurable experience. We find ourselves lingering over the memory—mentally reliving the experience. And a voice from within tempts: "Only one last time and then never again—let me try it, just one more time." The fattened entity laughs louder, becoming sure of its continued existence with its master gradually turning himself into its slave. This is how we gradually build our habits. Starting small, they end up becoming our rulers—becoming our fond habits, difficult to overcome. Difficult, but not impossible though.

We make our own destiny, using the power to think and choose. We have the power to make and unmake things. The trinity of

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, or the powers of creation, preservation and regeneration are within us. With firm resolve and determined effort we may overthrow the fiend. To acknowledge the existence of a vice in oneself is the first step and a firm resolve to uproot the vice and bleed it to death is the second. To the resolve, one needs to add “creative imagination.” It is wise to resolve affirmatively. For instance, it is better to say, “I will remain calm,” instead of, “I will not get angry.” The key lies in being able to divert the mind to something that elevates one’s consciousness. It could be reading of some scripture or a good book, listening to good music, calling up a friend, lending a helping hand to the needy, etc. Remaining on guard, we need to dismiss the temptation with a quick switchover to another area of interest without wasting even a second on analysis or reflection. We need to put behind that weak moment as quickly as possible. This short interval is most difficult to cross. Hence, the switchover has to be swift and smooth. Look not behind. It is a known fact that two thoughts cannot occupy our mind at the same time. If one has managed to switch over to a new thought, the old one has to vacate the place. The dismissed entities may seek entry again, but we have a choice and power to refuse them an entry. Each refusal weakens them. With each failure, they grow feeble and finally trouble us no more. But until then vigilance and practice of virtues is protective armour.

Sometimes we may fail, despite our best efforts. If it is anger we are combating, we must picture clearly in our mind that when the anger begins to rise, we would leave the scene, go off for a long walk, go for a swim, count ten or draw 10 long and deep breaths. Brooding over one’s faults is like adding fuel to the fire. We must regret *just enough* to learn so as not to repeat. Self-examination is a technique recommended for keeping a watchful eye on one’s course of journey. Each night, before going to bed, review the happenings of the day in the light of virtues. *Impartially* and objectively, we must take stock and make note of what went right and what went wrong and why—just enough analysis to identify the cause and decide on the course of action with fresh

determination. Patience is needed. Be patient, even with yourself, writes Mr. Judge. A sapling may be uprooted without much effort, but uprooting a full-grown tree calls for persistent effort and patience.

We fail only when we stop trying. Every trial can take us a step closer to success. We may derive strength from the fact that as others have done, so can we.

It is held as a truth among Theosophists that the interdependence of Humanity is the cause of what is called Distributive Karma, and it is this law which affords the solution to the great question of collective suffering and its relief. It is an occult law, moreover, that no man can rise superior to his individual failings, without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part.

In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of sin, alone. In reality, there is no such thing as “separateness”; and nearest approach to that selfish state, which the laws of life permit, is in the intent or motive. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 201)

A sincere spiritual aspirant has to overcome—apart from his own individual shortcomings and negative traits—the tendencies that he shares with his family, nation and humanity in general. Thus:

The Chela is not only called to face all latent evil propensities of his nature, but in addition, the whole volume of maleficent power accumulated by the community and nation to which he belongs.

Thus seven things are found to secure us a victory, or a sad, inglorious defeat in the mighty struggle known as the Dweller of the threshold and the ordeals of Chelaship: (1) The evil propensities common to ourselves and to our family; (2) those common to ourself and our nation; (3) those common to ourself and to mankind in general, or better known as the weakness of human nature, the fruits of Adam’s first transgression; (4 to 6) the noble qualities common to us and to these three; (7) the peculiar way in which the 6 sets of our past Karmas choose or

are allowed to influence us now, or their effects in producing in us the present tendency. The adept alone can take the seventh or last mentioned item completely into his own hands; and every mortal who would, as I have since recently begun to reiterate, direct all his energies to the highest plane possible for him (“Desire always to attain the unattainable”—says the author of “Light on the Path”)—such a mortal too could more or less do the same thing as the adept, in so far as he acts up to the rule. Every Chela and also those who have a desire to be Chelas even, as they suppose secretly, have to do with the first six propensities or influences.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 34*, pp. 2-3)

The real means of progress is careful performance of every duty to our own family and to our own nation. It is in the performance of our daily and hourly duties that we learn our lessons, overcome obstacles, and progress. If we mortify ourselves in careful performance of small duties of life then we are more likely to succeed in bigger challenges. Thus we rise from one level to another, higher and higher.

THE mind from the beginning is of a pure nature, but since there is the finite aspect of it which is sullied by finite views, there is this sullied aspect of it. Although there is this defilement, yet the original pure nature is eternally unchanged. This mystery the Enlightened One alone understands.

—ASVAGHOSHA

THE DREAM CONDITION

H. P. BLAVATSKY has given us a wealth of information on the subject of dreams in *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*. We also find there hints in regard to what we can do while awake to help us to take advantage of the sleep condition.

What is it that dreams? “There is no simple answer to the question,” says H.P.B., “for it depends entirely on each individual what principle will be the chief motor in dreams, and whether they will be remembered or forgotten.” The “principles” active during ordinary dreams, called idle visions—as distinguished from real dreams—“are Kama, the seat of the personal Ego and of desire awakened into chaotic activity by the slumbering reminiscences of the lower Manas.” It is the brain and the Kama-Manasic principle which helps us to remember our dreams or prevents us from gaining any clear idea of what happens to us during the sleep of the body. This is an important practical teaching given us in this section on dreams.

We learn that it is the cerebellum which functions during sleep. It is “the organ of instinctual animal functions, which reflect themselves in, or produce, dreams which for the most part are chaotic and inconsequent.” Dreams which are remembered, and present a sequence of events, are the result of the vision of the higher Ego.

The combined action of Kama and lower Manas is mechanical, for it is instinct, not reason, which is active in them. During sleep, they receive and send out mechanically electric shocks to and from various nerve-centres. These fade out on waking, or, if impressed strongly enough, are registered and preserved by the retentive faculty of the brain. But generally our memory registers only some of the distorted impressions which the brain receives, without order or sequence, at the moment of awakening. The dream state passing into the waking state can be compared to the embers of a dying fire, radiating and throwing off sparks. The play of the memory is like a current of air rekindling the dying embers. That is to say,

“the waking consciousness recalls to activity the cerebellum which was fading below the threshold of consciousness,” as the cerebrum, which functions when we are awake, begins to take over.

All these conditions can be affected by us, for good or ill, in the waking consciousness. There is not need for us to suffer from indigestion-caused dreams, nor from those of the drunkard, nor even from those caused by the disturbed kama-Manas. Our dream condition can be changed by right living during the waking state, and by right preparation before sleep, so that our last thoughts before we sink into slumber are of high ideals and noble aspirations. Before going to sleep, a period spent in quieting our lower mind filled with personal ideas and desires will be of help. Just as our last thoughts in any incarnation determine our consciousness after death, so our last thoughts before going to sleep determine the dream state; and the latter in turn affects our waking consciousness the following day.

We are told that

the memory of the Sleeper is like an Aeolian seven-stringed harp; and his state of mind may be compared to the wind that sweeps over the chords. The corresponding string of the harp will respond to that one of the seven states of mental activity in which the sleeper was before falling asleep.

So we see again the necessity for preparing ourselves for sleep.

There are other kinds of dreams which have various sources, but whether we remember them or not, or remember them correctly or incorrectly, still depends on the brain, except perhaps in the case of the direct action of the higher Ego.

Since real dreams are “The actions of the Ego during physical sleep, they are, of course, recorded on their own plane and produce their appropriate effects on this one. But it must be always remembered that dreams in general, and as we know them, are simply our waking and hazy recollections of these facts.”

Another fact has to be borne in mind, namely, the role that the Astral Light plays in dreams, H.P.B. states:

The Astral Light has been taken too literally to mean

some sort of a second blue sky. This imaginary space, however, on which are impressed the countless images of all that ever was, is, and will be, is but a too sad reality. It becomes in, and for, man—if at all psychic—and who is not?—a tempting Demon, his “evil angel,” and the inspirer of all our worst deeds. It acts on the will of even the sleeping man, through visions impressed upon his slumbering brain (which visions must not be confused with the “dreams”), and these germs bear their fruit when he awakes.

A sensitive can see in the Astral Light even when awake, and have what are called “waking visions,” but “the reflections in the Astral Light are seen better with closed eyes, and, in sleep, still more distinctly.”

The sevenfold division of dreams next needs to be considered.

(1) Prophetic dreams, we are told, are those impressed by the Higher Self *directly* on our memory, and therefore they are generally plain and clear; either a voice is heard or a coming event is foreseen. The clearer the brain, the more “porous” it is to spiritual influences, the more vivid will be the remembrance. H.P.B. says that truly prophetic dreams are had by certain persons “because their physical brains and memory are in closer relation and sympathy with their ‘Higher Ego’ than in the generality of men. The Ego-Self has more facilities for impressing upon the physical shell and memory that which is of importance to such persons than it has in the case of other less gifted persons.”

(2) Allegorical dreams may be explained as being hazy glimpses of realities, of the Ego’s doings, caught by the brain and distorted by our fancy. These realities “are reflected on the brain of the sleeper, like outside shadows on the canvas walls of a tent, which the occupier sees as he wakes.” Those thought-actions of the true Ego get distorted as the man becomes fully awake, and in interpreting them our fancy plays a part, so that what is remembered is generally only half true.

(3) Then there are dreams sent by Adepts, good or bad, by mesmerizers, or by the thoughts of very powerful minds bent on making us do their will. Why should we be open to such influences?

Where are they impressed? Our will or volition, though dormant and inactive during dreams, can be given a certain bent during its activity, and certain after-results developed. This, we are told, “is one of the dodges of ‘black magic,’ and when used for good purposes belongs to the training of an Occultist.” To act on the will of a sleeping person, that is, to control his dreams, and thus control his actions when awake, is not an easy task, and one must be far advanced on the “path” to be able to do so.

(4) We come next to retrospective dreams. What are these? They are dreams of events belonging to past incarnations. These events leave their impress behind them. The Astral Light is called the “tablet of the memory” of the animal man; but there is also the memory of the spiritual Ego, which acts on the will of the sleeping man through visions impressed upon his slumbering brain, and these visions are sometimes recalled on waking.

(5) Then there are dreams of warning and premonition, which require “the active co-operation of the inner Ego.” Sometimes the warning is meant for another who is unable to be impressed himself. Such a dream is “often due to the conscious or unconscious co-operation of the brains of two living persons, or of their two Egos.”

(6) Confused dreams, as already seen, are those produced by the instinctual animal functions of which the cerebellum is the organ. We can perhaps also say that our brain memory can confuse any dream or mix up different types of dreams when we wake up.

(7) Lastly, there are dreams which are mere fancies and chaotic pictures caused by indigestion, difficulty in breathing, or such-like physiological causes which create a feeling of oppression and produce a sensation of impending calamity. Nightmares and unpleasant dreams come under this category. Chaotic dreams may also be caused by mental trouble. A drunkard, for instance, who is in a stupor, sees everything whirling round in the brain, “producing in the imagination and fancy horrid and grotesque shapes in continual motion and convolutions.”

It needs to be remembered that while fancy should be curbed, imagination has to be cultivated. Imagination is not fancy; it is

image-building. The higher the type of image-building we have cultivated, the more spiritual will be the remembrance of the images we see in dreams. So we understand why we are advised not only to clear the mind and the emotions and the brain just before sleeping, but to give them definite food of a high nature, such as that provided by reading devotional books, by keeping high ideals in mind, and by giving the imagination a spiritual bent, remembering that each night we contact our spiritual Ego and enter into the *Sushupti* condition of consciousness.

In the case of children, how often do we send them to bed almost in a stupor, or in a state of physical and mental exhaustion! There is a wealth of elevating stories which can be used as bedtime stories, so that their brain and emotional condition are more in tune with the real life. There are so many wonderful, tranquillizing “mantrams” in *The Voice of the Silence*, for example, which can be the last remembered thing before going to sleep. Cleansing the body of the dirt of the day, harmonizing the emotions, and giving the mind seed-ideas of a spiritual nature—what a help this would be to the child! Let us try these things ourselves, and finding them good and useful, give the child the benefit of what we have learnt. Let us “make Theosophy a living power” by applying it to life!

THE first step in *becoming* is Resignation. Resignation is the sure, true, and royal road. Our subtle motives, ever changing, elude us when we seek it. You are near to it; it needs a great care. But while the body may be requiring time to feel its full results, we can instantly change the attitude of the mind. After Resignation, follow (in their own order) Satisfaction, Contentment, Knowledge....So try to acquire patient Resignation.

—W. Q. JUDGE

VIRAGA—TRUE INDIFFERENCE

ON the path of the spiritual life one of the most essential virtues to be cultivated is true detachment in contradistinction to carelessness, negligence and cold indifference of the nature of *tamas*. In ordinary life, we see the manifold expressions of indifference at all stages and in all circumstances. True detachment is the result of daily and hourly restraint upon oneself, according to the precepts of the holy Scriptures, enabling one to rise above the pairs of opposites. It is the balance point, leading to the success of a spiritual aspirant. True detachment is the cure prescribed by all the doctors of ancient wisdom for many of the ills, physical, mental and moral, to which human beings succumb.

In the Second Discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita* Shri Krishna points out to Arjuna how giving way to sense-inclinations is the primary cause of all troubles, leading to passion, anger, loss of memory, loss of discrimination and loss of all. There is nothing wrong with the objective world and objective things; they are necessary for evolution. There is nothing wrong with the senses when used as proper channels and instruments for the work of the soul. The mischief starts only when the senses begin to lead and tempt the mind, and drag it down with its owner, the self-conscious thinker, to a lower level, towards the material pole.

In the Third Discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Arjuna wants to know what propels man to commit offences, seemingly against his will and as if constrained by some secret force. And Shri Krishna answers that it is lust which instigates him; it is passion, sprung from the quality of *rajas*. Man is bound by a hundred chords of desire, for he does not consider what are the necessary actions to be engaged in, what benefit will accrue and to whom. His actions are impulsive and involve him in greater and greater difficulties, from which he does not seem to find a way out.

In the Sixth Discourse, Arjuna raises the difficulty about the wandering mind, restless and turbulent and difficult to control. Shri Krishna prescribes constant practice and detachment as the remedy

for the uncontrolled mind. “To whatsoever object the inconstant mind goeth out...subdue it, bring it back, and place it upon the Spirit.” So, detaching the mind from sense-inclinations, from lower desires, and placing it upon the Spirit is an excellent remedy for most of the troubles on different planes which afflict human beings today. The great Teachers go to the causal aspect, and point out the way to uproot the evil for ever.

The fourth of the Divine Paramitas given in *The Voice of the Silence* is : “VIRAGA, indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived.” This is true detachment. In order to conquer illusion, to perceive truth, and to rise above the pairs of opposites it is necessary to practise this Divine Paramita, its position being in the middle of the seven. We are not to be indifferent to another's pain or pleasure; there we have to be alert and vigilant to give our very best. *Viraga* is that higher indifference to our own pleasure or pain; it is the doing away with self-centredness. *The Voice of the Silence* again instructs us definitely on this point:

Ere thou canst settle in Dhyana-Marga and call it thine, thy soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit : as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for others' woes, as hard as that fruit's stone for thine own throes and sorrows, O Conqueror of Weal and Woe.

It is a beautiful image—to be soft and sweet to another's sorrow and suffering, but to forget our own and be firm with ourselves as the hard stone of the mango. This will lead to true detachment.

We are also asked to conquer illusions. What is illusion? To think of that which is real as unreal, and of that which is unreal as real. All that is transitory and perishable is unreal; the physical body to which so much importance is attached, the personal nature which always seeks gratification, are illusionary because they are constantly changing, whereas the immortal, permanent aspect of our constitution is eternal and changeless. But in our modern civilization most people do not give a thought to their permanent nature, and so they live surrounded by illusions, and evaluate things incorrectly. Once we are in search of truth, the ideation must

undergo a complete change, and a new attitude begin to shape itself. What is the truth to be perceived? It is the reality of each one being a ray of light divine, immortal in essence, therefore one with all other sparks of light. The source being the same, the goal is the same also, and everyone works towards that goal under the selfsame law. This can be perceived intellectually, but to live in accordance with it is the task ahead of each one, and a very difficult one too. *Kama*, *Krodha* and *Lobha* are the three gates of hell. They can be closed for ever through *Viraga*, true detachment, and through constant attention and vigilance to be in communion with the divine, the Higher Self.

It is our various attachments that cause trouble and create false values. Attachment to one's religion, which one considers to be the highest and the best, creates false pride and conflict with others. The soul is above all so-called religions. It is aware only of unity and harmony, love and truth. People show false patriotism by thinking of their own country as the most important in the world, failing to realize that it is but a part of the whole, and that the common good of all should be the aim of everyone. True detachment will lead one to rise above unnecessary attachments to classes and creeds and social position, and to attend to his own duties, *sva-dharma*, whole-heartedly. The closer the union with one's inner God, "the more serene man's destiny, the less dangerous the external conditions." (*Isis Unveiled*, II, 593)

When it is said, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," it is not meant that we should exclude ourselves from all our fellow beings, but rather that we should separate ourselves from false beliefs and adopt for ourselves a new style of thinking and ideation, on the basis of true unity and harmony. So many sadhus and fakirs leave their homes and families and go into seclusion, shirking their own duties and responsibilities, not realizing that this is the path of selfishness. Detachment must lead to dedication to one's duties, which may be performed without any consideration of the results of such actions. It is by living in the world that true detachment must be attained. Love of God and

understanding of the Law must show forth in the service of humanity. In H.P.B.'s article, "Chelas and Lay Chelas" (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*), the seventh of the qualifications expected in a Chela is given thus:

Calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of everything that constitutes the objective and transitory world, in its relation with, and to, the invisible regions.

In this particular qualification is summed up all the help and guidance one may need for the practice of true detachment. It implies true evaluation of life, the walking of the middle way not the discarding of this objective world, nor the denial of the invisible regions, but the recognition of the correct relationship between the two. The outer, objective world is but a reflection of the inner, and is to be looked upon with calm indifference, knowingly, deliberately, but at the same time appreciating the passing panorama, learning the many lessons it conveys, with neither elation at the joys, nor dejection at the sufferings. True appreciation makes us more alive to the needs of others, and more energetic to be the better able to help others and to teach them the Eternal Verities taught by the Sages and Torchbearers of Truth.

When one has true understanding of religion as a way of life and not merely as the performance of ceremonies and rituals, then necessarily all attachment for the founder of a particular religion also ceases. It is not difficult to comprehend that none of the great teachers and prophets is the only begotten son of God, that they all belong to one fraternity, that they all work with one mind, one will, one feeling for the good of humanity, that they are all engaged, whether in the embodied or the disembodied state, in the spiritual service of the race. Therefore no one is greater or superior to others; all are equally worthy of deep gratitude and reverence from all.

No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.

—VICTOR HUGO

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: Why does the idea of death cause panic in the minds of many? How should one prepare them to face it gracefully?

Answer: We are familiar with the phenomena of life and death, generally, and yet the thought of our own physical end fills our minds and hearts with uncanny fear. Basically, it is the “fear of the unknown.” Some fear death as children fear to go in the dark, and such fears increase with false tales!

What is behind the fear of death? It is apprehension of losing precious life and familiar companions and conditions. Aged people, especially, feel secure in their familiar place and any change brings resentment and helplessness. Death seems to snatch away all that we depended upon for our sense of identity. It is thoughts of (imaginary) pain that one may have to experience in letting go of the body one has inhabited for a long time, that causes the panic. One should know that the actual death or withdrawal is a release from pain, and liberation into peace and rest. A terminally ill person makes peace with himself towards the end, when he acknowledges the certainty of the release close at hand. None of those who have been revived from death—cases of NDEs (Near-Death Experiences)—described the experience to be even remotely painful. In fact, for some, death is a release from long-continued suffering and indeed a welcome experience.

Does death come as an end? Will all my aspirations and achievements vanish like a puff of smoke or like a torch dipped into water? If something survives the death of the body, what happens after death? These are some of the questions that plague many people and they find no satisfactory answers to them.

When a person feels his inadequacy to cope with the unknown, the anxiety of death is quite demoralizing. What then is the remedy? True knowledge always fortifies man, and one forewarned is always forearmed. Hence the clarion call of Theosophy is: Take knowledge! First thing to accept and appreciate is that death is necessary, as even our soul needs rest. *Bhagavad-Gita* advises a meditation on “birth, death, decay, sickness and error.” Life is related to form, and form must die. In fact, even a most beautiful poem or story must have a conclusive end. Death of a physical form is a necessity. The permanent spiritual aspect in us—the Soul—feels imprisoned during life. For that Soul, “death comes as a deliverer and friend.”

Secondly, death does not come as an *end*. There is that in man, call it the Ego, the Experiencer, or the permanent aspect, which survives death and goes to *Swarga* (*Devachan*, or *Deva-sthan*, “the place of the gods”). *Devachan* or *Swarga* is not a “no-man’s land,” but there we are said to be in company of the precious moments our soul cherished, while on earth—moments coloured by feelings of sympathy, love and mercy, impersonal appreciation of art and beauty, love of the good and the true, etc. It is a state of consciousness wherein the soul experiences unalloyed peace and bliss, surrounded by the near and dear ones. H.P.B. describes the state after death of a mother who dies, leaving behind her children:

The post-mortem spiritual consciousness of the mother will represent to her that she lives surrounded by her children and all those whom she loved; that no gap, no link, will be missing to make her disembodied state the most perfect and absolute happiness. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p.144)

Shelly writes: “Death is a veil which, those who live, call life; they sleep, and it is lifted.” Death, then, is a much-needed long sleep to awaken us refreshed, to be ready for the continuity called life. Death is not the last farewell, for we shall meet our loved ones in better forms and states, if we deserve them. There are those few who have made “dying” a sacred covenant and a soul-elevating last lesson. But behind them there are long years of devoted life and charitable pursuits.

Question: What is the *right* technique of meditation?

Answer: In the first place we need to ask ourselves, *why* and on *what* or *whom* we should meditate. Is our motive pure? Are we looking for any personal gain such as occult powers? Are we trying to meditate with superficial knowledge? H.P.B. warns us of the dangers of “sitting for development” at the very outset in *The Voice of the Silence*—chosen fragments from the “Book of the Golden Precepts”—meant for the daily use of disciples.

H.P.B. recommends self-examination at the end of the day, *i.e.*, impersonal evaluation of one’s thoughts, feelings, actions and motives, during the day, keeping one’s Divine nature as the witness. “Genuine concentration and meditation, *conscious* and *cautious*, upon one’s lower self in the light of the inner divine man [and the Paramitas or Transcendental Virtues] is an excellent thing.” But to sit for yoga, with only a superficial and often distorted knowledge of the real practice, is almost invariably fatal.

Sila (morals) and *Dhyana* (meditation) must go hand in hand. We should purify our psychic, mental and moral natures. We must begin by purifying our thoughts which in turn leads to purification of the *pranic* currents and of the psychic nature. We need to turn our attention to high thoughts and noble spiritual themes.

Real meditation involves yoking or uniting the personal lower self with the higher divine self. It is not gazing at the tip of the nose or a nail or a black spot in the wall. By such practices we are likely to get cross-eyed and lose our mental balance. Patanjali says that Yoga is “*Chitta Vritti Nirodhaha*,” *i.e.*, Yoga is controlling the modifications of the thinking principle.

The best technique of meditation is described in Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms, and it consists of eight steps: *Yama* (Forbearance), *Niyama* (Spiritual observances), *Asana* (postures), *Pranayama* (Suppression of breath), *Pratyahara* (Restraint), *Dhyana* (concentration), *Dharana* (contemplation) and *Samadhi* (meditation). Patanjali recommends assuming “a steady, comfortable position,”—with spine and head erect—so that one’s meditation is not likely to get disturbed by mere bodily discomfort.

We are asked to close our eyes and dwell upon a *sloka* from the devotional books, or some ennobling idea, like brotherhood, compassion, etc. As a first step, we should be able to ward off both the *external* and *internal* images. The greatest hindrance to concentration is memory. Mr. Judge describes it graphically:

The greatest foe and that most frequently present is memory, or recollection. This was at one time called *phantasy*. The moment the mind is restrained in concentration for the purpose of meditation, that moment the images, the impressions, the sensations of the past begin to troop through the brain and tend to instantly and constantly disturb the concentration. Hence the need for less selfishness, less personality, less dwelling on objects and desiring them—or sensation. If the mind be full of impressions, there is also self-productive power in it which takes hold of these seeds of thought and enlivens them. Recollection is the collecting together of impressions, and so it constitutes the first and the greatest obstruction to meditation. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 12, Foreword*)

We sit for meditation and wonder why we do not succeed. How can we suppose that half-an-hour of meditation, while spending the remaining hours the way we like, will enable us to concentrate? Our whole day should be an exercise in concentration. We must try to eliminate all idle and purposeless activities. We allow our energies to drain away by engaging in idle conversations, mental ramblings, reliving the past experiences or being anxious about things that have not yet happened. Every moment must be spent usefully. This can be achieved only through detachment (*Vairagya*) and constant practice (*Abhyasa*).

If we have succeeded, even a little, in the practice of concentration, we would experience our level of consciousness raised. We would be full of goodwill towards all. True meditation should make us more loving, more compassionate, and help us participate in other people’s joy instead of being envious.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

“When was the last time you sat happily doing absolutely nothing? Can’t remember? You’re not alone,” writes Lane Jennings (*The Futurist*, March-April 2005). There is a worldwide movement that challenges the cult of speed in this overscheduled world. U.S. journalist Carl Honoré says that going slow does not mean ignoring deadlines, but allotting appropriate measure of time to one’s duties and pleasures. “Taking the time to learn about life experiences, expectations, values, and concerns of a new patient can help doctors provide better care and achieve faster cures.” Honoré describes the effects of fast-moving life of the twenty-first-century existence, thus:

Studies in many countries find that more and more people are living on the edge of exhaustion, neglecting the quality of their lives as they futilely strive to maximize quantity and cram more activities into every hour of every day...

The price paid for constant speed is high, whether measured in money or human lives....Hurried meals lead to bad eating habits, poor nutrition, and chronic illness. The lure of speed behind the wheel is a major factor in the estimated 1.3 million traffic fatalities that occur worldwide every year. Psychological costs of speed include community breakdown, family stress, and poor work and school performance. The Japanese have a word for it—*karoshi* (“death from overwork”)—and officials reported a record 143 victims in Japan in 2001.

Brain scientist Richard Restak observes—in his book *The New Brain: How the Modern Age is Rewiring Your Mind*—that in the modern society, the workplace environment calls for the ability to process the information quickly, and shift from one activity to another without getting bogged down or losing time. Further:

As a result of our “make it quick culture” attention deficit disorder is becoming rampant in modern society....Such facility in rapid information processing requires profound alterations in our brain. And such alterations come at a cost—a devaluation

of the depth and quality of our relationships....The demarcation between here and elsewhere has become blurred. Thanks to technology, each of us exists simultaneously in not just one here but in several.

Even a child is familiar with the saying, “Haste makes waste.” We are asked to avoid “Hurry, worry and curry” on purely medical grounds. Multitasking—performing various tasks simultaneously—is one of the features and functions of computers so that when we imitate the computer in this respect, it is but natural that we often seem to be working like automatons. In this jet age, can we possibly live up to Mr. Judge’s advice to perform our duty “carefully and cheerfully,” putting “our whole heart into it”? Often quality is sacrificed to quantity, when things are done hastily. Haste is related to anxiety and it can be counteracted by patience—a very important ingredient of spiritual life. Mr. Judge writes:

As calmness is the one thing necessary for the spirit to be heard, it is evident how important patience is. It also prevents one from precipitating a thing, for by precipitation we may smash a good egg or a good plan, throw the Karma off for the time, and prevent certain good effects flowing.

Nothing is gained, but a good deal is lost, by impatience—not only strength, but also sight and intuition. So decide nothing hastily. Wait; make no set plan. Wait for the hour to make the decision, for if you decide in advance of the time you tend to raise a confusion. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*)

The proponents of the martial art of self-defence, kung-fu, are very apprehensive these days, as one of its deadliest tricks—the “dead-lock”—is used by children with rudimentary knowledge of kung-fu, to get high, reports Sangzuala Hmar (*The Times of India*, March 21, 2005). “Dead-lock is used by experts to block the artery that supplies oxygen and blood to the brain, forcing a person to fall unconscious....Young boys in Mizoram are doing the same to

‘just have some fun.’” One of the children explains that it is addictive because before falling unconscious, we experience a pleasurable feeling that permeates deep within. C. Dosavunga who runs a martial arts school in Aizwal, said he never teaches the move, fearing its misuse. Dead-lock can be fatal, as Mickey, a doctor at the Medical Consultant of Care Clinic explains: “The condition can lead to hyper-ventilation and if there is a delay in the supply of oxygen to the brain, it can lead to brain damage and brain death.”

Knowledge is a double-edged weapon. “Arcane knowledge misapplied is sorcery.” We are easily tempted to use certain knowledge to our own advantage. Hence, some forms of knowledge can be made public only after ascertaining the purity of motive of the recipient. It is precisely because of the possibility of misuse that “the occultists *will not* give out their even more perilous secrets promiscuously,” writes H.P.B.

Xu Xing of the Institute of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Palaeoanthropology in Beijing, recently discovered the fossilized leg bones of dinosaur *Pedopenna daohugouensis*, with large feathers on its leg. *Pedopenna* or “feather foot” would have been less than a meter long and was found in the Daohugou fossil beds of Inner Mongolia. The fossilized leg bones of this dinosaur reveal it to be as bird-like as archaeopteryx, the oldest known bird till now, writes Jeff Hecht (*New Scientist*, February 19, 2005). This and the earlier discovered fossils of the dinosaurs with flight feathers on the hind legs has stunned the world of palaeontology, making them wonder as to whether the back legs also played a role in flight. Xu concludes that *Pedopenna* and other creatures appearing with it must have lived in the late Jurassic age. Xu observes that if the fossil beds turn out to be this old, the exquisite preservation of the Daohugou fossils means it could be an extremely significant location for studying the origins of birds.

H.P.B. explains that the Secondary age—which comprises

Triassic, Jurassic and Chalk or Cretaceous periods—“is the age of Reptiles, of the gigantic Megalosauri, Ichthyosauri, Plesiosauri, etc., etc.” (*S.D.*, II, 713). H.P.B. observes that the stories of various *Rishis* like Pulatsya, Kasyapa, etc., are not fairy-tales. For instance, the fable of Kasyapa with his twelve wives, giving birth to numerous and diversified progeny of *nagas* (serpents), reptiles, birds and all kinds of living things, is a *veiled* record of the order of evolution in *this* round. Thus:

He [Kasyapa] was also the father of *Garuda*, the bird, the “King of the feathered tribe,” who descends *from*, and is of one stock *with the reptiles*, the *nagas*; and who becomes their mortal enemy *subsequently*—*as he is also a cycle, a period of time, when in the course of evolution the birds which developed from reptiles in their “struggle for life,”—“survival of the fittest,” etc., etc., turned in preference on those they issued from, to devour them*—perhaps prompted by natural law, in order to make room for other and more perfect species. (*S.D.*, II, 253-54)

Birds developed from reptiles, as is further corroborated by one of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, explaining the evolution of animals: “Animals with bones, Dragons of the deep and flying *sarpas* (serpents) were added to the creeping things. They that creep on the ground got wings.” H.P.B. explains:

This is a point on which the [esoteric] teachings and modern biological speculation are in perfect accord. The missing links representing this transition process between the reptile and bird are apparent to the veriest bigot, especially in the *ornithoscelidae*, *hesperornis*, and the *archaeopteryx* of Vogt. (*S.D.*, II, 183)

Human nature at its best or worst does get revealed during crises such as mass tragedies, like the recent one from the tsunami attack. When reporters and T.V. anchors like Nandita Das (*The Indian*

Express, February 5, 2005), visited Sri Lanka as volunteers along with the Red Cross, even a month after the tsunami disaster of 26th December, some of them had eye-opening and conscience-touching experiences. Nandita Das writes:

We have all got so numbed to tragedies through electronic overload. We watch death and devastation on T.V. over a sumptuous dinner. We read [or avoid reading] about the anguish and pain of innocent people in the dailies while sipping our morning coffee....Sensational journalism and entertainment compete for our emotions. We have begun to comfortably co-exist with the deep horror of human suffering. We sigh, mourn a bit, feel helpless and move on.

However, even in the face of these, the silver lining too was visible when at Galle, in southern Sri Lanka, Das met the seaside folk. She writes:

I thought to myself, surely, it's not going to be easy for them to befriend the sea again. But this was my logical mind assuming that the response to such a tragedy would invariably be that of anger and betrayal. But as I talked to people, I realized they had no anger! They felt the sea, their provider, had been much abused by the human race and she was expressing her anguish. They believed she knew that the lesson had been learnt and they now ought to apologize to the sea in all humility. Was this Buddhism speaking or the native wisdom of the islanders?

The answer to this, as H.P.B. gave years ago, was that the people in the Buddhist countries with their innate faith in the just Law of retribution, are more resigned and patient with nature's fierce acts through the elements. Besides, the natives truly have not yet forgotten their folk-wisdom, in spite of the inroads of western materialism into the Asiatic countries. These simple people can more easily come to terms with life's ups and downs, although sometimes such disasters bring out the best as well as the worst in us, and that depends on the individual's culture.
