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The Living of the Higher Life**

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THE AGELESS WISDOM

AN AGE means a period of time, and therefore it has a beginning and an end. That which is “ageless” has no beginning and will have no end. Time, as we know it, does not exist for that which is ageless. Thus, the “Ageless Wisdom” is Eternal Wisdom. Theosophy *per se* is Divine Wisdom and Eternal Truth, and its doctrines constitute a complete system of thought. H.P.B. calls it the Wisdom-Religion and the Esoteric Philosophy. The Wisdom Religion was never ever taught completely at any time or in any country. In every civilization, only some parts or aspects of it have been taught. However, here and there, there have been individuals who succeeded in mastering this knowledge completely by their training and effort. They are the custodians of knowledge, who impart some of this knowledge to those who are progressed or elect among men.

Even a portion of the Wisdom Religion, which is sacred and secret, is not always given out to the general public because unless they are ready, that knowledge or the teaching is likely to be concretized and anthropomorphized. But as the *Gita* says, “whenever there is a decline of virtue and an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world,” the great Custodians of this ancient Wisdom break “the silence of centuries” and give out to the public at large, a fragment of this Knowledge, laying emphasis on ethics or metaphysics, as per the needs of humanity. Some of these teachings are esoteric and secret, and therefore, presented in symbolic and allegorical language. H.P.B. cautions that whatever has been given

in the philosophy of Theosophy should never be believed on blind faith or any authority. However, she reminds us of the ancient source of Theosophy, saying: “What I do believe in is (1) the unbroken oral teachings revealed by living *divine* men during the infancy of mankind to the elect among men; (2) that it has reached us *unaltered*; and (3) that the MASTERS are thoroughly versed in the science based on such uninterrupted teachings.” This teaching is variously known as Wisdom-Religion or Bodhi Dharma, Ageless and Eternal Doctrine or *Sanatana Dharma*, Divine Wisdom (*Theosophia*) or Brahma Vidya, Esoteric Philosophy or *Gupta Vidya*.

It is on this Wisdom-Religion that *Theosophy is based*. The Wisdom-Religion is the Root-source from which all religions, philosophies and sciences have grown. In the *Theosophical Glossary*, H.P.B. defines it as one Religion which underlies all the presently existing religious creeds. The Wisdom-Religion consists of a body of definite principles or knowledge.

Who evolved this system of thought? It was not evolved by a person or group of persons or thinkers. It is the knowledge which is the result of observations made of the Laws of Nature, in its various departments, physical, psychic and spiritual. Those who made these observations are called the Kumaras or very high and pure intelligences or beings. “Their observations and findings were, and remain even today, flawless because of the virgin-pure nature of their minds.” They are called “Sons of Wisdom,” who had acquired knowledge during prior periods of evolution, and had incarnated in the earlier portion of Third Race humanity, and produced by *Kriyasakti* a “progeny called the... ‘Sons of Will and Yoga,’ ... they are those in whom are said to have incarnated the highest Dhyanis, ‘Munis and Rishis from previous Manvantaras’—to form the nursery for future human adepts, on this earth and during the present cycle.” (*S.D.*, I, 207)

These teachings were in possession of higher and exalted beings, who watched over the childhood of Humanity. They were men “who had developed and perfected their physical, mental, psychic and

spiritual organizations to the utmost possible degree.” These are persons whose spiritual perceptions are so trained as to range beyond the material limits. It enabled them to penetrate into the actual reality of things. These beings dealt with the very core of knowledge pertaining to this universe and the beings in it. This knowledge can be understood with the help of inner sense or intuition, and hence, although philosophers and men of great learning have accepted it, it meets with refusal from science, because modern science does not believe in the “soul of things,” or the inner, hidden side of man and nature, and hence would reject the whole system of ancient cosmogony.

This ancient doctrine has been transmitted in unbroken continuity, from one generation of Sages and Seers to the next. It is only after generations of such men had learnt, verified and recorded the Teachings that they began to teach. We are told that parts of the Wisdom-Religion were orally transmitted from one Race of humanity to another, up to the very beginning of the Fourth Race. Thus, as far as the present Theosophical teachings are concerned, we may say that the Teachings in *toto* include the whole evolutionary process of our universe. What has been given out to us today is only a portion of this knowledge.

The ancient doctrine transmitted by oral tradition was reduced to a Record in the Fourth or Atlantean Race (*S.D.*, I, 646). It was a Record of signs and glyphs, emblems and symbols. Some of these Atlanteans misused the teachings and became sorcerers, bringing about the cataclysm that destroyed the Atlantean continent and the Atlanteans. However, a few “Wise Men” among them were saved from the cataclysm and they passed their lives in *learning and not teaching* and became the Adepts of the Aryan or Fifth Race.

To understand how that Record was brought into existence, Shri B. P. Wadia draws our attention to “an old Book” mentioned in the *Secret Doctrine*, (pp. xlii-xliii). H.P.B. says that “it is so very old that our modern antiquarians might ponder over its pages an indefinite time, and still not quite agree as to the nature of the fabric upon

which it is written. It is the only original copy in existence.” Further, “Tradition says that it was taken down in Senzar, the secret sacerdotal tongue, from the words of the Divine Beings, who dictated it to the sons of Light, in Central Asia, at the very beginning of the Fifth (our) Race.” We read that Senzar language was known at one time to the Initiates of all lands. It is this “very old book” from which are derived many volumes of *Kiu-ti*, the book of *Shu-king*, which is China’s primitive Bible, the Sacred volumes of Egyptian Thoth-Hermes, the Puranas in India, the *Chaldean Book of Numbers* and the *Pentateuch*. The old book describes Cosmic Evolution, explains the origin of everything on earth, including man, gives the true history of the races from the First down to the Fifth, and stops short at the beginning of the Kali Yuga, which started at the death of Krishna about 5,000 years ago.

H.P.B. tells us that the Senzar is the “early hieroglyphic cypher still preserved in some Fraternities” (*S.D.*, II, 439). She tells us that it may be “rendered in several modes of writing in cypher characters, which partake more of the nature of ideographs than of syllables” (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. ii). *The Secret Doctrine* is based on the Stanzas from the *Book of Dzyan* and the “extracts are given from the Chinese Thibetan and Sanskrit translations of the original Senzar Commentaries and Glosses on the Book of DZYAN” (*S.D.*, I, 23). H.P.B. states that the truths which she gives out in her book, *The Secret Doctrine*, are by no means *revelation* and that she has put down the oldest tenets together in a harmonious unbroken whole. She did not have to resort to personal speculations and theories, because firstly, this is what she was taught by her Masters, and secondly, she has supplemented it in few details by her own observation and study, *i.e.*, some of these teachings are the result of her first-hand experience.

It was the Fifth Race Adepts who studied the Record for a prolonged time period. They checked, tested and verified the knowledge in the laboratory of nature through spiritual visions. Just as conclusions reached by one scientist in any branch of physical

science are verified by other scientists, so also, the spiritual vision of one Adept was corroborated by independent visions of other Adepts. The vision of no one Adept was accepted as established truth. The Adepts of the Fifth Race learnt the Record, reduced it to writing and also wrote the commentaries.

Where are these writings and records today? Says H.P.B.: “The Secret Doctrine was the universally diffused religion of the ancient and prehistoric world. Proofs of its diffusion, authentic records of its history, a complete chain of documents, showing its character and presence in every land, together with the teaching of all its great adepts, exist to this day in the secret crypts of libraries belonging to the Occult Fraternity.” (*S.D.*, I, xxxiv)

Thus, this ancient doctrine has been transmitted in unbroken continuity from one generation of Sages and Seers to another. One such pedigree of the Wisdom-Religion is mentioned at the very beginning of the Fourth Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, where the Wisdom-Religion is designated as “the exhaustless doctrine of Yoga.” Shri Krishna says: “I taught this exhaustless doctrine of Yoga to Vivaswat, Viwaswat communicated it to Manu, and Manu made it known unto Ikshawaku...until at length in the course of time the mighty art was lost.” Mr. Judge remarks that in the early part of a new *manvantara*, a being descends among men and imparts certain ideas and aspirations which reverberate through all the succeeding ages until the time of general dissolution. This “Being” represents the first manifestation of divine wisdom at the beginning of evolution, and that is why it is said to be taught by the Supreme Spirit or Krishna. After this Being retires, he leaves spiritual succession to Manu and his son Ikshawaku, who founded the line of Solar kings. These Solar kings were men of supreme knowledge, who ruled humanity as Adept-kings.

We cannot fail to appreciate that Krishna is the symbol of the great White Lodge of Adepts, and recognize the existence of Living Mahatmas, called Elder Brothers and Masters in Theosophy. Theosophy affirms that the most intelligent being in the universe,

man, has never been without a friend. There has been a long line of elder brothers who continually watch over the progress of humanity, preserving and imparting knowledge when the cyclic law permits. When the mind of man was lighted up or activated, the divine instructors burnt into the imperishable centre of man's consciousness, certain divine ideas, and taught humanity arts and sciences, which remain with us as *innate ideas*. Are these ideas lost? In one sense, as described in the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita*, the mighty art was lost. But there is also an inner line of transmission, in which the wisdom is transmitted in an unbroken continuity. Hence, when the outer transmission is garbled, a being from the inner line incarnates and restarts the chain.

Commenting on the opening verses of the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri B. P. Wadia remarks that the reason why Arjuna has come to the position where he can receive this great inheritance of Spiritual knowledge from his own teacher is because he has made himself the devotee (*bhakta*) and the friend (*sakha*) of that Teacher and of the Teaching itself. We should all aim to become a *Bhakta* and *Sakha* to Theosophy.

In the *Book of Job*, we read: "Where shall (true) wisdom be found? where is the place of understanding?" The answer is: "With the ancient is wisdom; and in the length of days understanding" (xxviii, 12, and xii, 12). H.P.B. explains that the "ancient" refers to the *Buddhi-Manas*. The human mind is the ray of the Soul, and in every incarnation, it carries within, the seeds of Wisdom. However, the weeds of passion, prejudice, pride, etc. do not allow the seeds to sprout. Hence, the first step is to clean from the mirror of mind, the dust of passion, attachment, false ideas, prejudices, biases, etc. In this process, self-examination is of great help. Secondly, we need to learn through experiences of life the necessary lessons. "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," says *The Voice of the Silence*. One has to become open-minded to welcome the truth. The breadth

refers to a broader outlook on life. It calls for the development of the universal perspective. The Depth of mind comes from having kindly concern for the opponent, *i.e.*, trying to understand his point of view instead of rejecting it *a priori*. Self-knowledge is the child of loving deeds. The “points” refer to altruistic endeavours and forgetfulness of personal self in the service of others. It is that which draws you closer to your Higher Self.

“In this world never is enmity appeased by hatred; enmity is ever appeased by Love. This is the Law Eternal.” (*The Dhammapada*, verse 5). In the comment on this verse, we are given one of the meanings of a true follower of the original Wisdom-Religion or *Sanatana Dharma*. Thus: “Law Eternal is in the original *Dhammo Sanatano*, Ancient or Eternal Law—the fount and basis of all *Dharma*. The Hindus refer often to their religion as *Sanatana Dharma*, Eternal Religion; every religion claims to be the foundation of religious belief and so of practice. This Verse teaches the basic principle of the Good Life, and every man who starts off his exercise with living this teaching is a true *Sanatanist*—follower of the original Wisdom Religion, *Bodhi Dharma* or *Sanatana Dharma*, Eternal Religion” (*The Dhammapada*, pp. 99-100). In other words, to always endeavour to counteract the feeling of hatred in another by the force of love is the true teaching of the *Sanatana Dharma*. It is the fount and basis of all religions.

The original, pure teachings tend to decay over the course of time, and to restore them, periodic attempts are made by the Great Lodge of the Masters in the last quarter of every century. The Theosophical Movement was launched in the year 1875 to bring the Ageless Wisdom into the world. Hence, H.P.B. states that “Theosophy is the most serious movement of this age,” and that “*he who studies Theosophy studies the highest transcendental philosophy.*”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE SPHINX

THE SPHINX is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe, first published in January 1846. The narrator in the story decides to accept the invitation brought forth to him by his relative living near the Hudson River, north of the city of New York, during the cholera epidemic that occurred in New York city in 1832. He stays with his friend for two weeks. Each day they hear the news of massive destruction caused by cholera, which includes the death of one of their friends from this terrible illness. The narrator writes, “The very air from the South seemed to us redolent with death. That palsyng thought, indeed, took the entire possession of my soul. I could neither speak, think, nor dream of anything else. My host was of a less excitable temperament, and, although greatly depressed in spirits, exerted himself to sustain my own. His richly philosophical intellect was not at any time affected by unrealities. To the substances of terror, he was sufficiently alive, but of its shadows, he had no apprehension.” Though the narrator is extremely upset because of the epidemic, the host being a rational person, tries to arouse him from the condition of gloom, but is not successful, partly because the narrator has been reading certain books from his library which tend to force into germination the seeds of hereditary superstition lying latent in him. For instance, the narrator believed in “omens” while his host did not. The narrator then relates an incident that occurred after he came to stay with his friend which, he thinks, could well be regarded as an omen.

One day he is busy reading a book near the window revealing a scenic view of the Hudson River, but all the time his attention is focused upon the cholera epidemic. When he glances up briefly, he sees a ghastly sight in the distant hills. There, an enormous creature larger than any oceangoing ship is climbing down! Its trunk is about seventy feet long, it has two tusks at its base like an elephant, surrounded by a huge mass of black hair, with a pair of “staffs”

forty feet long, sticking out on either side parallel to the trunk. It has “two pairs of wings—each wing nearly one hundred yards in length—one pair being placed above the other, and all thickly covered with metal scales; each scale apparently some ten or twelve feet in diameter...but the chief peculiarity of this horrible thing was the representation of a *Death’s Head*, which covered nearly the whole surface of its breast, and which was as accurately traced in glaring white, upon the dark ground of the body, as if it had been there carefully designed by an artist.” The monster opens its jaws and clamps them shut, causing a loud roar as it disappears at the bottom of the hill. The narrator faints and falls to the ground. “I considered the vision either as an omen of my death, or, worse, as the forerunner of an attack of mania.” He fears that the monster had come to claim his life, as the cholera epidemic had claimed several lives.

The narrator decides not to say anything about his experience to his friend. A few days later when they are sitting together in the same room, from which the narrator had seen the monster out of the window, he decides to share his experience with his friend. When he has finished relating his experience, his friend laughs at first but then becomes serious as he feels that the narrator has gone crazy. Soon after, the narrator once again sees the monster crawling down the hill bearing the “*Death’s Head*,” like a skull, upon its body. He describes the same to the host, but the host does not see anything. He goes on to calmly talk about various points of speculative philosophy, “insisting very especially...upon the idea that the principal source of error in all human investigations lay in the liability of the understanding to under-rate or to over-value the importance of an object.” As an example, he adds that although political theorists often write about the power of democracy and how great it would be if every government in the world was democratic, they do not mention how long it would be before this could become a reality. As such, this would be an example of how the importance of democracy may be overvalued, because it has not yet become widespread.

The host picks up a book about Natural History from his bookshelf and sits near the window, taking the narrator's seat, while the narrator sits on the sofa. He reads from the book about a type of creature "of the genus *Sphinx*, of the family, *Crepuscularia*, of the order *Lepidoptera*, of the class of *Insecta*—or insects." He reads out the description of the creature from the book which fits exactly the creature that the narrator has seen upon the hillside, and ends by describing that "The Death's-headed *Sphinx* has occasioned much terror among the vulgar, at times, by the melancholy kind of cry which it utters, and the insignia of death which it wears upon its corslet." After closing the book, he looks out of the window, searching for the "monster," and on locating it, exclaims, "Ah, here it is! It is reascending the face of the hill, and a very remarkable looking creature I admit it to be. Still, it is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it—for the fact is that, as it wriggles its way up this thread, which some spider has wrought along the window-sash, I find it to be about the sixteenth of an inch in its extreme length, and also about the sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye."

In the article, "The Theosophy of Edgar Allan Poe," we read that this American poet, who died at the age of forty was a genius in his own way, though not to be compared with the Buddha or Jesus. "And yet, if his creative powers were but the flowering of aptitudes cultivated in previous lives, they were *sui generis*. Few, if any, have excelled Poe in the depiction of the macabre, the sinister, in the painting of ruin, the evoking of despair, of dread, of awe before the superphysical." Some critics are of the view that this story, in which a man thinks that he sees a huge animal on a distant hill is in reality a small insect, does not have much to offer in terms of complexity and technique as compared with Poe's more famous stories. Yet, this story has important implications.

According to one view, at a simple level, this delusion can be attributed to the fear of contracting the dreadful disease of cholera, which was widespread in the nineteenth century, throughout India,

the Middle East, and the Western world, killing hundreds and thousands of people. This disease was considered to be highly contagious so even when there was a rumour of an epidemic outbreak, a large number of people moved away from towns and cities. The intense fear experienced by the narrator and his friend was probably based on the belief in contagion, which forces them to move away from New York city.

The title of the story is “The Sphinx.” The Sphinx is a mythological being with the body of a lion and a human head, associated with enigma and mystery. In Sophocles’ play, the Sphinx was killing travellers who could not answer its riddle, which at last was solved by the hero, Oedipus. The apparently simple-sounding story poses a riddle concerning the nature of perception and factors influencing it, as well as, how perspective affects the way we interpret symbols and omens, and what we read influences our perception of the world around us. In the story, the narrator is so afraid of being killed in the cholera epidemic that he thinks he sees in the surrounding countryside a huge and dreadful creature that is intent upon finding and killing him. What he has actually seen is a very small moth, a “Death’s-headed Sphinx” or a Death’s-Head Hawk-moth, at a very close range.

The narrator admits that he was interested in and defended “popular belief in omens.” It is interesting to know that the Death’s-Head Hawk moth gets its name from the skull-like mark on its thorax. It makes a squeaking sound when alarmed. It was due to the skull-marking that people once considered it a bad omen, even as an omen of death. Additionally, the narrator also admits that he had fallen into a condition of abnormal gloom mainly because he read things which helped to germinate the seeds of “hereditary superstition” that lay latent in him, and that in turn influenced his fancy. Each individual interprets every symbol, omen and the world around, in one’s own unique way, depending upon one’s perspective and understanding, and even one’s level of development. Thus, what is merely an insect for one person, can be for another person a symbol

representative of something far greater. It is Edgar Poe's genius that he has addressed these aspects in a short story of three or four pages.

In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, illusion is defined as a deception; wrong understanding of the true state of affairs; faulty perception of an external object or figment of imagination and hence something which has no real existence. Psychologically, false perceptions could arise due to our biases. Each one of us carries with himself the background of his culture, education and religion, and tends to look at the world and people through bits of these coloured glasses. Our judgments, more often than not, are biased. H.P.B. stresses the need for acquiring unbiased and clear judgment. Thus, our faulty perception or illusion could be because of the limitations of our senses or it could be the result of false conceptions, inherent in our build-up, carried from the past.

We say that good and evil are relative terms. What one person perceives to be good, from his limited understanding and knowledge, might be perceived as evil by a more advanced person, with higher knowledge and understanding. Lord Buddha draws attention to the warped psychology, thus: "They who feel shame when there is no cause for shame and they who feel no shame when they ought to be ashamed—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines." Our range of perception is governed by the ideas we hold regarding ourselves, our nature, and the life about us. It is man's false conceptions of life that prevent him from knowing the truth. He is then afraid or ashamed when in reality there is no need to be afraid or ashamed. We tend to judge things based on our limited ideas and start seeing evil where there is no evil; or we may fail to see evil in what is evil.

Some people feel ashamed of their poverty and suffer from an inferiority complex. Some people feel ashamed that they do not have an expensive house or car, or when they are not able to take their children abroad for vacation or buy expensive clothes. Likewise, there is the fear of isolation if one does not join others in taking bribes or distorting profit figures. There is also a fear of God's

wrath if one fails to perform certain rituals and ceremonies prescribed by the religion. People's idea of what is evil or sinful is often warped. In the olden days, it was considered sinful to touch an untouchable, a *Sudra*, a person from a lowly caste.

The same power of perception is possessed by each one of us. Each human being has the power to perceive and know all things, though at any given time that power may be restricted. What produces this restriction? It is caused by the narrow range of the ideas we adhere to, which form the basis for our actions. As a result, we are unable to have the right understanding of our observations and experiences. Hence, it is said that "proper adjustment and focussing of the instrument" is necessary. The instrument, the mind, "is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects."

What we call "our mind" is a bundle of ideas held by us, and we act in accordance with these ideas, writes Mr. Crosbie. "Mind is the Slayer of the Real," and "he who awakes illusion." For instance, when our thinking is guided by emotions, we are not able to see things clearly. Hence, to clean the mirror or to adjust the instrument implies that we must acquire universal ideas.

The narrator mentions "the principal source of error in all human investigations lay in the liability of the understanding to under-rate or to over-value the importance of an object." In *Studies in the Voice of the Silence* we read that the world of objects is illusory in the sense that our valuation of them is false. The objective world may be compared to a great bazaar (market) in which the desire-enslaved minds, not knowing the true prices of things take them and then bargain and haggle for them. The mind exploited in the bazaar of the objective world gains experience and learns to evaluate each object at its proper worth. It is only after a long training and purification of mind that one acquires "clear perception," and is able to "see things as they are."

RIGHT LONELINESS

THE NEED for love and Friendship is at the root of all human relationships. Man feels the desire to share his own thoughts and feelings, to communicate with other beings. He cannot live alone, and this for many reasons. The very nature and constitution of his being oppose it. He is part and parcel of a grand Cosmic Order. There is a natural and harmonious relationship between all the Units of Consciousness making up the Universe, and the One Law is inherent in the One Universal consciousness.

There is a kind of loneliness which the man of today is experiencing. Our globe can no longer be thought of as the real centre of the Universe; the position it occupies in the cosmic plan is insignificant. Even our sun is only one among thousands. But there are still lingering with us some old concepts while bold and far-reaching scientific theories have wrought a change in our thinking and our attitude to life. How is the modern man adopting himself to the new mental conception of time and space?

Loneliness of the mind is far less bearable than mere physical solitariness. Men thrive and feel alive whenever they are sharing ideas, communicating with one another on the mental plane. But let a man venture to go by himself, beyond the accepted concepts of his time, and not only will he find himself in a strange country, but will experience real loneliness. Such men are often underrated, nearly always misunderstood, and not rarely slandered and besmirched. They are alone, with nothing to prop or sustain them, no like minds to their own. They are the pioneers of the Race, centuries ahead of their time. The real work of the mind is to break ground again and again, to enlarge the mental horizon. For it is stated in *The Voice of the Silence*: "To live and reap experience, the mind needs breadth and depth and points to draw it towards the Diamond Soul."

Genuine thinking starts when we become attentive to our own thoughts. Whenever thought strives to be free, there is a mind in the making. Genuine thinking is rare; it demands courage and faith in

RIGHT LONELINESS

human nature to dare to think, to dare to challenge the leading minds of the time.

It is through the performance of their natural duty that men get a greater awareness of their true relationship to other human beings and to the whole of the Cosmos. Each one of us without exception is unique and in that sense we all are solitary beings. This solitariness is not a matter of choice. It simply means that we all have a definite work to do, a *dharma* to fulfil. In *The Voice of the Silence* we read: “The selfish devotee lives to no purpose. The man who does not go through his appointed work in life—has lived in vain.” We have to reconcile within ourselves two apparently opposing truths. We are all interdependent and interrelated and still are all different and stand alone. These two ideas are in fact complementary. How could there be any relationship between two objects or subjects if these two were absolutely identical with each other? Manifestation is synonymous with differentiation.

Therefore, though we may derive inspiration and help from a study of the life and work of the Great Ones, we cannot imitate them blindly. Every man has to evolve his own faculties and powers, to grow freely through inner stimulus. Then he has to adapt his growth to his environment. For this, man has to think, and thinking is a solitary task. He cannot progress, choose rightly, unless he trains himself to discriminate. In the last analysis, man is the arbiter of his own destiny. It is he who chooses his own particular line of thought or his own philosophy of life. It is perhaps in the anguish and throes of that free choice that man experiences real loneliness. Advice and counsel may be freely given, and friends and relations may surround one with love and affection, but each still remains alone to work out his own problems and to arrive at a decision, for which in all fairness he alone is entirely responsible. If he surrenders that birth-right and assents passively to the decision made by others in order to avoid ill feeling and criticism, he is failing in his status as a human being.

We all know of lonely people, people who feel lonely in their hearts and souls. Loneliness of the heart is felt at one time or another

RIGHT LONELINESS

by all human beings. This feeling partakes of the kamic nature. Self-reliance of the heart has to be cultivated. This is accomplished by self-control and purification. Right Loneliness of the heart is very rare; it is *Buddhi in actu*, real compassion.

The subject of Right Loneliness is approached from many angles. Paradoxical as it may seem, it could be said that Right Loneliness goes hand in hand with Right Companionship. A really solitary man will make friends wherever he goes. Self-reliance has a radiating and drawing power. The first step in true friendship is to be true to Self. Real friendship is a real fraternity of souls; we love the real being, not the outer form. In the *Dhammapada* we read: “If you do not find a prudent companion, upright and self-possessed, then walk alone like a king who has renounced his kingdom and his conquests. Be like a free elephant in the forest. It is better to live alone. There is no companionship with a fool. Let a man advance alone, committing no sin, like an elephant in the forest.” (Verses 329, 330)

Now let us consider the Noble Eightfold Path. Before we enter the Path, three primary truths must be learnt. The first is that life is a tale of woe; the second, that it is possible to know the cause of man’s misery, and this is followed by the third, or the bringing about of an end to suffering. This Path has an outer and an inner aspect. The outer man walks the outer path, the inner man is mindful of the inner path and the two become one.

In the last four stages of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Loneliness is preceded by Right Purity and Right Thought and is followed by Right Rapture. These are inner states. Right Loneliness is the last but one stage on the Path. It is that stage in which the mystic tries to reach out to the infinite. It implies inner equipoise and absolute detachment from worldly matters. Yet such men and women live in the world, performing in silence small and mighty duties for the enlightenment of the human race. They often appear as nothing in the eyes of men.

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS ANALOGY AND CORRESPONDENCE

CONSTANT thinking of the Divine has to be by trying to see Divinity in the very jobs we are doing. In the paper we write on and in the ink we write with there is Divinity as our very words carry thoughts within them. The periodic remembrance of this several times a day makes the remembrance permanent. Sacramental deeds, a few every day, produce their effects and one of these is continuity in sacredness. Our work will not suffer if we feel *calm*—“with calmness ever present.”

Metaphysically speaking, every type of action proceeds from and is rooted in an archetype. Every word of ours proceeds from a thought and that thought has an archetypal origin; so also, every deed of ours. Routine or “prosaic and worldly” duties are linked up archetypally. Thus, daily waking up is the return of the Ego to the body; everyday bathing is cleansing and ought to remind us of Baptism, *Snan*, or the Parsi *Nahan*. Breaking our fast is like the child’s sucking its mother’s breast—we suck Mother Nature. Going to sleep and death of body are kindred types to the setting of the sun, which also is an action rooted in the same archetype; and so on. It is the recalling of the archetype that makes the prosaic poetic, makes the worldly romantic or other-worldly. Sacramental become our secular deeds and events. I am writing this letter to you—body speaking to body but also mind and soul speaking to mind and soul. It comes from the same archetype as my Ego’s whispering to my brain. I am using pen and paper, *i.e.*, the king of my body (the brain) directs my pen to make marks on paper; so there is the king consciousness in Nature—*Purusha* using the media of *Prakriti*.

Our recalling or remembrance is an act of memory; when it is deliberate, we consciously link ourselves up with *Akasha*—the Divine Astral. What ordinarily are called evil expressions are not directly connected with *Akasha* but come through the Astral Light. But every sin is a dark shadow of a Paramita. On more and more

occasions every day we should try to recall this spirit-matter relationship. Take the correcting of proofs—is it not an art which calls for correction according to the right model or the MS? Is this not akin to the process employed in self-examination whereby we correct our lower personality by the model-picture of our Inner Ruler? Work it out along these lines; it is a fascinating exercise; the continuous use of it is taxing, but we do get accustomed to it. This is what is implied in *The Bhagavad-Gita*—*walking* or *sitting*, remember me, says Krishna. Judge ends Chapter III of his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* with a quotation where numerous “gods” are mentioned and the list covers many routine acts. Please read those pages once again in the light of what I have said above. Thus the whole of life becomes holy. It is holiness, wholeness or health which we are seeking and attempting to secure.

Morning corresponds to our birth as to the birth of the Cosmos. It is a new emanation and that is Karma, as Krishna points out in the eighth chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita*, in the very opening verses. Morning, the first day of the week, the bright fortnight of the moon, etc., are indicative of the rising cycle. There cannot but be a meaning hidden in the intimate relationship between Deity and Man, soul and body, and so on. The law of correspondences is a highly important law of knowledge, for it becomes the language of the developing intuition. May your latent divine intuitions begin to unfold fast and faster!

If *within* us the heart throbs for the Guru in devotion and without we are concentrated in all we do, a sacred force, the sacramental power, flows. It is not something special but it is using space and time increasingly from the Spirit point of view. We meet the same people but we meet them differently. Conscious living in the Spirit, all the time, *is* living in the Eternal. Thus we begin to see the immortality aspect of conscious life. This is a profound subject and much can be said, but for today this should suffice. Service of the All, the One Self, in space and time reveals the Servant within the carapace of selfhood.

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

“Live in the Eternal.” Some good points on this subject are to be found in *Through the Gates of Gold*. We do not truly live in the present, for every time we are thinking of the past or of the future with which what we are doing now is connected. Memory and anticipation all the time engulf the present. Now, when in our acts we forget the past and the future and are absorbed only in the present, we are touching the Eternal. What kind of acts (be they mental, moral or physical) make us forget memories and anticipations? Unselfish, sacrificial, service-full acts. What do we mean when we say, for example, “One forgets oneself on the platform”? It means the lower personal self. Now, the present which is not joined to the memory-anticipation complex is attached to the Higher. Personal memories, hopes, etc., keep us tied to the lower, the mundane, the temporal. We are called upon to overcome “the personal, the transitory, the evanescent and the perishable.” The Temporal and the Eternal are our yokes and our unions. The former moves horizontally: past, present, future—the present joining us to the other two. But when we go up, so to speak vertically, or deep within, we are proceeding towards the Eternal. And sometimes, for a moment or a few minutes, we experience Eternity. “To see a world in a grain of sand... and eternity in an hour” are space-time correlates. Hope you will find this helpful in your study and cogitations on the subject. May the Eternal sustain you from day to day!

WITHOUT ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. As to the methods there may be a million and then some, but the principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

THE PROBLEM OF FREE-WILL

OF all the seemingly self-evident, experientially obvious realities that melt into profound philosophical quandaries upon closer inspection, the question of free-will must be the crown jewel. The fact that it is inextricably interwoven with the question of the remembered and experienced Self, only deepens its profundity. The feeling that we possess free-will is so innate that many of us may not even realize that in it lies a profound problem. Simply stated, how can there be *free*-will when everything in the manifested universe is governed by deterministic law, including the biological system of our body and brain? Consequently, any decision we make must also be the effect of prior causes rather than the exertion of free-will at the moment of choice. Even if one subscribes to the idea of indeterminism and believes that everything is simply a matter of random chance, then also, there is no room for free-will since randomness is by definition the opposite of self-determined choice. Furthermore, brain scans in a lab setup have shown that a decision can be reliably predicted many seconds prior to the person consciously making that decision (“Unconscious determinants of free decisions in the human brain” by Chun Siong Soon, Marcel Brass, Hans-Jochen Heinze & John-Dylan Haynes, *Nature Neuroscience*, April 13, 2008). It is as if we fool ourselves into thinking we made a conscious decision when in reality we only became conscious of the decision that was already made through unconscious processes. Given such preponderance of evidence and arguments, many scientists have cut the Gordian Knot of free-will by simply denying that it even exists. The feeling that we indeed have free-will, they say, is an illusion. Or worse yet, that it is not even an illusion because the very question of free-will is incoherent as it militates against the fundamental idea of causality.

Theosophy agrees with Hermetic saying that *behind Will stands desire*. Hence, the intensity of desire determines the strength of Will that is directed towards its fulfilment. Accordingly, the Will so

directed is as free as the self is in choosing its desires and their corresponding intensity. So, the problem of free-will really boils down to the question of volition in choosing our desires. From experience, we find that desires are hard to control. They seem to arise capriciously on their own accord, and it is equally hard to sustain a desire for too long. In this situation, how can Will be free when it is directed by desires over which we have little control? Desires that we experience every day are essentially the senses seeking their respective sense-objects which are considered pleasurable. In this context, it is well to remember that in Eastern occultism, the mind is considered to be the eleventh *Indriya* (or sense) and its sense-objects are subtle desires such as aesthetic sensibilities or intellectualism, etc. Our experienced sense of self is bound up in the bundle of such desires which are all effects of prior causes. In Theosophy, this self is referred to as the Personal or Lower self which is the product of the Mind (or *Manas*) reflected in and commingled with desires (or *Kama*). As long as we identify ourselves with this lower self, we believe we have free-will because we mistakenly think we are indeed this bundle of desires. But in reality, we are slaves to those desires for they wield insidious control over us. In this sense, free-will is in fact as much an illusion as the sense of self derived from *Kama*.

Does this mean that Man is condemned to be an automaton? Ever seeking the fulfilment of desires set by prior causes, which in turn engender new desires, thus a victim of an endless sequence of knock-on effects? Scientific materialism would indeed condemn him to such a fate. But Theosophy teaches that *Manas* in its primary essence is not of this earth but of divine origin. However, in embodiment, it becomes dual in nature. The future state and the Karmic destiny of man depend on whether the *Manas*, working through the personality, gravitates more downward to *Kama*, the seat of the animal passions, or upwards to *Buddhi*, the Spiritual Ego. In the latter case, the higher consciousness of the individual Spiritual aspirations of mind (*Manas*), assimilating *Buddhi*, are

absorbed by it and form the reincarnating *Ego*. When it gets enmeshed in *Kama*, it engenders the strong sense of separateness that characterizes the personal self. The higher *Manas* is the reincarnating entity, the vehicle of that which is unconditionally immortal, the *Atma-Buddhi* monad, by clinging to which the *Manas* has become immortal. In reincarnating, it (the higher Mind) informs various personalities that live and die. In each incarnation, its ray becomes dual and assumes a two-fold attribute of being a heaven-aspiring mind, (higher *Manas*) and kama-tending or the lower *Manas*; its fate will depend upon the choice it makes—whether it levitates towards *Buddhi* or gets entangled in *Kama*. But between these two is the bridge (*Antahkarana*) that joins the lower to the higher *Manas*—the bridge built by the lower *Manas* (or personality) by its higher aspirations and spiritual living. It is for the lower *Manas* or the personality to throw its weight in the direction of the higher immortal trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* and elevate itself to the progressive realization of its true nature of non-separateness. However, this teaching presupposes that the personality can choose and hence has free-will, which brings us back to our original problem.

The impassable gulf in mental capabilities we see between man and even the most intelligent higher animals is explained in Theosophy to be the result of *Manas* being quickened in the former but being only latent in the latter. This gives man mental capabilities that appear god-like in comparison to animals. Self-consciousness, intelligence, conceptualization, language, creativity, purposiveness, compassion and so on, endow man with the unique capability to act against entropy, and create order from chaos, a decidedly god-like characteristic. All of nature also evinces intelligence but it is hard-wired and instinctual. An individual animal, no matter how intelligent, cannot reprogram itself consciously. A grizzly bear cannot independently reflect on the cruelty of subsisting on meat and become a vegan. But man can radically reprogram and drastically change himself even within a lifetime, as we see in the life of Gautama Buddha. This is possible because the thinking Entity imprisoned in

a case of flesh and bones is a Spiritual Entity, not Matter. It is divine in its essential nature, yet not pure enough to be one with Spirit. And yet, through the bridge, the *Antakarana*, formed of spiritual aspirations and spiritual acts, the immortal trinity is available to the human personality. H.P.B. says in her article, “Psychic and Noetic Action”: “This ‘Mind’ is manas, or rather its lower reflection, which whenever it disconnects itself, for the time being, with *kama*, becomes the guide of the highest mental faculties, and is the organ of the free-will in physical man.” All other faculties dependent on and generated by the animal brain are constrained by determinism, to more or less extent, depending on causes generated in the past.

This divine spark endows man with “free-will” and that means, it only affords man the ability to focus his internal attention towards one of the two centres of his dual nature—the universal, divine, unity or the personal, animal, separateness. And depending on where along the continuum between these two centers that man preponderantly focuses his attention, his nature is progressively reprogrammed in that likeness. And all his subsequent actions follow that nature which he has thus fashioned for himself. So, do we possess free will? Certainly, we do. The only free-will we have is in determining where we place our attention. Assume there is a patch of soil with seeds of weeds on one end and progressively useful seeds at the other end. Our final yield will depend on where we focus our grow-light and for how long. In fact, as more valuable seeds sprout, they compete for grow-light with the weeds that have been nurtured so far and immediately a death struggle begins. We have to starve the weeds before a progressively beneficent harvest can be reaped. The only free-will we have is in focusing the grow-light of attention, everything else is an effect of that cause. Similarly, we have a free-will in choosing where we focus our attention, consequently, on the nature (or *Svabhava*) that we fashion for ourselves which in turn determines the actions performed. By keeping up our focus in a particular direction, we strengthen our *Svabhava*; and it becomes increasingly difficult for us to choose

that which is contrary to the *Svabhava* moulded by ourselves. And yet, there is hope, as stated by Mr. Judge in the Preface to *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, thus: “The system postulates that *Ishwara*, the spirit in man, is untouched by any troubles, works, fruit of works, or desires, and when a firm position is assumed with the end in view of reaching union with spirit through concentration, He comes to the aid of the lower self and raises it gradually to higher planes. In this process the Will by degrees is given a stronger and stronger tendency to act upon a different line from that indicated by passion and desire. Thus, it is freed from the domination of desire and at last subdues the mind itself.”

Therefore, starting from the fundamental propositions of Theosophy, we can reconcile free-will with determinism and uncover some startling realizations about human nature. Even though we feel we do, in reality we do not have free-will to make an arbitrarily unrestrained choice at a decision-point of monumental importance in our lives. That decision is in fact the effect of many seemingly inconsequential choices we have made on where we focus our attention during times of relative unimportance. However, this should not be taken to mean that our *Svabhava* is unitary and, hence acts deterministically and we have absolutely no choice. On the contrary, our *Svabhava* is composed of many opposing tendencies of comparable strengths that compete for expression at the moment of choice and depending on where we focus our attention at that moment, we may be able to tip the balance in that direction. However, we obviously do not possess “free-will” to suddenly choose a path that we have not cultivated as a credible tendency in the past. In the eighth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna assures Arjuna that any man who meditates on Krishna at the time of death will surely come to him and hence to liberation. But one cannot live a life of debauchery and at the moment of death choose to meditate on Krishna. Because the thoughts that come to us at that point of monumental importance are the effect of the quality of life thus lived. Hence, Krishna extolls Arjuna to constantly focus his attention on

the higher-center in man, which is Krishna himself. So, we see that there is a temporal gradient to free-will. If we take the example of a piano concert, every key that the pianist chooses to play on stage is not an effort of free-will at that point in time. It is simply the expression of *Svabhava* that the player has fashioned for himself by focusing his attention over a long period of time on honing his skill. This should wake us up to the profound recognition that not one moment of our life is unimportant. We literally become what we focus our attention on. And since we have sovereignty over our attention, we have full control over who we become, and must also bear full responsibility for who we are and what we do.

This teaching is very evident in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In the third chapter, Krishna says, “All actions are performed by the qualities of nature. The man deluded by ignorance thinks ‘I am the actor.’” And further along in the same chapter, “All creatures act according to their own natures; what, then, will restraint effect?” And he goes on to answer that if a man fixes his attention on the likes and dislikes of his senses, that is, on the lower animalistic centre in him, then restraint has little effect. It is like applying brakes on a car without first removing our foot off the accelerator. The entire purport of the *Gita* hinges on the understanding that we must perform our duties (*Svadharmā*) concomitant with our nature (*Svabhava* or *Varna*) which is the emergent result of where we had chosen to let our attention dwell. But while doing so, to focus our current attention not on the results of such works but on the higher-center in us, which is Krishna or Christos. Thus, we set up causes in the right direction for the future while exhausting the effects of prior causes.

We have these inspiring words from Lord Tennyson: “Man’s free will is but a bird in a cage; he can stop at the lower perch, or he can mount to a higher. Then that which is and knows will enlarge his cage, give him a higher and a higher perch, and at last break off the top of his cage, and let him out to be one with the free will of the universe.”

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

SLAVERY is the subjection of one or many to do the will of, and labour for, another under duress, and at a more or less loss of natural rights of man. There are many kinds of slavery, like a hydra headed monster. Well known and much talked of is the political and economic slavery. A common feature that engages one's attention when reading *Histories* of Herodotus is the frequent wars kingdoms of that time fought with each other in which the victor expatriated to his kingdom the able-bodied men from the vanquished state as slaves to labour in farmlands and for other labour-intensive works.

Colonialism, defined as subjugation and exploitation of a nation, its people and its wealth by another stronger nation is another form of political and economic slavery of the subjugated people. It is a historical phenomenon that stretches around the globe and across time. In modern times, colonization and exploitation of weaker Afro-Asian and Latin American countries by the stronger European powers has been a global phenomenon till a few decades back. It was physical colonization of land and wealth of the colonised people and legitimised slave trade. Though physical colonisation in such a crude form is over, yet it is still prevalent, albeit metamorphosed into a subtler form through the instruments of hegemonic unequal international trade treaties, differential monetary policies, and geo-political manipulations—called Gunboat Diplomacy by contemporary historians.

There is yet another form of slavery. It is indiscriminate submission to established social norms, customs, cultural stereotypes, religious beliefs and traditions, to which the masses conform unquestioningly, and by the intelligentsia also, compromising with conscience, for the fear of ostracism or unpopularity or for the sake of preserving personal reputation and self-interest. It may be racial or colour prejudice prevalent among people of mixed races. In India it is the rigid caste based social order that has unjustly, for centuries, oppressed and deprived opportunities to the so-called lower caste

people by the fewer privileged, the worst form of which being “untouchability,” constituting unfortunate pariahs of Indian society.

One of the worst forms of social slavery is consigning hundreds of millions of poor labouring masses to addiction to intoxicating drinks for the sake of earning substantial revenue by the state by the sale of liquor; a form of slavery which leads to moral, spiritual and physical ruin of man, as also destruction of families.

Our present time is unspiritual, the chief characteristics of which is that the consideration of ethical principle of ends and means does not generally figure in people’s lives, and in the state’s policies and programmes. Ends justify the means is now the ruling principle. Such questions as how spending money earned by such immoral means as the sale of liquor that destroys millions of families and ruins individual lives, on social development programmes, can be productive of beneficial results, do not enter into the calculations of the policy makers and planners of the development projects of the state. It is generating obstructive national Karma that hinders true progress and happiness of all.

Modern political economy whose objective, and criteria of progress, is ever expanding industrialisation and insatiable consumption of goods and services has driven the whole population to slavery—slavery to the machine, to self-gratification, and digital social media culture. Look wherever we may, it is undeniable that the world is in the thrall of slavery.

What, then, is freedom? How can we be free? This is a profound question, the answer to which cannot be found in terms of the idea of progress that moves the world today; which is unbridled individualism and consumerism. Common idea of freedom in vogue now is individual freedom, implying absence of all constraints, except such as are imposed by the state for safeguarding the general interest, in the pursuit of personal happiness, and interests, and to live according to one’s convictions. This is considered as the hallmark of freedom and progress.

But what is the reality? Effects of action of an individual are not

sealed off as to be confined to the individual alone but proliferate in all directions, like the ripples spread out when a stone dropped on the still waters of a lagoon, affecting for good or ill all beings of the visible as well as the invisible world. All beings are unfolding expressions of One Life in various stages of evolution, bound together in a bond of universal brotherhood and law of reciprocity, all evincing a progressive march towards a higher life. This is the reality, the truth and the law of our being, whether we know it or not. Hence our thoughts and actions at variance with the immutable laws of higher life, which they inevitably are when selfish gratification is the motive in action, cause infraction of the harmonious universal order which adversely react on us as Karmic retribution, to which we become bound and suffer, as much as we are bound by the evanescent pleasantries of life that are the fruits of good actions; thus endlessly turning the wheel of involuntary reincarnations under Karmic law.

The fate of the ethic of such an idea of personal freedom is graphically portrayed in a painting, titled, *The wheel of fortune*, by Edward Burne Jones. It is an allegorical depiction of the vagaries of life, with individual lives elevated and cast down alternately as the wheel relentlessly turns. “There’s legions now,” insightfully says Shakespeare, “of beggars on the earth, that their original did spring from kings, and many a monarch now, whose fathers were the riff-raff of their age...”

Therefore, what is cherished as personal freedom devoid of obligations and duties to fellow beings, is no freedom but slavery—and, much more, the mother of all other forms of slavery. The state enacts laws and enforces them to end slavery in society in its various forms, like child labour, prostitution, bonded labour, drunkenness, corruption, usury, and so on. Well-meaning individuals and organizations make noble efforts to ameliorate the condition of the victims of slavery, but the evil persists because the moral cause of the problem remains untouched.

Arjuna asks Krishna what is that impalpable force which impels

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

a man to sin against his conscience and will. “It is lust which instigates him,” answers Krishna. “It is from the quality of *rajas*, insatiable and full of sin. Know this to be the enemy of man on earth.” In another chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* Krishna says that desire, anger, and covetousness are the three gates to hell. These passions also manifest in subtle ways in us as prejudices, biases, selfishness, vanity, and so on, as our hidden enemies.

So long as we have not emancipated ourselves from these defects of our lower nature, we remain slaves ourselves to them, and so long the evil of slavery in multifarious forms persists in society. World reform begins with efforts of individuals to reform themselves. It is the duty we owe to Nature and to humanity to strive to emancipate ourselves from that one chief source of all human ignorance and misery, namely, the personal idea that generates the sense of separateness and selfishness in us, by acquiring knowledge of the true nature of Self, which is the Self of all, and the law of our being, and enlightened performance of duties obligated by Nature and by Karma devoid of self-interest, with the view to benefit the world.

To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better,
whether by a healthy child, a garden patch,
or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Is out-of-body travel possible for the soul? The topic of out-of-body travel, which is also termed astral projection or out-of-body experience, is a controversial topic and there is only limited scientific evidence for its existence, writes Megha Chaturvedi. Several cases of astral projection have been reported. Astral projection “is a term used to describe a phenomenon where an individual’s consciousness or spirit appears to separate from their physical body and travel to different locations, realms, or dimensions. During an astral projection, a person may feel as though they are floating above or outside their body, observing themselves and their surroundings from a detached perspective.” In some cases of astral projection, people report “travelling to distant places, interacting with other entities, or having profound spiritual or psychic experiences.” In one such case the person felt that he had discovered a universe within himself and “the soul was free to explore the infinite possibilities of existence.”

Many skeptics and scientists are of the view that during astral projection there is no real separation of consciousness from the physical body, and that it is the result of imagination, dreams, or altered states of consciousness. It is difficult to scientifically study this phenomenon because people use techniques such as meditation, relaxation, and visualization to induce such experiences, and hence astral travel is often considered to be a philosophical or metaphysical experience. At present, there is no scientific means to objectively measure the departure and return of the person’s spirit from the body during sleep or meditation. Those who wish to explore these practices should do so with an open but critical mind and with healthy skepticism and caution, writes Megha Chaturvedi. (*India Today*, October 17, 2023)

To understand astral projection, it is necessary to understand the relation between body and soul. William James pointed out that we can say that body *produces* life [soul], *or*, that the body *reflects* life. He gives an analogy. Light is produced by a candle; if the candle is

put out, its light disappears. But light is reflected by a mirror; if the mirror is taken away the light still continues. So also, we may suppose that the body reflects the soul, therefore it is rational to believe that soul can exist apart from the body. We may argue that we do not have a *direct* experience of the soul existing independent of the body. Yet, there are innumerable instances of people who have had OBEs [Out-of-the-Body-Experiences]—in which they describe rushing out of the body, observing the body from a distance and re-entering it—showing that soul can exist independent of the body.

In *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, H.P.B. describes three kinds of astral bodies. She speaks of *Linga Sarira* as the “Double” around which physical body is formed. This double is born with man and dies with him, and can never separate itself too far away from the body. The second kind of astral body is called the “Thought” body, or Dream body or *Mayavi-rupa*. During life, the *Mayavi-rupa* or “Illusion-body” is the vehicle on which thoughts as also the passions and desires get impressed. It can pass anywhere, and unlike the *linga sharira*, which cannot go farther than a few feet away from the physical body, the *Mayavi rupa* can travel many miles away from the body. The *Mayavi rupa* is described as a result of the unconscious exercise of *Kriyasakti* or the power of thought. It is in fact described as a “walking thought.”

The astral form can be used at will by men of power and knowledge; but there are many hysterical, cataleptic and scrofulous people, as well as mediums, who could send out the astral body unconsciously, by reason of practices pursued in previous lives. In the article, “Projection of the Double,” (reprinted in *The Theosophical Movement*, Vol. 6) H.P.B. describes various cases of projection of the astral body, which she calls *Mayavi rupa*. She points out that these doubles are projected, either when the person is asleep, or when he is awake, or at times such a double is a forerunner of death, *i.e.*, projected by a dying person. Sometimes it is projected and it wanders, for the mere pleasure of seeing a friend. Sometimes, the desire to reach a familiar place can overpower the

physical power of the body to be at that place. We are given a case of a German Professor who was returning home. When he came near to his house, he found that his double had reached the place and was knocking at the door, and the door was opened by the maid and the double entered the house. He walked quickly and reached the door in minutes and rang the bell, only to find the terrified maid saying, “Why sir, I just let you in!” When he went to his room, he found his “double” seated in his chair, and as he approached, the double melted into thin air.

The *Mayavi rupa* of an Adept is projected by conscious exercise of thought and endowed with powers and faculties. Unlike the *mayavi rupa* of an ordinary man, that of an Adept can speak and act. Such *conscious* withdrawal and consequent travel is possible for Adepts, and in their case, when the astral body is withdrawn, their physical form appears to be in a state of meditation, and his physical senses are alert. This is the explanation for beings like Buddha, seen giving sermons at two places at the same time.

“Perhaps too much of everything is as bad as too little...but the difference lies in realising it!” writes Swati Jindal Garg. Ambition and enterprise is the cause of all improvement. If too much of everything is bad then wanting too much success must also be bad. Once we have achieved the desired goal, the question arises, do we stop trying to set another goal or “do we keep setting new goals and aspire to achieve more and more in that never-ending quest for perfection and self-improvement?” It is true that ambition is necessary for a satisfying and meaningful life but at the same time it is also important to pause and appreciate ourselves for what we have achieved, otherwise our soul shall hunger for praise. The next question is: “What is it that the human life craves for? What satisfies it?” It appears that our goals and cravings change depending upon our status in life. For instance, at one point in time our priority may be money, power, position, *i.e.*, success in professional life, but with

age and maturity, and also as a result of certain painful and pleasurable experiences, we may begin to realise that the ultimate joy comes from the love we get from our friends and family members. It is only when one learns to differentiate between greed and self-improvement that one is enabled to decide, what one wants to achieve and how much one wants to achieve. It is quite possible to seek more and more because one is not satisfied with what one already has.

But on the other hand, it is not good to be complacent. The tragedy of life often lies not in our doing too much, but rather in our doing too little; not in living above our ability, but rather in living below our capacities. “The real tragedy of life is not living as it deserves to be lived...and in not leaving behind friends and family who will miss you.” Walt Disney presents this dilemma by means of a story of a fish who swims up to an older fish and says that he wants to know where is the ocean. When told that he was already in the ocean the young fish says, “But this is water. What I want is ocean.” We are all like the little fish, “in search for the elusive, we sometimes forget the exclusive that we already possess, only to realise it after it is too late,” writes Swati Garg. (*Bhavan’s Journal*, August 16, 2023)

In his teachings on the Noble Eightfold Path, Lord Buddha asks us to follow the “middle way.” For instance, the practice of “Right Effort” seems to suggest avoiding of the extremes—of being over-active or complete inaction. Ambition is the strong determination to achieve success or distinction in a chosen field. It is clear that ambition is not wholly bad, firstly, because, often an unambitious person is not only complacent, but plain lethargic. Though ambition is generally associated with gain of worldly things—wealth, name, fame, position and power—it is a force or energy which needs to be channelized properly. “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?” said Robert Browning. *Light on the Path* advises us to “kill out ambition,” but also asks us to “work as those work who are ambitious.” An ambitious person is characterized by zeal, enthusiasm, perseverance and commitment. All these

qualities are essential in a spiritual aspirant. In fact, it is only when a spiritual aspirant realizes that his Karma is interwoven with Karma of others, and that his welfare is interwoven with the welfare of others, that he is able to make progress.

The choice is between successful life and meaningful life. In a sense, we may consider that a meaningful life when we die and survive in the minds and hearts of our loved ones, and at times, in the hearts and minds of millions of people. However, for many of us life is full of repetitive tasks. If we could perform them for their own sake, without concern for name, fame, money, power, etc., or looking upon them as useless drudgery, then those very mundane, repetitive actions would fill our life with meaning and would contribute in keeping up the harmonious life in the universe. Every life is meaningful, provided we change our attitude towards what life brings to us and live with the aim of self-actualization and self-transcendence. “The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself,” writes Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist, who founded Logotherapy.

It appears that Indians have always given more importance to the guru’s testimony over the scientific method. Those who speak in favour of science are accused of defaming tradition. Science must not be confused with logic because “science is about stepping outside the human mind, relying on measurement, comparison and evidence.” Science, according to the Latin definition, means “on the word of no one,” which is opposite of “shabda-praman,” or unconditional acceptance of the guru’s word. Science values doubt over faith.

There are various grades of teachers who give knowledge and skills for a fee or *dakshina*. A guru is given a high position, and is considered even greater than parents as well as gods. Such a guru-disciple relationship in which the guru is a Master and the pupil

becomes a willing slave, who would do nothing without the guru's approval or permission, is widespread in the art world. However, such a relationship did not always exist in India. For instance, Yajnavalkya refused to do what his teacher Vaisampayana asked him to do. We do not find any submission to the guru in *Prashna Upanishad*, wherein six students ask questions on spirituality and receive clear answers from the teacher, and in return they give him a gift and express their gratitude. Thus, we do not find submission to Vedic teachers, but it is found in the *Mahabharata* stories, where gurus exploit and abuse their students. For instance, in one case a student uses his body to block the breach in a canal to protect the guru's fields. Today, these stories are interpreted as being indicative of a student's true devotion and unconditional love.

“The idea of surrender to the guru amplified itself with the arrival of Sufism in India eight centuries ago....Around the same time in Hindu Vedantic mathas and bhakti sampradayas, we find disciples submitting to spiritual leaders like Shankara, Chaitanya, Ramanuja and Madhava, usually after losing a debate,” writes Devdutt Pattanaik. On the other hand, the purpose of science is not to argue, debate or challenge authority but to seek the truth which exists outside the human mind (ontology, metaphysics), and to get at the truth by experiments and measurements, which is not based on the opinions of scientists. India wishes to be seen as a fountainhead of scientific ideas but at the same time it clings to the concept “of the guru, who demands complete submission to his authority,” writes Devdutt Pattanaik. (*The Economic Times*, October 14, 2023)

To understand scientific and religious attitude it is useful to know that both doubt as well as faith have several aspects. As long as one doubts, there is curiosity. Curiosity stimulates enquiry and enquiry begets effort. This kind of doubt is an intellectual honesty. We must “doubt” and hence, question our blind beliefs. Credulity and unquestioned cynicism are but two sides of the same coin. Both are forms of mental laziness which avoid critical thinking. Questioning is the middle path between gullibility and cynicism, and that is the

steep path of an honest skeptic. “There lives more faith in honest doubt...than in half the creeds,” says Tennyson. Healthy skepticism or an honest doubt leads one to an ongoing quest for truth.

There is another form of doubt, where one seeks tangible proof, for being completely convinced. Thus, a “Doubting Thomas,” is a skeptic who refuses to believe without a direct personal experience. The skepticism of modern materialistic science falls in this category, which refuses to believe in the existence of God, Soul, Rebirth, Astral body, Astral matter, etc., for the lack of tangible proof. The knowledge of modern scientists is limited because of their unwillingness to probe beyond the physical. Neither Science nor religion admits the existence of the occult or super-material region, governed by laws. Religion attributes it to the Will of the God, and science—not being able to weigh, classify and analyse the knowledge of the ancients—rejects it as fraud and superstition.

Faith, in Sanskrit, is called *Shraddha*. Faith is inherent in every human being. It is due to lack of faith that knowledge of things divine eludes modern man. True religion must seek to replace blind belief by reasoned faith, and then by intuitive faith. Blind faith is based on human authority or hero-worship.

Mr. Judge explains that it is important to know that there are several divisions of Gurus as well as divisions of disciples. The proper function of the Guru is to *readjust*, and not to pour in vast masses of knowledge expressed in clear and easily comprehended terms, because then the Guru is no better than any well-written book. The faith and love which exists between Guru and disciple act as a stimulus to both, and as a purifier to the mind of the chela. It is at a very high stage, when Guru is known to be a great Sage that the Chela has to pay slavish attention to every word spoken by the Guru and then endeavour to assimilate the meaning underneath. Even when he is unable to immediately understand, he is satisfied to be near that Guru, and perform his duty. “For then his abiding faith will eventually clear his mind.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, pp. 45-46)