

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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ON THE BUDDHA’S MAHABHINISHKRAMAN —THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

THE SACRED day of Buddha Purnima falls on the full moon day of the lunar month of Vaisakh. It is the day on which the Buddhists all over the world pay homage to “Gautama the Buddha,” *i.e.*, Gautama the Enlightened One. This day marks the triple Anniversary of (a) Buddha’s birth as prince Siddhartha, (b) his Enlightenment, *i.e.*, the day on which he attained to Supreme Wisdom under the Bodhi tree at Gaya, and also (c) the day of his death, when he discarded his mortal coil and proceeded to *Mahaparinirvana*. His greatness was foretold in the dream his mother, Queen Maya, had, that of six-tusked white elephant entering her womb from the right side, and “Bliss beyond mortal mother’s filled her breast,” writes Sir Edwin Arnold in *The Light of Asia*. The dream-reader said that the dream was good, and it symbolized that the Queen will give birth to a child who will, either grow up to be a holy man of great wisdom delivering humanity from ignorance, or, rule the world as great monarch. His father, King Suddhodana, did not wish his son to become an ascetic, so he had him married to his cousin Yashodhara. He also ensured that the prince was not exposed to suffering, old age, disease or death. However, at the age of twenty nine, when he went out of the palace with his charioteer, he came across a sick person, an old man, and a dead body, and became

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aware of the inevitability of suffering. When he returned home, he was sad and disillusioned. When he sadly spoke of it to Yashodhara, she became sad too, and said, "Hath not my Lord comfort in me?" And the reply that the Buddha (Prince Siddhartha) made shows that his imagination had 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. The sight of a sick person, an old man, and a dead body, had a deep impact on him, which is beautifully expressed, thus: "I see, I feel, the vastness of the agony of earth, the vainness of its joys, the mockery of all its best, the anguish of its worst."

We are told of Yashodhara's fearful dreams in which she heard the words: "The time is near! The time is near!" She saw that Prince Siddhartha was not in the bed beside her. Could it mean that "Thou shouldst forsake me, or be taken?" Prince Siddhartha's words were very comforting and reassuring, and were spoken not just as a lover to his beloved, but as someone who understood deeper aspect of love. Even if the dreams may be shadows of things to come, he reassured her, "Be sure, I loved and love Yashodhara." But, he also told her that even if her dream should come true and the worst should happen, "Take comfort still in deeming there may be a way to *peace on earth by woes of ours*," and thus prepared her to sacrifice and surrender personal happiness for the greater good of humanity. That his was not carnal, passionate love of a mortal, but that of one soul for another, and the depth of which was owing to his love for all creatures, he expressed by saying, "I loved thee most because I loved so well all living souls." When finally, Yashodhara fell asleep, with heavy heart Prince Siddhartha got up to leave behind the palace and every comfort and attachment. It was not easy for him to so leave his beloved wife. Sir Edwin Arnold gives a poignant description of Prince Siddhartha's farewell which only shows how exalted was his love. Thus,

So, with his brow he touched her feet, and bent
The farewell of fond eyes, unutterable,

Upon her sleeping face, still wet with tears;
And thrice around the bed in reverence,
As though it were an altar...
And thrice he made to go, but thrice came back,
So strong her beauty was, so large his love.

He requested the night "to press heavy" so that sleep should descend heavily upon her eyelids, so that her tears or her voice should not hold him back. His charioteer Channa tried to dissuade him saying that what help he could bring for his father and his wife, when already he would break their hearts and shatter their bliss by going away? His answer was, "Friend, that love is false which clings to love for selfish sweets of love," and that his love transcended fleeting joys. It was necessary for him to leave to show the way to greater, more lasting bliss. He left behind a message for his father that he should forget his son till he returned, "Ten times a prince, with royal wisdom won," and that it is only by leaving the world, in a way, that he could save the world.

Many have tried to view the Great Renunciation of the Buddha, from Yashodhara's point of view, whom he abandoned in the process. Kavita Sharma tries to bring together these diverse views in her article, "Yashodhara's View," which appeared in *The Speaking Tree* (May 6, 2012). Maithilisharan Gupt has written a book, *Yashodhara*. He sees Yashodhara as an anguished woman betrayed more by Buddha's lack of faith in her, as he *stole away* while she slept. She belonged to the warrior class where women smilingly sent their men to war, and she would not have been an obstacle in his path. When the Buddha returns after enlightenment Yashodhara refrains from rushing to welcome him and the Buddha is compelled to seek her. Yashodhara is cheated again when the Buddha takes away Rahula, their son, to join the *Sangha*, leaving her bereft one more time. In the book, *Buddha's Wife*, Gabriel Constans' entirely fictionalized story, Yashodhara seems to suggest that "Siddhartha did not comprehend the shame and agony he caused to thousands of women who were left alone to fend for themselves, because of

his teachings and the path shown by him.” How could these women explain why their men left them for some elusive search for happiness? The dying Yashodhara concludes that “Siddhartha was afraid of loving an individual for fear of hurt and possible pain of separation if that person ceased to love or left or died. His vulnerability made him safe in compassion and understanding for all than in being in love and getting involved with one,” and she forgives Siddhartha for having left her and Rahula.

We get a different and a higher perspective in *The Light of Asia*, which mentions that Lord Buddha recalled that in one of his earlier lives he was Ram, and Yashodhara was called Lakshmi. He was a merchant. They were poor and he decided to go far and wide, both by land and sea. His wife Lakshmi beseeched him not to leave her, saying, “How could love leave what it loved?” But he plunged into the sea and after the deadly strife with the creatures of the deep he found a rare pearl, such as only Kings could possess. But when he reached home, there was famine and his wife Lakshmi was dying of starvation. He was ready to give away the precious pearl in exchange of bread and water, so that he could save his wife. He did get food and water so that his wife could live, and then she said, “Lo! Thou didst love indeed!” He says that he could comfort her heart and mind by bringing the pearl and saving her life. But, after many life times when he deserted her once again to search for “still rarer pearl,” diving still deeper into the ocean, the pearl he obtained this time was priceless, it could not be spent or exchanged, because it was the pearl of wisdom, which must necessarily be given free. Just as Mount Meru is far higher and superior to an ant-hill, so also, the gift he had brought to her in this life was far higher than the gift of precious pearl in the earlier life. And his love, free from sense-attachment, was vaster than mortal love. Even to his own father, who grieved when he saw him in simple yellow robe and a begging bowl in hand, he said that he had returned becoming more than the mightiest of Kings, by love and self-control, bringing with him rich treasure. As he walked, with his father on one side, and his wife

Yashodhara on the other side, he shared his treasure of knowledge, which makes for peace and purity—the Four Noble Truths, which speak of the cause and cure of sorrow, and of the Noble Eightfold Path. Both, King Suddhodana and Yashodhara, drank in the mighty words, and entered the “Way of Peace.”

We could see that Yashodhara was made to realize by the Buddha's words and his presence, that his leaving her was worthwhile. There is a lovely description of the Buddha giving a discourse with Rahula on his lap and Yashodhara sitting at his feet, “her heartache gone,” and being able to sense higher love, which is not dependent on body and senses. At the end of his discourse which went on all night, Yashodhara was no longer crying and complaining, nor was Suddhodana a sad and disappointed father. Both were transformed inwardly, and filled with boundless joy, so that it was *Yashodhara herself* who pleaded that their son Rahula may also be accepted. In fact, all three—the King, Yashodhara and Rahula, join the *Sangha*. Thus:

The King...bowed low before his Son
Kissing his hem; and said, “Take me, O Son!
Lowest and least of all thy Company.”
And sweet Yashodhara, all happy now—
cried, “Give to Rahula—thou Blessed One!
The treasure of the Kingdom of thy Word
For his inheritance.” Thus passed these Three
Into the Path.

Mr. Judge mentions in *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* that we are born in the company of those with whom we have set up strong karmic affinity. In reassuming a body, other beings once known to the man arrive into incarnation at the same time, and bring into action affinities, attractions, and powers that can only act through them and him. Their influence cannot be calculated. It may be good or bad, and, just as he is swayed by them or as he sways the other being, so will work out the Karma of each (pp. 67-68). He explains: Suppose in some past life a person had established a deep and interior

intimacy with a friend. Death separates them, and in subsequent lives he pursues pleasures while this friend seeks truth and wisdom. After many lives they meet again and the old intimacy asserts itself. Then the former friend has a strange power to touch his inward life, and wake him up to search for truth and his own soul. *It is the unexpended affinity, and by its aid nature works his salvation.*

There are plenty of examples of great beings, leaving their family and friends, in search of truth. At every such parting there is agony and pain. When Rama was compelled to leave the kingdom, he departed when his father fell down unconscious—as if to make the suffering of parting a little more bearable. Separation seems to be one of those basic experiences, through which we all pass, some time or the other, to learn the lesson of detachment and Oneness. Every such separation could make us aware of our sentimental and physical attachment, and provide us an opportunity to transcend personal affection. Gradually, there is refinement of emotions, and passion becomes compassion. Suffering that the separation brings seems to be the most effective means of transcending our personal, superficial attachment through detached concern, and expanding the circle of love to embrace the whole of humanity.

One is not allowed to *desert* family duty in order to go on spiritual quest. Those who try to imitate the Buddha and desert their families in “search of happiness or truth,” should honestly ask themselves whether they are “running away,” overwhelmed by some difficulty or responsibility, *or* is it the result of temporary detachment caused by some incident in life? In the Buddha's case, the outer renunciation was but a reflection of *true inward renouncing*, which resulted from inner detachment. The message that he brought was that it is necessary to “renounce” the world, in order to be the better able to serve it. He showed this by his greatest sacrifice—instead of choosing the path of liberation or *moksha*—which is but exalted and glorious selfishness—he chose the path of renunciation, so as to help the suffering humanity.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THE LESSON OF THE ALABASTER BOWLS

“THE NEWS went quickly round the village that a Wise Man had come to it and was sitting under the great banyan tree by the well, prepared to answer any questions that might be put to him before continuing on his journey to the mountains. Two friends, Nirmal and Pulak, left their work and approached him together.

Nirmal was the first to venture. “What,” he asked, “is the best time for meditation?” But before the Wise Man could answer him, Pulak, from sheer nervousness, broke in with his own inquiry: “Pray, tell me, sir, how can I make my mind one-pointed?”

“I will answer you both,” said the Wise Man, “in part.” And he gave to each an appropriate verse from the *Gita*, then bade them go home and think it over, which they did with a certain amount of disappointment. “Why did he say ‘in part’?” they asked each other, but neither could guess the reason, and it was with a sense of lost opportunity that they returned to their dwellings and prepared for their night's rest.

But as they set out to work again early next morning, the Wise Man met them and presented each with a little alabaster bowl. “I go my way,” he said, “for I am on pilgrimage, but I would not do so leaving my answer to your questions incomplete. Take these bowls, my sons, and keep them carefully. It may be that, when we meet again, they shall be filled with nectar.”

He passed on, and the two friends gazed after him, mystified. How could two bowls be the final answer to their questions? They were obliged to turn back home and put the bowls in a safe place. “I will keep mine here,” said Nirmal, as he stood in the common living-room, where his wife performed her household tasks and the children played and he spent his scanty hours of leisure. He put the bowl on a high shelf. “If it is in our midst,” he said, “there is no danger of my forgetting it. I should not like to become indifferent to such a treasure. And it will be ready to hand when the Wise One returns.”

Sure enough, as time went by, Nirmal's attention turned often to the alabaster bowl. He prized it greatly and dusted it regularly. It was a constant joy to him, but what made it doubly precious was the thought that some day it might be filled with heavenly nectar."

Pulak likewise prized his bowl. It was so precious to him that he hid it away carefully in a secret place beneath the thatch and never even dared to take it out and look at it. "If it is meant to hold nectar," he said, "it must be kept for that. Its hour of fulfilment lies in the future. Meanwhile, knowing it is safe, I need not worry about it."

The monsoon came and went. At last, one night, when the full moon shone above the village, Nirmal heard a knock at his door, and on opening it found the Wise Man standing on the threshold. "Greetings, my son," said he benevolently. "I have come again, returning from my pilgrimage. Where is the alabaster bowl? Bring it forth and let us seek the house of Pulak."

Nirmal hastened to obey, and, carrying the bowl with the greatest care, he accompanied the Wise Man along the silent street to Pulak's door, which unlike his own, was not opened until the sage had knocked loudly, several times. Pulak, too, was asked to bring forth the alabaster bowl. He looked troubled at this, and hesitated. "Sir," he said, "that will take a little time. It is in a hiding place. I was anxious above all things to keep it safe. It is not far off, but I require a moment or two to get it."

"We shall wait," said the Wise Man gently, and he and Nirmal had to stand there for full ten minutes before Pulak reappeared with bowl in his hands. "I have not had time to clean it," he said ruefully, and Nirmal saw that the bowl was full of dust and bits of straw and even spider-webs. Granted, it was not broken, or even chipped. But it was far from being fit to hold the heavenly-sweet nectar.

The Wise Man made no comment. He led the way to the banyan tree, the two friends following him. The two friends stood before him. "Recall your questions," said the Wise Man, fixing his earnest gaze upon them. "You, Nirmal, asked what is the best time for meditation. You, Pulak, asked how to make your mind one-pointed.

The answers to both now lie in your alabaster bowls."

Nirmal and Pulak looked utterly perplexed. The Wise Man watched them for a moment, smiling gravely. "It seems," he said at last, "that I must explain to you, as to children. Listen carefully, my sons. The alabaster bowls symbolize the mind's capacity for meditation. When that is exercised, and Divine Truth is perceived, the bowls are filled with nectar. But the bowls must be ever ready. They must not be set aside as though intended only for some rare occasion, which may or may not come. As Nirmal kept his in the common living-room, he was always aware of it, in work and play alike, and could command the use of it instantly when it was required of him; moreover, having been cared for, it could be brought forth unsullied. Pulak treated *his* bowl mistakenly, though his motive for doing so was good. He thought of it as meant for one high purpose only—to hold nectar—and, with that in view, put it aside, until, like all things unused, it gathered dust and was unfit to receive the nectar, should that be given him.

"Therefore, the answer to the first question is this: there is no time that is not 'best' for meditation; and to the second: the mind becomes one-pointed through mindfulness—that is to say, through attentiveness, non-forgetting, and awareness.

"My sons, go home now," the Sage concluded, "and put these qualities into practice, having learnt the Lesson of the Alabaster Bowls."

Dhyana is described as ceaseless contemplation. We might meditate everyday but we find it difficult to integrate it to our day to day life. As a result, little things in life have the power of shattering our peace and disturbing our calm. We all experience this. If we do not get taxi as we set out for work, or after reaching office do not find the necessary papers which we had asked the subordinate to prepare and keep, we fly in rage—we fret and fume. Mr. Crosbie writes: "Your studies and your efforts are futile if you are disturbed

inwardly. The first thing then is to get calmness, and that can be reached by taking the firm position that nothing can really injure you, and that you are brave enough and strong enough to endure anything; also that all is a necessary part of your training.” Mr. Judge speaks of meditation practised at a set time, and the meditation of an entire lifetime. How are we going to arrange our life in a proper manner so that it will aid in our half-hour meditation? Our meditation undertaken at a fixed time can be aided when we have *line of life meditation*—a single thread of intention or desire running all through the life. But what is the “line of life’s meditation”? It is that on which the heart is set. If we follow spiritual discipline, making it our line of life’s meditation, setting our whole heart on it, then we are assured that we will be able to carry it to next life, it remains like an unbroken thread.

What is mindfulness? Our mind is generally diffused over many things. It is pulled in diverse directions by hundred cords of desire. The Mindfulness of Breathing practice helps us to cultivate concentration of mind, by counteracting distraction. “Right Mindfulness” or “Right Awareness,” means not only becoming aware of one’s surrounding, actions, and contents of one’s mind, but it implies becoming aware of one’s mental processes. It is very important for a spiritual aspirant to be not only good-hearted but also to study his own mental processes, so that he does not have one-track mind. The seventh step of the Eightfold Path is described as “Perfect awareness” or “Perfect mindfulness.” There are levels and levels of awareness. In *The Dhammapada* we are asked to be watchful or mindful of bodily-irritation, speech-irritation and mind-irritation. However, the first step of the Eightfold Path is *Samyak Dristi* or “Perfect Vision,” *i.e.*, continually being mindful or aware of three characteristics of conditioned existence. It means being aware that (1) Conditioned existence is suffering, (2) Conditioned existence is impermanent and (3) Conditioned existence is devoid of true Selfhood.

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA THE DOWNWARD COURSE—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Nirayavaggo* or “The Downward Course” or “Hell.” It contains verses which show how man can degrade himself by his evil ways. While the world may not see anything evil in his way of life, if it breaks the harmony and goes against the universal ethics, it is an evil act. In the spiritual discipline constant vigilance is required to keep away from evil. If we are lukewarm about the moral principles, we will find excuses which will increase in us the tendency to go against the principles and to make mistakes. And when we break the harmony, we will have to face the consequences. The Buddha warns: Think not lightly of the evil, saying that it will not come unto me. Even a water pot is filled by constant falling of drops of water. A man can become full of evil, if he gathers it little by little. It is a downward course that leads to hell. All spiritual traditions speak of man suffering in hell for his evil deeds, whether temporarily or eternally. However, heaven and hell are both the results of our actions done during life and have a beginning and an end. Neither the heaven nor the hell lasts eternally for any man, though the duration may be so long that it may appear almost like an eternity. It is said that virtue has its own reward and vice its punishment. The effects are already wrapped up in the cause. By our actions, we create for ourselves the heaven or hell on earth. By the very act of evil, we degrade ourselves. So also, when we overcome an evil tendency by the effort of will, we raise ourselves, be it ever so little. “Far hath he gone whose foot treads down one fond offence,” says the Buddha in *The Light of Asia*.

1. *He who reports what happened not goes to hell; also he who, having done a thing says, “I did not.” The after-death state of both is similar; for that state they embody their evil deeds. (306)*

To report what happened not is to bear false witness. In “Exodus”

in the *Old Testament* it is said: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” To be a false witness is legally an offence. The motive may be good or bad. But to tell a lie with a bad motive is to sin against the law of justice. Your one lie can send an innocent person to the jail or to gallows, and which must bring its consequences. Moreover, one cannot tell such a lie without destroying something noble within. The voice of conscience tries to stop us, but if we ignore it, it will then speak in terms of guilty conscience. The world may not find us out but our inner self knows that we have erred. It makes us feel uneasy.

However, if the motive is pure, the consequences are not likely to be severe. If a sage sees a person running away from an angry crowd, the sage may give wrong direction to the chasing crowd and save his life. It is a question of life of someone. Rules are not rigid. One has to take into account the consequences and then take decision. And having taken the decision we must be ready to face the consequences. As human beings, it is our prerogative to think and choose.

Sometimes we act impulsively without thinking, carried away by our strong desire or emotion, by our likes and dislikes. Then, afraid of the consequences, we may say we did not do what we did. We may appear to escape the consequences for the time being, but in reality, there is no getting away from the law of Karma which will bring to us the result of all our actions in this or future life. Therefore, our actions have to be deliberate and not impulsive. Also, we must have courage of conviction. H.P.B. tells us: “Never to do a thing by halves; *i.e.*, if he thinks it is the right things to do, let him do it openly and boldly, and if wrong, never touch it at all.” By telling a lie, we lose our integrity and become untrustworthy.

2. Many who wear the yellow robe are ill-natured and uncontrolled; such evil men are born of their evil deeds in hell. (307)

This is a warning for those who rush into the spiritual realm

without purity of motive or preparation. When someone becomes a monk and wears a yellow robe, he is declaring to himself and to the world his resolve to become spiritual. Such a resolution arouses opposition from his lower nature. “No man or woman knows his or her moral strength until it is tried,” writes H.P.B. The disciple is sure to face the trials, sooner or later, depending upon his earnestness and sincerity. It will bring to the surface every sleeping passion of his animal nature, as also, the germs of every good quality. Unless he has the right stuff in him, he is likely to fall. Therefore, it is better that the would-be disciple purifies his thoughts, desires and emotions to a reasonable extent by trying to live the life of a disciple even before he offers himself to be taken as a disciple. Then, when the actual trials and tests come, he is better prepared and will not fall prey to temptations. However, not all are thus prepared and therefore they succumb to temptations and vices of their lower nature. It could be lust for power or money, sensuality, sexuality, pride, anger, vanity, false speaking or even cruelty. For the monk who has resolved to live the spiritual life, consequences are bound to be far more severe as compared to worldly man who knows no better. Terrible are the consequences for the one who wears the yellow robe with ulterior motive. Such a man, instead of becoming an example for others to emulate, brings disrepute to the *sangha* or *monastery*, thereby turning away other aspiring candidates. *Light on the Path* mentions that “the disciple who undertakes the task, secretly hoping for fame or success, to appear as a teacher and apostle before the world, fails even before his task is attempted, and his hidden hypocrisy poisons his own soul, and the souls of those he touches. He is secretly worshipping himself, and this idolatrous practice must bring its own reward.” As a monk wearing the yellow robe, he is trusted by other people. But when he breaks this trust by violating any of the rules of discipleship, the consequences are grave. An evil person can find solace by trying to become spiritual, but if the person who wears the yellow robe becomes evil, he is following the downward course that may lead him to his spiritual death.

3. *Better it were to swallow an iron ball, red-hot and flaming, than to live a wicked and unrestrained life eating the food of the state. (308)*

In the third chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna expounds the principle of reciprocity or interdependence in which each person makes a contribution in the work of the world, thereby supporting and benefiting one another. But the one who “sinfully delighting in the gratification of his passions, doth not cause this wheel thus already set in motion to continue revolving, liveth in vain,” says Krishna. It is better for the *tamasic* man to swallow an iron ball, red-hot and flaming, than to live a wicked and unrestrained life, eating the fruits of labour of others. How can we expect the work to go on if everyone refuses to make contribution, choosing only to enjoy the fruits of the labour of other people? Such a man lives without purpose, neglecting his duty. By living a wicked and unrestrained life, he becomes of the demoniacal nature. Shri Krishna tells us that the “wicked among men, the deluded and the low-minded, deprived of spiritual perception by this illusion, and inclining toward demoniacal dispositions, do not have recourse to me.”

4. *Four things befall the reckless man who courts another’s wife—access of demerit, comfortless sleep, thirdly blame and lastly hell. (309)*

5. *There is access of demerit and declivity to an evil state for the short-lived pleasure of the frightened in the arms of the frightened. Outwardly is a heavy penalty from the ruler. Therefore let no man think of the wife of another. (310)*

Buddhism recommends observance of *Panchashila* (Five Rules) to all. In the chapter on “Impurity,” we are told that “he who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who, in this world, takes what is not given to him, who consorts with another man’s wife, who is addicted to intoxicating drinks—he, even in this world, digs up the very root of his own life.” These rules were also given by Moses to people: “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not

steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.”

Particular emphasis has been placed on the rule of not committing adultery. Jesus goes a step further and says that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. He says that it is better to pluck the offending eye; it is better to cut the offending hand from the body. “It is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” The reason for this is explained in the Bible thus:

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth into his neighbour’s wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. *Men* do not despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; but *if* he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. *But* whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy *is* the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts. (*Proverbs: 6*)

In those days, adultery was considered to be a great sin. It gave rise to anxiety and fear of being caught. If discovered, it brought blame, demerit and penalty from the ruler. Life for such a person would become a living hell—all these for “the short-lived pleasure of the frightened in the arms of the frightened.” Hence the Buddha urges: “Let no man *think* of the wife of another.”

(To be concluded)

NUMBERS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

V

“NUMBER is, as the great writer [Balzac] thought, an Entity, and at the same time, a Breath emanating from what he called God and what we call the ALL; the breath which alone could organise the physical Kosmos, ‘where nought obtains its form but through the Deity, which is an effort of Number,’” writes H.P.B. When Number is said to be an Entity, it represents the hierarchy of intelligent, creative powers, on various planes, which are involved in the manifestation of the cosmos from the subjective to the objective plane. There is a class of “Builders” or the invisible but intelligent Masons, who fashion matter according to the Ideal plan ready for them in the Cosmic Mind or Divine Ideation.

“Deity geometrizes,” says Plato. In *Notes on the Bagavad-Gita*, Mr. Crosbie elaborates this statement by pointing out that from the “point” whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere, a radiation equal in all direction begins and establishes a circumference, thus producing a sphere within which the activity of the “point” is confined. The “point” spreads out horizontally and becomes a diameter, dividing the sphere into positive and negative hemispheres as basis for action and reaction. Similarly extension of the point vertically forms the cross within the circle. The lines of forces proceeding from the center and tending to return to it begin the revolution of the sphere with vertical and horizontal lines extending towards each other and thus forming ansated cross (or *swastika*), and finally the square within the circle. He goes on to explain how the figure of cube, pentagram or five-pointed star and six-pointed star would be seen within the sphere.

Interestingly, this is part of the explanation of Arjuna’s *Viswarupa Darshan* or seeing the Divine Form as containing all forms. The Divine Form is like the spherical mirror which reflects all things. We might consider Arjuna’s *Viswarupa Darshan* to be a glimpse into the *noumenal* or archetypal world, in which all that is in

manifestation, exists as abstract forms. Thus, a four-pointed star is a symbol of animal kingdom. It is the symbol of a being that has not yet developed *Manas* or mind. A five-pointed star or Pentagram is the symbol of mind. It also symbolizes a human being who is not an Adept. The Pentagram is an emblem of the *microcosm* or “little universe,” or man mirroring the *macrocosm* (the great cosmos). It is the sign of supremacy of human intellect or spirit over brutal matter. The five-pointed star inverted or upside down represents dark side and also symbolizes death, writes Mr. Judge.

Six-pointed star symbolizes *macrocosm* or the great cosmos. It is represented as “double triangle” composed of two triangles, white and black. It is known in Europe as “Solomon’s Seal,” and in India as the “Sign of Vishnu” or *Sri Chakra*. These two triangles are interlaced. The tip of the *white* triangle pointing upwards, represents Spirit. The lower point of its *black* triangle pointing downward, represents matter. The two lower points or angles of the white triangle symbolize, “spirit falling into generation,” or pure spirit getting involved in the phenomenal world.

The *two* triangles with *two* colours show that duality supervenes in the manifested universe in terms of Spirit and Matter or *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, as also, darkness and light, heat and cold, pleasure and pain. Both man and nature are triune. These three aspects of man and Nature are: Body, Soul and Spirit; or purely *spiritual*, purely *material* or physical, and the middle astral or indwelling energizing nature. The trinity of Nature and man is depicted by an equilateral triangle, with three equal sides, because these three principles are diffused throughout the universe in equal proportions. These three principles or three aspects—spirit, matter and middle nature—are depicted as *three lights* and *three energies*, viz., creative, preservative and destructive. The *first light* which infuses conscious life throughout the universe represents creative energy. The *second light* or energy, which continually produces (astral) forms out of cosmic pre-existent matter, represents preservative energy. The *third light* produces universe of gross physical matter, which forever recedes

from the central spiritual light, and hence leads to darkness, evil and death, and thus represents destructive energy, explains H.P.B.

Dr. Jeffrey Weeks, a mathematician in New York, argues that our Universe resembles a ball of mirrors with 12 sides. *Dodecahedron* is a solid figure with twelve faces. Theosophy affirms the 12-faced (*Dodecahedron*) shape of the universe. Mr. T. Subba Row explains it in the article, "The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac." *Makaram* or Capricorn is the tenth sign of the Zodiac. Generally, the term "*Dasadisa*" or ten sides is used by the Sanskrit writers to denote ten faces or sides of the universe. Thus, the tenth sign of the zodiac is intended to represent faces of the universe, and indicates that the figure of the universe is bounded by *Pentagons*. "If we take pentagons as regular pentagons... the figure of the material universe will, of course, be a *Dodecahedron*, the geometrical model imitated by the Demiurgos in constructing the material universe," writes T. Subba Row. H.P.B. affirms that our universe was constructed on the geometrical figure of the *dodecahedron* (*S.D.*, I, 340). Further, he mentions that just as the microcosm or man, has his *sthula sarira* or physical body built on the model body called *Suskshma sarira*, so also, Macrocosm or universe has its own gross body and subtle body. The visible universe is the gross or physical body. The ancients held that as a substratum for this visible universe there is another universe, which perhaps may be called the "universe of Astral Light," which is the real universe or *noumenal* universe or the soul of the visible universe. It has been hinted in certain passages of the Veda and the Upanishads that this hidden universe of Astral Light may be represented by an *Icosahedron*. *Icosahedron* is a solid figure with twenty faces. He writes that though the figures of *Icosahedron* and *Dodecahedron* appear to be very dissimilar to each other, there exists a very peculiar connection between them which can be understood by the geometrical construction. Thus, we may describe a sphere about *Icosahedron* and then draw perpendiculars from the centre of the sphere on the faces or sides of the *Icosahedron* and then extend these perpendiculars so that they meet the surface of

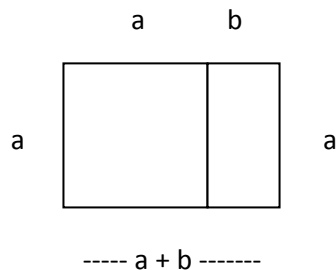
the sphere. If we join the points of intersection then *Dodecahedron* can be formed within the sphere. By a similar process *Icosahedron* may be constructed from a *Dodecahedron*, writes T. Subba Row, referring to Todhunter's Spherical Trigonometry.

All cosmic phenomena were referred to by the Rosicrucians as animated Geometry. Geometry is defined as relative arrangement of objects and parts. It is relation or properties of dots, lines, surfaces and solids. *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 97) mentions that Nature geometrizes in all her manifestations. On p. 594, (*S.D.*, II) we are told that first came three or the triangle, and this is corroborated in mineralogy, botany and geology. In the process of crystallization of salt in the salt solution the molecules deposit themselves by assuming triangular shape, in terms of pyramids and cones. The second geometrical shape in the manifested Nature is square or cube. The particles of fire are pyramidal while that of earth are cubicle. Flame assumes pyramidal shape. The pine tree, one of the most primitive trees, has pyramidal shape. When snow crystals are viewed under a microscope we find that they appear as double or treble six-pointed stars. The nucleus is like a miniature star within the large one. H.P.B. mentions that the earliest forms of elementary geometry might have been inferred from the arrangement of heavenly bodies and their groupings (*S.D.*, I, 320). Thus, in each constellation stars are arranged in certain shape. The heavenly bodies, as they move in their orbits around the sun, make certain angles with each other, and which produce definite effect on earth.

We are all familiar with Pi or π which represents the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. Pi is an irrational number with infinite digits after the decimal point. But very few of us are familiar with another number 1.618 called Golden Ratio, represented by the Greek letter Phi, which is obtained when a line is divided in a special way. When a line of certain length (say A) is divided into two parts, one large (say B) and one small (say C), there is reached a certain unique point, at which the ratio of the large piece (of length B=0.618) to the small piece (of length C=0.382) is exactly the same

as the ratio of the entire line to the large piece, and at this point the Golden Ratio of both, *i.e.*, A/B and B/C is 1.618 or Phi. This “golden” number, 1.61803399, is also known as the Golden Proportion, Golden Mean, Golden Section and Divine Proportion. It was written about by Euclid in “Elements” around 300 B.C., by Luca Pacioli, a contemporary of Leonardo Da Vinci, in “*De Divina Proportione*” in 1509, and by Dan Brown in 2003 in his novel, “The Da Vinci Code.” The description of “golden proportion” as “Divine Proportion” is seen to be apt, because it unveils the hidden harmony and connectedness in various forms in nature. Thus, for instance, the positions and proportions of the key dimensions of many animals, such as body sections of ants and other insects, as also, spirals of sea shells are said to be based on Phi or Golden Ratio. The 16th-century philosopher Heinrich Agrippa drew a man over a pentagram inside a circle, implying a relationship to the golden ratio.

Another way of getting the Golden Ratio is by using the Fibonacci series. The Fibonacci series of numbers begin with zero, to which 1 is added. The subsequent numbers are obtained by adding two previous numbers, giving Fibonacci series as: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, and so on. When each number in the series is divided by the one preceding it, then we very nearly get the number for Phi or Golden Ratio. The further we proceed, we get better and better approximation to Phi. Fibonacci numbers frequently, but not always, appear in the numbers of petals in a flower. Thus, for instance, buttercups have 5 petals; lilies and iris



have 3 petals; some delphiniums have 8; corn marigolds have 13 petals and daisies can be found with 34, 55 or even 89 petals. There are plants that show Fibonacci numbers in the arrangements of the leaves around their stems.

The above figure is called golden rectangle, whose sides are in golden proportion. A golden rectangle with long side “a” and short side “b” when placed adjacent to a square with sides of length “a,” will produce a similar golden rectangle, having longer side “a+b” and shorter side a, with $(a+b)/a = a/b = 1.618$. Many of the proportions of the famous ancient Greek temple, the Parthenon, are alleged to exhibit the golden ratio. The Parthenon’s facade, for instance, is said to be circumscribed by golden rectangles. Some scholars do not agree with this view. Likewise, the Great Pyramid of Egypt appears to embody the Golden Ratio, in the ratios of its base, height and hypotenuse, but it is difficult to prove conclusively, because we do not find the mention of Phi in ancient Egyptian writings. The Swiss architect Le Corbusier, centred his design philosophy on systems of harmony and proportion. Le Corbusier’s faith in the mathematical order of the universe was closely bound to the golden ratio and the Fibonacci series.

H.P.B. draws our attention to the works of Vitruvius Pollio’s works on architecture, in which he gives the rules of proportion, which were taught *at initiations*, and says that *there is deep esoteric significance hidden in every rule and law of proportion*. “Modern architects may not altogether have neglected those rules, but they have superadded enough empirical innovations to destroy those just proportions. It is Vitruvius who gave to posterity the rules of construction of the Grecian temples erected to the immortal gods.” She says that Vitruvius Pollio was an *initiate*, and his ten books on architecture can only be studied esoterically. The Druidical circles, the Dolmen, the Temples of India, Egypt and Greece are all works of initiated priest architects. (*S.D.*, I, 208-209 fn.)

(Concluded)

LIBERATION—NIRVANA—MOKSHA

IN THE INDIAN religious tradition *Nirvana*, *Moksha*, *Mukti*, *Apavarga*, *Paramapada* are all synonymous terms. They refer to the state of the freedom of a Soul, won by its own efforts and merit, from all fetters which had bound it to endless transmigrations in conditioned existence, and thus resume its original, unconditioned, Absolute existence as pure Spirit. In the Jewish mystic tradition it is referred to as the “Palace of Love,” and the Gnostics spoke of it as the “Pleroma of Eternal Light.” It is the “Kingdom of Heaven” spoken of by Jesus. In modern usage it is referred as Liberation, Emancipation, Enlightenment, and so on.

It is not possible to define or describe this sublime state. Yet the sacred books speak of it in various ways. When, therefore, studying them we must remember that the descriptions are only metaphoric expressions used in the books to inspire and aid seekers of truth in their efforts towards spiritual culture. *The Voice of the Silence* describes this state of culmination of human perfection as, “Changeless change—Nirvana, the glorious state of Absoluteness, Bliss past human thought.” One who attains to that state is an emancipated Soul, who no more incurs involuntary rebirths, for he has passed from darkness into Light, from mortality into immortality, and rent asunder the veil of *Maya* which had hid from him Reality.

A question that is commonly asked is that if the Soul is originally pure, free and indissoluble portion of the Supreme Spirit, which is Eternal and all-perfect, why did it have to enter into bondage to material existence at all with all its miseries? It is a profound question; a quest of the answer to which will lead to a revelation of the whole philosophy of the meaning and purpose of existence. At the dawn of every manifestation of the universe—in the endless series of its successive appearance from and disappearance into the Unknown Absolute Cause—Souls emanate from the Universal Soul which is One, like sparks from the one flame or drops in the ocean, under the impulse of Karmic and Cyclic Law. Souls being of the same essence

as the parent essence, from which they emanate, they tend to reunite with the latter. But, the *Secret Doctrine* teaches, the separation having once occurred re-union of each Soul with the primal source is possible only through its conscious effort of will and moral choices checked by its Karma through long cycles of personal terrestrial existence and rebirths. This inevitable law is expressed in an allegory in the Jewish mystic book, the *Zohar*:

The soul is made to plead before God: “Lord of the Universe! I am happy in this world, and do not wish to go into another world, where I shall be handmaid, and be exposed to all kinds of pollutions.” The doctrine of fatal necessity, the everlasting immutable law, is asserted in the answer of the Deity: “Against thy will thou becomest an embryo, and against thy will thou art born.” (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 110)

It is evident that in the universe, under the sway of absolute justice, a god born in the world with the innate pure, stainless and superhuman virtues in the face of struggling and suffering humanity is unthinkable, as it is anomalous and an impossibility in Nature. It is in the logic of evolutionary and Karmic law that “Perfection, to be fully such, must be born out of imperfection, the *incorruptible* must grow out of the corruptible, having the latter as its vehicle and basis and contrast” (*S.D.*, II, 95). Though the Soul, the “heaven-born,” is all potent on its own pure *formless* spiritual plane, yet when invested with matter on our differentiated earth-plane in the body, it loses its primordial purity and perfection, because of its contact with, and the consequent delusion caused by, the blinding and binding power of qualities which proceed from *Prakriti*-matter, and the great duality of Nature. Henceforth, the embodied Soul has to free itself from the bonds of matter through knowledge gained, in degrees, in the great school of life through many rebirths. Purity and perfection have to be earned by means of self-conquest in the fire of trials, tribulations and temptations of earth-life through cycles of reincarnation impelled by the law of Karma.

We, the embodied Souls, are forever seeking bliss, which is the very essence of our true self and nature, which we have lost after falling into generation. But the natural longing of man to recover the lost state is forever being evaded by the great deluder—the simple human nature—“the misguided, sensual and vicious nature, which *men, not nature, created*” by that insatiable, self-perpetuating, thirst—*Tanha* for sensuous personal existence and enjoyment in matter (*S.D.*, II, 216fn.). Hence we are seeking in vain happiness outside of us—in material comforts, emotional satisfaction, intellectual possessions and moral virtues. Experiences of life are constantly teaching us the lesson that in none of these can *true* happiness be found. It is only when ages upon ages of experience through repeated reincarnations has burnt into the soul the realization of the impermanence of all things, and that the permanent happiness is to be sought within himself that man begins to look inwards towards the Self, with reverted sight, seeking deathlessness. It is then that man begins to long for final liberation—Nirvana. Says *Light on the Path*: “No man desires to see that light which illumines the spaceless soul until pain and sorrow has driven him away from the life of ordinary humanity. First he wears out pleasure; then he wears out pain—till, at last, his eyes become incapable of tears.” The Teacher explains that “to be incapable of tears is to have faced and conquered the simple human nature, and to have attained an equilibrium which cannot be shaken by personal emotions.” (pp. 35-36)

Nirvana cannot be conferred or granted. It is an old saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is to be taken by violence. From the time the Soul begins to seek Self-knowledge to its final consummation, however, ages must pass. *The Voice of the Silence* teaches that an Arhat does not become one in that birth when for the first the Soul begins to long for final liberation. The conquering of the desires of the individual soul is a great and a difficult victory. He has to fight and conquer the army of formidable enemies resident in his own human nature—his own passions and desires which he shares in common with mankind as a whole. The passion in nature, the quality

of *Rajas*, surrounds the universe, its empire is not only over the senses and organs but extends over the thinking principle and the discriminative faculty also, and which deludes the “Lord of the body,” teaches the *Gita*. One who aspires to *Nirvana* must kill out this great foe of man resident in himself. “Thus knowing what is greater than the discriminating principle and strengthening the lower by the Higher Self, do thou of mighty arms slay this foe which is formed of desire and is difficult to seize.” (*Gita*, III)

When the army of the great deluder, Mara, is conquered at one level it reappears transformed at the next higher subtler level, till the very threshold of *Nirvana*. We see in the life of the Buddha, how, walled in with perfect virtue, he heeded not the whisperings of the Mara’s host, and attained Enlightenment.

There is a general misconception that *Nirvana* means extinction of the Soul and that the *Nirvanees* (the one who attains to *Nirvana*) never returns. The true teaching is that it is extinction only in one sense, and that is, the extinction of the illusive separative *personal Ego* or *personality*, the matrix of *Avidya*. The Immortal Individuality is not annihilated but merges into the Universal Soul, like drop merging into the ocean, from which it first emerged, for rest and bliss for as long a period as the great cycle of manifestation—*Manvantara*—lasts. But the Ego re-emerges as a still more perfect being on a far higher plane, when the great Law calls forth all things back into activity at the end of the period of universal dissolution, *Pralaya*. (*S.D.*, II, 80, and I, 266) The returning *Nirvanees* are perfected men who having overcome bondage to conditioned existence live in spirit and take active part in the governance of worlds and evolution of humanity, and periodically come into the world of men as *Avatars*, philosopher-kings, Teachers and benefactors.

Sublime perfection is the state of *Nirvana*, which is the much longed for ideal of many a devotee, yet the “Buddhas of Perfection” spurn it as an unworthy one, as the way to selfish bliss, since the one who enters *Nirvana* will be unable to help men and all sentient

beings in their struggle and sorrows. Therefore, they choose a much higher ideal, which is, after having won the right to enter the supreme bliss, they renounce the great reward, and remain invisibly in their permanent subtle bodies, within the sphere of the earth, in touch with humanity, in order to help their struggling brethren in the arduous path of evolutionary progress towards perfection. This is the “Path of Renunciation,” preferred by the Buddhas of Compassion. One is the “Open Way” leading to bliss supreme, Nirvana. The other is the “Secret Way” which “leads also to Paranirvanic bliss—but at the close of *Kalpas* without number; Nirvanas gained and lost from boundless pity and compassion for the world of deluded mortals.” (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 46)

Though the attainment of *Nirvana* is a far off ideal for seekers of truth, yet it is of the greatest importance for the devotees to choose between the two ideals at the initial stage itself. This is because the choice one makes at the threshold of Nirvana, ages hence—whether he will accept the great reward, and don the glorious *Dharmakaya* vesture, which then will be to him oblivion of the world and men for ever, *or*, will renounce it for the sake of suffering fellowmen, and don the *Nirmanakaya*’s humble robe—will be determined by his thoughts, aspirations, choices, motive and training during the whole term of his long journey to the Holy Seat. Only the highest motive can lead to the highest place—which is greater than *Nirvana*—through self-sacrificial labour for man’s liberation for *Kalpas* without end. The highest motive is contained in the sacred ancient solemn Pledge which the Bodhisattvas of the Secret Heart take:

NEVER WILL I SEEK NOR RECEIVE PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL SALVATION. NEVER
WILL I ENTER INTO FINAL PEACE ALONE; BUT FOR EVER AND EVERYWHERE
WILL I LIVE AND STRIVE FOR THE REDEMPTION OF EVERY CREATURE
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

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 memory? How does our memory work?

Answer: H.P.B. aptly describes memory as the despair of the materialist, the enigma of the psychologist and the sphinx of science, because of their inability to understand the nature of mind and potentialities of Higher Mind. Brain is the instrument used by mind. There are three types of memory—*Remembrance*, *Recollection* and *Reminiscence*, and in order to understand soul-memory or reminiscence one must accept the existence of Higher Mind.

Broadly speaking, “Memory is an innate power in thinking beings, and even in animals, of reproducing past impressions by an association of ideas principally suggested by objective things or by some action on our external sensory organs.” Remembrance and recollection are dependent on more or less normal and healthy functioning of our *physical* brain. *Remembrance* is spontaneous remembering of the past impressions or ideas, with little or no effort. But when we remember by an effort of the will, *or* when we recall because something in the outside suggests itself to us, it is called *recollection*. For instance, we may be reminded of our trip to Switzerland on seeing a picture of snowy mountains. *Reminiscence* is soul-memory, it is the direct perception of what was, and is not dependent upon brain—the brain serves as a sort of filter or translator of impressions.

What is the seat of memory? Brain is not the seat of memory. Astral Light is the tablet or repository of the unseen universe, where every fleeting impression, feeling, thought and action as every pulsation of the visible cosmos is recorded. Astral Light is the tablet

of memory of the animal man while *Akasa* is the tablet of memory of the spiritual Ego. Memory, says H.P.B., is that power which every human being unconsciously exercises, to look with inner sight into the astral light and there see the images of past sensations and impressions. In other words, *memory is unconscious looking into and reading the impressions in the astral light.*

The brain cells are *receivers* and *conveyors* of memory, but not their preservers or *retainers*. When it is said that one has lost his memory, or that it is weakened, it is partly because the memory cells have become enfeebled. H.P.B. gives an analogy. Through the window glass we are able to see the objects outside, but if the windowpane is cracked, we shall see only distorted images and if it is replaced with cardboard, we are unable to see anything. However, the objects outside the window have not disappeared and can be seen once the window pane is repaired. So, too, the Universal Memory preserves every impression.

Besides the enfeebling or degeneration of the brain cells, poor memory may have something to do with careful observation and *notation*. Mr. Crosbie defines memory as the faculty of perceiving the registration. Effectiveness of physical memory depends upon effectiveness of physical registry. We have many careless habits of letting things impress us without careful notation. For instance, people often look at their watch and put it back in the pocket. If you ask, “What time is it?” they have to look again, because first time when they looked at the watch, they saw what time it *was not*, and hence the observation did not result in any clear and definite *notation*. Probably, this is the reason why in olden days importance was given to “repetition” in the learning process, so as to create clear and definite impression. Impressions that are deeply imprinted can be easily recollected. Thus, the secret of good memory is “attention.”

Our body is made up of atoms, and atoms are made up of “lives.” Every atom has a life and memory of its own. Memory in the “lives” when *innate* is called instinct. However, we can train the “lives” of the body to perform certain tasks—for instance, typing, playing

musical instruments, etc. The “lives” in the fingertips retain the memory, are habituated, so that after several attempts we are able to perform the task effortlessly, and almost automatically.

Mr. Judge explains that instinct is *recollection*, divisible into physical and mental memory. In the case of a person who might have burnt himself in a particular life, his physical and mental memory is so impressed by that experience that in the next life he will instinctively stay away from the fire; and we call this instinctive fear of fire. In the same way the *Kama* principle can be given such strong impressions that in the coming lives we have instinctive likes and dislikes.

Question: Our memory is so weak that we cannot remember what we ate yesterday. How, then, is it possible to look into our past incarnations and remember our past lives?

Answer: Memory is the record pertaining to a particular existence. At every new birth there is *new* body, *new* brain and *new* memory. In a new birth a new record pertaining to that existence is developed, which has no remembrance of past lives. However, our Higher Ego is omniscient and has the memory of all our past lives. Reminiscence is the memory of the soul or the Higher Ego. At the solemn moment of death, even when the death is sudden, every man sees the whole of his life marshalled up before him, in its minutest detail. For one short instant the personal ego becomes one with the Individual and *all-knowing* Ego. “At the last moment, the whole life is reflected in our memory and emerges from all the forgotten nooks and corners, picture after picture, one event after the other. The dying brain dislodges memory with a strong, supreme impulse.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 25, p. 1*)

At the time of physical death, all the impressions and memories of lifetime are revived and focused or centred in the astral body (the model or design body for the physical), which survives the death of the physical body for a while. Then a process of sifting of the memories takes place. Those memories, which are consubstantial to the Ego, in terms of moral quality, are absorbed by it and built

into permanent memory. Those experiences that are of lower, personal and selfish character remain in the astral body, and gradually disperse as the astral body disintegrates—leaving behind *skandhas* or congeries of lives with certain impressions. These *skandhas* are of five types and they combine to form a new personality, determining its limits and capacities. However, the purely *personal* memories of previous incarnation is “lost” during the vast period of 1000 to 1500 years that the Ego spends in *Devachan* or *Swarga*.

For soul-memory to become available in our waking consciousness, the brain must be made porous and receptive so that it could be impressed with this memory of the past. For this, it is essential to think and act along right lines during waking consciousness. Spiritually advanced beings such as the Buddhas and Initiates remember all their past incarnations.

But then how to account for the instances of individuals who remember certain incidents from their past lives, which are proved to be correct? Theosophy teaches that if a child dies very young, before the Egoic consciousness has had the opportunity to acquire any food for assimilation in *Devachan*, then that Ego is born very early and often with the same *astral body*, on which the memories of the previous short life, just lived, were impressed. These memories may be transmitted to the waking brain consciousness of the new body while the person is still young. Hence, we have stray instances of some children being able to recall fragments of their last life.

There are instances, when people claim to remember, what they think is *their* past life. These are *sensitives*, with the ability to see in the Astral Light of the earth, wherein are impressed the records of all actions, thoughts and feelings of whole humanity. As these sensitives are not fully trained to look into the astral light, their glimpses are partial and indefinite, and at times what they *claim* to remember from the past life has no relation to *their* own past life. It may be simply picking up of the impressions of the life of another Ego.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Do you never begin because you fear the end? A boy, sitting with a plate full of food he loved in front of him, said that he could not bring himself to start eating it, because the very thought that it will soon be over upset him. Quite casually he had uttered the universal truth, *viz.*, in every beginning is the end. As soon as we are born the only surety is that life will end one day. Every time we sit down to read a good book or watch a good movie, we are aware that it will come to an end, after few hours or few days, writes Vinita Dawra Nangia. She says that she has piled up a lot of good books and DVDs, and is happy to look at her accumulated treasure, instead of sitting down to watch the DVDs or read the books, because of the fear of good-times ending.

It would be shameful to just stand at the shore without jumping into the ocean to plumb the depths. We must be ready to move from one experience to another, trusting that our lives may have better experiences to unfold. Every end is a promise of a new and better beginning. Sometimes we can see and experience the “end” without having a chance to make a “beginning,” as when a boy covets a girl he can never have, or when someone desires a life he is sure he can never live. That should make us realize that we are lucky to be able to make a beginning.

Let us not be *afraid* of the “end,” but let us be *aware* of it. In fact, it is always good to remember, “this, too shall pass.” The awareness that all states of life, happy and sad, are temporary helps us to live a balanced life. Life is a series of beginnings and endings. When one book, movie, experience or job ends, another is almost always waiting for us ahead. The experience we undergo in every such cycle has the potential to lead us to further growth and evolution. If in every beginning lies the end, then it is also true that in every ending there is a promise of a better beginning. The end of childhood leads to the beginning of promising adult life; the end of passion in marriage could well be the beginning of abiding love and care; with

the end of one assignment we move over to another one with value addition, writes Vinita Nangia. (*Times Life!* [*Sunday Times of India*], March 24, 2103)

Lord Buddha points out that so much of our suffering is because we fail to realize impermanence of conditioned existence. There is always *potential suffering* attached to everything in this world. Something may be a source of joy, at a given moment, but sooner or later, you may either have to give it up or it may be destroyed. Our body, our ideas and emotions, all keep changing. We try to derive pleasure out of sensations. *Light on the Path* says: “In sensation no permanent home can be found, because change is the law of this vibratory existence. It is useless to pause and weep for a scene in a kaleidoscope which has passed.” Things and pleasures of the world are as fleeting as the scene or pattern formed in a kaleidoscope. The cycle of beginning and end is the cycle of change. Lord Shiva is said to dance jubilantly at the time of destruction (dissolution) of the universe. He is said to destroy things under one form but to recall them to life under another more perfect one. The cells of the body die and are replaced by new ones and so too, when old leaves fall off, new leaves take their place. When life of personality ends, spiritual life begins.

A meaningful human existence depends upon the prospect of death and its attendant joys and anguish, without which freedom and action have no value. In fact, a story or a poem must also have a moving and conclusive end. Are we not bored when a television serial drags on endlessly? In the poem *Tithonus*, by Tennyson, the Greek God laments his unnatural longevity, saying, “After many a summer dies the swan. Me only cruel immortality consumes.” “All that lives must one day die, passing from Nature to Eternity,” writes Shakespeare. Life is related to form, and form must die. Death of a physical form is a necessity. The permanent spiritual aspect in us—the soul—feels imprisoned during life. For the soul, “Death comes as a deliverer and a friend.”

What is the meaning of Life? In Douglas Adam’s *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, a race of hyper-intelligent beings built a supercomputer to find a satisfactory answer to the meaning of life. After 7.5 million years the computer delivers the answer: 42. The creators of the computer realize that the answer was unintelligible because they had asked the ultimate question concerning life and the Universe, and so to figure out the nature of the question itself, they built an even larger computer. This suggests that the question of the meaning of life is vast and deep, in which we are trying to find out “why we are here,” but that itself implies two things: (1) What are the origins of human life? (2) What is the purpose of human existence? The answer of theistic religion is that the Universe and man were created by God, the supernatural creator, and that our purpose on earth is to submit to the will of God and fulfil his divine plan. In 1859, Charles Darwin proposed the theory that life is a result of blind, purposeless natural processes. Since our existence is the result of an accident in nature, we need not search for any direction or meaning to life. An account of evolution put forward by Richard Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, describes individual organisms to be the biological vessels built from DNA blueprints and the sole purpose of life is to perpetuate the existence of our genes.

The “existentialist” philosophers, such as, Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer and Sigmund Freud agreed that there is a crisis of meaning, and seemed to suggest that life does not come with a pre-assigned meaning. If our lives have meaning, it is something we endow them with. An American philosopher, ED Klemke wrote, “I, for one, am glad that Universe has no meaning, for thereby is man all the more glorious...this leaves me free to forge my own meanings.” This is a subjective view, in which each one of us constructs the meaning by interpreting life in his own way, so that one person might get meaning from hiking in the mountains, and another one from building model trains.

Others believe that life must be inherently meaningful. After all,

some things are inherently more meaningful such as, creativity and morality, as compared to chewing gum or trimming toenails. There is an objective purpose and meaning to life, and which Plato said was pursuit of the highest form of Knowledge. In Plato's view, contemplating the meaning of life *is* the meaning of life. In Aristotle's view, the meaning of life is the pursuit of happiness, or "eudaimonia," through the creative fulfilment of our human talents and potentials. Some have wondered if the happiness derived from loving family relationships can make life meaningful. Probably, the question of meaning of life, which has perplexed thinkers for millennia, will never go away, writes Dan Cossins, a British freelance journalist. (*BBC Knowledge*, April 2013)

Life is intrinsically meaningful, worthwhile and valuable, and it is left to each individual to realize and sense the value and meaning of life. 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 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."

There is a meaning, pattern and plan for the universe and for human life in general. But life of a particular person does not become meaningful because human life *in general* has a meaning. 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. Theosophy says with sage Patanjali that the whole universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. The purpose of life is to learn and it is all made up of learning. There is in each one of us, "will to meaning." 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 more one forgets himself in serving a cause or in loving another person, the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself, writes Victor Frankl in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

There have been many love stories since creation. People reaffirm and validate these stories because they reaffirm and validate their faith in the power of love. Whether Platonic or passionate, love and its stories remind us of the innate capacity to love—to love steadfastly, magnificently, for all time. Love stories are also symbolic of the Hero's Journey, our common quest for transcendence and transformation. In almost all the love stories the protagonist chooses love, though it may appear to be impractical, unwise, or dangerous, and sticks to his choice unflinchingly. In the course of that love, almost all have to contend with social censure, familial turbulence, and the very play of destiny. Love gives them courage, strength, endurance and heroism.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus and Penelope are separated for around 20 years, just after a few years of marriage. It was love which urged Penelope to wait endlessly for her husband. They could both have led a different life, saved themselves heart aches and agony of eternal wait, but then, that would not have been love. The mythological love story of Radha-Krishna might be one of the greatest love stories ever. They are intrinsically one and appear as two to manifest the quality of pure, transcendental love. There were no expectations from each other and that is what selfless love is all about. There is the legendary love story of *Laila-Majnu*. A man's eternal quest for his love that is beyond his reach, this tale from Arabic literature is an allegory for the soul seeking union with the Supreme. "These eternal love stories revolve around people who gave up their all in love....Most of these stories ended with death or separation but the lingering emotion is that love still prevailed. It

did not die with the death of the mortal body,” writes Punya Srivastava. (*Life Positive*, April 2013)

Love between man and woman has been the favourite theme of writers and poets down the ages. At the familiar level, such love means sharing and total acceptance of each other. There is no greater agony or disappointment than unrequited love, and no greater ecstasy than finding true love. To love at all is to be vulnerable. It is through the love between the two sexes that life teaches the lessons of sympathy and unity. Love between man and woman is one of the most potent forms of love, which has the power to lift a person out of apathy and help him burst the hard shell of pride and egotism. Such love may well border on being one-pointed devotion, and then one is willing to do anything for the other. Often, the spirit of self-sacrifice, self-transcendence and self-surrender is as intense as that of the spiritual aspirant. And his sympathy is not restricted to a single soul, but extends in an ever-widening circle, till at last he embraces entire humanity in holy bonds of love. There is no greater teacher of morals than love itself, for the first lesson that one learns from love is: “I am not, you are.” True love leads to self-denial, self-abnegation, self-effacement, self-transcendence.

In the allegorical romance of *Layla-Majnun* when Majnun insisted upon having a glimpse of Layla’s beauty, acceding to the request, they brought him near Layla’s tent and lifted only a corner of her tent. Majnun could glance only at the fold of Layla’s skirt and yet fell senseless. Idries Shah remarks: “Illumination cannot be sustained by someone who is not ready for it. At the best it will throw him into an ecstatic state in which he is paralyzed, as it were, and unable to consummate the contact.” Spiritual progress must be gradual, step by step.

TOWARDS LOVE...is the right way; the Love of the Divine
and of all beings.

—W. Q. JUDGE

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The United Lodge of Theosophists

DECLARATION

THE policy of this Lodge is independent devotion to the cause of Theosophy, without professing attachment to any Theosophical organization. It is loyal to the great Founders of the Theosophical Movement, but does not concern itself with dissensions or differences of individual opinion.

The work it has on hand and the end it keeps in view are too absorbing and too lofty to leave it the time or inclination to take part in side issues. That work and that end is the dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the Philosophy of Theosophy, and the exemplification in practice of those principles, through a truer realization of the SELF, a profounder conviction of Universal Brotherhood.

It holds that the unassailable *Basis for Union* among Theosophists, wherever and however situated, is “*similarity of aim, purpose and teaching,*” and therefore has neither Constitution, By-Laws nor Officers, the sole bond between its Associates being that *basis*. And it aims to disseminate this idea among Theosophists in the furtherance of Unity.

It regards as Theosophists all who are engaged in the true service of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, condition or organization, and

It welcomes to its association all those who are in accord with its declared purposes and who desire to fit themselves, by study and otherwise, to be the better able to help and teach others.

“The true Theosophist belongs to no cult or sect, yet belongs to each and all.”

Being in sympathy with the purposes of this Lodge, as set forth in its “Declaration,” I hereby record my desire to be enrolled as an Associate, it being understood that such association calls for no obligation on my part, other than that which I, myself, determine.

The foregoing is the form signed by Associates of the United Lodge of Theosophists. Inquiries are invited from all persons to whom this Movement may appeal. Cards for signature will be sent upon request, and every possible assistance furnished to Associates in their studies and in efforts to form local Lodges. There are no fees of any kind, and no formalities to be complied with.

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