

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THE MEANING OF LIFE

WE assume that life is meaningful, because the need for value judgment comes in only when we do not regard a thing to be intrinsically valuable. For instance, a woman who has given up her successful career in order to look after her family may well ask, if it was worthwhile. Such judgments make sense because we are weighing one good against the other, and the things being judged are not valuable for their own sake.

Life is intrinsically meaningful, worthwhile and valuable, and it is left to each individual to realize and sense the value and meaning of life. The only alternative to life is “death,” and we then have to weigh the worth of living against the worth of dying. Mr. Judge says, “Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, American ed., p. 34). So, we only need to ask, “What is the meaning of life”? This is the most important question of all, because many decisions we make regarding our career, leisure and moral dilemmas depend upon our understanding of the meaning of life.

To investigate the meaning of life is to find out, in the first place, if there is plan or pattern for the *universe*. The modern Intelligent Design theory is the revival of an argument made by the British philosopher William Paley, in 1802, that unlike the stone, a watch appears purposely assembled and would not function without its precise combination of parts. Hence, “the watch must have a maker.”

Paley argued that along similar lines, the complexity of certain biological structures implies *design*. Darwin's answer to Paley's argument was that natural selection could create the *appearance* of design. Darwin posits a *series of natural forces working blindly—without aim and without design*. In the article, "Which is Vague, Theosophy or Science?," Mr. Judge describes this as a wild and fanciful theory. There is not a single proof in the present life, in any of the lower kingdoms, of blind forces beginning work without design and finally producing a beautiful design, visible in the smallest form we see. The evolutionary theory put forward by Theosophy admits of both intelligence and pattern. The whole Kosmos is guided, controlled and animated by an endless series of Hierarchies of sentient beings or conscious Divine Powers who are agents of Karmic and Cosmic Laws and they are "intelligent Beings who adjust and control evolution."

Then the question may arise: Is there a purpose to *human life*, in general? Do I exist to fulfil some purpose? Though these questions are inter-related, we are generally more worried about the latter, the personal aspect, *viz.*, does *my* life have any meaning? Surprisingly, some of the very eminent and successful people have been assailed with the feeling of meaninglessness of their lives. For instance, Count Leo Tolstoy was overwhelmed by the thought of his own death, and death of those he cared for, as also by the transitory nature of all human achievements. He likened the fate of a human being to a traveller in an eastern tale, who is overtaken by a beast, and saves himself by jumping into a waterless well. But at the bottom of the well he sees a dragon with open jaws ready to swallow him. This man can neither come out for the fear of the beast nor jump down for the fear of the dragon. So, he clutches at the twig of a wild bush growing in the cleft of the well, and finds two mice nibbling at the twig he is holding, so that any time the twig could break, sending him into the jaws of the dragon. The traveller, who knows that death is inevitable, still hangs on to the bush and seeing some drops of honey on the leaves, begins to lick them. The two drops of honey in

Tolstoy's life were his love for his family and writing of books. But as he suggests, there are people who have never concerned themselves with the meaning of life. There are those who have questioned life and experienced hopelessness, and yet seize as many of life's pleasures as possible, ignoring the "dragon," the "beast," and the "mice." There are those who see hopelessness of life and commit suicide. Tolstoy was dismayed by the fact that when life ends everything comes to an end with it. To some of us life may appear to be an endless cycle of repetitive activities, and a journey without a destination.

Theosophy says with the sage Patanjali that the whole universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. This universe does not come into existence arbitrarily but according to Law. That law is the Law of Periodicity or Cycles. The plan, the blueprint for this phenomenal universe exists in the Divine Mind, and is interpreted and executed by hierarchies of intelligent divine beings. Our present universe is but one in the series of universes which have come and gone. This process is beginningless and endless. Everything in the universe is governed by the Law. Fire burns and water flows, each behaves according to its *dharma*. Man, endowed with mind and hence the power to think and choose, can go against the Law and harmony of the universe. But he could also become a Buddha, actualizing his potentialities, and raise the whole of manifestation to a higher level, ever so little. But the Buddhahood or perfection—mental, moral, psychological and spiritual—cannot be achieved in one life. At the end of every life there is an assimilation and expansion of all the nobler qualities—sympathy, love for beauty, art, and the abstract things of life—in *Devachan [swarga]*, so that the soul comes back enriched. No effort is lost. In fact, it is after passing through what the Hindus call eighty four lakh *yonis*, *i.e.*, after passing through and having experience in various lower forms—*viz.*, elemental, mineral, vegetable, and animal—that the human stage is reached. "Difficult it is to obtain birth as a human being. Difficult it is to live the life of a man," says the Buddha. It is a long journey from being

an ordinary human being to reach the stage of a perfected being, a *Tathagata*, who goes out of this world with wisdom and yet returns to it out of compassion. The highest “meaning of life” is to attain peace and bliss of *Nirvana* but to renounce it, in order to help the suffering humanity.

So, there is a meaning, pattern and plan for the universe and for human life in general. But life of a particular individual does not become meaningful just because human life *in general* has a meaning. It is not enough to know that there exists a plan and that we are included in it. To make our lives meaningful, we must try to understand the plan, see our place in it and then work towards realization of that plan.

How many of us are aware of this pattern? If aware, how many of us try to follow it? Only a few. As a result, our life resembles the state described in the “Myth of Sisyphus.” It is said that Sisyphus betrayed divine secrets to mortals and for this he was condemned by the gods to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, and the rock would roll down of its own weight. He had to once again push it up only to see it roll down, thus again and again forever. It is symbolic of man’s eternal struggle, his willingness to try one more time without giving up, as also of futile and hopeless labour. So long as we have some goal to pursue, or we are engaged in fulfilment of some desire, we find our life meaningful. But almost all our goals are transitory. When one goal is fulfilled we run after another. Generally, we believe that a person’s life is meaningful if he has devoted himself to a cause. So Gandhiji, Thoreau, Lincoln, Mother Teresa and all those with some dominant overall goal seem to have lived a meaningful life. Is the life of an ordinary person meaningless? For many of us life is full of repetitive tasks, which we seem to be doing day-in and day-out. If we do them for their own sake, without concern for name, fame, money, power, etc., or looking upon it as useless drudgery, then those very mundane, repetitive actions would fill our life with meaning. It would then imply our own contribution in keeping up the harmonious life in the universe. Every life is

meaningful, provided we change our attitude towards what life brings to us. Life of a teacher, a businessman or a sweeper could be meaningful, provided each lives his life with the aim of self-actualization and self-transcendence.

The possibility of change and the capacity to change gives meaning to human life. No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, if we regard it as an opportunity to learn from, then we grow. The purpose of life is to learn and it is all made up of learning. It is not as if always there is *conscious learning*. Even when someone loses a near and dear one, the experience seems to cause only pain and nothing more. At times, such experience may fill one’s heart with bitterness and complain, but it may also bring about at least some detachment, and change in attitude to life. The process of “change” and “learning” is always gradual and imperceptible, but it is there in every person who is not completely insensitive.

If we could but face our life problems without grumbling or trying to run away, we are gradually drawn closer to the centre of our being. When we are close to the divine centre, life acquires meaning, which no words can express. It is only when we are away from this centre that we feel vacuum, depression and hopelessness. Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist, writes in his book, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, that 85 percent of the students attempting suicide at an American University, did so because life seemed meaningless. He writes:

This happens, in the midst of affluent societies and in the midst of welfare states! For too long we have been dreaming a dream from which we are now waking up; the dream that if we just improve the socioeconomic situation of people, everything will be okay, people will become happy. The truth is that as the struggle for survival has subsided, the question has emerged: survival for what? Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.

He points out that there is in each one of us, “will to meaning.”

Man needs something to live for. When the rush of the busy week is over, the void within becomes manifest. To fill this void we indulge in drinks and drugs. But pursuit of wealth, comfort, pleasures and power is ineffectual in filling this void. Man's concern about the worthwhileness of his life is a spiritual distress and not a mental illness. We keep experiencing this existential vacuum at various levels of our spiritual progress. The more one strives to go close to the divine, the more one becomes aware of the illusory nature of existence, which in turn produces the feeling of meaninglessness and hopelessness. *Light on the Path* describes the experience of the neophyte, thus:

It is a very well-known fact, one with which Bulwer Lytton dealt with great power, that an intolerable sadness is the very first experience of the neophyte in Occultism. A sense of blankness falls upon him which makes the world a waste, and life a vain exertion....In gazing, or even in attempting to gaze, on the ineffable mystery of his own higher nature, he himself causes the initial trial to fall on him. The oscillation between pleasure and pain ceases for—perhaps an instant of time; but that is enough to have cut him loose from his fast moorings in the world of sensation. He has experienced, however briefly, the greater life; and he goes through ordinary existence weighted by a sense of unreality, of blank, of horrid negation. (p. 42)

Victor Frankl points out that there ought to be self-transcendence of human existence. “It denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.” (*Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 133)

WISDOM IN ACTION

Bestride the Bird of Life if thou would'st know. Give up thy life, if thou would'st live.

The WISE ONES tarry not in pleasure-grounds of senses.
The WISE ONES heed not the sweet-tongued voices of illusion.

—*The Voice of the Silence*

“I ACCEPT unreservedly the views of no man, living or dead,” said Horace Greeley, the well-known American journalist. In *The Friendly Philosopher*, Robert Crosbie writes: “The foolish look for a ‘Man,’ the wise look for a Message.” The Buddhists hold that “Nothing that is contradicted by sound reason can be true.” In line with the above, Lavater is credited with saying, “The proportion of genius (in general) to the vulgar, is like one to a million; but genius without tyranny, without pretension, that judges the weak with equity, the superior with humanity, and equals with justice, is like one in ten millions.” This is a touchstone for us in evaluating the ideas offered to us.

If “the purpose of life is to learn and it is all made up of learning,” and if, as Carlyle said, “The end of man is an *action* and not a *thought*, though it were the noblest,” then we need to exercise caution, calmness and discrimination, for the plane of practical action begins with the controlled mind.

Caution and calmness, when exercised, check the curiosity and impulsiveness of the feeling-nature. Discrimination is a mental discipline and implies study, analysis and diligent search for Truth.

A search for help, for the guides and criteria that the wise in the past have willed to us as their heirs, is revealing. The Code of Manu records: “Of all duties, the principal one is to acquire the knowledge of the Supreme Soul (SPIRIT); it is the first of all sciences, for it alone confers on man immortality.”

But who is the “man” who makes this claim to continuous existence, who is birthless and deathless? In the *Mahabharata* we find this verse:

O man, thou thinkest that thou art alone, and actest as thou likest. Thou dost not perceive the eternal Soul that dwells within thy breast. Whatever is done by thee, IT sees and notes it all. This Soul is its own witness and is its own refuge. It is the supreme, Eternal witness of man. Do not offend It.

Shankaracharya in *The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom* further develops this theme, enjoining us to note that

He who is single-minded, fixed on the word divine, his steadfast fulfilment of duty will make the knowing soul within him pure; to him whose soul is pure, a knowing of the Self supreme shall come; and through this knowledge of the Self supreme he shall destroy this circle of birth and death and its root together.

The usage of these great ideas reveals that a Messenger or Great Teacher works in the world for the future of humanity, attracts companions who, in helping his work, resolve to know and to purify themselves, to become better companions, so as to “live to benefit mankind.”

This innate urge, or aspiration, or sublimated feeling of compassion, needs the fire of the mind, the light of the *Manasaputra*, to reduce it to a method, to a path of self-discipline. A man who faces facts squarely learns to settle for less than he dreams. He realizes that he faces a lifetime of self-discipline, of self-training, to pull himself out of his past errors and mistakes. The Buddha said that he who conquers himself is greater than the conqueror of worlds.

The true Guru knows the disciple’s need to set up an ideal, a goal, and shows him that “knowledge dwells in heads replete with thoughts of other men, Wisdom in minds attentive to their own” (Cowper). In other words, he enjoins: “Man, know thyself!” The teacher does not and cannot do the thinking and learning for the disciple. He offers the further idea that “Self-dependence is happiness; other-dependence is misery.” He sets the inquirer back

on his own feet to work under the direction of this own enlightenment-seeking mind. In a practical vein, he shows that:

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world. (Confucius)

Many, feeling the large-hearted urge to work for others, but not being sure how or where to start, investigate many systems, turn to those who make high claims or mysterious promises. Such false claimants and self-styled “gurus” use words such as “secret” and “sacred” to blunt honest inquiry. The French have an adage: “*Qui s’excuse, s’accuse.*” (He who makes excuses, stands self-accused.) It takes all the wisdom of the “wise” to correct the follies of the “good.” The wise do not speak in confusing riddles, but offer divine ideas and practical ethics to the common man. They advise us to look for those small plain duties which are our own and are so frequently overpassed while we seek the glories and responsibilities which are the lot of “proven Souls.”

If philanthropy is the reason why the teachings of Theosophy are in the world, and the reason for the expenditure of enormous energy by the Masters and H.P.B., then the least we can do is to train ourselves to live for others. Our brother, our neighbour, is the one who needs help. Our Karma leads us to him. Our effort now is to fit ourselves to know how to help.

All men are our brothers if we take reincarnation into account as a fact of evolution. The “stranger” or “chance acquaintance” of this life may have been a close relation or friend of our past life, and our treatment of him today realigns this relationship for the future.

ON TELEPATHY OR THOUGHT-TRANSFERENCE

RESEARCHERS have always been intrigued, how a person's brain quickly processes the meaning as well as understands what the other person is trying to convey, in "Brain Storming" sessions, where people talk of variety of topics. Psychologist Jos Van Berkum from the Max Planck Institute in the Netherlands has tried to decode how our brain turns seemingly random sounds into sentences with clear meaning. It is believed that the listener is able to process the meaning, knowing the subject of conversation, and also because our brain tends to anticipate what the other person is about to say, relating it with what the speaker has said before. (*The Times of India*, February 22, 2009)

All of us are communicating *telepathically* with one another all the time, but most often, both the sender and receiver of the message are not conscious of it. It is a common occurrence that another person speaks of a matter about which we were thinking. We may be thinking or speaking of another, and just then he appears unexpectedly. We write or may think of writing to someone and his/her letter arrives. Such occurrences are so common and frequent that we could not brush them aside as mere "coincidences."

Telepathy is the communicating of thought or idea from mind to mind, at no matter what distance. It is a natural power. Among birds and beasts, telepathy is instinctually performed. We are using telepathy every day, in common life, in our communication with each other. Every thought produces an image or a picture. Telepathy is closely related to clairvoyance, which is the ability to see with the inner senses, pictures and images in the astral light or in the mind of another. It is with the aid of this power of clairvoyance that we are able to convey to another any idea whatsoever, says Mr. Judge. Dr. Hans Ehrenwald, in his article, "Psychopathological Aspects of Telepathy," in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research for November 1940, mentions the case of a feeble-minded Lithuanian child of ten years, who possessed the power of thought-

reading to a remarkable degree. She was unable to read even the simplest text, but if the teacher were standing near her, reading a book gently or even without making a sound, then the child "read" the text without mistake. Even more surprising, she could read any text read by another person not just in Lithuanian but even in German, French, English or Latin.

Instead of picking up the thought-images from another mind, it is possible to pick up the images from astral light, the common reservoir of thought. It is the repository of all our thoughts, acts and feelings. A most remarkable instance of the unconscious exercise of thought-reading or reading in the astral light was cited in magazine *Theosophy* for October 1926. It is the experience of a well-known Canadian journalist, who as young reporter on the *Toronto Globe* had "faked" a story of lost treasure in Alaska. As far as he was concerned, he knew that he was only spinning a yarn. But to his surprise the story turned out to be correct, in *toto*.

A person, who considers telepathy to be a mere superstition, will not be able to exercise this power. And yet, it is possible to bring this art to perfection and exercise the power against obstacles and distance. The *rationale* of telepathy is that if two minds vibrate or change into the same state they will think alike, *i.e.*, receive the impression sent by the other. "When two minds are sympathetically related, and the instruments [brains] through which they function are tuned to respond magnetically and electrically to one another, there will be transmission of thoughts from one to the other, at will." (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 289)

Several experiments have been carried out to test telepathic communication. In a card guessing experiment, there is a pack of cards marked with pictures or numbers, where one person picks up the card and tries to transmit his thought to the guesser. These guesses are recorded and later compared with the order of the actual cards. Similar experiments have been carried out by individuals, at a distance from each other. For instance, two ladies, one living in Melbourne and the other in Sydney, carried out telepathic tests over

a period of several months. The number of correct guesses was small at first but became very high at the end of the experiment. Every day in the morning, for five minutes, one person “sent” while the other “received,” and then for the next five minutes, the “receiver” became “sender,” while the other received. Every day for four days one of them sent (or tried to transmit) the picture of a red rose to the other. It was recorded that on the first day the receiver could not guess it at all. The next day she recorded the colour red, the third day she put down a rose that seemed pinkish, and on the fourth day she recorded “red rose.”

Some of these experiments were carried out by M. Warcollier, a French chemical engineer, in 1940. He suggested that to succeed in sending a message telepathically, the sender should think intensely. It would help if the receiver tries to go in imagination towards the sender, using photographs, letters or any other objects belonging to the sender. This will help to create “telepathic atmosphere.”

Two persons in sympathetic agreement are like two connected vessels. In 1952, writing in a column in *The Times of India*, Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University of U.S.A., mentioned several strikingly spontaneous cases of telepathy. A woman, playing cards at a club, got up in the middle of the game and phoned her maid to find out about her baby’s safety. At that very moment the maid was rescuing the baby from being strangled. In each of these cases there was obviously strong psychic sympathy, existing like a telegraph line, which carried impressions from one person to another. A Master of Wisdom writes:

As the water in a full tank runs into an empty one which it is connected with; and as the common level will be sooner or later reached according to the capacity of the feed-pipe, so does the knowledge of the adept flow to the chela; and the chela attains the adept-level according to his receptive capacities.

In the article, “A Psychic Warning,” H.P.B. mentions the case of

a person who was very close to a friend and they had decided to visit a certain place together during holidays, but for some reason it did not materialize, as the friend had to go to some other place. While parting, the friend told this person, “Though absent physically, I will be with you in thought and spirit.” At a certain point in his holidays, this person felt depressed and he felt an irresistible urge to visit the place where that friend was. When he reached the place, he discovered that his friend had died. H.P.B. writes, “The cause for this particular phenomenon is to be sought in the occult influence exercised by the active will of one man over the will of another man, whenever the will of the latter is surprised in a moment of rest or a state of passiveness.” What played an important role was the affinity between the two of them and also the intensity of the thought of the dying person, which could overpower the mind of the other person. But telepathy could take place between two people who do not share a deep bond, and are only acquaintances. Mr. Judge puts it thus:

To communicate with another mind at any distance the Adept attunes all the molecules of the brain and all the thoughts of the mind so as to vibrate in unison with the mind to be affected and that other mind and brain also to be either voluntarily thrown into the same unison or fall into it voluntarily. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 148)

There could also be sympathetic relation between the living and the dead, and the consequent transfer of impressions. Sometimes, a pure and unpaid medium (a pure sensitive) may ascend to the plane of *Devachan* and remain *en rapport* and hold communication with the Egos there. In “Fragments of Occult Truth,” (Reprinted in *The Theosophical Movement*, Vol. 24), it is stated that “being *en rapport*... is simply an identity of molecular vibration between the astral part of the incarnated sensitive and the astral part of the disincarnate personality.” When the identity of molecular vibrations is established, for a brief space of time, the sensitive becomes the

departed personality, and writes in its handwriting, uses its language, and thinks its thoughts. At such times the sensitives may believe that the spirit of the departed entity has descended on earth, but in reality “it is merely their own spirits, which being correctly attuned to those others, are for the time, blended with them.”

Before the mind of man was fully developed, communication was by means of thought-transference. When we intensely think about doing some good work, but are unable to do it ourselves, it is said that our strong desire would strike like Vulcan upon other hearts in the world, and suddenly another person may do that which *we* desired to do. In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* Mr. Judge states that in India, when help is needed for some orphanages, they pray to some patron god and help comes. What happens in such cases is that strong and constant faith carries the thoughts of the prayer into receptive minds and they are moved to action.

However, it is fine for impersonal scientific investigation to test one’s ability of mind-reading, with consent and co-operation of that person, but it is quite another matter to read another’s mind without his permission or try to impose our thought and thus influence another mind. So long as we are not free from human weaknesses, trying to use telepathy consciously would be dangerous, because one is likely to have almost irresistible temptation to pry into another’s mind out of curiosity or make a mental suggestion. Even to send a strong thought to a particular person, asking that person to ring up, or concentrate one’s thoughts on a person and make him turn his head, is undesirable. H.P.B. sounds warning in these terms:

Unless the “suggestion” made is for the good only of the subject, and entirely free from any selfish motive, a suggestion *by thought* is an act of *black magic* still more pregnant with evil consequences than a *spoken* suggestion.

Even if a Master wishes to send some important message to a disciple, generally it is the disciple who throws his mind into receptive passivity. In “mental telegraphy,” images of geometrical and other

figures are sent by an active brain (say, that of an adept), along the psychic currents, to the recipient brain (of a *chela*). To produce perfect and instantaneous mental telegraphy, close concentration on part of the sender and complete receptive passivity in the receiver is essential.

Likewise, an adept can direct his inner sight and hearing to the mind to be seen and at once, he becomes aware of another’s thoughts. Only a rogue would pry into another’s mind without permission, but never an adept, writes Mr. Judge. No one has the right to look into another’s mind and pick out its secrets, as it amounts to burglary on a mental and psychic plane, only much worse. Analogous to the rule on material plane, “Thou shalt not steal,” the rule on psychic plane prohibits one from stealing the thoughts of another. Even if we possess the power, we must not try to influence or pry into mind of another that is not protected. If we find that we are about to discover the secrets of another, we must at once withdraw and proceed no further. Even if he happens to be a disciple, it is misuse of power, and he would lose the power. “For nature has her laws and her policemen, and if we commit felonies in the Astral world the great Law and the guardians of it, for which no bribery is possible, will execute the penalty, no matter how long we wait, even if it be for ten thousand years.” (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 149)

NANGTA (the Naked One) used to instruct me about the nature of *Satchidananda* Brahman. He would say that It is like an Infinite ocean—water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when it is active. Its activities are creation, preservation and destruction.

Brahman is beyond mind and speech. A salt doll entered the ocean to measure its depth; but it did not return to tell others how deep the ocean was. It melted in the ocean itself.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

MIND—II

A WISE person watches his thinking. Our actions are based on thoughts and emotions. Self-examination of day's activities, thoughts and emotions at the end of the day would give us some insight into our own nature and motivations. If we were attentive, we would be able to step back and trace out the complete trail of thoughts that led to any particular thought. Our mind is like some unruly horse and carries us away to wherever it wants. As a rider, we should know how to control it and make it take us where *we* want to go. We need to control the mind and keep it on track, obedient to the will of the inner man.

To cultivate mindfulness, we have to perform every action with complete attention. No work must be done with an idea to “complete it *somehow*.” Smallest job, it may be stamping an envelope or making a cup of tea, must be done with complete attention and deliberation. A disciple is also advised to set aside some time for silent study and reflection, at some fixed time every day. He can take up for study and reflection verses from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Bible*, the *Dhammapada* or any other devotional book. Such a practice has calming effect on mind and helps cultivate concentration.

5. *He who controls his mind escapes the bondage of Mara. The mind is incorporeal, moves alone, travels far and rests in the cave of the heart. (37)*

If a man is not vigilant, he is at the risk of being attacked by Mara. When we are not on our guard, Mara lures us away from our true purpose. The tempting demon has umpteen tricks up his sleeves to delude the “practical man” of the world as to why it is perfectly all right for him to desire his own progress and happiness, even if it means hurting another or making someone else suffer for it. It will try to convince us to settle for the lower standards of morality and be content rather than practising the Transcendental Virtues.

Mind is not an organ that can be located at a definite place in the body. It is true that it requires a healthy physical brain to function on the plane of waking consciousness. But its essential nature is incorporeal or ethereal, its movements are free, unobstructed and unhindered. Poets and philosophers, artists and geniuses have shown this to be true. “A slave may be dragged through the streets in chains, and yet retain the quiet soul of a philosopher, as was well seen in the person of Epictetus,” says *Light on the path*. We are free to soar high like a mountain eagle, but our passions, or our identification with passions keeps us caged. To be reliable, mind has to move alone and travel far. It cannot be reliable as long as it is entangled in emotions and desires.

At the present stage of our development, mind is not fully incarnated. At each incarnation, only a ray is launched by the immortal Ego to function through the body, which is called the lower *Manas* or animal soul. But its intelligence does not come from brain, which is only its instrument. Mind *per se* is independent of all causations and therefore capable of being rational. Each night during our rest, the animal soul, the personal man who was busy running after this, that and the other, retires into the inmost chamber of the heart and rests. The original Pali text simply says that it rests in the cave. Cave signifies higher spiritual consciousness. Moving from waking state to dream state, it finally enters into the deep sleep (*sushupti*) where the higher *Manas*, the real man, functions on its own plane, free from the trammels of matter. Thus, as the animal when it enters into its cave is not seen, the animal soul—the separative existence—when resting under the care of its parent, the higher nature, is not perceived. During Deep Sleep State, it reassumes its true nature, which is beautifully described in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, thus:

Here the father is father no more; nor the mother a mother; nor the worlds, worlds; here the scriptures are no longer scriptures; the thief is a thief no more; nor the murderer a murderer; nor the outcast an outcast; nor the base born,

baseborn; the pilgrim is a pilgrim no longer, nor the saint a saint. For the Spirit of man is not followed by good, he is not followed by evil. For he has crossed over all the sorrows of the heart. (*Selections From the Upanishads*, p. 16)

Every individual is said to be a miniature universe itself. Our heart is like a center from which fan out the radii in all direction to embrace the universe. These radii are the windows into the manifested world. Through our heart we can plumb the mysteries of the whole cosmos. Heart is considered to be the seat of spiritual consciousness. “I am the Ego seated in the hearts of all beings,” says Krishna. The omnipresent and omniscient Self within is described by Him, thus: “It is the light of all lights, and is declared to be beyond all darkness; and it is wisdom itself, the object of wisdom, and that which is to be obtained by wisdom; in the hearts of all it ever presideth.” The Chhandogya Upanishad says:

There is this city of Brahman—the body—and in it the palace, the small lotus of the heart, and in it that small ether. Both heaven and earth are contained within it, both fire and air, both sun and moon, both lightning and stars; and whatever there is of the Self here in the world, and whatever has been or will be, all that is contained within it.

A *yogi* can, by his will, focus his consciousness on anything, on any plane and know the past, present or future. When the outer man is asleep or paralyzed by will, the higher Ego acts on its own plane. In that state of *yoga*—union with the divine—the higher *Manas* partakes of the qualities of omniscience and omnipotence. A *yogi* becomes free from hindrance of space and time to which the physical man and senses are subjected to. In a spiritually advanced man, there is permanent union between his *Buddhi* and *Manas*.

6. *Wisdom fills not the unsteady mind of the man of ruffled serenity; he is ignorant of the true teaching. (38)*

Even at a simplest level, there is a close connection between calmness and our ability to deal with the situation properly. When

we are calm, our mind is able to think clearly and take a well considered decision. Our judgment is less likely to be clouded when we are not agitated. But, when there is a personal concern, emotional attachment, we are less objective and more liable to fear, anxiety, indecision and self-doubt. Often, surgeons who have thousands of successful surgeries to their credit, including some of the most intricate and critical ones, find it difficult to perform a surgery on their own near and dear ones. Why? Because there is attachment, there is fear of going wrong, as also the fear of losing the loved one. On the other hand, we are able to look at things objectively and come to correct conclusions and right course of action about matters that pertain to another, because we are calm. Krishna explains how we lose our hold on the spiritual knowledge when we are agitated:

The man whose heart and mind are not at rest is without wisdom or the power of contemplation; who doth not practice reflection, hath no calm; and how can a man without calm obtain happiness? The uncontrolled heart, following the dictates of the moving passions, snatcheth away his spiritual knowledge, as the storm the bark upon the raging ocean. (*Gita*, II)

The Moon makes a clear image on the surface of the calm lake. Its reflection is distorted if the lake waters are disturbed. So is the state of an agitated mind. Our Higher self, the inner wisdom, cannot reflect itself in an agitated mind. Its voice of wisdom can reach us only if we are attentive. The Higher self can guide us, if we turn within for help. Whisperings of the voice of conscience speaks louder and in unmistakable terms as we pay heed to it. Wisdom does not arise simply from our mind. Wisdom is thinking illuminated by spiritual knowledge and spiritual discernment.

7. *Fear there is not for him whose mind is not burning with desires, and which, having risen above likes and dislikes, is serene. He is awakened. (39)*

Fear comes from desire, particularly when it is a “burning” desire.

There is a fear of not getting what we want or losing what we already have. Serenity comes from detachment from one's likes and dislikes. It comes from being equal-minded in all circumstances of our life. Most of our troubles come from wanting life to shape up exactly as we want. There is nothing wrong in wanting to take charge of our lives and shape it. But, we become unhappy when things do not shape up the way we wanted, even if it were for something good. There is disappointment. We swing between the moods of elation and desolation. On the other hand, the wise man puts his whole heart in whatever he does, but remains detached, knowing that the results will come in accordance with the law which "moves to righteousness." True calmness can come from an unswerving faith in the working of the law of Karma, coupled with perfect equanimity. The man who is "confirmed in spiritual knowledge" is described by Shri Krishna, thus:

A man is said to be confirmed in spiritual knowledge when he forsaketh every desire which entereth into his heart, and of himself is happy and content in the Self through the Self. His mind is undisturbed in adversity; he is happy and contented in prosperity, and he is a stranger to anxiety, fear, and anger. Such a man is called a Muni. When in every condition he receives each event, whether favourable or unfavourable, with an equal mind which neither likes nor dislikes, his wisdom is established, and, having met good or evil, neither rejoiceth at the one nor is cast down by the other. (*Gita*, II)

Our personal desires spring from the ignorance of our real nature. Our personality is transitory and so are its worldly attainments. We have to understand that we are not our personality but the Immortal Self within, which is unaffected by life's circumstances, good or bad. If we reflect on what is permanent and what is evanescent, we would become wiser. We would then learn the art of detached action.

(To be concluded)

JULIUS CAESAR

A STUDY IN VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED

IV

THESE beliefs are in general corroborated by H. P. Blavatsky, though of course expressed with stricter shades of occult meanings.

"Daimon was a name given by ancient peoples...to all kinds of spirits, whether good or bad."

"...the word 'demon'... in the meaning given to it by the whole of antiquity, standing for the guardian Spirit, an 'Angel,' not a devil of Satanic descent. Satan...is simply the personification of the abstract evil, which is the weapon of karmic law and KARMA. It is our human nature and man himself, as it is said that 'Satan is always near and inextricably interwoven with man.' It is only a question of that Power being latent or active in us."

"Porphyry, speaking of evil spirits, said: 'Demons are invisible, but they know *how to clothe themselves* with forms.'"

"Destiny which...every man is weaving around himself...is guided either by the heavenly voice of the invisible *prototype* (the guardian Angel) outside of us, or by our more intimate astral, or inner man, who is but too often the evil genius of the embodied entity called man."

"The whole endless catalogue of bad spirits are not *devils* [as distinct from humanity] but *spiritually incarnated* sins, crimes and human thoughts."

These passages seem to indicate that the Apparition to Brutus was a form taken by that complex of thought-energies—it was the "spiritually incarnated sins and crimes"—his own and others', which caused those gigantic evils of the murder and the war. Coming at a late quiet hour, when Brutus was weary and troubled, his mind in a passive astral state, the Appearance shot into his inner vision a ghastly

realization of his accountability. His hour indeed had come.

That “terrible appearance in the human form but of prodigious stature and the most hideous aspect” was also a close corresponding embodiment of what the conspirators’ inhuman acts drew forth from Caesar in his last moments. Just before stabbing him they had insidiously begged for the return in freedom of one whom he had exiled—their motive being to find in his denial a public excuse for the murder. Astonished and growing irritated, Caesar had finally refused with a haughty magniloquent self-importance. Then with the stabs were roused in him fear, anger, burning resentment, and deep sadness at the deception and injustice practised on him. All these feelings were dominant in his mind at the moment of his bodily death. And it is certain that that mass of ambitions and conscious powers, of disappointments and desires, hatreds and fears, which constituted the mind of him who “bestrode the world like a Colossus,” could not be shunted out of life by sudden treacherous stabs of supposed friends, without carrying into death a profound melancholy and a towering revengeful fury. This weight of feelings would by its own fierce grisly nature image itself in a figure frightful to see.

There is, moreover, a special and subtle reason for its visit to Brutus as an evil genius and as representing Caesar. This reason is in the bloodbath, pictured by Shakespeare with graphic hideousness. Brutus set the example as he shouted (Act III, Scene 1):

Stoop, Romans, stoop,
And let us bathe our hands in Caesar’s blood
Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords...
And, waving our red weapons o’er our heads,
Let’s all cry, *Peace! Freedom! and liberty!*

He thereby strengthened tenfold and poisoned the magnetic ties between Caesar, himself, and the other murderers. For blood has most powerful magnetic qualities.

It was the magnetic life-bearing nature of blood that led to the beliefs in its mysterious power and caused such practices as are

indicated in Shakespeare’s line: “great men shall press for tinctures, stains, relics and cognizance.” Various religions have taught veneration of blood and its sacramental power to unify into some strong and sacred bond those who shared in it, who were touched by it or “purified.” Though these beliefs were of course easily degraded into savage excesses, nothing could destroy the peculiar qualities of blood. In this case these qualities acted not only to create a particularly close bond between Caesar and his murderers, but they bound in stronger unity those terrible psychic forces sent out by Caesar’s mind at the time of his death. By bathing their hands in his blood and waving the stained metal of their swords, they called down upon themselves those strange forces in Nature that became united and visible in the monstrous figure which visited Brutus because of Caesar’s murder, and which, in Plutarch’s words, was “the avenger” and pursued “through every land all those who were concerned in it, and suffering none to escape.”

The old Chinese philosopher Lao Tse said quietly:

If a kingdom is governed according to the Tao the spirits of the departed will be as peaceful as are the people, and will molest no one, for they too are governed by the Tao. When this harmony prevails between the living and those who have left, their good influences are combined.

Besides the physical magnetism in Caesar’s blood, there was another bond, an even more occult reason for the visitation to Brutus. There was likewise soul-magnetism between the two men. They were friends, attached by affection. Brutus had been rescued from political danger by Caesar, had been given honours and dignities. Caesar trusted him. All these magnetic ties of soul Brutus ruptured, tore into quivering shreds that dripped with the ethereal fluids of the unrecognized inner life.

Further, since Brutus was always the centre and chief mover of the unit of action constituting the drama, it may be that Shakespeare regarded him both ethically and dramatically as a synthetic symbol;

a symbol representing himself, his fellow conspirators, the entire government and the state, broken into fragments by his treachery, unwisdom and political incompetence. When so regarded, and when his possible accomplishments are compared with his actual failures, Brutus and the drama depicting him, tower up among the great tragic results of Shakespeare's creation—heart-moving images of nobility blinded by false ideas of what constitutes man's duty to himself and other individuals, as also to his country and its government.

(Concluded)

MAGIC makes a straw a mountain by artifice; again, it weaves a mountain like a straw.

It makes ugly things beautiful by means of sleight; it makes beautiful things ugly by means of opinion.

The work of magic is this, that it breathes and at every breath transforms reality.

At one time it shows a man in the guise of an ass, at another time it makes an ass look like a man and a notable.

Such a magician is within you and latent: truly, there is a concealed magic in temptation (exerted by the fleshly soul);

But in the world in which are these magic arts, there are magicians who defeat sorcery.

In the plain where this flesh poison grew, there has also grown the antidote, O son.

The antidote says to you, "Seek from me a shield, for I am nearer than the poison to thee.

Her (the fleshly soul's) words are magic and thy ruin; my words are lawful magic and the counter-charm to her magic."

—RUMI

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

Question: What is meant by, "In dreams and visions of the night, man is instructed"?

Answer: We may understand this statement in various ways. Man has three principal states of consciousness—waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. There are idle visions, which include physiological dreams, caused by indigestion or breathing difficulty, and those that are only reflection of our hidden desires, motives, etc. In the dreamless sleep state it is believed that communion is enjoyed with the Spirit. On returning from the dreamless sleep into the waking state, the Ego passes through the dream state, again. These are "Real" dreams that reflect the action of the Ego on its own plane during the sleep of the body and the brain. When the Ego is free from the trammels of matter during sleep, it is omniscient, as then there is no past, present or future for the Ego. We are asked to sleep over a problem, and many times, we get solution to our problems during sleep. This is one form of "instruction." It is seen in a marked manner in case of scientists, writers and artists. We know that Kekule struggled to know the structure of the Benzene molecule, and dreamt of a serpent biting its own tail, which suggested a closed ring structure of the Benzene molecule. Similarly, Samuel Taylor Colridge got the plot of *Kubla Khan* in sleep. We are "instructed" by our Divine nature through allegorical dreams. For instance, Mr. Judge mentions in *Letters That Have Helped Me* that a dream often comes to those who are striving to live the higher life and to develop their inner faculties, in which one is apparently attacked or pursued. It represents the struggle between the higher and the lower nature, producing

fear when the lower tendencies and desires seem to get the upper hand. If the aspiration towards higher life is kept up, but one does not make corresponding attempt to change one's thoughts and actions, then the dream of being pursued and attacked is repeated. This dream would cease to come only if one makes the effort to live the higher life, *or*, gives up the fight and lives an ordinary life.

If we fall asleep with a strong desire and determination to get an answer to some moral problem, we are likely to get its answer in the dream. "A sincere and devoted man who earnestly calls upon the Higher Self for aid in right conduct will receive the aid asked for," writes Mr. Judge. However, the Higher Self has no concern with material things or any temporal affairs.

There are dreams sent by adepts. Sometimes people get instructions in dreams for building a temple or a church at a particular place or for performing certain ceremony or *Yajna* for re-establishing peace and harmony in certain city, etc. We are told about Saint Dhyaneswar, who took *samadhi* at a young age of 21, at Alandi, and hence he sat in meditation in a room that was closed, and a structure was built on top of it. It is said that as time went by, roots of the tree planted above penetrated down and touched Dhyaneswar's head. Dhyaneswar is said to have *instructed* saint Eknath, in dream, to have the roots cut.

Bulwer Lytton says, in the *Strange Story*, that man's first initiation comes in dreams. To be initiated means to be tested and tried by the *guru* (spiritual teacher) to determine if one is ready to take the next step on the Path. Sometimes the *guru* may want to test the disciple for his courage by letting loose a tiger on him during sleep, on the astral plane. Thus he may dream of a tiger pursuing him or pouncing on him. It all happens on subjective plane or astral plane. Does he get frightened or does he show the courage and fight the tiger? Thus, without causing actual harm to the disciple, the *guru* could test his courage. Similarly, he could be tempted through a dream of a beautiful woman or lots of money, waiting to be taken, and so on. He is initiated if he passes the test.

Question: In our present age the average span of life is 70 to 100 years. However, is it not possible for the great beings to increase their life span and live for *thousands of years*, using occult knowledge and elixir of life?

Answer: In *The Ocean of Theosophy* Mr. Judge points out that our body is subject to laws of evolutionary period to which it belongs and hence its duration now is limited to seventy to one hundred years. However, its possible duration is longer. There are instances in history where ordinary persons have lived to be two hundred years of age. "The Elixir of Life," reprinted in *Five Years of Theosophy*, deals at length with the subject of "longevity." Thus, in each species—including human—there is a "well-known limit within which the Race-life lies, and none are known to survive beyond it." Even when disease, accidents and famine are avoided, there comes a time "when the particles of the body would feel the hereditary tendency to do that, which leads inevitably to dissolution." However, it is possible to live beyond the limits determined by heredity. Thus:

The whole rationale then, of the first condition of continued existence in this world, is (a) the development of a Will so powerful as to overcome the hereditary (in a Darwinian sense) tendencies of the atoms composing the "gross" and palpable animal frame, to hurry on at a particular period in a certain course of Kosmic changes; and (b) to so weaken the concrete action of that animal frame as to make it more amenable to the power of the Will.

A person with knowledge of occult laws of nature can extend this limit of life duration nearly to four hundred years. In the article, "Premature and Phenomenal Growths," H.P.B. draws our attention to certain Asiatic old books which mention that the Sixth and Seventh race men will be born adults and will live many years. In the fifth race humanity we find that life of man lasted for 400 years in *Krita yuga*, 300 years in *Treta yuga*, 200 years in *Dwapara yuga* and only 100 years in the present age or *Kali yuga*. However, in the

Sixth Race, the natural age of man will be gradually increased to 200, then 300 and 400 in the last two *yugas* (*H.P.B. Series No. 18*, p. 28). However, H.P.B. points out that in the fifth race of the fourth Round, no person can live for more than 300 to 400 years in one body, and there have been examples cited by physicians of a few people living for 150 and even 170 years. In the article “Do the Rishis Exist?” H.P.B. remarks that there are reasons to believe that some of the great Hindu Adepts of ancient times have been reincarnating themselves occasionally in Tibet and Tartary.

Genesis, mentions that Methuselah, the son of Enoch and the father of Lamech, lived for 969 years. If Methuselah represents early races of humanity, it is possible that he lived for 969 years, or even more. In the article, “If Methuselah Existed, Why So Short Our Lives?” Mr. Judge points out that in the earlier races of humanity, say the second and the third, mentioned in the *Secret Doctrine*, man had much more ethereal body, and lived longer than Methuselah, the aged. Many people have wondered, how could our present bodies, which appear to be more compact and stable, and are not so readily disintegrated, last only for 70 to 100 years, while that of early races lasted several hundred years? Mr. Judge explains that when the human body was ethereal, the particles or atoms composing the body were not so close together as in the present times. As a result the friction between the particles was much less. At present, in denser bodies, the atoms are close together, resulting in greater friction between the atoms, which in turn produces heat. The heat thus evolved destroys the medium through which cohesive power could act, and thus heat tends to weaken the cohesive power between the atoms of the body. Moreover, the heat produced due to friction would also tend to destroy the bond or cohesive power between one combination of atoms and the adjoining one. In the end, such a process will bring about the disintegration of the entire mass of atoms.

Apart from the closer association of the atoms in our present physical bodies, the force of the mind and the emotions also play an important role in quicker wear and tear of the body. Mr. Judge puts

it thus:

It is well known that as man increases his brain use and power and the play of his emotions, he is able to affect his physical frame thereby. Today many hold that the American people are becoming too nervously organized. This reacts upon the atoms in the body, and must make the average age less than those ancient races when the mental and emotional natures did not have such sway over the human being. (*W.Q.J. Series No. 22*, p. 22)

The article, “The Elixir of Life,” suggests that the aspirant to longevity must beware of impure and animal thoughts.

The other explanation is given in terms of “creators” and “destroyers.” It is stated that various organs of our body are made of millions of cells. Cells themselves are made up of millions of infinitesimal lives. There are also present in the body microbes, bacilli and bacteria, which themselves are composed of more minute lives, which include “fiery lives.” The mystery of physical life and death is hidden among these infinitesimal “lives.” It is a well known fact that the physical body of man undergoes a complete change of structure every seven years, and the process of destruction and preservation is the result of the alternate function of the fiery lives as “destroyers” and “builders.” As builders, they restrain the destructive tendency of the microbes in the body. They do this by offering themselves as sacrifice to microbes to provide them vitality and compel them to build up the material body and its cells. The fiery lives become “destroyers” when that restraint is removed and the microbes seeking vitality from healthy cells of the body run riot as destructive agents. Thus, during the first half of a man’s life, *i.e.*, for around thirty-five years, the “fiery lives” are indirectly engaged in the process of building up man’s material body; life is on the ascending scale, and the force is used in construction and increase. After this period is passed, the work of destruction and decrease commences.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Excerpts from the book, *The Lonely American: Drifting apart in the 21st Century*, by Jacqueline Olds and Richard S. Schwartz, professors of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, reprinted in *Utne Reader* (March-April 2009), provide an insight into cause and cure of loneliness experienced by the 21st century Americans. The book shows that we feel increasingly alone even with the technologies devoted to staying connected. We are caught in a tug-of-war between conflicting desires—we want to stay connected, and we want to be free. How does one strike the balance? Using data from General Social Survey, Duke University researchers found that the number of Americans who said that there was no one with whom they discussed important matters tripled, between 1985 and 2004. In another study, it was discovered that one out of four households in U.S. consists of one person only. Social connectedness is directly related to health and happiness. When people lose the sense of belonging to a community, it leads to increase in aggressive behaviour. The authors point out that frenetic busyness of our lives has adversely impacted our neighbourhoods. “Being neighbourly used to mean visiting people. Now being nice to your neighbours means not bothering them.” Socializing is not a frivolous diversion but is essential to our well-being. “As self-reliant Americans, we are automatically prepared to question the value of our strongest bonds and to step away from them when necessary, relying instead on ourselves.” In the consumerist culture, some of us try to fill the void by turning to objects that will define one’s identity through possessions, while others turn to drinks and drugs. The first step is to be willing to acknowledge one’s loneliness. Many Americans were found to passionately defend their choice of staying disconnected. Our smallest choices pave the way to loneliness or social connectedness. Thus:

Yes, we all need balance in our lives. We all need time away from the crowd. But we also need one another—and

feeling left out, even when one has chosen to be left out, is not satisfying. It is painful.

Small daily choices—whether to go to a local store or order off the Internet, whether to pick up a ringing telephone or let it go to voice mail, whether to get together with a friend or pop in a DVD—end up defining one’s social world. These little decisions are cumulative. You step back a little from others. They step back a little from you. You feel a little left out.

When we experience a feeling of being “left out,” we must examine, and then chances are that we would work a little harder to reconnect, instead of sinking into apathy and seclusion. There are individuals who have stepped into human entanglements and showed that courage and creativity could flow from engagement and connection with people. “Loneliness was never the goal. It’s just the spot where too many people wind up,” write Jacqueline Olds and Richard S. Schwartz.

Modern man suffers from two great maladies—loneliness and depression. In India, what has contributed to loneliness is the gradual but definite shift from joint family system to nuclear families. It is our self-centredness that has alienated us from the others. The key lies in not being dependent on others, but at the same time not breaking all connections with other human beings—achieving a balance between independence and interdependence. Mr. Judge warns us against the wrong concept of independence, saying, he was tired “of all these people who gape and gape and are (excuse me) so Americanly ‘independent’—as if men were ever independent of each other.”

There is a difference between loneliness and aloneness. It is not necessary to isolate ourselves from others, but in order to experience lasting peace and happiness, it is necessary to turn within—every day, for a few minutes. We may find this practice difficult at first, but if kept up, it would yield positive results. Sometimes life, the great teacher, drives us towards solitude, which *we* term loneliness,

till we have learnt to deal with it. We are either separated from our companions, friends and relatives or life snatches them away, one by one, driving us to lean heavily on to some other substitute. Life seems to take away all props, one by one, forcing us to seek our own company. Our success or failure to handle such situation would depend upon the extent to which we lived the life of detachment even while we were surrounded by our loved ones, and the comfort of books, art, music, etc. One of the qualities of a wise man is, “a want of pleasure in congregations of men” (*Gita*, XIII). It appears that we have lost the art of being alone. It is not easy to love peace and solitude for most of us who love the life of sensation and excitement. The ability to deal with and love solitude marks spiritual maturity. Says *The Dhammapada*:

Delightful are the forests to the Arhat; they charm not the worldly. There the passionless find delight, for they are not allured by sense-life. (Verse 99)

Daydreaming, also described as zoning out, wool-gathering, building castles in the air, etc., was considered a waste of time, a distraction and even pathological. But now, neuroscientists and psychologists believe it to be closely connected with creativity, and say that it may even be the backbone of our consciousness. Before the discovery of computers, daydreams served as earth’s first virtual world, where we could rehearse social situations, love affairs, adventures, emergencies and conflicts without risk or consequences. We spend 15 to 50 per cent of our waking hours in daydreaming. In the 1960s Jerome Singer, now an emeritus professor of psychology at Yale, set out to investigate daydreaming and discovered that most people’s daydreams deal with the immediate concerns of everyday life: mundane planning for the future or dealing with other people in significant relationships. It deals with one’s everyday goals,

aspirations and apprehensions. Daydreaming could fulfil a psychic need, where one could give vent to one’s emotions. By giving play to our anger mentally, we may diffuse it and arrive at a sensible solution to our problem. But it is also possible that obsessively fantasizing about some violent solution to a problem may actually drive us to carry it out in action.

Psychologist Jonathan Schooler of the University of California, Santa Barbara, believes that those who pay attention to their daydreams are likely to harvest creative insights from their reveries. For instance, Albert Einstein imagined himself running alongside a light wave, a fantasy that ultimately led to his theory of special relativity. If creative insights are the products of daydreaming, could it be that they are the *purpose* of daydreaming?

In the absence of any outside stimulus our mind turns to daydreaming, and the web of brain regions responsible for daydreaming is termed, “default network.” Activity in the default network indicates daydreaming. People with autism have unusually low levels of activity in the default network. In Alzheimer’s disease, the MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) studies show that the disease weakens the connections between regions of the default network.

It is believed that children who are heavy viewers of television are less imaginative than those who watch only one hour a day. Some forty years ago Jerome Singer pointed out that what is most truly human about man is his capacity for fantasy. He suggests that we must set aside a bit of time each day for some creative spacing out, paying close attention to the fleeting fantasies of our brains, writes Josie Glausiusz. (*Psychology Today*, March-April 2009)

Theosophy differentiates between fancy, phantasy, daydreaming and imagination. In the article, “Phantasy and Psychism,” (*Theosophy*, Vol. 17), *phantasy* is defined as “the faculty by which images, thoughts, impressions, are evoked from the storehouse of conscious or unconscious memory and automatically rearranged and dramatized into a never-ending series of stories or pictures....” *Or*,

it may take the form of meaningless arguments or speculations about other people's business, and so on. For most of us, when our attention is not held by some work, such arguments, speculations, pictures, stories, etc., form the whole of our mental life. We may say that phantasy is the power to re-arrange elements already existing in the lower mind. Whatever we see, read, hear, from newspapers, novels or through gossips, these impressions accumulate and tend to have self-reproductive power. We must minimize the collection of useless impressions. Phantasy is automatic and operates without the control of the Ego. Day-dreaming is mild form of phantasy wherein the Ego has weak and intermittent control. However, when one is under the influence of drugs, the Ego has no control over the impressions and sensations of the lower mind. Phantasy differs from the faculty of imagination in which there is conscious arrangement of impressions and images in the mind. Phantasy implies supremacy of lower mind and is the chief obstacle to meditation and to concentrated thought.

In "Creative visualization," "imagination" and "lucid dreaming," there is awareness and *conscious control*. In "lucid dreaming," you are aware that you are dreaming and you direct the dreaming. Creative visualization is learning to imagine the desired outcome. It is imagining yourself being, doing and having that which you desire. We are asked to visualize moving images and not static pictures. For instance, a person who wants to overcome his fear of swimming, might visualize himself jumping into the water and making movements of hands and feet, probably sinking a little and yet not giving up, and finally reaching the other end of the swimming pool. However, we are advised to begin with visualizing or imagining of familiar objects, such as, a chair, a mango, a rose, etc., and then slowly go beyond the familiar to embrace the abstract.

"Imagination is the picture-making power of the human mind. In the ordinary average human it has not enough training or force to be more than a sort of dream, but it may be trained," says Mr. Judge. A wonder-worker in the east makes his audience see a snake, where

there is no snake, because he was asked to see a snake before his mind's eye, right from his childhood, so that the image he forms of the snake is so strong that everyone in the audience had to see it. Fancy, is the decay of the power of imagination, where there is mixing up of the desire, image and the mind with all its powers.

Albert Einstein said: "Imagination is more important than knowledge for knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."

At some point in life each one of us must have felt that we deserve more than is on our plate and the larger chunk of that pie called life. There is a feeling, "I deserve better, I am special." That is what the young couple in the movie *Revolutionary Road* tell themselves, dissatisfied at being tied to the mundane existence and the ordinariness of regular life. Life they lived did not match with their vision for themselves. Why is it that in our professional life, and more so, after we have retired, we get the feeling that we are at the wrong place at the wrong time. In the movie *Revolutionary Road*, the wife wishes to settle in Paris to escape the "hopeless emptiness of life" in suburban America of 1950s. Is it good to seek to change the situation? It can be argued both ways. "A permanent state of dissatisfaction can only lead to misery and frustration, and so should be avoided. On the other hand, complete satisfaction with a situation leads to complacency and a lack of drive to achieve bigger and better!" writes Vinita Dwara Nangia. Quite often circumstances may be beyond our power, but we can certainly change the way we respond to them. All you need to do is take a good hard look. We can change the circumstances by changing ourselves, so that instead of allowing the situation to get the better of us we can use them as our opportunities. The idea is not to leave dreaming and planning, but to live the life to our full potential, cultivating the wisdom and

capability to figure out when we should accept and when we should challenge and overcome, writes Vinita Nangia. (*Sunday Times of India*, April 12, 2009)

H.P.B. points out that man is a free agent during his stay on earth, but “there are *external and internal conditions* which affect the determination of our will upon our actions.” In other words, the exercise of free will is conditioned or limited by the *external* circumstance, as well as, the *inner* capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma. Destiny and free-will co-exist. A person may think ten times before he makes the choice, but having made it, that choice becomes his destiny, by which he is bound. When Karma has ripened and begun to precipitate, all we can do is to experience the effects with right attitude. Since the Law of Karma is just and merciful, there cannot be a misshapen day. So, instead of complaining or grumbling there must be acceptance or resignation. We might even go a step further and say, “This is not only what I deserved, but what in fact I desired.” This is an attitude of supreme surrender, of unswerving faith in the Law of Karma—an inward stance necessary to be cultivated by every true spiritual aspirant.

However, “acceptance” should not be equated with passivity and helplessness. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power. We can use the situation as raw material and extract the necessary lessons. One of the aphorisms on Karma points out that in the given life we can take measures to repress wrong tendencies and eliminate defects. When intense efforts are made, the influence of the Karmic tendency is shortened. Karma has placed us where we are, but it does not hold us there. We do not know the intensity of efforts needed to completely overcome the fate created by our previous Karma. There is the beautiful prayer to the effect: “God, grant me the serenity to take the things I cannot change. Courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference.”