

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 78, No. 12

October 17, 2008

THEOSOPHY AS RELIGION

AS far back as in the 3rd Century A.D. Ammonius Saccas used the name Theosophy for his Eclectic Theosophical system. “Eclectic” means selected from various doctrines, systems, etc. They followed the practice of interpreting all sacred legends, myths and mysteries by a rule or principle of analogy and correspondence. The object of this system was to inculcate certain great moral truths upon its disciples. Their aim was “to reconcile all religions, sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities.” Today, many years later, it is the aim of Theosophy to show that all religions are based on one and the same truth. The various sects are like the twigs on the branches, which represent the religions, and these branches have sprung from the same trunk called the WISDOM RELIGION or *Theosophia*. All religions spring from the same source, but all without exception are overlaid with cobwebs of superstition, corruption and dogmatism. All are true at the source, but false on the surface.

Religions as a general rule discourage intellectual study of belief. Somehow there is a feeling that to question the scriptures or religious authority is to be irreverent towards your religion. Religions and religious creeds with their rituals and dogmas are intellectual extinguishers. A rather strong and startling statement occurs in *Through the Gates of Gold* : “Religion holds a man back from the path and prevents his stepping forward.” One who follows the dead-

letter form of Religion only falls into a rut. Even Job asked questions of God. It is said that there lies more faith in an honest doubt than in the thousand creeds of the world. Religion of Theosophy inculcates the spirit of inquiry. Thus:

Orthodoxy in Theosophy is a thing neither possible nor desirable. It is diversity of opinion, within certain limits that keeps the Theosophical Society a living and a healthy body.... Were it not, also, for the existence of a large amount of uncertainty in the minds of students of Theosophy, such healthy divergencies would be impossible, and the Society would degenerate into a sect, in which a narrow and stereotyped creed would take the place of the living and breathing spirit of Truth and an ever growing Knowledge. (*Five Messages*, p. 5)

“Ortho” means right or correct, and *doxa* means opinion. Earlier, Orthodoxy meant correct teachings or doctrines as given out by the Teacher or Prophet-reformer. But gradually, orthodoxy came to mean authorized or generally accepted theories or doctrines. It implied conforming to the authority and hence, those who interpreted the teachings differently from the religious authority were labelled heretics. History is replete with instances of heretics being burnt at stake, and of other religious persecutions. On the other hand, never have the teachers and messengers of theosophy posed as intermediary between the Truth-seekers and the Masters of Truth. Says Shri Krishna in the *Gita*, “I am he who is the author of the Vedanta, and I alone am the interpreter of the *Vedas*.” Keeping in mind Krishna’s words, Mr. Judge advises us to read the *Gita* [also applicable to other scriptures] by the light of the spiritual lamp, *i.e.*, by the light of the divine nature within. This spiritual lamp will shed brighter light if we live the life according to the dictates of our divine nature and diligently inquire after the meaning. The method of study suggested is that when the question arises in the student’s mind, it should be deeply thought over from all its aspects, so that he may find the answer himself. Only when every ordinary means of solving

the doubt or acquiring the information has been exhausted, should the question be asked. It is suggested that every earnest student-aspirant should follow this course in order to develop self-reliance and intuition.

True religion must seek to replace blind belief by reasoned and then intuitive faith. H.P.B. points out that between *faith on authority* and *faith on one’s spiritual intuition*, there is a very great difference. H.P.B. says that blind faith, based on human authority or hero-worship, is like logic of some emotional women, for whom 2 plus 2 is generally 4, but it could be 5 also, by the will of God. It is this kind of blind faith which leads to religious conflicts and fanaticism. When we accept our religion on such a faith, we are more likely to be intolerant of other religions. It is comparable to canine instinct, like a dog that guards his master’s property, we become possessive and protective about our religion with a deep feeling of religious exclusiveness.

Faith is a covenant between man’s higher and his lower nature. A covenant is an agreement. Faith is necessary because there are things, which could be experienced and verified only when we reach a certain stage in our inner development. Sometimes a poet or an artist brings to us things that we are not able to understand or experience at our level. The same applies to the Spiritual realm. Faith is required not just in accepting things we have not seen or are not able to verify, but most of all faith is required in holding on firmly to things, which we have found to be good and true. For instance, we need to have faith in God as also the faith that the Law of Karma works unerringly and impartially. We have very little faith in our higher nature because we have very few direct or self-certifying experiences of the presence of the higher nature. It is the kind of faith, which makes one accept that the higher in me may lead to loneliness and pain, but it still leads me towards something good and great.

Only the one who is untameable, who cannot be dominated, who knows that he has to play the lord over facts, over all things

save his own divinity can arouse the faculty of intuition and cultivate intuitive faith, says *Light on the Path*. We are influenced by thousand and one voices—of the society, community, religious groups, leaders, etc.—but ultimately, we have to follow only *our* sense of right and wrong. We may consult wise people and good books but above all let us consult our own inner nature. In the process we may go wrong in our judgment but the important thing is to learn self-reliance.

Religion of Theosophy enables a man to break the fetters of every kind of limitation which religious creeds fashion. As we seek points of agreement in different creeds, countries and castes, we see the fundamental unity. Religion of Theosophy asks us to look for points of similarity in Ethics. A true religion and philosophy always gives *Universal Ethics*. Ethics are not social morals or social customs that keep changing from time to time. If our religion claims exclusiveness in ethics we should be able to reason out. Professor Lewis asks, Can we ever say that Christian ethics entered the world as a novelty or as a set of new commands? What was there before the Christian ethics? An ethical vacuum? He says that people who feel that Christianity has to give anything radically new are only ignorant of Jewish and Pagan religions. The second object of U.L.T. is to undertake the comparative study of the Aryan and other scriptures, world religions and sciences, in order to (1) show the importance of old Asiatic literature like Brahminical, Buddhist and Zoroastrian philosophies and (2) select therefrom the universal Ethics.

No single religion can have exclusive claim to ethics. No religion gives out new ethics, only the emphasis changes. Some emphasize charity, some good works and some love and purity. It would be seen that certain basic truths or moral codes are common to all religions. Two different people belonging to two different religions may not agree on their ideas of hell and heaven or their concept of God, or belief in Karma and Reincarnation, but they will agree on being good, kindly, loving, honest, etc. The ethics of Theosophy are identical with those taught by the Buddha, Jesus, Zoroaster, etc. That is because “these ethics are the soul of the Wisdom-Religion,

and were once the common property of the initiates of all nations.” In Theosophy, the emphasis is on the practice of these ethics. In its practical bearing theosophy is divine ethics.

Theosophy is not *a* Religion but is Religion itself. What is the nature of true religion? The English word religion is derived from the Latin *religio*, which means “to bind back,” as it is made up of the root, *re* (again) and *ligare* (bind or connect). The theosophical definition of true religion is:

True religion must give us a basis for thinking, and consequently, a basis for acting; it must give us an understanding of nature, of ourselves and of other beings. Religion is a *bond* uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs—binding not only all Men, but also all Beings and all *things* in the entire Universe, into one grand whole. Just that basis and that bond are presented in the three fundamental propositions of the *Secret Doctrine*. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 211)

Theosophy is scientific religion and religious science, and unlike the popular belief that science and religion will always be at loggerheads, theosophy tries to show that science and religion can be reconciled, if only religion could be cleared of its cobwebs of dogmatism and superstitions, and science of its materialism and atheism. Knowledge *is* religion, says Mr. Crosbie. That knowledge is not a supposed “revelation” from some superior being, but an actual knowledge gained through myriads of lives, leading to perfection. True religion is knowledge of one’s own self and living the life in accordance with that knowledge, and realizing that the powers of the Godhead, *i.e.*, the power to create, preserve and destroy, are within each and every one of us.

Religion is the Way of Life. Those who pay only lip-service to the teachings of theosophy, are called “drones of theosophy” by H.P.B. She says, “Theosophist is, who Theosophy does.” The whole attitude of the practitioner must undergo a change; his relationship with others must become a spiritual one, and he must begin to regard

himself, more and more as a unit in the Spiritual Family. The Way of Life taught by Theosophy is the realization that Humanity is "essentially" spiritual.

The motto adopted by the Theosophical Society was, "There is no religion higher than Truth!"

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ON ASTRAL TRAVEL

WHAT is astral travel? Though many people speak of astral travel, the concept and the rationale are not clearly understood. Astral travel denotes the astral body or *double* leaving the physical body to travel in the astral plane. But what is an astral body? Another name for astral body is *design body* or model body on which physical body is built. The model for the growing child in the womb is astral body, on which molecules arrange themselves until the child is complete. The real centres of sense organs for seeing, hearing, etc., are within the astral body. The powers of seeing, tasting, smelling, hearing and the sense of touch are all in the astral body. The physical sense organ would be useless if the corresponding astral sense organ is damaged. Often, in congenital blindness or deafness it is the astral organ, which is damaged, so that even if the physical eye or ear may be normal and uninjured, the person is not able to see or hear. Just as the blood flows through the physical body, astral fluid flows through the astral body. It has its own complete system of nerves and arteries. It is called inner or astral man.

Normally, this astral body is inextricably interwoven with the physical body, cell for cell and fibre for fibre, like the fibres of a mango in the pulp. It is possible to project this astral body out of the physical, *consciously or unconsciously*. But it is not *easy* to extricate the astral from the physical body. In order to project and then travel in this astral body, we must be able to extract it, fibre by fibre, from the surrounding blood, bones, mucous, bile, skin and flesh and make it coherent, else it would be no better than quivering jelly. It takes years of training, and perfection in the power of concentration to make it coherent. Ordinarily, it is difficult to demarcate the inner and outer organs. But when a person begins the practice of concentration in earnest, the inner, astral organs gradually begin to awake and separate from the outer. Then the person begins to duplicate his powers, *i.e.*, he can use physical sense organs to function on the physical plane and the inner, astral organs to function on the

astral plane. When the practice of concentration is kept up for a long time, at last, the inner form begins to take shape, complete with inner faculties. Using the astral senses one is able to see in the astral light, which is the invisible register carrying the impress of all our thoughts, actions, feelings and events. Clairvoyance (*clear seeing*) or seeing things that are happening at a distance or in the past or future is the faculty of seeing in the astral light with astral eyes. Similarly, clairaudience is hearing things happening at a distance, using the inner ear. Just as a child must learn to crawl before he can walk, and learn to walk before he can run, the inner or the astral man has to learn to do the same, gradually. But the child can see and hear far away things even before it learns to move about, so also, the astral man first learns to see and hear before it is able to travel far away from the body. However, every emotion has an impact on the astral body and prevents it from becoming coherent. For instance, while the astral body is developing into coherent body, if one gives vent to anger, then there is violent shaking and pulling apart of the coherent particles of astral. Likewise, fear tends to shrivel up, coagulate and contract the astral body.

Such people, who strive towards perfection in concentration, and follow rigorous discipline of mental and moral nature, can *consciously and voluntarily*, withdraw their astral (inner) man from the outer man (physical body). Their astral form can go anywhere, penetrate any obstacles—neither time nor space offers any obstacle. Such *conscious* withdrawal and consequent travel is possible to Adepts and in their case, when the astral body is withdrawn, their physical form appears to be in a state of meditation. But, his physical senses are alert. This is the explanation for beings like Buddha and Apollonius of Tyana being seen at two places at the same time. In the Buddhist stories many of the immediate disciples of Buddha are said to have flown from place to place, through the air. In *Ramayana*, Rama's brother Lakshmana had been mortally wounded in the battle and the only thing that could save him was the Sanjivini ("life-giving") herb, which grew far away on Dronagiri mountain in the

Himalayas. Rama was disconsolate at this news, but Hanuman assured him that he would get the plant. Hanuman flew to the Himalayas and found the mountain, but was unable to find the plant. Undaunted, he lifted the entire mountain and brought it back to Lanka, where the physicians quickly located the herb, and brought Lakshmana back to health. In such instances, it is the astral body which goes from one place to another. The physical body cannot fly from one place to another, though it can be *levitated*, lifted up in the air like a bird. How does this happen?

We are told that earth is a magnetic body charged with one form of electricity, say positive. All the organic and inorganic bodies on earth are charged with the opposite form of electricity, *i.e.*, negative. Hence, there is an attraction between earth and all the bodies on earth. Changing the electrical polarity of the object on the earth, from negative to positive could counteract this attraction. This change of polarity can be achieved by a well-regulated will. The juggler determines beforehand that he will levitate, for how long a time and to what height, and regulates the occult forces accordingly. H.P.B. mentions that the priest of Siam, while in pagoda, rises fifty feet in the air with a candle in hand, flying from idol to idol, lighting up the niches, self-supported, and stepping as confidently as if he were on solid ground. However, there could also be unconscious levitation, as has been observed in the case of somnambulism or in some patients of epileptic fits, who are seen to rise two to three yards from their beds, during seizures.

During sleep, the astral extrudes out of the physical, but for most of us, it remains close to the sleeping physical body. In very rare cases, this astral man rushes out of the physical and travels far, round visible and invisible worlds. Pictures and images seen during astral travel are impressed on the brain, but we remember nothing upon waking up. However, the impressions of scenes and landscapes that the astral body saw in its travel are still there, though lying latent, and they may be awakened at any moment. And a man who knows that he has never visited in body, nor seen the landscape and person

that he recognizes, may well assert that still he has seen and knows them. That is because the acquaintance was formed while travelling in "spirit." (*Isis*, I, 180)

Sometimes, overpowering fright, grief, despair or violent attack of sickness may cause the astral man to leave the physical body, which can be then taken possession of by the astral form of a sorcerer, depraved entity or an elemental.

There are some people, known as mediums, who have the power of *unconsciously* sending out their astral body, by reason of practices followed in former lives. Sometimes such projection of astral happens in case of people who are suffering from catalepsy, hysteria or tuberculosis. In such cases, when the astral body leaves the physical, the latter remains in a cataleptic state.

An Out-of-Body Experience (OBE) is an experience that typically involves a sensation of floating outside of one's body and, in some cases, perceiving one's physical body from a place outside one's body. Studies conducted by neuroscientists, such as Dr. Olaf Blanke, have shown that stimulating of the left *angular gyrus* gave the patient a sensation of a shadowy person lurking behind, while stimulation of the right *angular gyrus* resulted in an Out-of-Body Experience, as if the patient was floating from the ceiling looking down at himself. These patients were being evaluated for epilepsy surgery at University Hospital in Geneva.

H.P.B. mentions that a person's phantom, apparition or astral body can appear before his dearest friend at the instant of death or moments after his death. Such an apparition could be produced by the thought of the dying person and is known as *mayavi rupa*. If the dying person thinks very intently of the person he is anxious to see, then the thought becomes objective. The astral body of the dying person that visits another man is like a reflection in a mirror. This astral or "double" would carry the expression and appearance of the dying person. If the person who has drowned appears to his friend, the *image* or the astral will be seen dripping with water.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES OF ACTION

ABSENCE of philosophical principles always leads people to wrong action. Mental confusion results in deeds which produce pain, sooner or later. Philosophical principles cleanse our minds of confusion and enable us to decide on a course of action which, however unpleasant in the beginning, produces bliss in the end. In times of stress, the absence of such philosophical principles precipitates wrong action.

Men and women live so much in their passing moods of feelings and emotions that most of them evaluate events in the light of the pleasure or pain they experience hour by hour. We do not need a philosopher to tell us that emotional moods of pleasure and repose or of pain and confusion are in themselves a great symbol of restlessness. A person in glee at high noon is down in the depths of despair at sunset, for men and masses of men ever move between light and darkness which are the world's eternal ways. But we certainly *do* need a philosopher to stress for us the fact that feelings of enthusiasm and depression provide a false gauge, and a dangerous one because utterly unreliable.

Sometimes the same action brings joy to one and despair to another. The victor and the vanquished react differently to the same event. Changing moods are fancied by people to be misery and happiness. Enveloped by emotional glamour, they shed tears or shout cheers. The action which produces these opposite moods is one and the same action; and had it been true in the scientific sense or righteous in the philosophic, then there would have been *Ananda-Bliss* everywhere; bliss born of mental equanimity and of heart satisfaction would have been followed by a spirit of thankfulness everywhere.

Let us seek for the philosophical principles which would enable us to evaluate actions and their effects on us as pleasure and pain. In the Eighteenth Discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita* Krishna describes three kinds of happiness. All people who are seeking happiness

have a direct and a valuable piece of instruction in this classification.

The first type of pleasure, the lowest, is rooted in mental laziness which makes a person inattentive and heedless. No one should allow his mind to remain for ever in the torpor of sleep. But there *are* people who enjoy their mental torpor, enjoy not doing anything. That pleasure is negative in quality; it is a feeling of dullness, arising from the neglect of duties, which the *Gita* describes as improper.

The second kind of happiness is that which is rooted in actions impelled by the senses and by the appetites and the desires. The *Gita* describes it as sweet in the beginning, but bitter in the long run. The beguiling sweetness tastes like *Amrita*, heavenly nectar, while the senses and the organs are enjoying it; but it proves to be poison in the process of time. Shankara in his commentary on this *Gita* verse uses strong language; this kind of happiness brings "deterioration in strength, vigour, wisdom, intellect, wealth and energy; it leads to *adharma*, unrighteousness, and ultimately to *naraka*, hell." Human actions which are related to this type of happiness fall into two divisions: (a) avoidance of actions which look painful or troublesome though they are duties to be attended to; and (b) indulgence in actions which look pleasurable, which are easy to perform, but which, not being duties, are not necessary to undertake. For temporary and sensuous satisfaction in the present, men and women act, thoughtless of the future.

The third kind of pleasure is defined as arising from a purified understanding and from clear knowledge belonging to the Soul. When our mind is cleansed and the knowledge of *Atma-Buddhi* flows into and through it, we enjoy the supreme satisfaction of the third type of happiness. The cleaning of the mind is a painful process and therefore this type of pleasure is described in the *Gita* as poison-like in the beginning; but when, as a result of that cleansing, the Wisdom of the Higher Self—*Atma-Buddhi*—flows into the mind, we enjoy the happiness of Nectar—the beverage of the immortal Gods. The cleansing of the mind destroys whatever conflict of duties we may have been troubled about, for the inflowing wisdom reveals

to us what our duties really are, and more—that wisdom brings the strength to perform those duties without self-interest and without a desire for reward. Self-interest implies desire for a particular kind of result; if it comes about, we are happy; if not, we become unhappy; but in that feeling we lose sight of the truth and the righteousness of our actions. Therefore, real happiness follows when self-interest is put away and desire for the fruits of our deeds is eradicated.

An action does not become right or righteous because it is pleasurable and profitable to us; nor must it be rejected as wrong or unrighteous because its effects on us are painful. Such profit and loss, pain and pleasure, are ephemeral and in the whirligig of time the enduring aspect of any action has to be faced by each one of us. Virtue brings its own reward, and guilt its punishment—tomorrow or after many days.

Each one of us has to learn to seek the principles to be applied in performing actions. The *Bhagavad-Gita* has been called the Book of *Karma-Yoga*; but *Karma-Yoga* is not the performance of ordinary actions. W. Q. Judge explains that *Karma-Yoga* means "concentration and contemplation while engaged in action." He writes:

We must therefore seek for concentration in order that we may be able to do those actions which the All-Wise presents to us to be done, remaining the while unaffected.

But the All-Wise cannot and does not present any plan to the lower desire-self, with its wandering mind. Only to the purified mind which is concentrated does the true vision come, which vision enables one to act rightly and righteously.

Each one of us, then, has the solemn duty of finding out the truths and principles ere we act; nay more, of determining what our duties are in verity. The responsibility of political leaders whose acts involve nations is a thousand times greater. Pure actions result only from pure thinking.

THE MIDDLE WAY

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA advises exercise of moderation as a preliminary preparation for one who wants to practice *Dhyana* or meditation. It is stated that the divine discipline of trying to achieve union with the divine, through meditation, is not to be attained by one who eats too much or too little; or by a person who sleeps too much or too little. "The meditation which destroyeth pain is produced in him who is moderate in eating and in recreation, of moderate exertion in his actions, and regulated in sleeping and waking....He should...place his seat, firm, neither too high nor too low." The advice to follow the "Middle Way," came most emphatically from Buddha, from his own experience. When Lord Buddha was fainting, after wrong ascetic practices, he was reminded of the "Middle Way" by a band of dancers and musicians who spoke metaphorically about tuning the sitar wires, "neither too high nor too low," which if kept too tight or too loose will not produce music. "The string overstretched breaks, and the music flies; the string overslack is dumb, and the music dies." The Buddha said: "The foolish oft-times teach the wise; I strain too much this string of life, belike, meaning to make such music as shall save." (*The Light of Asia*, pp. 153-54, Mysore Ed.)

Lord Buddha asks us to maintain this balance in his teachings on the Noble Eightfold Path. Each of the eight steps is prefixed by the word, "perfect," or "right." For instance, the practice of "Right Effort" and "Right Action," seems to suggest avoiding of the extremes—of being over-active or totally inactive.

The "Middle Way" implies balance, which comes about when we are above the pairs of opposites. When the pendulum moves to the right it is at the same time gathering momentum to go to the left. The more it goes to the right, the more energy it gathers to go to the left and *vice versa*. Love or hate does not sway the person who is centred in compassion. But so long as we are still struggling on the path we are likely to oscillate between the extremes of pain and

pleasure, cold and heat, love and hatred and so on. But it is said that when an earnest aspirant tries to grapple with the mystery of his own divine nature, he finds himself in a state where the oscillation between pain and pleasure ceases, perhaps for an instant of time. But that experience is enough to cut him loose from the world of sensation. There is a feeling of blankness and nothingness. But if he survives this shock of facing the abyss of nothingness, he experiences greater life—greater peace and happiness.

But till such time, we find that we oscillate between the extremes. A person who has been brought up by parents that are strict disciplinarians, often becomes an over-indulgent parent himself, to regret it later. If one suffered from a broken relationship because one spoke too much, then the second time around one tends to go to the other extreme of maintaining complete silence. When we suffer for being hot-tempered, we generally go to the other extreme of becoming too mild. When we realize the folly of being too sentimental, we tend to become dry and stoical. When our impulsive nature lets us down, we fly to the other extreme and become overcautious, for which there is a proverb that one who has burnt his tongue while drinking milk, will cool even buttermilk before drinking! But soon we find that we are wrong even in taking the other extreme. There is the story of a snake who was venomous and vicious, who would bite just anyone who crossed his path. At the advice of a saintly person, he began to mend his ways and the time came when he became completely harmless. Seeing that the snake would not retaliate, children would throw stones at him, just for fun. The snake approached the saint and sought his advice. The saint advised him not to go to the other extreme, and was asked to "hiss, but not bite." Sometimes, without experiencing the extremes, we are unable to recognize the need for balance.

Characters in *Mahabharata* depict various aspects of human nature in one way or another. Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, is a person of great integrity and honesty. Duryodhana, the eldest of Kauravas, is a person of meanest character. Hence, when Yudhishthira

was asked to find *one bad* person in a gathering, he came back saying, "There is not a single bad person. All are good." When Duryodhana was asked to find *one good* person in the same gathering, he came back saying, "I searched high and low, but could not find a single good person. There are only bad people." It shows that as a person is, so the world appears to him to be. However, it also shows extremes in perception. It is good to be honest and upright and try to see good in others, but one must also be able to distinguish between good and bad. Shri Krishna had that discernment, which both Duryodhana and Yudhisthira lacked. We ought to be able to see evil as evil and good as good. Lord Buddha draws attention to 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....They who fear when there is no cause for fear and they who do not fear when they ought to fear—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines....They who discern evil where there is no evil and they who see nothing evil in what is evil—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines. (*The Dhammapada*, verses 316-18)

Clinicians of our time are still encountering warped psyches influenced by distorted conceptions of sin.

It is difficult to stay in the middle. H.P.B. says, "To sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbour's efforts." Not only does this imply that it is better to err on the good side, but also that it is not easy to praise.

There is one exception to the practice of moderation and that is in practising vigilance. There could never be too much of vigilance. "Eternal vigilance is the price for safety."

Paradoxically, when one begins to walk the path of occultism, *i.e.*, takes a vow to pursue spiritual discipline in earnest, he finds that he is forced to make definite choices between good and evil.

An ordinary person always lives waveringly—sometimes good and sometimes bad—and his standard of life is indefinite. But once a vow is taken, one is not capable of indecision but has to take steps definitely and knowingly, in good or bad direction. There is no staying in the middle. As a result, the Law of Karma operates in a definite and marked manner, bringing to him sharp reactions in good or evil direction.

The race as a whole has not fully developed *Manas* (mind), which will be so only in the Fifth Round. However, the choices we make now—right or wrong—will determine whether we are able to choose right when time comes in the future to make final choice. That point in human evolution is described as the "Moment of Choice," when the humanity as a whole will be compelled to make a choice in good or evil direction. It will be the point when our mind will be fully developed (it is only partially developed now) and humanity as a whole will be in full possession of power and knowledge. It is stated that those who drift along and never choose right or wrong, and thus remain indifferent, will remain unconscious until the next Planetary *Manvantara*. The same idea occurs in St. John's *Revelation*: "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art, *lukewarm* and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." In other words, those who fail to make a definite choice in the good or evil direction in the Fifth Round will not reach perfection that is possible on Earth. They will not be a unit of the race of Buddhas and Christs, at the end of the Seventh Round, and will carry on their evolution at a relatively lower level in a new *Manvantara*. This conception, says H.P.B., is not new. Coleridge likened the case to that of an oak tree which bears millions of acorns, and under normal conditions, perhaps one in a thousand develops into a tree. It is an echo of what is stated in the *Gita*: "Among thousands of mortals a single one perhaps strives for perfection, and among those so striving perhaps a single one knows me as I am."

THE BRIDGE WITHIN

H.P.B. makes a very interesting statement in the Introductory to *The Secret Doctrine* (I, xix): "Buddhi is the faculty of cognizing the channel through which divine knowledge reaches the 'Ego,' the discernment of good and evil, 'divine conscience' also."

What is this channel by which divine knowledge reaches the Ego, the Higher Manas? Following the law of analogy, just as *antaskarana* is the channel between the Higher Ego and the Lower Ego in the body—a channel which exists, though unrecognized by us at present, and which becomes more and more definite through the constant turning upward of the Lower Manas to the Higher Manas—so too can we say that there is a channel between the Higher Self and the Higher Ego? What constitutes this channel?

Just as thought travels from the lower manasic level to the higher level by the channel or bridge of *antaskarana* until the higher can manifest through the lower, so we learn that in this concept of the channel between the Higher Self and the Higher Manas or Individuality, there is the first step to be taken. This first step is to have "an intuitional perception of one's being the vehicle of the manifested Avalokitesvara or Divine Atman (Spirit)."

How can we begin to gain this intuitional perception? When read or heard theoretically, this instruction remains but a mental picture. We have to transform this mental picture by meditating thereon into a line of ideation. To keep this line intact and make it permanent it is necessary to have purity of thought.

Besides meditating on the mental picture at a set time every day, we have to try to remember it all the time throughout our daily life and its activities. This is possible because the potentialities of both Higher Manas and Buddhi are locked up in Lower Manas. In other words, we are told, "Hold fast to the Image of Buddhi-Manas within yourself and in thinking and feeling, in speaking and acting hour by hour, look for the potentialities of Buddhi-Manas in the Personal Ego, and let them radiate forth beams of service impersonally

rendered to all." ("Let Go": THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT, February 1937, November 1961)

This is the practical aspect of the building of the channel.

Another way to understand this channel is to recognize the existence of a bridge called conscience. "Conscience is *Antahkarana*—the internal organ—and it is both the voice of experience accumulated in the world of matter and the channel of divine light streaming forth from the world of Spirit. Conscience rightly activated bridges the gulf which ordinarily exists between mental and moral activities" ("Studies in The Voice of the Silence"). Conscience, therefore, stretches from the memory of past experiences right up to the full activity of the universality of Buddhi. Will a proposed action benefit all or only a few? This gives us also a test to prove to ourselves whether we are acting as personal beings or as Egoic beings, in conformity with the Divine Will.

Just what is Will? What is Spiritual or Divine Will? How can it be cultivated and developed? It can be developed by acting always on a universal basis, not on the basis of the desire-fraught personality. And this on all planes of human life. If we recognize Will to be Spirit in action, once again we have a clue to its understanding.

We are always acting. Let us constantly test our motive. Are we thinking universally, non-separatively, for the good of all? Are we ourselves living a life of integrity, with compassion flowing from the heart in an ever-widening sphere till it flows through the whole of the manifested Cosmos and beyond?

We are given the stages of this development. To get beyond the sphere of the self-centredness of ordinary life we have first to recognize mentally the ideal and goal. Then, by meditating on the fact that each of us, as a personal being, is, in fact, the vehicle of the Ego or Individuality, the Manasic being, we arrive at the stage of the Krishna, Buddha, Christos, or God within us. Let us bear this in mind until it becomes clear and well-defined.

KING LEAR

A STUDY IN KARMA

II

[Reprinted from THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT, Vol. XIII,
pp. 106-111, for May 1943.]

THE TEACHINGS of Theosophy declare that intense selfishness in some form is a prime cause of insanity. The essence of selfishness is the constant direction of thought and feeling to the lower desires or fears and to the lower principles as active with these. Through the strength of the desires and the attention given them, or through some shock to them, a loosening or an actual disconnection occurs between one or more of the principles and the rest. Anger or terror, for example, may cause a partial displacement without destroying the mental balance; but a further degree of disconnection creates that completer unbalance known as insanity. Adepts by Their knowledge and power to act directly on man's inner and higher planes and principles, can heal insanity. Sometimes a suffering individual helps himself,¹ through moral changes; especially if he succeeds in lessening his selfishness by giving kindly attention to other men. In that way he may bring about his own cure. This is precisely what Lear does. Shakespeare through him embodied the Adept teaching on the subject. Then comes, too, the healing sleep. In this deep sleep Lear's harassed mind regains its poise and control over the lower self. His previously hidden higher nature, with its lovingness and wisdom, is freed enough to act on and through his outer life. When he awakens before Cordelia, the blatant king-self and domineering father are forever gone, his sanity is recovered.

The two elder daughters, having seized on all, are united only in their secret quarrel for the other's share and in their love of Edmund; their very characters being thus the heaviest Karma their souls could

¹Cf. C.W. BEERS, *A Mind that Found Itself*.

KING LEAR

have—that lustful, jealous love the highest humanness they can reach, and their greed in it so fierce that it leads to their quick deaths. Yet for Edmund this love is in part redemptive. The compassion infused into the soul of Shakespeare could perceive some good in even such love as theirs.

Edmund, in the last few minutes of his life, obeys the better nature he had before rejected. Faced by his present death, and by the proof of his treachery to each of the two sisters, he admits the justice that has fallen on him as on the father. When Edgar says of the father:

The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes,

Edmund places himself in the guilty group:

Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true;
The wheel is come full circle; I am here.

The deeper import of his reply Edmund could scarcely have seen, but a Theosophist knows that if Edmund had not from a past life deserved to be born a bastard son, he never would have been so. As Edgar continues with the touching story of their father's passing, Edmund, much moved, struggles with himself; but when he sees by their deaths the force of the love for him borne by the two unhappy women, he lets the bonds of his selfishness melt away:

I pant for life:—some good I mean to do
Despite of mine own nature.

The one good he can do—the release of Lear and Cordelia, whose execution he had himself ordered—he urges and hastens to do. That his release comes too late cannot fully destroy its karmic value to the soul of Edmund. He dies in peace with himself, with his family, and with those he had wronged. Sinned against and stigmatized all his life, this inner redemption at the close is the best retribution he could meet. Though he gives little, it yet balances some of the heavy past Karma and prepares for a future in which his experience of this life will not again be needed.

Shakespeare pictures other bastard sons and their revengeful hate, but in no other play does he represent the life of such a man so fully, revealing his sufferings, the hardening of his nature, his tiger-like spitting back at everybody because of the constant injustices shown him, and his final redemption by obeying the impulses that come from his own better self. There can scarcely be a question that this phase of family life, so full of selfish sin, was one that the Adept Inspirers were glad to see thus treated, with such prominence and compassion as to be truly instructional.

For Edgar, "whose nature is so far from doing harms that he suspects none," Karma operates in the way he most truly would have desired. Though it puts him into the depths as apparently a crazy beggar, yet it permits him thereby to become his father's defender. In his beggarly state he is tempted to self-pity, but with independent unselfishness resists that. Immediately after, he meets his father, now sightless. Again resisting a tide of wondering anger, he quietly takes his duty as a guide, which the blind father himself, psychically perceiving the bond between them, lays upon him. Thus Edgar wins the spiritual victory that redeems his whole family. For it is really Edmund who has been the cause of his father's terrible punishment. Edmund is thus the karmic agent in Gloster's account. Yet, though necessarily so, he must also meet the Karma of his own treachery. Who can be the next karmic agent in this complicated family record but Edgar, the lawful son and harmless brother, when after convincing evidences of his own goodness, he at last, by a successful knightly challenge of Edmund as a traitor, wipes off before the world the stains that Gloster had put upon the lives of them all.

The Earl of Kent is one of the rare souls that in feudal days were occasionally evolved by the system of vassalage that led a man to bind himself in body and mind to his overlord. Such a vassal considered no service too high, no task too menial, if done for that lord—just as Kent, disguised, "followed his enemy king and did him service improper for a slave." But the bond of vassalage, being personal, frequently included error. This relation, when it thus

became religious, may be regarded as a transfer and perversion of the relation in the East between disciple and teacher. Such souls are likely ere long to find their way to those who know how to cherish their devotion, remove it from personal attachments, and guide it to its proper aim in the Cause of uplifting humanity.

The most recondite phases of Karma are those connected with the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Often spectators have felt that these deaths, especially hers, are pitifully unjust, unnecessary, and are only the dramatist's way of rounding off his story. But dramatic conventions are not based on mere fancy or convenience. They have inner reasons, consonant with the grandeur of this and other great dramas. Besides, Adept Influence would not lead to disregard of dramatic laws. Rather, it would inspire obedience to deeper conditions of mind or soul expressible through such laws and productive of values for soul-growth, even more at times than writers themselves realize. In reality, the end of great plays is the completion of groups of karmic causes—it is a natural end, not artificial, since the causes in the story are developed to some equilibrium.

The ideal close of man's life comes when he has gained such moral balance as tends to harmonize it with the equilibrium in Nature. The physical limit of Lear's life is about reached. But though his last grief and suffering are far higher in quality than his former selfish feelings, he has not yet earned a peaceful end; for that he has not balanced enough of his Karma. His past violences demand that he be stricken again and even more poignantly. In the last passages one beholds the poignancy. He is bent down under it.

But something else should not be overlooked. In studying Shakespeare's chief personages, one can hardly afford to forget that they have once been actual men on earth; just as the Greek tragedies are founded on deeds of actual beings. In neither case are the figures simulacra of fancy. *The source-stories may have been much modified, yet the basic essence of them was preserved and made evident in their final transcendent forms.*

Therefore in studying the Greek or the English tragic persons,

one is as justified in using all possible insight to detect their inner experiences as he is to perceive those of men recently gone. Hence he may properly consider by intuition that swift vision of the closing life—incidents, cause and results—which a soul has at the last moments before complete death. That period of vision is the most intensely living portion of the whole life. The fact of such death-vision has often been attested by men rescued from drowning. The teachings of Theosophy record the fact as a universal experience. In a letter from one of the Masters occurs the following:

The dying brain dislodges memory with a strong supreme impulse; and memory restores faithfully every impression that has been entrusted to it....That impression and thought which was the strongest, naturally becomes the most vivid, and survives, so to say, all the rest.²

During the last hour, Lear's mind is fixed on Cordelia; he is most intimately near to her. Therefore his life and hers he sees in the solemn final review in the egoic way, as incidents in a continuous life; he understands her present death as it really was—less a passive or unwilling sacrifice than a beneficent yielding of her life; beneficent to his soul, and thus to her own, by bringing them both into more harmony with the equilibrium of Nature. Though there was brutality and violence with her going, yet her death is not punitive to her. Even in that violence she met some of the Karma of her family—this, rather than her own. She left France to right the family wrongs by succouring her father, knowing that death for them both was possible. She was no doubt willing to die before him if she could thereby serve him. More living, for Cordelia, would mean less than her realization that she has done all she could, that perhaps even her death was not defeat but a help to him who was closer to her than any other being. "We should know," said Robert Crosbie, "that Karma does not castigate, it simply affords the

²*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 25*, p.1

opportunity for adjustment." But whether or not Shakespeare knew the deeper nature of death-visions, he yet obeyed the profound perception that longer life for Lear or for Cordelia would mean a disregard of the subtler demands of Karma, and so would truly be a weakness in his work.

The story and problems of Lear and his daughters apply to mankind high and low, and are seen not infrequently. The retention by the old of property which the young may be too eager to get, unfair divisions or even disinheritances, and in general the moral and economic debts of parents to children, of children to parents—these are familiar subjects important in human development and in karmic adjustment. Shakespeare shows the tragedy that may spring out of these questions, and he suggests by reversal wiser answers than many families reach. Because of its universal applicability and highly instructional quality, perhaps he puts into this drama special effort to detect and display motives and results in order still further to intensify and extend its appeal.

(Concluded)

As for the mere word-by-word explication of these dialectics, thou thyself art sufficiently expert; but to realize their true import it is necessary to renounce the Eight Worldly Ambitions, lopping off their heads, to subdue the illusion of belief in the personal ego, and, regarding *Nirvana* and *Sangsara* as inseparable, to conquer the spiritual ego by meditation in mountain solitudes. I have never valued or studied the mere sophistry of word-knowledge, set down in books in conventionalized form of questions and answers to be committed to memory (and fired off at one's opponent); these lead but to mental confusion and not to such practice as bringeth actual realization of Truth. Of such word-knowledge I am ignorant; and if ever I did know it, I have forgotten it long ago.

—MILAREPA (addressing a pundit)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Question: It is said that we are in the “transition period.” What exactly is it and how long will it last?

Answer: “Transition,” in general, means passing or change from one state or condition to another. It is comparable to “critical state,” which is a transition from one state of matter to another, as occurs in the transformation from solid to liquid or from liquid to gas, etc. In “transition state” or period, we have not quite left behind the old state or condition, and we are *only beginning to get the grasp* of the new state. We may perhaps consider adolescence as one such period in an individual’s life, where one is in the process of leaving behind immaturity of the child and grasping the maturity of the adulthood.

Such “transition period” is faced by every spiritual aspirant in his individual life as he struggles to leave behind ordinary life—centred in personal care and worldly affairs—and live a spiritual life, where the focus shifts from one’s personal self to Spiritual Self. It is a transition from dealing with tangible and palpable to things invisible, immaterial and impalpable, beyond the domain of the five senses. This “transition period” is the most delicate and crucial period in an aspirant’s life, because it is difficult to leave the familiar in order to grasp the unknown and the unfamiliar. It is here that he has to summon courage and take the next higher step, which requires both faith and trust.

The “transition period” mentioned in the theosophical literature is in a definite context. We are in the Fourth Round and Fifth Race, which is the point in evolution where we find that *Kama* or desire

principle is predominant. We are being told by the Teachers that the race as a whole is behind the schedule in its development. We ought to show greater development of mind and lesser involvement with our desires and passions, by now. Instead what do we find? We find that there is too much preoccupation with the development of personality; too much importance is being given to physical appearance, and acquiring of name, fame, position and power. In all the modes of living, gratification of senses is esteemed the highest good. There is greater sensuality in our art and literature. However, we also perceive the beginning of the transition from what we are, *i.e.*, beings who are in possession of the *germ* of real mind to men of mind complete. The race mind is changing by enlargement, as dogmatism is being replaced by the “age of inquiry.” These inquiries will grow louder year by year and the answers will be required to satisfy the mind as it grows, until at last all dogmatism will end, and those who will overcome the animal nature will attain to perfection, writes Mr. Judge.

It is stated that in the middle of the Fifth Round there will come this point where the race as a whole will have fully developed and active *Manas* (mind)—with complete powers and knowledge. Full development of mind will bring with it complete responsibility for the choices made. It is called the “Moment of Choice,” where every unit of the human race will be compelled to make the conscious choice of right or left hand path; for good or evil. The choice of right hand path leading to complete and conscious union with *Atma*, and hence conscious immortality, the other to the severance from the divine and hence to annihilation.

But that moment of choice is made up of and will be affected by all the choices we make now. Just as our state after death is determined by our last group of prominent thoughts, and those in turn depend upon the kind of life lived, so also, this “transition period” is the preparatory period where we can decide, by making choices, in which direction we wish to go. But it is not as if we are compelled to wait till the middle of the Fifth Round, which will be millions of

years later, in order to make the final choice of taking the path of Buddhahood. We have shining examples of Shankara, Buddha and Plato, who, being in the Fourth Round displayed power and knowledge which average humanity will have only in the Fifth or Sixth Round. The "transition period" will be over for average humanity in the middle of the Fifth Round. But an individual, who takes his evolution into his own hands, need not wait so long. "For the student of occultism it ['Moment of Choice'] may come in the next instant, or it may come one hundred lives after. But it cannot come this instant unless all the previous lives have led up to it," writes Mr. Judge.

Question: What is spirituality in its true sense and how does one live with spirituality as the base, as so many things are labelled "spiritual" these days?

Answer: Sometimes it is important to know what a thing *is not*, in order to know what *it is*, say H.P.B. In earlier days, spirituality was mixed up with the externals, such as wearing of yellow robe, wearing sandalwood *tilak* on one's forehead, as well as with the performance of rituals and ceremonies. A person, who observed fasts recommended by the scriptures, regularly visited the temple or mosque or the church was considered pious and religious and that was held synonymous with spirituality. Spirituality is not fasting, or false asceticism of tormenting the body, practice of celibacy, or renouncing externally the desires of the flesh or renouncing the comforts and luxury of the family life, and going to some *ashram* or a secluded spot. True Spirituality is that which takes us a step nearer to achieving union with the divine.

In addition to the above, in our days, possession of psychic powers is often mistaken for spirituality. Spirituality is not the knowledge of the occult alone. Possessors of the knowledge of Vaastu, Feng Shui, Past Life Recall, Astrology, Mental Healing, Hypnosis, Yoga practices, are all mistaken to be *spiritual* gurus. Most of these deal only with the effects, but leave the causes untouched. Some of these might relieve us of stress and anxiety or

even a disease, but so long as we do not deal with the causes—competitiveness and ambition, envy and hatred—so long these will reappear. Spirituality aims at inward change.

True spirituality is that which makes us look *inward* for help. Spirituality consists in learning to *accept* the responsibility of our actions, and then learning to *respond* and not *react* to calamities and pain. True spirituality consists in learning to make the best of the circumstances and in trying to learn the lesson. It is learning to turn within for the solution rather than without. It is less and less involvement with self and more and more concern for others. In *The Key to Theosophy*, in the section on "Self-improvement," there is a very curious statement: "When you plant a rose in your neighbour's garden, a loathsome weed disappears from your own." How does this happen? Planting a rose in our neighbour's garden is akin to doing a good turn to our neighbour in spite of his uncharitable or greedy nature. In order to do a good turn to him we accept him with all his weaknesses and overcome our dislike of his greedy and uncharitable nature. Thus, there is self-transcendence, to some extent at least.

True spirituality is the life of self-denial. It does not mean shunning wealth and comfort but cultivating an attitude of non-possession, and a feeling that we are trustees of our possessions. It is the ability to live without the comforts, name, fame, and even love of the near and dear ones if such happens to be our Karma. We must certainly aim towards purity in thought, word and deed and to act with the purest of motives. Yet, a truly spiritual act is one which is done without expectation of reward, or attachment to result or with the feeling of doership, such as, "I" have done this or "I" made this suggestion, etc. True Spirituality stems from impersonality. We are being impersonal if we are developing the child-heart; if we are becoming more honest and plain and simple; if we are beginning to sense the sweet side of life and if we feel ourselves expanding in sympathy, writes Mr. Crosbie.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

The *mantram*, *Matri devo bhava, pitri devo bhava* and *acharya devo bhava*, enshrines the old ideal, conveying the sound practical advice that if we wish to learn and receive anything worthwhile from our parents and teachers, we must treat them as we would a god. We must look upon them as a channel and messenger of God, who is brought nearer to us through these significant persons. It was an ideal meant to preserve the "collective wisdom" of the race and the younger generation was to receive it without questioning and with reverence. It was meant to ensure a well-rounded life, relatively free from error and extremes. It did create a small nucleus of cultured humanity, an enlightened group that became a beacon light for the race, such that the king himself listened to them and obeyed their command. It went as far as it could and then came about a great reversal and a setback. That is because, over a period of time such method of passive learning based on reverence and obedience to the external authority in whom one was supposed to see God, leads to stagnation. The *acharya* (Teacher) and the parent, once revered and worshipped become tyrants themselves when their eyes are no more on some high inner Truth but on the material gains they can derive from the pupil and the child. They do not live for any higher aims, and yet ironically, expect the children to follow the old dictum. Now the time has come when the old truth must be seen in a New Light. We may say that the old *mantram* is a call to the parents and teachers to be as a God, and that their true worth lies in how far they can be a good instrument and a channel for God's work. Further:

It means to be full of a fundamental humility that knows how little we really know and is therefore always keen to progress and arrive at fresh vistas and vision of knowledge. It means to have a subtle and plastic consciousness that knows how to adapt the means to the end and is not rigidly stuck in a fixed groove of a particular method....It means a

total vision and not one cabined in narrow and fixed frames of customary ideas and thoughts.

As the vistas of an unending progress have been opened for humanity, those only will help in the progress who see godlike possibility in every human being; and not only in speech and words but as living example reveal what it means to be a God, writes Alok Pandey. (*The Advent*, August 2008)

Both teachers and parents occupy an important place in a person's life. From the earliest times, at least in the East, the teacher was given great reverence by the pupil and the pupil was taught to look upon his teacher as second only to his father and mother in dignity. It was believed that if the pupil were disrespectful to his teacher, even in thought, it would bring about an actual harm to his moral being. The reason being that there exists a *guruparampara chain*, which extends from the teacher who may perhaps only teach you your alphabets, ending in the highest spiritual chief or guide, in whose ray or descending line the pupil may be. Whether the teacher deserves it or not, by his reverent and diligent attitude, the pupil progresses and is able to transcend his erstwhile teacher. The ordinary teacher-pupil relationship is but a reflection of the guru-chela relationship, on a higher, spiritual plane.

While parents give us our body and its faculties, the (spiritual) Teacher shows how to develop the inner faculties for the acquisition of the Eternal Wisdom. Strictly speaking, only a spiritual teacher is to be looked upon as a god. The spiritual teacher is called a Guru and a true Guru is always an Adept in Occult Science. He is a man of profound knowledge and one who has brought his carnal nature under the subjection of his Will.

Where does memory reside? Earlier, memory was considered to be the component of the mind alone. Scientists were forced to reconsider this belief, when it was observed that some patients who underwent organ transplants developed characteristics of the donor

whose organ they had been given. A person who had an organ transplant said, "Everything is copasetic," as he emerged out of the operation theatre and continued to use that word all the time. It was later explained by the donor's wife that she and her husband used that word as a signal, when they made up after an argument, to show that everything was okay. The donor had died in a car accident after he had an argument with his wife and had never made up. In another startling case, a girl received the heart of a ten-year-old girl who had been murdered. After the transplant the recipient had horrifying nightmares of a man murdering her donor. They could find the murderer, using the details given by this girl, as to time, weapon, place, clothes he wore, his features, etc. Such cases compelled the scientists to conclude that, perhaps, memory was stored in every single cell of one's body. At the spiritual level, the theory of cellular memory suggests that we are holistic beings: not a sum of our parts. Each point within our hologram contains all the information of the whole. The complete blueprint of our existence is contained in every one of our cells. Since our cells are constantly in a state of dying and growing, each organ in our body renews itself after a few days or weeks. Why is it then, even when the old cells and organs are renewed, the old disease continues to show? Rebecca Noel, a healer of the cellular memory, explains that the memory from the old cell, also called phantom memory, is passed on to the new cell being born, so that the disease is replicated again and again, even though the cell is entirely new, and this continues indefinitely until the cell programming is interrupted. If the cells can be reprogrammed towards positivity then healing can take place. Healing cellular memory is one of the ways used for healing physical and emotional diseases, writes Megha Bajaj. (*Life Positive*, August 2008)

Occult philosophy teaches that the "cell" is an illusion. It has no existence as a material thing. A cell is an ideal form within which the actual physical atoms—which are made up of tiny sensitive points of energy, called "lives"—arrange themselves. These atoms, and

hence "lives," leave the cell every moment, to be replaced by new ones. Hence it is said that there is no cell but only the *privative limits* of the cell—the ideal walls and the general shape. In other words, there is no physical cell, but matter or "lives," existing within the astral cell, which produce the appearance of a cell. The astral cell is the real cell. At a simple level, the question may arise that if the cells and organs of the body change continually then how is it that a tattoo mark or vaccination scar does not change, sometimes through the entire life? Any time there is a wound that makes a scar, and which involves pain, there the mind is centred on it. That mind acts exactly like an engraving tool; the consciousness makes a deep registration in the astral body; forming more or less permanent mould or matrix. As a result, the new atoms arrange themselves within the mould or matrix of the cell existing in the astral body. So the impression on the surface of the body does not change even when atoms and "lives" forming the cell continually change.

We are also told that every organ and cell in the body is a *seat* of memory. Thus:

The whole human body is, as said, a vast sounding board, in which each cell bears a long record of impressions connected with its parent organ, and each cell has a memory and a consciousness of its kind, or call it instinct if you will.
(*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

The memory of purely personal activities is related to certain *Kamic* or passionate organs, such as, spleen, liver, stomach, etc., so that the memory of personal activities is first awakened in these organs. On the other hand higher forms of mental experiences correlate with cerebral and cardiac centres, *i.e.*, brain and heart. "Occultism teaches that the liver and spleen-cells are the most subservient to the action of our 'personal' mind, the heart being the organ *par excellence* through which the Higher Ego acts—through the Lower Self."

In a routine ultra-sound scan, a woman discovered that she was 27 weeks pregnant and her baby was growing in her abdomen, on the omentum—the layers of fat that cover the bowel. Almost all such foetuses die within weeks or even days of conception, and only one similar case has been reported in Britain. In a pioneering operation at Derriford hospital at Plymouth, she successfully delivered the baby boy weighing 2 pounds 2 oz, on April 19. The baby was kept in a little resealable sandwich bag to keep his temperature up. He was called “miracle baby” as he grew outside the womb. (*The Times of India*, September 2, 2008)

In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 131), H.P.B. mentions Magendie, a French physiologist, who wrote in his book about the curious case where the umbilical cord was ruptured and perfectly cicatrized, and yet the infant was born alive. How was the circulation carried on in this organ? What can be said of the nutrition of the foetus? “Physiological works contain only *vague conjectures* on this point,” writes Magendie.

H.P.B. writes that “the two chief difficulties of the science of embryology—namely, what are the forces at work in the formation of the foetus, and the *cause* of ‘hereditary transmission’ of likeness, physical, moral or mental,” would never be solved “till the day when scientists condescend to accept occult theories” (*S.D.*, I, 223). According to Theosophy, it is

the spiritual potency in the physical cell that guides the development of the embryo, and which is the cause of the hereditary transmission of faculties and all the inherent qualities in man....This inner soul of the physical cell—this “spiritual plasm” that dominates the germinal plasm—is the key that must open one day the gates of the terra-incognita of the Biologist, now called the dark mystery of Embryology. (*S.D.*, I, 219)

The presence of the astral body, the model for the growing child in the womb, could explain many mysterious matters in embryology, says Mr. Judge. The fact that when humanity was “Sweat-born”

and then “Egg-born,” the human embryo was nourished *ab extra* by Cosmic forces, might provide an insight into the nourishment and development of the embryo.

In India, during the lunar month of *Shravan*, an estimated seven lakh devotees block most of the roads from Haridwar to their hometowns and villages. These devotees are called “kanwarias” because during this period they carry small pots of Ganga water on their shoulders, on a bamboo pole called a “kanwar.” Now, there is a new custom of “dak kanwars,” with groups of kanwarias running in relays to quickly get at their destination and who are known to get violent if their passage is delayed. Numerous supporters who provide them with food, refreshments, and shelter believe that they will gain *punya* or merit for a better next life. This custom has no sanction in any of the religious scriptures. “This annual migration with its raucous religiosity is a far cry from the quiet spirituality of a true religion,” writes Murad Ali Baig (*The Times of India*, July 25, 2008). Many new customs develop as the professional priests of every religion convince their gullible devotees with the promise of heavenly or other-worldly rewards in exchange for donations, pilgrimages, fasts, sacrifices or austerities. Outward form becomes more important than inner substance, and religiosity masquerades as religion. It suits people because it is easier to practice rituals, penances and offerings than to understand and apply the deep moral, social and philosophical tenets of religion. Prophets, reformers or sages have never advocated such customs but the priests of every religion are intoxicated by the power that religiosity gives them, and are supported by the politicians. It is religiosity that brings about the degradation and the collapsing of the religions. History shows that new reformers, disgusted with empty rituals, superstitions and arrogant priests, broke away from the old order and founded new faiths. For instance, Zoroaster and Buddha, disgusted with the

sacrifices of the old Avestan and Vedic priests, founded simple faiths, writes Murad Ali Baig.

Looking at the state of religions today, it is only natural to ask, Is religion necessary, when what we have been left with today is only "institutionalized religion"? In most cases, the teachings were transmitted orally and were reduced to writing only after the death of the Teacher. It is at this stage that there is found to be conscious as well as unconscious corruption of the original teachings, with gradual shift from the study and application of ethics to rites, rituals and ceremonies. Brahmins and priests and purohits, instead of being true interpreters of the scriptures, not only misinterpreted and interpolated them but gained prominence only in relation to the performance of rituals and ceremonies. God, instead of being the Immutable and Impersonal Principle, came to be regarded as a person, who must be propitiated and worshipped and from whom favours could be asked. To appease God and Gods, rites and rituals had to be performed through the agency of priests.

Besides emphasizing rituals and ceremonies, the priest-class began to present the ethical principles as commandments and dictates, instead of self-evident truths. To continue their hold over the masses, some religions discarded the doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation and introduced a series of dogmas. But it is not the priestly class alone that is to be blamed. How many people really want the truth? How many of us are ready to suffer the consequences of our actions? Do we not look for a quick and easy solution to our problems and are only too happy to offer a scapegoat for our sins? We look for ceremonies to dodge the Law of Karma.

However, no Rishi, no Buddha, no Mahatma, no Prophet, ever tried to establish *a religion*. Each one of them has protested against mere mechanical performance of rituals and ceremonies, and have explained the underlying significance. Every prophet-reformer taught a Way of Life, a Way to Wisdom and Brotherhood and that is the function of true religion.

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