

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### INNER AND OUTER—SOME REFLECTIONS

INNER is considered to be more important than the outer. Inner is often the basis or support on which the outer is built. Every religion has its outer or exoteric, and inner or esoteric side and teachings. The “outer” discipline and teachings are for the masses, the “inner” more rigorous discipline and deeper teachings are for the chosen disciples. When any religion loses sight of the “inner” principles, it tends to degenerate into a mere shell, emphasizing rituals and ceremonies.

It is precisely the inner body of knowledge that is concerned with the inner and hidden aspects of man and nature and holds a key to the mysteries of man and nature. Man is threefold. The inner body is astral body, on which the physical form is built. The outer is a shell, the inner is the pulp. Though we say eyes see, ears hear, nose smells, or the tongue tastes, etc., the organs and the senses do not cognize objects. The soul cognizes and experiences the things in the outer world through the physical body. But the intermediate or connecting link between the soul and the physical body is the astral body. Thus, corresponding to the physical eye, there is astral eye or astral centre for seeing, and so also, corresponding to the physical ear, there is astral ear, and so on. The *real centres of perception* are in the astral body. The outer, physical organs are mere channels or means of concentrating the physical vibrations, so as to transmit them to astral organs and senses.

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In *The Ocean of Theosophy*, Mr. Judge explains that when we “see” an object, the eye receives the picture on the retina, which is first turned into vibrations in the optic nerves, and then transmitted to the brain, where *Manas* is able to perceive the object as an *idea*. But behind *Manas* is the Spirit or Self. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* teaches that the power to act, to perceive, to enjoy, to think and to choose comes from the Self and yet the Self is unaffected by pain and pleasure, or our choices and perceptions, though by lending the power it *seems* to participate in various actions, and *seems* to experience various feelings. *Kena Upanishad* describes it thus, “It is the ear of the ear, mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the breath of the breath, and the eye of the eye,” because this spirit experiences the objects of sense by presiding over the ear, the eye, the touch, the taste, and the smell, and also over mind, as mentioned in the Fifteenth Chapter of the *Gita*.

The first direct application of this knowledge is to seek for the “pulp” in our fellow beings. “The sweet pulp of the orange is inside the skin, Sahib,” wrote a Master of Wisdom. Let us therefore seek for the pulp under the skin, under the roughest, most wrinkled, hardest exterior of our fellow men. If we search for the pulp in the orange, we can extract life-giving juice. By being compassionate and charitable to the weaknesses of others, we can hope to succeed in bringing out the best in our fellow beings.

All true impressions and Wisdom are in the Self, divine nature or *Atman*. Hence, no Ego differs from another Ego, in its essential nature. That, which makes one person a great individual and another a silly person is the capability of the brain and body to transmit and give expression to the light of the *Inner man* within, writes H.P.B. The body and the brain are the instruments of the Ego. It is only when the Ego has passed through various experiences of life and learnt from them that it acquires the power to utilize the brain to its full capacity. Men are wise, not in proportion to their experience, but in proportion to their capacity for experience. Thus, on the one hand, we need to increase the capacity of the Ego to use the

instrument, through assimilation of the life experiences, and on the other hand work towards achieving the purity and soundness of the instruments or vehicles, if we wish to manifest the wisdom within.

Hence, spiritual life is not a life of a stoic, divorced from pleasures. We read in *Through the Gates of Gold* that the stoic, who subscribes to the philosophy of being indifferent to pleasure and pain, misses the point and thus throws away the baby with the bath water. “The stoic does not allow that there is joy within pleasure, and by denying himself the one loses the other. But the true philosopher... sees that the kernel is within the shell, and that instead of crunching up the whole nut like a gross and indifferent feeder, the essence of the thing is obtained by cracking the shell and casting it away.” It would be a folly to eat the walnut along with the shell. We have to take the trouble of separating the husk from the grain; the shell from the kernel. Every emotion, sensation and experience must be subjected to this process. Hence the need of testing and valuing every joy of existence. *Light on the Path* suggests, weighing, observing and testing every sensation, without yielding to the seductions of the senses. We may experience the sensations without feeling horror and with confidence that a time will come when they will affect us no longer. A certain amount of detachment is necessary to extract lessons out of our experiences. Our involvement with an event is like raw material and reflection upon it is like processing of the raw material. We process it the best, when we are detached.

Along these lines, the psychology of the *Gita* makes a very profound point that giving up of desires only outwardly, is a hindrance rather than an aid to spiritual progress. In the Third Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna shows Arjuna the method of overcoming desire. “In the first place, restrain thy sense.” But, simultaneously with the control of the senses, one must control the mind and heart, lest one becomes a “false pietist of bewildered soul.” At times, we give up the desire outwardly but within there is longing for sweets, cakes, alcohol, movies, etc. As one controls the senses, one must also control the mind and not indulge in mental gratification by

fantasizing. It is important to recognize that *ultimately*, it is the *mind*, and not the senses that lead us astray.

When one considers various suggestions made by modern researchers, one is led to believe that science proposes to begin at the wrong end, *viz.*, from without, within. For instance, they ask, can we take a “morality pill” to enhance our morality? If there are drugs to enhance physical ability, expand memory and increase cognitive performance, why not moral steroids? For instance, is it wrong to have drugs specifically designed to target and increase feelings such as kindness or altruism? Some people argue that drugs might make us only “artificially moral,” and our ability to choose might gradually atrophy. Rightly so. When athletes take steroids to boost their energy level and give their best performance, they are disqualified, because that achievement under the effect of the drugs is not considered “their own.” It is only temporary. Sometimes drugs and alcohol spur creativity. But could we compare creativity achieved under the influence of drugs with that resulting from genuine inspiration from within? When a hypnotizer helps the subject to overcome his habit of stealing or drinking, by *suggestions*, it prevents the subject from making further bad Karma, but there is no merit in it for the subject. He would have increased the stock of his good Karma had he made personal effort to reform of his own free will—which would involve great mental and physical struggle, writes H.P.B. When one chooses the discipline of one’s own free will, it becomes part of the Ego. It survives death, and the Ego is born with that tendency strengthened.

If we go a step further, we are able to appreciate it even more that the *outer* is nothing without the *inner*. For instance, is there a difference between a person who tries to *be* good and to *do* good out of fear of karmic punishment, and the one who is determined to follow the moral principles, anyway? The one who follows morally good behaviour out of fear of karmic punishment, may drop it, if he is convinced that there will be no karmic punishment. On the other hand, in the person who appreciates moral values, there is an internal

recognition of values, and he will keep his face turned in the right direction, under every condition. In the first case, the person develops the tendency or *skandhas* in the direction of good, moral behaviour, while in the second case, the spontaneous discipline of ethical living would purify his character and will become part of the Ego.

Karmic reward and punishment also are meted out based on the inner considerations and not merely based on outward action. Karma is action and reaction. However, this reaction is not mechanical but takes into account the motive, the inner state of the person and the weight of his past Karma. For instance, when a mother, who wants her child to grow up to be an upright and honest person, is severe with him, the law of Karma takes into account her “good motive,” while meting out karmic consequences for her severity. Similarly, there is a difference in the karmic merit won by a person giving charity for earning name and fame, and another who gives with no such ulterior motive. Likewise, the *inner state* is the deciding factor. That inner state could be the sum total of all experiences and circumstances of a given life as well as those of earlier lives. A stingy and unkind person often has the background of a difficult childhood or an exposure to extreme poverty. A person born with an especially strong tendency towards gossip or sensuality or greed has to fight harder to curb these tendencies as compared to another person who is not burdened with the weight of his past Karma. The law of Karma also takes into account the person’s level of knowledge or ignorance. The Karmic responsibility is in proportion to his knowledge. The more the knowledge—of right and wrong—the less will be the “mercy” of the law.

Buddhism mentions ten fetters which bind a person to the wheel of life and death. One of these fetters is to consider the ethical rules and religious observances as ends in themselves. Thus, “you must not take life” is an ethical rule, and a non-vegetarian breaks the rule of “not taking life.” So, some of the vegetarians think that the meat eaters are sinners and cannot be spiritual. It is an old and true saying that the Kingdom of God cometh not from taking or refraining from

meat, nor from the refraining from anything whatever, but that it is *within us*. In other words, one cannot claim to be spiritual, just because one is a strict vegetarian. Wicked and gross thoughts are more harmful than the eating of flesh. Not eating meat is only a means to an end, because animal food necessarily imparts to the eater qualities of the animal. “Inner improvements create the outer ones,” says Robin Sharma, and therefore we need to pay more attention to purifying our inner nature, by purifying our thoughts, speech, emotions and desires.

Altruism is an integral part of self-development. But here again, the “inner” is more important than the “outer.” H.P.B. writes: “Theosophists are of necessity the friends of all those movements in the world, whether intellectual or simply practical, for the amelioration of the condition of mankind” (*Five Messages*, p. 8). But we must not lose sight of the fact that man is not just his body, nor just his mind but something more. Instead of laying emphasis on mere material charity—providing food, clothing and shelter, or amenities to the diseased—more importance must be given to alleviating mental and moral suffering. Mr. Judge observes that the physical woes of the race are only skin-deep; the real cause of these woes is mental and moral. The inner man is a thinking being who feeds upon a right or wrong philosophy, and therefore students of Theosophy should expound theosophical ideas of brotherhood of humanity, Karma and Rebirth to change the mind and Buddhi of the race, aim to bring inner conversion, and make those charitable who are not already so, by inspiring them to listen to the “still small voice within.” As Marianne Williamson puts it, “As all of us are only too aware, the loud and frantic voices of the outer world, easily drown out the small, still loving voice within.”

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BEAUTY is truth's smile, when she beholds her own face in a perfect mirror.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT MAHAMAYA

“MAHAMAYA” is a short story by Rabindranath Tagore, which presents the awful life of a woman who becomes a widow the day after her wedding. The story opens with the meeting of Mahamaya and her childhood friend, Rajiv Lochan, in an ancient temple. She is young and beautiful, and belongs to the elite (*kulin*) Brahmin caste. Her father has passed away, but she has an elder brother named Bhavanicharan Chatterjee. Rajiv is a stranger to the village. He has been brought up by a British manager of the local silk factory. Rajiv's father had been an employee of this Englishman, so after the father's demise, the Englishman has taken the responsibility of this young boy and has brought him to this village, when he is still a child. They were living as neighbours of Bhavanicharan. So Mahamaya grows up as a childhood companion of Rajiv.

Rajiv has been in love with Mahamaya and has been looking for an opportunity to express his love to her. One day he succeeds in bringing Mahamaya to a ruined temple. He has planned to divulge everything weighing on his mind, but all that he manages to say is, “Let us escape from this place and get married secretly.” Mahamaya remains wordless for a long time, as she had never expected Rajiv to propose to her so hastily. After a while, Mahamaya shakes her head and says, “No, that is not possible.” She is aware that she was a high-class Brahmin whereas Rajiv, though Brahmin, belongs to lower Brahmin class. Around that time Rajiv sees Mahamaya's brother, Bhavanicharan, coming towards the old temple. He tries to run away from there, but Mahamaya holds his hand firmly and says in a calm voice, “Rajiv, I will become your wife one day. You wait for me.” Her brother steps out of the temple without a word, and Mahamaya follows him in silence.

That same night Bhavanicharan brings a red wedding sari and asks his sister to wear it, and takes her to the cemetery near the river. An old Brahmin is lying there biding for death. A priest has been

waiting there to perform the wedding ceremony. Mahamaya realizes that she is going to be married to the dying man, but says not a word. The wedding ceremony is carried out with “unintelligible religious incantations mixed with distressful cries of the dying.” Mahamaya becomes a widow the next day. Rajiv is thoroughly shocked, when he hears that Mahamaya is going to be cremated alive with her husband. His first reaction is to approach his English manager and seek his help to forcefully stop this dreadful incident. But he recalls that his employer has left for his new posting in another town.

While Rajiv is helplessly sitting at home, there is a torrential rain with storm. Just then someone pushes the door with full force. It is Mahamaya, with her face covered with a long veil. She says that she has escaped from the funeral pyre, and that she has come to fulfil her promise and become his wife, provided “you promise never to open my veil and see my face.” They begin to run in the direction of the village where Rajiv’s employer, the English manager has relocated himself.

The author tells us that, after the death of her husband, tied hand and foot, Mahamaya has been consigned to the funeral pyre and set on fire. However, due to rain the fire blows out quickly, and she finds that the rope with which her hands had been tied was burnt, setting her hands free. She unfastens her two legs and runs home, before going to meet Rajiv, to change her sari which is quite completely burnt. When she looks at her face in the mirror, she finds it partly burnt. That is when she covers her face with the end of her sari and proceeds to meet Rajiv.

Mahamaya begins to live with Rajiv, but there is no happiness in his heart, as he feels that always the veil stood between them. The two lonely creatures live together in this way for several months. Then one night Rajiv walks into Mahamaya’s bedroom. She is sleeping. A moonbeam falling on her face reveals that a part of her left cheek is burnt. On seeing this sight Rajiv makes a whimpering noise, which wakes up Mahamaya. She pulls the veil over her face

and in spite of Rajiv’s begging for forgiveness she dashes out of the house without a word, never to return again. The mute anger created by this heartless goodbye leaves a bruise on Rajiv’s life forever.

The story brings home the importance of social status in ancient India, wherein a low caste person could not hope to marry someone of higher social status. The brother of the girl would rather marry his sister to a dying but high class brahmin, than allow her to marry a brahmin boy of a slightly lower status. Another important theme is the status of a woman in the Hindu society. Through many of his stories, Tagore tries to highlight the basic desires of a woman, such as to enjoy her freedom and individuality and to break the shackles of patriarchal society. In some of his stories we see that in the Indian society of his time, a woman was expected to be a quiet sufferer and an obedient and a tolerant wife, daughter and sister. Tagore seeks to expose the pathetic condition of women not only in social life, but also in marital life.

It is useful to pause and reflect on the fact that women have enjoyed equal status and rights with men during the early Vedic period, but it began to change from the Medieval period. “In Vedic period their women were not placed apart from men in penitential, or ‘Zenanas.’ Their seclusion began when the Mahomedans...had conquered the land and gradually enforced their ways and customs upon the Hindus. The pre- and post-Vedic woman was as free as man,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, I, 382). In the course of time the status of woman in society has been lowered. How many men are ready to recognize and practise the teaching of Manu: “Where women are honoured, there verily the Devas rejoice; where they are not honoured, there verily indeed all rites are fruitless.” In many stories, legends and allegories the woman is symbolized as inferior to man. These stories must not be taken literally but allegorically. Matter is symbolized by woman and the powers of Matter or *Shaktis* are personified by women. Just as Spirit and Matter are but two aspects of One Reality, so are man and woman. “When man, the Soul unites with Wisdom the woman, he attains Enlightenment. If without her

he cannot rise, without him she is an impotent abstraction,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. For a long time now, men have assumed the position of superiority and women that of inferiority, and the way out is not by woman asserting her independence or trying in her turn to exploit men, but by trying to awaken in men the sense of duty towards women. Both men and women must recognize their duties and their interdependence.

Rabindranath Tagore states that his views about women were shaped by his own experience, and by the influence of contemporary thinkers. One such figure was the Indian religious reformer and founder of *Brahmo Samaj*, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who created much awareness about women’s education and their equal rights in Indian society. Age old system of *Sati* or burning of Widow in her dead husband’s funeral pyre, was abolished due to his efforts.

The story briefly but poignantly touches upon the cruel tradition of widow burning, that was prevalent in India at that time. How and why did the tradition of *Sati* or “widow burning” take such a firm hold? It is because people *blindly* follow traditions. The woman dying on the funeral pyre of her husband is made to understand that she will get “freedom” if she becomes a *Sati*. H.P.B. seems to suggest that in the ancient times the Brahmins knew the science of anæsthetics, and they used a certain plant as anaesthetic. Thus: “The widow...has no dread of suffering the least pain, for the fiercest flames will consume her, without one pang of agony being experienced by her. The holy plants which crown her brow, as she is conducted in ceremony to the funeral pile; the sacred root culled at the midnight hour on the spot where the Ganges and the Yamuna mingle their waters; and the process of anointing the body of the self-appointed victim with ghee and sacred oils, after she has bathed in all her clothes and finery, are so many *magical* anæsthetics.... Firmly believing in the promises of a future life, her whole mind is absorbed in the contemplation of the approaching bliss—the beatitude of ‘freedom,’ which she is about to attain. She generally dies with the smile of heavenly rapture on her countenance; and if someone

is to suffer at the hour of retribution, it is not the earnest devotee of her faith, but the crafty Brahmans who know well enough that no such ferocious rite was ever prescribed,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 540-41)

The rite of “widow burning” is sanctioned nowhere in the Hindu scriptures. Oriental scholars, both native and European, have shown that the rite of widow-burning was not only unsanctionable but imperatively forbidden by the earliest and most authoritative Hindu Scriptures, writes H.P.B. Professor Wilson was the first to point out that by changing “*yonim agre*” to “*yonim Agne*” (womb of fire) the practice of *Sati* was introduced. According to the hymns of the *Rig Veda* and Vedic ceremonials contained in the “*Grihya Sutras*,” the wife accompanies the corpse of her husband to the funeral pyre, but she is addressed with verses taken from the *Rig Veda* and ordered to leave and go back to the world of the living. (*Isis*, I, 541 and fn.)

*Smriti* are traditions imparted orally. *Manu-Smriti* is the most important. It lays down the code of conduct for individuals, societies, families, etc. It is these traditions which prepare a person for the higher spiritual life. However, we need to distinguish between true and false traditions.

There are, then, both true and false “traditions,” and it is possible to establish philosophical criteria for distinguishing between them...Originally pure, originally having to do only with the acquirement of self-knowledge, some traditions may have become confused with the twistings and distortions which contrive to place emphasis on *external* means for the gaining of a higher spiritual state...In an intelligent society...Tradition can become the “cement” of mutual assistance on the path of the Higher Self. (*Theosophy*, Vol. 41)

One of the ways to distinguish between true and false traditions is to use our reason and discrimination. We have to follow the inner feeling which says, “This must be true.”

## LESSONS FROM THE CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC

“THE APHORISMS on Karma” by William Judge provide us an insight into the working of Karma in a simplistic yet profound manner. Aphorisms 2 and 3 state that there is an inherent harmony in Nature, and that Nature always tries to maintain this harmony. Further, during this process of harmonising the system as a whole, there needs to be some adjustment, during which the being upon whom and through whom that adjustment is made, experiences pain or pleasure.

According to *Avatamsaka Sutra* of the Mahayana School of the Buddhists: “Indra’s net” or *Indrajala* is an infinitely large net of cords owned by the Vedic god Indra, which hangs over his palace on Mount Meru, the *axis mundi* (axis of rotation) of Buddhist and Hindu cosmology. In this metaphor, Indra’s net has a multifaceted jewel at each vertex of the net, and each jewel is reflected in all of the other jewels. The metaphor of Indra’s net is also used in Atharva Veda, to describe the interconnectedness of the universe. If we contemplate on this, we can see that all these multifaceted jewels at each vertex of the net may be taken to represent a Divine Monad symbolically. It may also be taken to represent a Man, a Solar system and a Universe. This means that each unit, from a microcosmic unit to a macrocosmic unit, is interconnected, and is a copy of the same divine blue print wherein each is a reflection of the other and THAT. This is the foundation of the well-known sayings, *Aham brahmasmi* and *Tat tvam asi*.

The Law of Karma applies to everything in the manifested universe from Brahma to the Atom. Since we all are interconnected, we not only have individual Karma, but there is also family Karma, national Karma, racial Karma, planetary Karma, and beyond. Even from a scientific perspective we can clearly see how economies, stock markets, food chains, trade, employment, local and global weather, etc. are linked to all. Disturbance in one corner of the world has impact on every spot on the globe as mentioned in the “Butterfly

Effect Theory” by Lorenz, a meteorology professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He said, to illustrate the idea, that some complex dynamical systems exhibiting unpredictable behaviours such that small variances in the initial conditions could have profound and widely divergent effects on the system’s outcomes. Because of the sensitivity of these systems, outcomes are unpredictable. Simply put, the Butterfly effect is an idea that a small change can have a large impact.

However, this clearly proves that our whole world exists in a delicate balance and even a small disturbance due to disharmony can have vast unpredictable outcomes. Now that we understand that we are interconnected with each other at different levels, let us try to understand how our thoughts play a role in this interconnected world. Each Thought is a Thought Energy and every Thought generated gets associated with Elementals.

“The Universe is worked and *guided* from *within outwards*. As above so it is below, as in heaven so on earth; and man—the microcosm and miniature copy of the macrocosm—is the living witness to this Universal Law and to the mode of its action. We see that every *external* motion, act, gesture, whether voluntary or mechanical, organic or mental, is produced and preceded by *internal* feeling or emotion, will or volition, and thought or mind.” (*S.D.*, I, 274)

Just imagine the impact of the collective thoughts of mankind on the whole system. In the conversation on “Elementals and Elementaries,” we read that “an elemental is a centre of force, without intelligence, without moral character or tendencies, but capable of being directed in its movements by human thoughts, which may, consciously or not, give it any form, and to a certain extent intelligence; in its simplest form it is visible as a disturbance in a transparent medium, such as would be produced by a ‘glass fish, so transparent as to be invisible, swimming through the air of the room,’ and leaving behind him a shimmer, such as hot air makes when rising from a stove.”

The “Sage” agrees with this understanding of the enquirer, and adds that “Some classes of elementals, however, have an intelligence of their own and a character, but they are far beyond our comprehension and ought perhaps to have some other name. That class which has most to do with us answers the above description. They are centres of force or energy which are acted on by us while thinking and in other bodily motions. We also act on them and give them form by a species of thought which we have no register of...For there is a vast unknown country in each human being which he does not himself understand until he has tried, and then only after many initiations.” (*Vernal Blooms*, pp. 135-36)

Here we have an important definition which is worth remembering: The Elementals are centres of force or energy which are acted on by us while thinking and in other bodily motions. Let us consider a few other statements: The elementals are energetic centres in the Astral Light. “The world of the elementals is an important factor in our world and in the course of the student. Each thought as it is evolved by a man coalesces instantly with an elemental, and is then beyond the man’s power. It can easily be seen that this process is going on every instant. Therefore, each thought exists as an entity. Its length of life depends on two things: (a) The original force of the person’s will and thought; (b) The power of the elemental which coalesced with it, the latter being determined by the class to which the elemental belongs. This is the case with good and bad thoughts alike, and as the will beneath the generality of wicked thoughts is usually powerful, we can see that the result is very important, because the elemental has no conscience and obtains its constitution and direction from the thought it may from time to time carry. Each human being has his own elementals that partake of his nature and his thoughts,” writes Mr. Judge. (*An Epitome of Theosophy*, pp. 21-22)

Then we have this further elucidation from Robert Crosbie as regards the power of thought and how it affects others through the agency of “lives” or elementals. Thus, “Every thought is in regard

to something and produces an image of that thing; the concentration of the Thinker upon the matrix he has created draws into it the lives that swarm in the terrestrial atmosphere, energizes them and gives them direction, according to the motive and desire of the Thinker; this matrix, made a living force, can insidiously impel to action other Thinkers whose natures and desires are similar, or who have the seeds of such desires within them, and all this whether the creator of the matrix is conscious of the results or not. ‘Thought’ or more correctly, the ability to think, is the most powerful creative, destructive, preservative or regenerative agent that any beings possess; it acts weakly and strongly, according to the knowledge and power of concentration of the Thinker. In occultism, ‘thought’ is the real plane of action; what we see or perceive physically are merely the effects of thought” (*Answers to Questions on The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 62-63). Hence the astral light not only records but it also *reflects*, as the above passage explains. So, we are encouraged in the Theosophical literature to become “a co-worker with Nature” and to “help Nature and work on with her,” and create harmony in our Thought, Speech and Action.

In nature everything is cyclic and so are the cycles of epidemics as mentioned in the article by H.P.B., “Does Vaccination Prevent Smallpox?” (*The Theosophist*, March 1881). It talks about Dr. Parkin’s theory called “Epidemiology,” which explores remote causes of epidemic diseases. He says that “there occur certain ‘pestilential epochs,’ during which the world is at frequent intervals devastated by epidemics which travel in a determinate direction from Central or Eastern Asia to the west of Europe and even to America.” This is exactly what is happening now, the origination of the Corona virus being central east Asia, and China specifically. Further he says that “during such epochs all diseases, even those not considered as communicable from one person to another, increase in frequency and violence; that these epochs are further marked by Epizoötics and by ‘blights’ or widespread diseases in the vegetable world, and are attended by a general intensification of earthquakes, storms,



floods, droughts, fogs, seasons of abnormal heat or cold, and other convulsions of inorganic nature.”

The article “Earthquakes” that appeared in September 1885 issue of *The Theosophist* magazine, seems to suggest that our Earth has its own magnetic field and that disharmonious thoughts of men have a direct impact on this resulting in tremors and earthquakes in order for the Earth to recalibrate the harmony. Further, “Modern scientific men can see no connection between the cause of earthquakes and events on the mental plane of the earth. But when they understand that there is no such thing as accident in this universe, that every event which appears to us as accident, is the effect of a force on the mental plane, then they will be able to understand why the superstitious Hindus look upon earthquakes, epidemics, etc. as the effect of accumulated sins committed by men.”

Due to widespread panic caused by the Corona virus, people are resorting to Astrologers to provide some solution and predict the dates when this will resolve. In this context Mr. Judge advises, in his article “Direful Prophecies” (*The Path*, March 1894): “Do your duty where you find yourself, and if from your goodness you are a favourite of the gods you will escape, while if you are not their favourite it is better for you to die and take another chance at bettering your character. Death will come when it will, and why should we fear, since it is ‘a necessary end.’ Theosophists too often occupy themselves with these woeful lookings into the future, to the detriment of their present work. They should try to discover the fine line of duty and endeavour.” Let us all follow this advice.

Everyone around the world seem to be sending negative thoughts about death, disease, financial crises, and so on, making Corona a Mantra which is having more detrimental effect than helping humanity. We need to consciously make an effort not to panic, have a positive frame of mind and have altruistic thoughts, speech and action that can aid mother nature to heal.

## EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

ABOUT the masses and their progress: Of course, even illiterate people can and should be given Theosophy. One can study not only by reading books but also by listening. The publication of books reflects but an aspect of progress and, like other phases of evolution, will pass away. How were chelas taught in the past? Even now true chelaship-training consists in listening to a word, an aphorism, a *sutra*, and meditating thereon; then listening to what the guru and co-disciples have to say about the matter—mutual study. Symbols for the chelas, and myths, allegories and folk tales for the *hoi polloi*. Then, please note what the *Key to Theosophy* says about student’s knowing metaphysics but teaching the four truths of the golden square—Reincarnation, Karma, Brotherhood and Universal Unity and Causation. Exoteric and esoteric wisdom are the archetypal pair and then we get many dualities like the *Para* and *Apara Vidya* of the Upanishads. We of this civilization are accustomed to books and so the great Holy Ones, always gracious and thoughtful, use that which is nearest and easiest for the mind. Hence H.P.B. wrote and published. In *Echoes from the Orient* Judge deals with this problem. Also, pilgrimages were a mode of teaching used in olden days for the masses. It is a fascinating subject—how the Great Lodge instructed people at different times and in different eras.

Next, how can individual Associates of the U.L.T. promulgate? It seems to me the platform and the pen are the two avenues for collective teaching; conversation and correspondence, for personal teaching. All four should be utilized and then the most vital—let life speak; let life send out rays of radiant symbols. It seems to me that practical service is not an end but only a means.

I am not against all social service. “Let Every Man Prove His Own Work” pamphlet sets forth the dangers of some forms of social service. Again, the *Key to Theosophy* recommends the use of our own personal soul as an avenue to attentive, unselfish and loving

aid to other persons. I think the world would be better if several dozens of social service organizations I can name were to stop. Read the very first editorial of Judge in *The Path*—Vol. I, No.1; we have already reprinted it in the *Theosophical Movement* magazine.

About this problem of taking Theosophy to the masses: I will allow myself to offer two suggestions. First, please reread very attentively H.P.B.'s "Let Every Man Prove His Own Work." Secondly, consider the direct and indirect influence of U.L.T. work on the masses. There is indirect thought-influence, for each common man in the street has his own *Manas-Buddhi* which through *Akasha* is bound to be touched. Also, each student has his own circle of non-theosophical contacts and the precepts and example of each carry forth and convey Theosophy. This may sound far-fetched; but consider this: the Blessed Masters are Great Theosophists, and we are the ignorant masses who are being helped by Them. The Programme They follow can be easily envisaged by us. Consider "Some Words on Daily Life" and "The Great Master's Letter" (*U.L.T. Pamphlet Nos. 22 and 33*).

Consider the number and kind of minds and hearts that have been influenced through our U.L.T. work. Great ideas have been accepted and lives transformed in a considerable measure, and so many have been brought nearer to the occult world of Masters. But ideals and aspirations are not fully realized. To what extent has the U.L.T. followed Masters' Programme? What does taking Theosophy to the masses mean? If the truth of Karma is not responded to and if what people want is immediate physical relief, then the truth of H.P.B.'s words, to the effect that Theosophy considers the relief and well-being of the mind-soul as more valuable than feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc., strikes us. Perhaps a fresh consideration of all these statements of H.P.B. and Masters may help you to gain a better insight.

Our ideals grow and our aspirations deepen as we succeed. We must be thankful that we of the U.L.T. have been able to accomplish so much. Many a village Hampden has arisen to fight and obtain

his own Divine Heritage. Some of these we know; many are unknown to us. There is an invisible effect of the U.L.T. work which we are doing because of the strength of the Science of Occultism which Associates study, aspirants apply and devotees promulgate. Then, we have been true to the Masters' Programme inasmuch as we have not strayed from it, have not broken it. There is more of it to fulfil.

As to the two aspects of the Movement: We have furthered to a considerable extent the wider aspect. Take our books: the number of copies of the *Secret Doctrine* which we of the U.L.T. have put into circulation is enormous. Who brought those copies since 1925? Similarly, *Isis*. Then thousands of copies of the *Gita* and the *Ocean of Theosophy* have gone. That is one sign. The number of those who actually sign our U.L.T. Associate's card is very large; most of them drop out, but their touch with U.L.T. meetings and magazines survives. Then through the *The Aryan Path* many have contacted H.P.B. and even Judge. We are not able to put our finger exactly on this fact and that figure, but it seems to me the influence is there. Our ideas have most definitely been stamped on the race-mind during the last 70 years. Look at it from the point of view of the three objects; in each, the race-mind has become more Theosophical. A few individuals have been seeking the Path and the Masters, but many lives are bettered. The number of those who, failing to become the "sun," have attempted to become "planets" is not small.

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You will find that other members care for nothing but Theosophy, and are yet forced by circumstances to work in other fields as well. What moments they have left are devoted to the Cause...each moment, day and evening, is filled up, and therefore they are happy. Yet they are unhappy that they cannot give their entire working time to the Cause in which some have been from the beginning. They feel...a burning desire within them to get these truths to the ears of all men.

—W.Q. JUDGE

## FROG—IN CULTURE AND MYTHS

FROGS belong to a group of animals called amphibians. They are the class of animals that spend part of their lives in water and part on land. Frogs typically lay their eggs in water. In the next stage they exist as tadpoles. At the end of the tadpole stage, a frog undergoes metamorphosis in which its body makes a sudden transition into the adult form. This metamorphosis typically lasts only twenty-four hours. When fully developed they live on land. The life cycle of frogs involves one major transformation, from tadpole to adult. Many shed their skin regularly as they grow. These transformations may explain why many cultures see frogs as symbolic of re-creation or as creatures who keep the secrets of transformations. The life cycle of frog also shows transition. It can be seen that in moving from egg stage to that of tadpole it loses the protection and safety of egg shell, and then again in growing from tadpole stage to adult frog it loses its ability to move speedily in water. But at every step it also gains something, showing that both physical and spiritual growth entails change. “To live as a plant, the seed must die. To live as a conscious entity in the Eternity, the passions and senses of man must first DIE before his body does.” (*S.D.*, I, 459 fn.)

There is also the myth of the frog in the moon, wherein the wolf in love with the frog was pursuing her by night, and she leaped into the moon and escaped. The frog transforms from the tadpole stage in the water to the adult frog on the land. The moon likewise transforms, and the metamorphosis of the lunar orb, or various phases of the moon, could be typified by the changes in the frog. “The moon rose up monthly from the celestial waters, renewed like the frog, and as the horned one [crescent moon] grew to the full orb [full moon] it might be thought of as losing the tail of its tadpole condition,” explains Gerald Massey in his lecture “Luniatry—Ancient and Modern.”

Frogs play a variety of roles in culture, appearing in folklore and fairy tales, such as the Brothers Grimm story of *The Frog Prince*.

Frogs are the subject of fables attributed to Aesop, and of proverbs in various cultures. *Kupamanduk* is a Sanskrit term, which literally means “frog in a well.” The story of *Kupamanduk* is often told to children in India and forms a part of many folktales. The story goes that once upon a time there was a frog that lived in a deep old well. For him the well was his world. He was happy in the well, feeding on worms he had become fat and full of energy. One day a sea turtle stopped by the edge of the well. The frog wanted to know where he came from. The turtle replied, “I am from the sea.” The frog asked how big was the sea. Was it as big as the well? He took a leap from one side of the well to the other. The turtle said, “how do you compare the sea with your little well?” Then the frog took another leap and asked, “Is your sea so big?” The turtle exclaimed, “The sea is bigger, much bigger than your well.” The frog shouted, “You are a liar! Nothing can be bigger than my well!” The advice is, let us not be *Kupamanduks*, the frogs in the well, but be open-minded. If we think that we have learned all that we need to know, then we are being like this frog in a well who imagined his well to be the largest water body, and could not imagine an ocean that is more immense.

*The Voice of the Silence* says, “The seeds of Wisdom cannot sprout and grow in airless space. To live and reap experience, the mind needs breadth and depth and points to draw it towards the Diamond Soul.” The Sanskrit term for experience is *anubhava*, *i.e.*, becoming (something different) as a sequel to some event. For this to happen we need to make our mind porous and receptive to the guidance from our divine nature. For this we must acquire breadth and the depth of mind. *Breadth* of mind is, in one sense, a large scope of awareness. It also means acquiring *non-parochial* views. We must be able to welcome truth from whichever quarter it comes. We must not say, “how can I read the Bible, as I am a Hindu?” In olden days there were scholars, who were called *wandering* scholars, who moved from city to city gathering knowledge. Today, this breadth of mind comes from reading. We must let our minds contact

universal ideas through good books, scriptures, etc.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* is the shortest of all the Upanishads. It consists of twelve short verses, which discuss the syllable AUM, and present the theory of four states of consciousness, namely, waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep (*Sushupti*) and the transcendent fourth state of *Turiya*. It is suggested that *Mandukya Upanishad* alone is sufficient for knowledge that can help to gain liberation or *moksha*. The root of *Mandukya* is sometimes considered as *Manduka* which, among other things, means “frog.” Then the name literally translates, “The Frog Upanishad.” As to why this Upanishad got its strange name, one explanation is that this Upanishad tells us how to leap like a frog from the first to the fourth stage of consciousness, without difficulty. The Upanishad teaches that it is possible to reach the state of awareness in one leap, like a frog, by meditation on AUM. There are some sub-species of frog that can cover 10 to 12 feet in a single leap, and that is how perhaps we have the phrase “to leap-frog,” means to “bound over.” We, ordinary mortals, move along the slow path, going from Waking state to Dream state, and then to Dreamless sleep state, rarely touching the highest state of consciousness or *Turiya*. The Upanishad describes how the Yogis and Munis, leap-frog like a “Manduka” and jump straight from the Waking to Dreamless sleep state and also catapult themselves into the fourth state of *Turiya*.

During the extreme conditions, some frogs enter a state of torpor and remain inactive for months. In colder regions frogs hibernate in winter. Thus, the frogs living on land either hide in crevices or bury themselves in leaves. During this state of hibernation, their metabolism slows down and they live on energy reserve. Some frogs survive even after being frozen in extreme cold. Then, an apparently lifeless, frozen frog can resume respiration, and the heart beat can restart, when the conditions warm up.

*The Secret Doctrine* states that “analogy is the guiding law of Nature.” What is the analogy between the winter sleep of animals and the method by which an Adept can greatly prolong the life of

his physical body? H.P.B. writes that “some Adepts do exceed, by a good deal, what you would call the ordinary age; yet there is nothing miraculous in it.” In the September 1880 issue of *The Theosophist* (Vol. I, p. 314), H.P.B. writes that “human hibernation” belonged to the Yoga system and might be termed one of its many results. The article on “Yoga Vidya” (*The Theosophist*, November 1879) mentions:

While average mortals maintain their perceptions only during the day, the initiated Yogi has an equally real, undimmed, and perfect appreciation of his individual existence at night, even while his body sleeps. He can go even further: he can voluntarily paralyze his vital functions so that this body shall lie like a corpse, the heart still, the lungs collapsed, animal heat transferred to the interior surfaces; the vital machine stopped, as it were, like a clock which waits only the key that rewinds it, to resume its beating. What nature does for the scores of hibernating quadrupeds, reptiles and insects, under the spontaneous action of her established laws, the Yogi effects for his physical body by long practice, and the intense concentration of an undaunted will.

Quiescence, hibernation, torpor, etc., represent different degrees of suspended animation, displaying drastic reduction in both metabolism (energy production) and cellular activity (energy consumption). Are humans capable of entering into suspended animation? In *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. cites several examples of suspended animation in human beings, as also of revival and resuscitation from that state.

In the unsigned “Comment” on an article entitled “A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy,” we are told that during such a state of torpor or trance, no wear and tear of the organs can possibly take place, which “wear and tear” does take place during one’s natural sleep. As a result, “the Raja Yogis have been sometimes known to live the double and triple amount of years of an average human life, and occasionally, to have preserved a youthful appearance for an unusual

period of time and when they were known to be old men—in years.”

It is precisely because frogs can “resurrect” after a long period of hibernation in rocks and walls that frog-goddesses in some myths and culture are connected with resurrection. Heqet or Hiquet is an Egyptian goddess of fertility represented in the form of a frog. To the Egyptians, the frog was an ancient symbol of fertility. In the myth of Osiris, when he is killed, it is Hiquet who breathed life back into Osiris’ body and it was then that Horus was conceived. As the birth of Horus became more intimately associated with the resurrection of Osiris, so Hiquet’s role became more closely associated with the resurrection. As the goddess Hiquet is connected with organization of the world, along with Khnoom, who is comparable to Brahma and also Osiris, it shows that the resurrection of Osiris into Horus represents the transformation of ideal or subjective world into Objective, physical world. “A frog or toad enshrined in a lotus flower, or simply without the latter emblem, was the form chosen for the *Church lamps* on which were engraved the words ‘I am the resurrection.’ These frog goddesses are also found on all the mummies,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, I, 385)

This “resurrection” can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, with the Egyptians, there is resurrection in rebirth, after 3000 years, in *Swarga*, Paradise or *Devachan*. Regarding the mystery of mummification, not much is known. According to one view, the dead body was considered to be an earthly home for the soul and therefore, had to be preserved. In the article “Hierosophy and Philosophy,” Mr. Oxley puts forward the popular belief or explanation for mummification. He points out that the Egyptians taught the doctrine of Metempsychosis which states that the soul, after leaving the body, reincarnates into lower and animal forms, so that at the end of 3000 years, it would return and be reunited with the body, which is carefully preserved through mummification. However, he observes that many mummies are older than 3000 years, but the soul has not returned to claim the body. In “Footnotes to ‘Hierosophy and Theosophy’” (*The Theosophist*, July 1883), H.P.B.

explains that the “mummy” is an objective, *empty*, symbolic form under which lies hidden a great scientific and occult truth. We are told that for 3000 years, more or less, the mummy goes on throwing off the invisible atoms or Life atoms of *Jiva* (the second principle), in spite of embalming or chemical preparation. These invisible atoms pass through all kinds of organized life forms. After that period of endless transmigration, when the soul or the Ego reincarnates, these atoms are once again drawn back to the Ego, and they form its outer clothing or body, just as had happened earlier.

We may take this only as a symbol to show that at last, when immortality is achieved, there is resurrection, but not in the physical body, as when it is said that Jesus rose with every member or every part of his body sound or whole, it must refer to Jesus rising in one of his finer bodies or *Mayavi rupa*. The mummy (*Karest*) is wound in a seamless bandage (*swathe*) which is around 1000 yards long. It symbolizes the seamless robe of the Christ. In the Gospel it is said that Jesus rose again with every member sound, like the perfectly preserved mummy. But in the Egyptian original, the mummy transforms. The deceased says, “I am spiritualized. I am become a soul. I rise as a God.” Thus, the image of Mummy is the image of immortality in the tombs of Egypt.

At a simple level, the frogs being amphibious, capable of living on land and water, teach us to be adaptive and graceful when facing various issues in life. However, there is a far deeper meaning attached to the term “amphibious.” The Greek word *amphibios* means simply “life on two planes,” from *amphi*, “on both sides,” and *bios*, “life.” The word was often applied in antiquity to those men who, though still wearing a human form, had made themselves almost divine: through knowledge, and lived as much in the spiritual supersensuous regions as on earth. Thus, they belonged to two planes: the spiritual and the physical. We are reminded of what H.P.B. tells us about many spiritual entities who have incarnated in man and still continue to exist as independently in the infinities of Space. (*S.D.*, I, 233)

## APHORISMS ON KARMA—SOME REFLECTIONS XII

IN THE FIRST part of the article on Aphorisms 17, 18 and 19 which appeared in the previous issue of this magazine, the meaning, in Theosophical parlance, of the terms *Ego* and *instrument*, used in the aphorisms, was made explicit. Preparations are going on in the cyclic progression of races to revive true spiritual knowledge and re-establish virtuous living, when harmonious relation between inner character and outer conditions will be restored. As we act and live, we raise up or pull down the general standard. This is also beyond doubt the real reason for the ancient insistence of the purity of the family line; it is at the same time the cause for the amalgamation of many races to produce a new one, as we see here in our own land. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 154)

The reference is to the amalgamation of the people of different races and nations which is going on in America. It will result in the long run in the production of a hybrid race which will be appropriate instrument for the more evolved Egos that will constitute the sixth sub-race. However, it will not be a gift of nature. It has to be brought into being by conscious striving to live the higher life by the responsible units of our present fifth sub-race of the fifth root-race.

We will now consider the intimate vital magnetic and Karmic linkages between the Ego and the instrument it fashions by its Karma in every rebirth, and of the power of the Ego to bring on changes in the instrument so as to serve its higher purpose. A perfect understanding of the Karmic Law, gives us a knowledge of what binds us to the cycles of endless error and misery of conditioned existence, and of the means by which we can force ourselves from this bondage, and realize our true Self to be beyond the realm in which Karma operates, and become liberated.

Aphorism 17 implies that the body we acquire at birth, circumstances of our life, the moral character, emotional nature, state of the mind, intellectual nature and capacity, and psychic nature,

inclinations, proclivities, our parentage, etc., are by no means a chance occurrence but the exact and absolutely just outcome of our thoughts and actions in the previous lives. Just as the personal self, immediately after the death of the physical body, reviews in retrospect all the events of its life just ended, good and bad, in minutest detail, so at the end of its post-mortem state of Devachanic bliss, it has a prospective view of the next earth life which awaits it together with the Karma of its past which is leading to it, and recognizes the perfect justice of it.

Several Karmic factors determine why the disembodied Ego emerging from Devachan chooses particular parentage and family in which to incarnate. It may be because its acquired nature is similar to that of the parents and of the family, mutual similarity of natures of both providing the path of least resistance to the incarnating Ego; or the circumstances and nature of the family provide opportunity to work out its evolution; or because of its affinity with the Egos that constitute the family which was mutually generated by them in past lives. Any, or some, or all these factors may come into play in various degrees. For instance, the predominant reason may be that the indigent circumstances of the family give the Ego opportunity to develop virtues of patience, fortitude, humility, inner strength, and thus develop and consolidate its character for its higher evolution. The Ego may be drawn to a family in order to work out the ill-effects of inharmonious relations it had generated in past lives with other Egos now embodied in that family. Some people are born in happy circumstances which may be reward for past Karmic merit or Karmic compensation for much suffering endured at the hands of others in the past. Birth of the Ego in circumstances fraught with difficulties and constraints, frustrating ambitions and aspirations, can only be a just retribution for its past neglect or its unjust actions which were hurtful to others. The time lag between the sowing of causes and reaping of the effects, however long it may be in the time scale of human reckoning, in no way alters or dilutes the potency of the Karmic causes, which are indelibly impressed in the nature

of the Egos involved, till they are worked out and compensated by experiencing the effects—pleasurable or painful—by the embodied Egos concerned, in the scale of rigid justice of Karma.

Many diseases of body and mind are hereditary. Some families exhibit certain traits of character which run in the family lineage. Modern geneticists claim that it is the genes which make up the DNA molecules in the cells of the body which are transmitters of hereditary traits, other than those that are developed owing to environmental influences. It is a gross error to attribute the source of individual human character and propensities solely to the cells of the body. It is like saying that it is the key-board and strings of the piano which produce by themselves the melodies. In the production of the melody, the key-board is a factor indeed but not the sole factor; they could never do it without the musician operating it. The same is true for the genes to which are attributed transmission of hereditary traits. The latter have been caused by, and related to, the living, thinking, conscious Ego. It must however be noted that there are far more variations and differences in character traits of individuals in a family than similarities, the former being the Karmic heirloom of individuals coming back to them by their individual Karma. Similarities of character of members of a family, as well as character unique to each individual, are to be traced to what is called in Sanskrit as *Samskara*, or “the impressions left upon the mind by individual actions or external circumstances, and capable of being developed on any future favourable occasion—even in future birth” (*The Theosophical Glossary*). Genes are only the material cause and physical means by which those mental deposits or impressions find expression in physical life. The moral cause is *Samskara*, or the Karma of individuals which fixes individual moral responsibility on them for their condition. The same law applies to nations and races. National Karma is the aggregate of the Karma of individuals who have similar character traits, or are contributors in making those traits.

If the knowledge of Karma and Reincarnation becomes well

known and well understood, it would engender a sense of moral responsibility in individuals not only for their individual condition in life but also for that of the family and of the nation they belong to. Right knowledge and right education would lead individuals to make efforts to improve character by acquiring virtues, getting rid of vices, overcome hereditary defects, and raise to a higher level the national character. Thus, heredity is the handmaid of Karmic Law by a knowledge of which it can be altered or even overcome.

The instruments acquired by Karma in any life, *i.e.*, the body, mental and emotional nature, intellect, moral character, psychic nature, may undergo change because of the exhaustion of one set of causes and beginning of operation of another class of Karma. For instance, a normal healthy boy born of healthy parents may be struck with polio virus at the age of fourteen, deforming his body for the rest of his life, while his intellectual, mental and moral natures continue to be sound. Why is this so? Because, as the flow of one phase of the Karma operating on the bodily plane, providing him with a healthy body, was exhausted, the other phase consisting of strong mental impressions in the past life or lives created by himself, perhaps by his subjecting a fellowman to physical torture, began to precipitate through the bodily instrument, resulting in deformity of the latter in exact measure and proportion to the Karmic cause. Contracting poliomyelitis was the means by which the Karmic destiny was fulfilled. People with an indifferent attitude towards, or even ignorant of moral questions, at a certain stage in life are seen to become ethical and responsible in behaviour. Instances of the converse of this is also seen when people with a good report in society succumb to temptations and fall into disgrace.

Operation of this aspect of the Karmic Law is also seen in the life of nations, in the rise and fall of civilizations. For instance, stream of Egos who made the erstwhile highly advanced Atlantean civilization which perished are now reincarnating in America and Europe. Teachers say that the reason why they are not exhibiting higher knowledge and attainment of Atlantean civilization is owing

to the fact that Karma of the evil deeds committed by the Egos in Atlantean bodies is now operating through the bodies acquired by the race appropriate to it, “which cramps and binds the mighty man within. This again is Nemesis-Karma that punishes us by means of these galling limitations, penning up our power and for the time frustrating our ambition.” (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 25)

An illustration of the first part of aphorism 19—that changes may occur in the instrument by the power of a vow—is seen in the lives of even common people who are able to overcome undesirable habits by the power of a vow. In the ordinary course of the life of people, stored-up Karma of the past takes many lives to exhaust itself, appropriate to the body acquired in each. But when such a person turns his attention to higher knowledge of the Science of the Soul and aspires to reach Truth, the power of the higher thought brings about rapid changes in the body and the stored-up Karma of the past tends to precipitate through changed condition at a rapid pace. It is an opportunity for the aspirant to exhaust past Karma at a quickened pace. The higher and the stronger the aspiration and effort the greater the rapidity with which the past Karma flows out and exhausts itself in the life and circumstances of the aspirant, often causing much strain on the fabric of the mind and body.

“It is, moreover, unquestionable,” teaches *The Secret Doctrine*, “that in the case of *human* incarnations the law of Karma, racial or individual, overrides the subordinate tendencies of ‘Heredity,’ its servant” (II, 178). It is well known that the body undergoes a complete change every seven years, old atoms giving place to new ones. Making use of this law of eternal change of atoms, one can overcome hereditary habits and tendencies by maintaining firm resolve and unwavering determination to think and act on the laws and the principles of Higher Life throughout one or more cycles of seven years. One may thus recreate oneself anew in the image of a higher ideal of life and raise oneself to higher levels of consciousness.

(*To be continued*)

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Death and disease are unavoidable aspects of life. Will the sense of meaning help us? It sometimes seems that we have developed a delusional denial in the West, of the inevitability of death. We pour in billions into prolonging life with increasingly expensive medical and surgical interventions, writes Warren Ward, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Queensland. He hastens to add that if he were to get struck down with cancer, he too would spend money on treatment. Like others, he too would tend not to really value his life unless he was faced with the imminent possibility of it being taken away from him. Thus, the best thing we could do to appreciate life is to keep the inevitability of our death always at the forefront of our minds. It was German philosopher Martin Heidegger, whose work inspired Jean-Paul Sartre and other existential thinkers, who highlighted the relationship between death-awareness and leading a fulfilling life. According to him many wasted their lives running with the “herd” than being true to themselves.

Influenced by the Aristotelian notion of Being, all the existence, including human beings, has been considered as things to be classified and analysed. As against that Heidegger argued that before we classify Being, we should ask: “Who or what is doing all this questioning?” He invented a special word for this Being that asks, looks and cares, and called it *Dasein*. As contrasted with human body, which is material and will break down to its constituent parts, Heidegger’s ontology puts human experience at the centre of our understanding of the world. According to him, this awareness that one day we will die pushes us to make our life worthwhile, to give it meaning, purpose and value. Most Eastern philosophical traditions appreciate the importance of death-awareness for a well-lived life. The Buddha reminded his disciples of the impermanence of conditioned existence, saying, “Work out your salvation with diligence.” While we have to be aware of the fragility of the human body, “as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, however, I am also



reminded how empty life can be if we have no sense of meaning or purpose,” and that we should not only seek but create meaning if necessary, writes Warren Ward in an article that appeared in *Aeon* magazine.

The incentive to meaningful life does not depend only on the knowledge of the inevitability of death, but rather on the understanding of what death means. Is death the end? Or does something survive the death of the body? As Edmund Wilson puts it, “The knowledge that death is not so far away, that my mind and emotions and vitality will soon disappear like a puff of smoke, has the effect of making earthly affairs seem unimportant and human beings more and more ignoble. It is harder to take human life seriously, including one’s own efforts and achievements.” There is no incentive to achieve anything or lead an ethical and moral life, if death is seen as an end. In fact, there is desire to enjoy as many pleasures as possible, based on the philosophy that “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

It is belief in Karma and rebirth that makes for living a meaningful life. We need to appreciate that there is that in us, the “experiencer” or the perceiver, call it Soul or Ego, which survives the death of the body. Each life is an opportunity to learn and experience. In a given life we are not able to act out all our thoughts, feelings and aspirations. There is a limitation imposed by brain capacity, bodily handicaps, etc. Sometimes our efforts and achievements are only halfway through when we die. But death does not mean an end. What happens if we are in the middle of learning the piano and we die? In the next life we pick up the thread from where we had left off in the previous life. In fact, in *Devachan [swarga]* there is an assimilation and expansion of all the nobler qualities—sympathy, love for beauty, art, and the abstract things of life—so that the soul comes back enriched. It is this knowledge that our own comes back to us, if not in this life then in some other life, that can make people live ethically. They would think twice before doing anything wrong. Knowledge of rebirth takes from us the dread of death. It changes

the very outlook on life. 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. The highest “meaning of life” is to attain to peace and bliss of *Nirvana* but to renounce it, in order to help suffering humanity.

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It has been observed that people are more religiously active during crises as they see religion as an effective means to cope with catastrophes. During the Corona virus pandemic, a lot of people were seen going to church instead of staying at home. A woman was asked by a reporter if she was not worried about catching the disease and infecting others, and she replied, “I am covered in Jesus’ blood,” and therefore being infected when shopping is not scary or nerve-wrecking. Some studies have shown that during periods of catastrophes people donate more to the churches, with the hope that in lieu of the donation, they will be protected by the divine. In a 2019 study, Jeanet Bentzen found that when struck by catastrophe people seek closeness to God and pray more often. Keeping in mind the prohibition of large gatherings, in the time of COVID-19, religious leaders have arranged for online services as they feel a particularly strong need in the people for their church community.

In times like these, it is not surprising that people pray more. Prayer has been shown to benefit mental health, helping people to deal with anxiety caused by fear of one’s health and that of loved ones, or depression and anxiety from the self-isolation. Prayer can also give people sense of purpose and guidance in difficult times. Even doctors and nurses, resort to prayers during their spare time. People are willing to pray for the wellbeing of others and are happy to have others pray for them.

But there is another side to prayer. Prayer can give people a false sense of assurance that something has been done. In the context of COVID-19, “prayers can take the place of effective action, such as

social distancing and material aid, which can prevent people from becoming sick and dying.” People may begin to feel that once they pray, the divine will take care of everything. Some studies show that Christians who prayed for hurricane victims donated less than Christians who did not pray for the victims. Thus, prayers were seen to take the place of material help. “Ultimately research shows that, during social catastrophe, religion can promote prosocial behaviour and prayer can offer comfort to people. But it also demonstrates that prayer risks interfering with public efforts aimed at controlling a crisis and alleviating people from its harmful effects,” writes Linda Helena Thunstrom, an assistant professor in the Department of Economics at University of Wyoming, in an article that appeared in *Nautilus* magazine.

When life goes by smoothly, we generally do not remember God. We are reminded of God only when there is suffering, adversities, or some desire to be fulfilled. We turn to God as a last resort, after having exhausted all the alternatives for acquiring pleasures. Professor C. S. Lewis very pertinently remarks, “We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it is there for emergencies but he hopes he will never have to use it.” Saint Kabir conveys the same idea in his *Doha* (couplet): *Dukh mein simran sab kar, sukh mein kare na koye; Jo sukh mein simran kare, tau dukh kahe ko hoye.*” Such is human nature. When we are in distress, in a state of helplessness, we invariably remember God and wish to communicate through prayers or otherwise. However, we tend to forget Him, during good times. Saint Kabir says that if only we were to pray to God and remember Him during good times, we will not suffer.

Prayer is generally considered to be a means of communicating one’s problems, wishes and desires to Almighty. All alike are tempted to engage in purely petitionary prayers, asking God to grant this wish or avert that disaster. Does an Omniscient God need to be told what should or should not be done? “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him,” said Jesus. Millions of people recite prayers for the earthquake to stop or for the rain to

fall, but the earthquake continues and so does dryness. Some prayers *seem* to be answered, but more often than not, it is due to strong faith *or* due to intensity of thought and desire. Mr. Judge points out that in India, when help is needed for some orphanages, they pray to some patron god and help comes most miraculously. He explains that strong and constant faith carries the thoughts of the prayer into receptive minds and they are then moved to act.

H.P.B. points out that petitionary prayers kill self-reliance. She observes that when one considers oneself separate from God and prays to Him, everything must be possible to that all-powerful God. But then where is the justice or merit of such conquest? Would you pay the labourer you hired to work in your fields a full day’s wages if you did most of his work for him, while he sitting under an apple tree prayed to you to do his work? In such prayers we are living in moral idleness, passing on our burden to God. (*The Key to Theosophy*)

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A good night’s sleep is not only essential for brain health but also for the proper functioning of the body. One of the most obvious benefits of having a good sleep is that it enables us to remain alert through the day. But there are subtler benefits of good sleep. For instance, there are some hormones which rise and fall with our sleep-wake cycles, and among other things, they perform the function of regulating our immune systems. For instance, the high and low levels of cortisol follow the sleep and waking cycle. This hormone plays an important role in keeping our immune systems in shape. “Getting too little sleep can throw off the cortisol rhythm and keep high levels of the hormone going for longer. Other biological processes ramp up the immune system’s line of defense, and it turns out sleep might play a role in those factors, too,” writes Leslie Nemo.

Since last several years researchers are aware that poor sleep, which implies too few hours or a restless night or unusual bedtimes, is associated with weight gain. Kendra Krietsch, who studies sleep in teens and adolescents at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical

Centre, has conducted her own research and tried to figure out why disrupted sleep causes weight gain in adolescents. It appears that “lack of sleep does not appear to reliably boost, lower or leave alone hormones that regulate hunger or satiety.” It is difficult to say if certain condition of body and mind is due to sleep alone, as we need to take other factors also into account. The relation between sleep and health is undeniable. Hence, according to Krietsch, proper sleep as also, sleeping at right time could cause ripple effects of improvement elsewhere in one’s life, writes Nemo. (*Discover*, May 2020)

Experiments have shown that when people were deprived of sleep, their power of concentration was reduced, and also memory was adversely affected. To a troubled student, Mr. Judge once advised: “Now sleep, I say; I command you to sleep. It is sleep your tired nature on the outside wants, for sleep knits up the revelled thread of life and makes us young again.” The real function of sleep still eludes science, but the reasons for sleep are becoming less enigmatic.

Theosophy explains that we do not sleep because body becomes tired and depleted of vitality, but rather, we are more full of life energy when we fall asleep, than in the morning. As this life energy exists around us like an ocean, when we are awake the life waves rush into the body. Our power to resist is limited, and so we fall asleep. In sleep, equilibrium is reached, because during sleep we *absorb* life energy instead of resisting. While sleeping, the life waves adjust themselves to the molecules of the body; and when the equilibrium is complete, we again wake up. The physical organs are rested and recharged. If this periodical adjustment did not occur, the life current would destroy us. H.P.B. says, “Sleep is the shady nook in the sunlit valley of life,” and explains that sleep affords an opportunity to the nervous centres and especially the sensory ganglia of the brain to recuperate their strength on another plane.