

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THE YOGA OF DEVOTION—BHAKTI YOGA

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA is a book of devotion *par excellence*. Except the first chapter, each of its chapters treats of devotion from one or another angle. We can learn the Science of Devotion from this little book. Shri Krishna expounds the knowledge of the Self and the tendency to identify ourselves with forms and conditions. There is attachment to bodily existence through *sattva*, *i.e.*, love of that which is good and pleasant; through entanglements with passions and desires or *rajas*; and through carelessness and heedlessness which destroys the power of judgment or *tamas*. He shows that freedom from such attachment arises as a result of right discrimination, which in turn arises from true devotion or *bhakti*.

According to Shri Shankaracharya, devotion may be called intentness on the reality of the Self. The term *bhakti* is also defined as the “art of worship,” or “supreme love for God.” It is love for its own sake and the devotee wants nothing else but to be in the proximity of God or the Divine. The heart and mind of true *bhakta* are drawn to the divine, like a needle to a magnet.

True *bhakti* or devotion is inherent in the heart of every one of us. What is the origin of the feeling of devotion? Explaining the process of lighting up of *manas*, we are told that the solar deities or *Agnishwatta pitris* gave to the mindless man, the spark of Wisdom and kindled the Fire of Intelligence, making him a self-conscious, thinking and a choosing being. As a result of this act of benevolence,

the first feeling that was awakened in man was “a sense of solidarity, of oneness with his spiritual creators.” Thus:

As the child’s first feeling is for its mother and nurse, so the first aspirations of the awakening consciousness in primitive man were for those whose element he felt within himself, and who yet were outside, and independent of him. Devotion arose out of that feeling, and became the first and foremost motor in his nature; for it is the only one which is natural in our heart, which is innate in us, and which we find alike in human babe and the young of the animal. (*S.D.*, I, 210)

Devotion was the first conscious feeling to arise in our human consciousness, and it springs from the depths of our own being. This explains the origin of the feeling of longing or yearning for the nearness and company, or for achieving oneness with our Spiritual Benefactors, Guides and Gurus. In the course of time, the concept of devotion came to be degraded, giving rise to personal god idea, elaborate worship, rituals and ceremonies. The lower form of devotion is but emotional and personal attachment, and is only a reflection of the archetypal attachment of the human soul to the Universal Soul, or of the human heart for its spiritual guide, or of the chela to the guru. Devotion to one’s family, to one’s friends, to one’s work and service—these are all desirable, but they are still on the outer plane. These are means to an end.

Bhakti is classified as *sakamya* and *nishkamya bhakti*. *Sakamya*, as the name suggests, is the kind of devotion and worship undertaken with the aim to fulfil certain desires. A great number of devotees visiting temples, churches or mosques do so with the expectation of fulfilling some or the other desire. Shri Krishna says that “Four classes of men who work righteousness worship me, O Arjuna; those who are afflicted, the searchers for truth, those who desire possessions, and the wise....Of these the best is the one possessed of spiritual knowledge, who is always devoted to me” (*Gita*, VII). Likewise, there is *apara bhakti* or inferior devotion and *para bhakti* or supreme

devotion. It appears that *apara bhakti* is for a beginner, who has a need for an idol or image for focussing his faith and consciousness. He is also attached to rituals and ceremonies. More often than not such a devotee makes the mistake of thinking that god is only in that particular idol of Shiva or Krishna or Rama, and nowhere else. As a result, he may consider other gods and religions as inferior. Gradually, one has to learn to give up fasts, prayers, pilgrimages, ablutions, rites, ceremonies, etc., which are termed as Practical worship, and take up Spiritual worship, which consists in seeking communion with the Divine, and which enables one to see the divinity everywhere and in all things. It is not easy to cultivate true and supreme devotion. “This exhortation to devotion is at once the most simple and the most difficult. Some deride it because they want powers and ‘development;’ others because they think it is too simple; but the wise student, even when he cannot at first grasp its meaning, will revolve it in his mind, strive after it, and make it a thing to be attained by him.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 69)

In *Bhagavat-Purana* we are given nine primary forms of *Bhakti*: (1) *sravana* (“listening” to the scriptural stories of divine beings), (2) *kirtana* (“praising,” usually refers to ecstatic group singing), (3) *smarana* (“remembering” or fixing the mind on the Divine), (4) *pada-sevana* (rendering service), (6) *dasya* (servitude), (7) *archana* (worshiping an image), (7) *vandana* (paying homage), (8) *sakhya* (friendship), and (9) *atma-nivedana* (complete surrender of the self).

Ordinarily, *sravana bhakti* consists in listening, with one-pointed attention, to the expounding of the life stories of divine beings, as also, to the scriptures. One has to be a perfect listener of right philosophy, before one can become perfect practitioner of it. Shri Krishna says, “And even a man who shall listen to it [*Gita*] with faith and not reviling shall, being freed from evil, attain to the regions of happiness provided for those whose deeds are righteous” (*Gita*, XVIII). A true devotee has to learn to be like Arjuna, who was a perfect, humble and resolute listener, and therefore, could catch the Wisdom of Krishna amidst the din of the battlefield. It is because

Arjuna had listened to and assimilated the teachings of Shri Krishna that he was ready to fight his own lower animal nature and was confident that he would triumph.

Kirtana is singing the glories of the Lord. The *bhajans* or devotional songs are the outpourings of heart of true devotees, such as, Kabir, Tukaram or Mirabai, some of them full of deep metaphysics. When these are sung with understanding and in right rhythm, they help to temporarily elevate one's consciousness. The sacred scripture of the Sikhs, "Guru Granth Sahib," is a collection of hymns, which are arranged under different *ragas* or musical modes of Indian classical music system, because it is strongly believed that an atmosphere of sanctity is created, enabling one to have spiritual experience through combination of words and music, *i.e.*, *Shabda-kirtan*.

Smarana is remembering god. One method is *Japa* or the practice of repeating God's name. It is the practice common to almost all religions. Sometimes there is *mantra-japa* where some *mantram* or sacred formula such as *Om Namah Shivay* is repeated, as many as 108 times. *Japa* could be external verbal repetition of name or a *mantram*, or it could be *manasic japa* where one mentally repeats the name. Generally, the seeker is advised that there should not be *mechanical* repetition, but that there must be simultaneous contemplation on the meaning and importance of the name or *mantram* being recited. *Japa-sadhana* could act as means of concentrating and purifying the mind. However, there must be moment to moment remembering of the divine, as we carry on our daily activities. In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* (pp. 100-101), Mr. Judge writes that the disciple must learn to do every act with the Divine in view, and see the divine in everything. It is said in the *Brihad Nundekeshwar Purana* that "while taking medicine one should think of Vishnu or the all-pervading, while eating, of Janardana, the All-Giver...while travelling to foreign land, of Trivikrama, at the time of death, of Narayana...in the midst of a forest, of Narasingha...and in all acts, of Madhava." Mr. Judge writes

that all these names of Vishnu represent his various powers and appearances. We would do well to keep alive in us the memory of various aspects of divinity, which are also present in us as various powers and potentialities, as we pass through this dense forest of existence. Then we would never feel helpless and miserable, so as to look outside of us for salvation.

Dasya Bhakti is the love of God through servant-sentiment. At a simple level, a devotee serves the Lord by cleaning the temple, by bathing the idols, by preparing garlands and offerings for worship, and so on. The word for "service," in Sanskrit, as also in many vernacular languages, is *seva*. Since God is not separate from his creatures and creation, one who wishes to serve God must perform his duties well and serve humanity with the highest sense of duty. *Seva* is of three kinds: That done through bodily instrument (*tan*), through mental faculties (*man*) and through material wealth (*dhan*). When we look around us we find that more than the *physical* it is the mental, moral and emotional suffering of humanity, which need to be addressed. We do not have to search for the afflicted. We find them everywhere, if only our eyes are open. Let us first learn to attune ourselves to the pain of family members and neighbours. How could there be a lonely, depressed or a needy person in my vicinity and I am not aware of it? From moment to moment we have a chance to do the selfless service, in helping the sick, the lonely, the embittered or a neglected person. Selfless service must have as its foundation, self-sacrifice.

Sakha-bhav is cultivation of the bond of friendship with the divine within. In the process of spiritual development, help and guidance come from the inner planes of being, and to avail of it we must retire within and observe periodical silence. Loneliness, depression, feeling of dullness, and the like, are, in the ultimate analysis, indicators that we have moved away from the "source." If we are connected with our divine nature, which is indeed, the Asylum and the Friend, we would never feel lonely. The one who has complete faith and devotion in his Higher Self can never be alone.

Atma-nivedana is complete surrender of the self. Many misunderstand it to imply surrender of responsibilities, and to live the idle life. Devotion is intense love of God. The first lesson that one learns from love is: “I am not, you are.” True love leads to self-denial, self-abnegation, self-effacement, self-transcendence. Jalalluddin Rumi writes:

A man went to the door of the Beloved and knocked.
 A voice asked, “Who is there?”
 He answered, “It is I.”
 The voice said, “There is no room for Me and Thee.”
 The door was shut.
 After a year of solitude and deprivation he returned and knocked.
 A voice from within asked: “Who is there?”
 The man said: “It is Thee.”
 The door was opened for him.

The Voice of the Silence puts it thus: “The Self of Matter and the SELF of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both.” A mystic is one who perseveres in wiping away the false ego, *i.e.*, identification with the personality—by meditation, concentration, study and prayer, so that the false ego can disappear and the divine can manifest.

In the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna asks us to seek devotion and become devoted. He speaks of mental devotion to the Divine, which is mental abnegation, and this involves giving up of interest in the results of our actions. Since the Law of Karma is just and merciful, there cannot be a misshapen day. So, instead of complaining or grumbling there must be acceptance or resignation. We might even go a step further and say, “This is not only what I deserved, but what in fact I desired.” This is an attitude of supreme surrender, of unswerving faith in the Law of Karma—an inward stance necessary to be cultivated by every true spiritual aspirant. With such attitude, we will not resort to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, to cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge

the karmic consequences. It is total acceptance that “my own comes back to me.”

Mortal man can gain courage only from his Immortal Spirit. The Divine Will or spiritual energy can manifest only when the personal self is surrendered. Only he can hope to possess Spiritual Courage who is willing to be guided and assisted by Higher Self, and is determined to “suffer or enjoy whatever the Higher Self has in store for one by way of discipline and experience.” Writes Mr. Judge: “The way of inward peace is in all things to conform to the pleasure and disposition of the Divine Will. Such as would have all things succeed and come to pass according to their own fancy, are not come to know this way; and therefore lead a harsh and bitter life... without treading the way of peace.”

Knowledge and devotion must go hand in hand. Mr. Judge gives example of Jacob Boehme and of many illiterate men who had no access to books and yet they had perceived by their inward sense the real truth of things. “The reason is that these men have attained to devotion, and thereby cleared away from before the eye of the soul the clouds of sense whose shadows obscure our view of truth. I do not despise learning; it is a great possession; but if the learned man were also devoted one in the sense of the Bhagavad-Gita, how much wider would be the sweep of his intellection no one can calculate.” (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 75-76)

However, in the absence of knowledge, devotion remains some kind of emotional effervescence. When a person combines knowledge with devotion, he has philosophy to guide his steps, and is prevented from being dragged down, again and again, by the weaknesses of the race to which he belongs. Hence, it is essential to combine devotion with good sound philosophy. There are many who have gone far on the road of spiritual progress through devotion alone, but they are not as high as those who combine knowledge with devotion, teaches the philosophy of Theosophy.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THE MANGO CHARM

[Taken from *The Jataka Tales or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*]

ONCE AGAIN Devadatta repudiated his Teacher saying, "I will be Buddha myself, Gotama is no teacher of mine," and soon after this the earth opened and he went down to hell. As the Brethren were discussing this, the Master came in and, learning the subject of their talk, said that in former times Devadatta had deserted his teacher and which brought about his own destruction, and he told them the following story:

Once the chaplain of the King of Benaras and all his family, except one son, died of malaria. The son went to Takkasila and studied under the world-renowned teacher. When he had finished his studies he left, intending to travel.

On his journey he came to a frontier village near which was another village where low-caste people lived, among them the Buddha-to-be. Even in this life the one who was to become the Buddha was a wise man, and possessed the knowledge of many secrets, one of which was the power to make the mango tree bear fruit out of season. Every morning he used to go to the forest to a mango tree, and repeat his charm while sprinkling the tree with water. Immediately the leaves began to grow, and then came the flowers and the fruit. The fruit ripened at once and fell to the ground. He then ate all he needed and, gathering up the rest in his baskets, went to the village, where he sold the fruit and thus gained a livelihood for himself and his wife and child.

One day the Brahmin saw him and realizing that the fruit must be made to grow out of season by some charm, he followed the Buddha-to-be and saw what happened. He returned to the village and went to the house of the Buddha-to-be and asked his wife where her husband was. She told him he was out, and he waited for his return. When he came he took the baskets from him and carried

them into the house. The Buddha-to-be looked at him and saw that he was not a good man, and he told his wife that he had come to get his charm but that no charm would stay with him. Meanwhile the youth was thinking that in order to get the charm he would stay in the house and act as a servant, bringing wood for the fire and doing the cooking and other menial work.

Seeing all this, the Master's wife asked her husband to let the youth have the charm even if he did not keep it, for he was obviously well-born and yet he did all the menial work. The Master agreed, but he told the youth that though the charm would bring him great honour he must remember that when he was asked by a king, who had given him the charm, he must admit that he got it from a low-caste man. If he did not do this, but said he got it from a great Brahmin, the charm would cease to work.

The youth agreed to this, saying, why should he be ashamed of his teacher? Then the youth left and went to Benaras, where by selling his mangoes he became very wealthy. One day the king was given one of the mangoes and he asked his park keeper where he had obtained it, for it tasted so very sweet. When he learnt that a youth was selling them out of season he asked that in future the mangoes should be brought to him. This was done and in time the youth became wealthier, rising to be the king's servant and gaining his confidence.

The king was so interested that he asked him how he got the fruit out of season and, hearing of the charm, went with him one day to watch it at work. He was greatly pleased, and asked who had taught him this secret. The youth now was in a difficulty for he felt that if he said he learnt it from a low-caste man he would be put to shame. He therefore, said that a world-renowned wise man at Takkasila had taught him. Immediately the charm ceased to work, though he was not aware of the fact.

Some days later the king went with him again to see the mangoes grow, and the youth repeated the charm. But nothing happened. The king asked him why the charm was not working and in dismay

the youth said that the conjunction of the planets was not right. Perhaps later, he said, it would work and he would bring him the mangoes—thus adding another lie to his first one.

The king wondered to himself why the Brahmin had not mentioned the planet-conjunction before, and so he asked him the reason. Under these circumstances the youth had to confess the truth, and he said, “My folly bitterly I rue.” But the king was angry for, he said, what had birth to do with so precious a treasure as the charm? And he told his men to drive the youth away. This they did, telling him to go to his teacher and ask forgiveness. Then if he could learn the charm again he could come back, but if not, he must never come to that country again.

The man returned to the village and went to the teacher, saying:

So I have sinned, and lost my spell; but you, O teacher
wise,
Forgive! and let me once again find favour in your eyes.

But the teacher told him he could not help him, and disconsolately he went to the woods and died.

The Buddha identified the birth. Ananda was the king, Devadatta was the young Brahmin, and “I myself was the low-caste man.”

The bond between Chela and Guru of the *Gupta Vidya*, the Secret Sciences, is a purely spiritual one. There is a chain of gurus or *guruparampara*, and the first link of this chain is in the World of Spirit, and its last here on earth—mortal educators of religious and mystical lore. Every link in the chain is important. However, when the relationship is not spiritual, but merely outward and formal, it is like the one that exists between *teacher* and *pupil*. From the earliest times the pupil is asked to look upon his teacher as second only to his father and mother in dignity. It was taught that to be disrespectful to one’s teacher even in thought was a sin, and that it did actual

harm to the moral being of the pupil. Yet, all down the ages, for some reason or the other, many who derived spiritual benefit and knowledge from the Teachers have failed to show due reverence and even sought to ignore them. When due respect is not paid to the Teacher, the disciple ceases to derive any benefit from the teachings. The disciple is benefited by the teachings only when there is unshakable faith and devotion for the Teacher.

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STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

CRAVING—II

7. *The streams of craving flow everywhere. The creeper of passion sprouts and stands strong. If you see the creeper springing up cut the very roots by wisdom. (340)*

8. *Pleasures and joys run to beings and attract. Hugging those pleasures men hanker after them. Such of course are subject to old age and rebirth. (341)*

9. *Driven on by craving men run round like a hunted hare. Fettered and enshackled they undergo suffering for a long time again and again. (342)*

10. *Driven on by craving men run round and round like the hunted hare. Let, therefore, the mendicant, wishing for himself freedom from passion, shake off craving. (343)*

IN THESE verses, the same warning is issued to the worldly man in several ways. It is human nature to pass over simple but profound statements, thinking that we have understood its real significance. Therefore, the Buddha has to reiterate the point in more than one way to make us understand that it is something that requires our special attention. Craving, like the dangerous creeper has to be uprooted before it becomes too strong. The creeper of passion has to be uprooted not by brute force but by understanding. We are not asked to become stoics and refuse all sensation, pleasure as well as pain. What is required is to experience them without getting attached to either of them. This requires wisdom and ability to extract lessons that life brings to us in pleasures and pain. *Through the Gates of Gold* tells us: “If men will but pause and consider what lessons they have learned from pleasure and pain, much might be guessed of that strange thing which causes these effects. But men are prone to turn away hastily from self-study, or from any close analysis of human nature.” Therefore, the Buddha warns us against getting attached to pleasures and joys. Once attached, the chain of causation as described in Twelve Nidanas would lead us to repeated births.

Fettered and enshackled we would suffer for a long time again and again. The mendicant, who has realized this, longs to obtain freedom from passion. He has to shake off craving with determined effort of Will.

11. *He who having come out of the forest of desires, goes back to it, he who freed from the forest of desires, runs back to it—look at him, though free he re-enters bondage. (344)*

This shows how desires are capable of exercising an overpowering “pull” even when a man appears to have overcome them. Why does this happen? It is because he has still not reached a stage where he becomes constitutionally incapable of doing wrong—the *Samadana* state. Until that state is reached, there is always a possibility of fall. First of all, “no man or woman knows his or her moral strength until it is tried.” Indra managed to tempt great *rishis* with the help of beautiful *Apsaras*. Sometimes *rishis* fell prey to the subtle pride and vanity for their powers and attainments. *Light on the Path* says that vices of the ordinary man pass through a subtle transformation and reappear with changed aspect in the heart of the disciple. A person desiring authority may find himself trying to control lives of others in the name of “benevolent interest.” He may be willing to lay down his life for a cause, provided others would toe his line and follow what he says. If things are not done in the way suggested by him, he loses all interest in the matter. “Self-watchfulness is never more necessary than when a personal wish to lead, and wounded vanity, dress themselves in the peacock’s feathers of devotion and altruistic work,” says H.P.B. in the *Five Messages*. In “Practical Occultism,” H.P.B. tells us: “None can feel the difference between himself and his fellow-students, such as ‘I am the wisest,’ ‘I am more holy and pleasing to the teacher, or in my community, than my brother,’ etc.—and remain an *upasaka*. His thoughts must be predominantly fixed upon his heart, chasing therefrom every hostile thought to any living being.” The disciple

has to pass through trials and tests and emerge triumphant. The Chela is not only called to face all the latent evil propensities of his own nature, but, in addition, the whole volume of maleficent power accumulated by the community and nation to which he belongs. Because, it is his responsibility to raise not just himself, but all the units of the body to which he belongs. He may fail, but he must not give up.

12-13. *Wise people do not call that a strong fetter which is made of iron, wood or fibre; but jewels and precious stones, sons and wives form stronger fetters. These latter drag down, and though they can be overcome they are difficult to undo. Having destroyed such a fetter let a man renounce the world, let him be free of longing, and having forsaken the pleasures of the senses, let him not look behind. (345-346)*

This is not an invitation to abandon one's duties and responsibilities. Buddha is simply pointing out the enormous difficulty experienced by an aspirant in overcoming attachment to wealth, and love of near and dear ones. Though they may be overcome, they are difficult to undo. It takes a Buddha to move on from loving the few to loving ALL, to transform passion into compassion. Jewels and precious stones, sons and wives form strong fetters that keep us chained to the world through endless rounds of birth and death. Destruction of such fetters implies overcoming of attachment. Without inner relinquishment, there is no use running away to forest, to ashrams or monasteries. Krishna said: "He who remains inert, restraining the senses and organs, yet pondering with his heart upon objects of sense, is called a false pietist of bewildered soul. But he who having subdued all his passions performeth with his active faculties all the duties of life, unconcerned as to their result, is to be esteemed."

How wealth can become an obstacle in spiritual progress is shown in the Bible. A rich young man approached Jesus and asked: "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life"? Jesus told him:

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come and follow me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Jesus then told his disciples: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (*Matthew: 19:16-24*)

Until one has reached the state of complete detachment, which state is spontaneous and not forced, there is still the fear of getting tempted. This is because the power of temptation is too strong to resist. Hence the warning is issued in the *Voice of the Silence*, "Look not behind or thou art lost." It further says:

For, on Path fourth [the Portal of temptations], the lightest breeze of passion or desire will stir the steady light upon the pure white walls of Soul. The smallest wave of longing or regret for Maya's gifts illusive, along *Antaskarana*—the path that lies between thy Spirit and thy self, the highway of sensations, the rude arousers of *Ahankara*—a thought as fleeting as the lightning flash will make thee thy three prizes forfeit—the prizes thou hast won. (pp. 61-62)

But the man who knows himself to be the unchanging Self within is not affected by pleasures of the senses. Having renounced the world, the Great One chooses to come back into the world in order to teach and help the suffering humanity, as did the Buddha, after he had reached enlightenment.

14. *Slave to their desires men run down the streams just as a spider runs into the net he himself has spun. Steadfast persons retire from the world when they have cut the bond, and leaving all sorrow behind they look not behind. (347)*

The spider spins the web to catch the prey. When the prey is caught, it runs into the net to feed on the prey. Just as a spider runs into its net to satisfy its desire for food, man runs down the stream of his desire in order to satisfy them. This simile is also used by H.P.B. in the *Secret Doctrine* to explain how man weaves his own

destiny. Ever in search of happiness, wishing to fulfill desires, man weaves the net-work of his destiny, thread by thread around himself, and when the last strand is woven, he gets seemingly enwrapped in the net-work of his own making—his self-made destiny. Creatures who are given to passions, depraved by hatred and maddened by wrath, run along the stream of thirst which they have made themselves and cannot cross it, says *Buddhaghosa*. The one who longs for freedom from rebirth retires from the world, cutting off all bondage and leaving behind all sorrows. Resolute and steadfast, the man moves on without looking back.

15. *Be free from the future; be free of the past; be free in the present; cross to the yonder shore. With a mind wholly free you will not fall into birth and death. (348)*

We divide time into past, present and future because we live as finite and conditioned beings. We have a date of birth and a date of death. Our consciousness links up series of moments, one succeeding another, to give us a feeling of continuity due to memory with associated pleasant or unpleasant sensations and craving. But time itself is “but the panoramic succession of our states of consciousness” which belongs to the Self and which alone is unchanging. Not realizing this, the Self gets identified with pleasant and unpleasant experiences of life, and desires to repeat the pleasurable experiences and shuns the painful ones. Pining for the happy past and living in anticipation of future happiness, we fail to receive gifts of the present moment. We live in the past, present and future instead of living as an immortal entity which lives in eternity like a witness—unaffected by anything. The Buddha asks us to become free from craving of the past, present and future. “Let us, then, live happily, we who possess nothing.” The one, who is free from desires, crosses over the ocean of life and death to reach the other shore.

(To be continued)

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

OUR ATTITUDES, ideals, values are all shaped by ideas which have been suggested to us at various times from various quarters, such as, the family culture, the school education, relations, social influences, the kind of literature we read, etc. Our religious beliefs, for instance, are derived from the religious tradition of the family into which we are born, which we imbibed as children. Rarely are religions adopted by people after due deliberation. It is rare that people inquire into the basis of the ideas and beliefs they hold, question the underlying assumptions, and enter upon an independent search for truth in all things. The common trend being conformity to the ideas that have been suggested and imbibed.

Suggestions are, therefore, a very powerful factor in our lives. They have a vital bearing on the forming of our character and our destiny. Character of everyone, like a tree, has grown from the seed-ideas which have been sown in the soil of one’s mind, and nurtured by oneself by dwelling upon and acting along the lines of thoughts suggested. The sum of mental qualities, psychic capacities, moral propensities, tendencies, inclinations, and impulses, which are unique to each individual, and which we call character, is, of course, not entirely formed by the impressions and experiences in the present life alone. They are brought over in essence by each individual into the present life from the previous incarnation, and developed in this one, which makes each one a unique person and different from every other. Yet impressions of thoughts and acts of others coming to us from different quarters, either aid us in improving and refining our nature and character, or hinder us by lowering or coarsening it. In the lives of great men we often see illustration of the former kind; examples of the latter kind are the most common, and much of the evils in society are traceable to it. For instance, we learn from Gandhiji’s autobiography that the wholesome and elevating ideas and ideals which he cherished and which he wove into the fabric of his life, which made him great, were partly imbibed by him as

child from his pious mother, and to a large extent from ideas and example of noble lives of such great thinkers and practical idealists as Tolstoy, Gopalakrishna Gokhale, Ruskin, Raichandbhai, etc., which helped him to clearly think out and practically apply in life the moral and spiritual ideals of Truth and Non-violence. The example of his own life, in turn, inspired and transformed many others who have contributed greatly to the culture of non-violence, world peace and human progress.

Children's minds are highly impressionable and absorb thoughts, actions, ideas, behaviour and conduct of adults, like a sponge, and grow in the likeness of these. Juvenile delinquencies are, to a large extent, traceable to vicious home atmosphere. Popular entertainment media in which scenes of lewdness, violence and crime are continuously projected at the present time pervert the minds and vitiate the character of people in general, especially of the youth and children, who are exposed to them. The power of mind over matter in some of its tangible effects are readily seen and generally well known. The experienced physician takes care not to reveal directly, and at once, to his patient, who lacks strength of mind, of a dreaded disease he might have diagnosed, lest it should work mischief in the patient's mind so as to aggravate the disease and hinder the process of recovery. People seeking astrological counselling in the face of difficulties, a practice quite common in India, often bring about the calamity that was foretold by the very intensity of their thoughts constantly dwelling upon the prognostication, which could well have been prevented by avoiding the seeking of such counselling. The power of suggestion over people's minds are taken advantage of and exploited by commercial interests to promote the sale of their products and services through tempting audio-visual advertisements which, in silent and subtle ways, work in the minds of people and induce them to patronise the products. Great Teachers say that acting on the minds of people and interfering in the free mental action in such ways for the promotion of one's selfish interest, profit and advantage is nothing short of a

black art, and that it is highly pernicious to the moral and spiritual progress of mankind.

One of the most pervading and powerful cause of the evils which prevails in society is the Astral Light, being on the plane of the Lower Mind, it retains the images of all the evil thoughts, ill-deeds and crimes, and reflects them back on the world on the mental plane like a mirror. These acting at the sub-conscious level sow seeds of unwholesome thoughts in the minds of people, both in the waking life and in the dream state during sleep, tempting and impelling them to commit various crimes. Like attracts like. Those given to higher thoughts and with a relatively purer personal magnetism are not so much affected by dark influences reflected from the Astral Light. But many natures of the opposite kind are influenced by the suggestions coming from these insidious influences, and very often succumb to them. Thus from the Astral Plane come impulses of waves of crimes of various kinds—calamities, moral and physical diseases, of suicides, rapes and murders, social convulsions etc.—which sweep through society periodically like epidemics. The phenomenon is vastly aggravated by unconscionable crime of capital punishment which the State metes out to those who commit grave crimes, and by those who through moral cowardice commit suicide. In such cases, only the body is dead, but the Inner Man will still be alive unseen in the Astral World, and their minds are caught up intensely in such negative thoughts and emotions as grief, hatred, revenge, lust, and repeatedly rehearsing in imagination the memories of crime they committed. Thus thoughts of crime, coming from the inner plane, are sown in the minds of vulnerable people living in the world and impel them to commit similar crimes. This fact is, unfortunately, little known. Were there a general awareness of the working of this moral and psychological law much of the evils of society would be prevented by means of right education, inculcation of virtues, inducing responsible action on the part of individuals and groups.

The general notion is that the events of life are accidental or

chance happenings. Therefore, people tend to absolve themselves of individual responsibility for the ills of society and for the unhappy and painful personal conditions in which they may find themselves. This is a wrong view. We are Eternal Thinkers, not mere creatures of a day. As Thinkers we make our world by our thoughts—by thinking and acting on the basis of the ideas we hold—and are, therefore, responsible for the conditions which make up our lives. A general recognition and admission of this basic truth of life will in itself raise mankind to a higher moral development and induce voluntary responsible individual action, which tends to promote mutual co-operation and social harmony.

It is, therefore, of paramount importance to understand that ideas and beliefs which have no basis in truth, or which are at best partial truths, will necessarily lead us into error and confusion. For instance, the theological idea of an extra-cosmic personal God, which has held such a sway over the human mind for centuries, has indeed no basis in reality and truth. We have ample illustrations, both in history of civilizations and in our contemporary world, that this belief is at the root of the tendency in believers to absolve themselves of the moral responsibility for their actions and for the conditions of their lives, on the one hand, and for the growth of religious dogmatism, intolerance and superstitions, on the other. There is no substance in the argument that scientific progress, in the modern sense of the term, will cure society of superstitions. If it has freed the mind from one kind of superstitions, it has fostered other sorts in their place, which are equally pernicious in their effects, as much of the theories of science are built on wrong premises. Wrong premises cannot but lead to wrong conclusions, though the line of reasoning from the major and minor terms of the syllogism, as per rules of logic, is faultless. Thus the modern scientific dictum that life, mind and consciousness have physical basis is contrary to truth, and, consequently, the wrong premise has necessarily given rise to the pervading materialism of the times with all its horrific consequences which we are witnessing in the world today. Very few indeed ever

question these assumptions and the great mass of people, including those considered to be learned and educated, live by and act upon such erroneous popular ideas. Social and international relations and institutions are all built on such false notions of life. This is the root cause of the world problems.

Great Teachers have always taught that mind is the real plane of action, and that if it is misdirected by mistaken notions or assumptions about life and its purpose, it leads us into obscurity and spiritual darkness. The Buddha teaches that a wrongly directed mind does greater harm to us than that which our enemies wish for us. The way out of obscurity and difficulties in which we are is to free the mind from wrong ideas and direct it to consideration of universal and eternal truths. The latter reveal to us the true nature of our real being and that of the universe, both being differentiation or manifestation of One Life, governed by One Law—the cyclic and Karmic Law—gradually evolving towards the one grand consummation, which is universal divine perfection of every being. The great Teachers give out such ideas founded on self-evidently true universal axioms, which arouse in those who are receptive to them the hitherto dormant faculty of Intuition by which they are able to readily grasp the reality of the universal ideas. Such ideas as divinity latent in man, of the true nature of the Self, of universal brotherhood of humanity, of the laws of Karma and Reincarnation which unravel and explain the otherwise unsolvable riddles, paradoxes and mysteries of life, which when dwelt upon, resonate in the inmost depths of our being, enabling us to inwardly recognize the self-evidently true basis of these verities—are indeed the living realities of our Higher Consciousness. Thus do the great Sages sow the seeds of wisdom in the minds of those who are receptive, and show them the way and the means by which each one can verify for oneself the great truths suggested, free oneself from all error, and attain perfection of spiritual cultivation—Divinity.

THE ADEPTS IN THE BIBLE

ABRAHAM AND SOLOMON

ACCORDING to the biblical book of *Genesis*, Abraham or Abram was a native of Ur, in Mesopotemia, but he was called by God (Jehovah) to leave his own country and journey to an undesignated land, which was later named Canaan, for the founding of a new nation. He was promised by God that his “seed” would inherit the land and he would make him the ancestor of great nations. At the age of 75, and childless, he obeyed the command of the God, unquestioningly, and proceeded with his barren wife Sarai (who later became Sarah), and other companions to the land of Canaan. When Abram was eighty-six years of age, he had a son, Ishmael, by his wife’s maid-servant Hagar. Thirteen years later, when Abram was ninety-nine years of age, God declared Abram’s new name: “Abraham”—“a father of many nations” (*Genesis*, 17:5). Then God declared Sarai’s new name: “Sarah” and blessed her and told Abraham, “I will give thee a son also of her” (*Genesis*, 17:15-16). At 100 years of age, he had a legitimate son, Isaac, by Sarah, who was to be the heir of the promise. In his *Epistle to the Galatians*, (iv, 24) St. Paul says: “It is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a freewoman...which things are an allegory.”

H.P.B. points out that those who would compare the legends of Abram or Abraham, and Sarai or Sarah, with those of Brahma and Saraswati or Sri, or Lakshmi-Venus, and understand the Kabalistic meaning of the Hebrew God Jehovah and his connection with the Moon, cannot fail to see that the story of Abraham is based upon that of Brahma. She explains that moon gods and goddesses represent the generative power of nature. Moon returns to the *same phase* in 29 ½ days, which is called Lunar Synodical month. The Metonic cycle is a period of 19 tropical years or 235 Lunar Synodical months, which being completed, the solar and lunar time coincide, and after which the full moon returns on the *same solar day* of the month.

H.P.B. points out that Mount Sinai, which is called the “Mountain of the Moon” is the monument of the exact time of the lunar years and months, by which this spiritually vitalizing cycle (of 19 tropical years or 235 months) could be computed. We are told that Hagar, the bond-woman represents “Mount Sinai in Arabia,” and in Hebrew her numerical value is 235. “So also, Sarai, the wife of Abram could have no child until her name was changed to Sarah giving to her the property of this lunar influence,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, II, 76-77)

There is another allegorical meaning possible to the child born of a free woman and a bond-woman. In the *Esoteric Character of the Gospels*, explaining the meaning of crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, H.P.B. writes that the “Son of Man” is no child of the bond-woman—*flesh*, but verily of the free-woman—*Spirit*, the child of man’s own deeds and the fruit of his own spiritual labour. A person striving after spiritual perfection must have *three* births: (1) physical, from his mortal parents; (2) *spiritual* through Initiation; and (3) his final birth into the world of spirit—at death (*Isis*, II, 565). Then again, Paul exhorted his followers to free themselves from the trammels of Jewish dogmatism. “Cast out the bondwoman and her son” (the old Law and the Synagogue) he cried. “The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman. Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free; be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

Thus, Abraham has, at 100 years of age, by Sarah, a legitimate son, Isaac, who is to be the heir of the promise. Yet Abraham is ready to obey God’s command to sacrifice Isaac, as a test of his faith, which he is not required to consummate in the end because God substitutes a ram. Thus, Abraham is pictured as a righteous man, with whole-hearted commitment to God. Mr. Judge mentions that Abraham was called “the friend of God.” “The references to his conversations with the Almighty in respect of the destruction of cities alone shows him to have been an Adept who had long ago passed beyond the need of ceremonial or other adventitious aids” (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 9). This has reference to the argument

of Abraham with God to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the days of Abraham, there were two cities named Sodom and Gomorrah. The people who lived there had turned away from God, and rejoiced in doing wrong. Abraham had a nephew named Lot. Lot and his family lived in the city of Sodom. They cared about God, and tried to do what pleased him. When evil in the cities kept increasing, God decided to destroy both the cities, and he told Abraham about what he was going to do. "What if there are some good people living there?" Abraham asked. "If you destroy the city, they will die too. That wouldn't be right." God promised not to destroy the cities so long as there were even 50 good people. But Abraham argued on and asked what if there were forty-five, or forty, or thirty, or ten good people, would God destroy the cities? God finally promised that he would not destroy the cities so long as there were even three good people remaining in the cities.

Abraham, Moses and Solomon make a great Triad of Adepts. In the article, "Alchemy in the Nineteenth Century," H.P.B. mentions that Moses and Solomon are later adepts in the occult sciences, for they were preceded by Abraham, who in turn, was preceded in the knowledge of the *Science of Sciences* by Hermes. It is said that the oldest existing treatise on Alchemy is found in *Smaragdine Tablet*. Eliphaz Levi says that this Tablet of Emerald is the whole of magic in a single page. This Tablet is alleged to have been found by Sarai, Abraham's wife, *on the dead body of Hermes*. H.P.B. points out that "Hermes" was never the name of a man, and that Thoth-Hermes is simply the personification of the sacred teachings. Theosophy says that the finding of the tablet on the dead body of Hermes by Sarai is an allegory. As H.P.B. points out, the legends of Abraham and Sarai (or Sarah) are comparable with those of Brahma and Saraswati. The allegory may perhaps mean that *Sarai-swati*, the wife of Brahma, or the goddess of secret wisdom and learning, finding still much of the ancient wisdom latent in the dead body of Humanity, revived that wisdom. This led to the revival and rebirth of the Occult Sciences, so long forgotten and neglected, the world

over. (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

Though Abraham and Moses were initiates, in the history of Abraham we come across Melchizedek, who was so much beyond Abraham that he had the right to confer upon the latter a dignity, a privilege, or a blessing (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 8-9). Melchizedek is a figure of importance in biblical tradition because he was King-Hierophant of Salem, and worshipper of the Sun, "the Most High." When Abram returns after defeating king Chedorlaomer, Melchizedek brought out bread and wine and blessed Abram and said, "Blessed *be* Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth" (*Genesis*, 14:19). Melchizedek is an old Canaanite name meaning "My King Is [the god] Sedek" or "My King Is Righteousness."

An Adept is the true magician who has complete control over the elementals as well as knowledge of the occult laws, which govern certain occult processes in nature. Mr. Judge mentions that Solomon was a great Adept with great magical powers. Now and then mention is made in the Arabian Nights of the power of King Solomon and his seal. The symbol of interlaced triangles is called "Seal of Solomon," because it was believed that the great Adept Solomon used this seal when dealing with the genii or elemental spirits that obeyed him. In the Arabian Nights stories we find him dealing with wicked genii or elemental spirits, and he would bury them in the Red Sea. Since Solomon was a Jewish King in the land of Palestine and since there is no mention made of his travel, how did he get to Red Sea? We must therefore accept that "Solomon" does not stand for any particular king or Adept, but he stands for vast knowledge of magic arts possessed by the adepts of antiquity.

H.P.B. points out that Solomon was never a living man. His life and works are an allegory of the trials and glory of Initiation. Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines are merely the personifications of man's attributes, feelings, passions and his various occult powers. Solomon is the emblem of SOL or Sun. He is compared to the Indian "Vikartana" (the Sun) who was shorn of his beams by

the Hierophant-Initiator, Viswakarman (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 1*, p. 4 fn.). In the Puranic allegory, Viswakarman's daughter Sanjana (spiritual consciousness), who was the wife of Surya the sun, complained to her father of the too great effulgence of her husband. Viswakarman, the divine carpenter, crucified the sun on his lathe and cut away eighth part of his rays—creating round him a dark aureole. After that, Surya looked as though he had been crowned with dark thorns and he became “Vikarttana,” one who was shorn of his effulgence. Vikarttana is the type of the initiated neophyte. All these names were given to candidates who were going through trials of initiation. The candidate for initiation personifies the sun, who has to kill all his fiery passions and wear a crown of thorns, before he can rise into new life and be reborn. By cutting off the sun's rays, Viswakarman created a kind of darkness. A candidate for initiation was literally made to sit, all alone, in a dark room. This is equivalent to descent into lower worlds or Hades, wherein the candidate touches the lowest levels of his consciousness. After facing the darkness of his lower nature, and purifying it, he rises with fully purified consciousness.

“The building of the Temple of Solomon is the symbolical representation of the gradual acquirement of the secret wisdom, or magic.” It represents building or development of the spiritual from the earthly, and manifestation of the power and glory of the spirit in the physical world through wisdom and genius of the builder, writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, II, 391)

AND I saw the river over which every soul must pass
To reach the kingdom of heaven
And the name of that river was suffering:
And I saw a boat, which carries souls across the river
And the name of that boat was love.

—ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Question: What are OBEs (Out-of-Body Experiences) and NDEs (Near-Death Experiences)? Is it possible to Video-record these to see with our physical eyes the process of death and thereafter?

Answer: Both Plato and St. Paul taught that man is composed of body, soul and spirit. No matter how man has been classified in various systems of philosophy, the underlying fact is that man is more than his visible physical body. There is something in us, call it soul or self, which is a permanent entity, and which bridges the gap between sleeping and waking, as also, life and death. During sleep also we are conscious, because on waking up we sometimes say, “I dreamed.” On waking up we do not feel that we are a different person. That soul or Inner Self or Real Man survives the death of the body. The scoffing skeptic says, “Who ever saw the inner Self?” Though philosophical arguments are presented to prove the existence of the “hidden, permanent self,” OBEs (Out-of-Body Experiences) and NDEs (Near-Death Experiences) seem to provide undeniable proof of the existence of the permanent self apart from the body.

Out-of-Body Experiences refer to cases of people who, at the time of near fatal accidents or during surgical operations, found themselves outside their bodies, and accurately observed all that transpired while their bodies were unconscious. When Peter Sellers had his first heart attack, and the doctors had pronounced him dead, he recalled leaving his body and looking down and seeing his open chest cavity and the surgeon holding his heart in his hands (*New York Times*, October 31, 1980). Ernest Hemingway also had an Out-of-Body Experience when he was seriously wounded while

servicing as an ambulance corpsman during World War I. He was so profoundly affected by that experience that he has mentioned it in several of his writings. He describes that there was a flash, as when blast-furnace door is swung open. "I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself. It (my soul) flew all around and then came back and I wasn't dead anymore." Another person who had such experience writes that as he hovered over his body, he felt regard but not *concern* for his own body.

Near-Death Experiences, as the name suggests, are the experiences of people who had close call with death. These were the people who appeared to have died, but were resuscitated after a few minutes. In the internationally famous book, *Life After Life*, Dr. Raymond Moody, recounts Near-Death Experiences of many of his patients, who were interviewed by him. He found striking similarity among the accounts of the experiences. Taking into account all the common elements in various experiences, he observed that, typically, in every case, the dying man reaches a point of greatest physical distress and hears the doctor pronounce him dead. Then he feels himself moving through a long dark tunnel, and after which he finds himself outside of his own physical body. He sees his physical body from a distance, and at the same time becomes aware that he still has a body which is very different from the physical body. He has glimpses of the spirits of relatives and friends. Then he finds himself in the presence of a "Being of Light," who helps him get a panoramic review of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, and the time for his death has not yet come. He is reluctant to return from that state where he experienced intense feeling of joy, peace and love, but finds himself reuniting with the physical body. In most cases, the Near-Death Experience has had profound impact on the life of the person who experienced it. They no longer wonder whether

they could survive death, but they *know* that they could survive, because they had experienced their consciousness existing apart from the body.

It does not seem possible to Video-record these phenomena to enable us to see with our physical eyes the process of death and thereafter. However, there have been a number of reports of death-bed visions, in which a psychically sensitive person sitting near the dying person sees the astral body floating above the physical body, joined by a magnetic cord.

Question: Every man's account in this physical world is separate. There is no joint-account in spirituality also. Every man's Karma is separate. Why do we get entangled in this world and create a hell out of heaven?

Answer: In the physical and the spiritual life, there are individual as well as joint accounts, whether we consider bank accounts or karmic accounts. With every thought, feeling and action, we create Karma and seem to open our karmic account. But none of us acts in isolation, as we are all united on inner and invisible planes, and therefore, we continually affect one another through our thoughts, feelings and actions. It is through mutual influence, affinities and antipathies which we feel for a person or group of persons, that we open, as it were, a karmic joint account. Through acts of commission or omission, each one of us creates karmic debt, and to pay off the debt we are born in the company of that person. H.P.B. points out that we are like cells in the body. One unhealthy cell may affect the whole body. There is no such thing as separateness.

It is a gross misunderstanding that by not entering into human relationship one can maintain his separate karmic account. In India, especially, some people mistakenly believe that to help anyone or take another's help is to get involved and create a tie with that person, which in turn means having to be born again, instead of freedom from the round of births and deaths. "Inaction based on selfish fear can bear but evil fruit," says *The Voice of the Silence*.

Since we are continually affecting one another through our thoughts, feelings and actions, it is difficult to say what portion of another's karma is *strictly of his own making*. As Mr. Judge suggests, "The indissoluble unity of the race demands that we should consider every man's troubles as partly due to ourselves, because we have been always units in the race and helped to make the conditions which cause suffering" (*"Forum" Answers*, p. 55). A son may decide to walk out of a house where the father earns money by unfair means. But he must know that it is not so simple to disconnect himself from the family because he would not have been born into that family if he had not contributed in making the family as he finds it today. Family, Racial and National Karma are collective Karma which influences every unit constituting the whole through the law of distribution.

Besides individual karma there are causes generated in company of other people and that is what we term as "collective karma," which is another form of joint account. We either accelerate or retard the progress of the race, by ever so little measure, through our good or bad actions. For instance, living in this century, we enjoy amenities like better transport, computers, and electrical gadgets. But it also means having to bear with crime, pollution, and corruption. This is the collective aspect of karma, where we bear the consequences by virtue of being part of the whole.

When a person renounces interest in the fruits of actions, and performs actions renouncing the *kartabhav* or "doership," he is not bound by actions, because then, he does not offer an individual focus, where karmic effects could return. He, so to speak, closes his account. Even these beings, who are beyond the entanglements, continue to "people their currents in space with entities powerful for good alone." Their very presence charges the atmosphere with beneficent influence and They are said to alleviate collective suffering of humanity, "protecting it from further and far greater misery and sorrow."

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Conformism has its origin in a phenomenon known as herd behaviour. Our society encourages and rewards conformism in order to maintain status quo. It is the fire of non-conformism which dispels darkness and lights the path ahead. Conformism is deeply rooted in our psyche because right from our childhood we are forced to learn how to relate to others in ways which are pleasing to them. In matters of eating, sleeping, dressing up and the like we are expected to conform to the wish and ways of our elders. Conformism is a potential social evil. It is the crucifixion of the individual at the altar of society. Conformism represses our free will, destroys our spirit and does not let us live an inspired life. Unlike rebellion which is a reaction against conventional rules and regulations, and comes from the same level of consciousness, non-conformism is a higher response. The only way to quell rebellion is by pouring love and through engaging in meditation. When we cling too much to people we consider powerful, we deny the power within us. When we take too much advice from other people and constantly occupy ourselves with what others think and say, we tend to stifle our own thought processes. When we constantly seek social attention, we deny ourselves relationship with our own self.

All powerful writers, artists, poets, scientists and mystics seek solitude and prefer the company of their own soul. The simplest way to dissociate from herd behaviour is to seek and love your own company, to be your own guide and mentor. We have to learn to honour ourselves by learning the art of saying "no" gracefully, instead of wanting to please others all the time. Let us learn to listen to our own inner voice. One of the greatest paradoxes of our times is the way we try to conform to a path walked by a non-conformist, such as Jesus, Buddha or Mohammed. We cannot find God by walking a road walked by someone else, but by renouncing all paths, all outward journeys and retreating within. Every seeker, becomes a non-conformist when he steps off the beaten track walked by those

before him. By questioning the conventional ways and by refusing to accept the conventional answers, we enter the domain of the unknown, in which we find all the answers. “The non-conformist is never against society, but he may seem to be against societal norms. He who honours himself will always love and honour anything which serves the whole,” writes Sanjiv Ranjan. (*Life Positive*, September 2013)

We all have strong herd-instinct and are only too ready to conform. A conformist seldom exercises his power of thinking and choosing. Dr. Erich Fromm points out that we accept ready-made goals and pursue a career that has approval of the society. Modern man thinks he knows what he wants, while he actually wants what he *is supposed to want*. Mr. Crosbie writes, “From our birth we are surrounded by those who suggest certain ideas to us as true, and we follow these suggested ideas. There is very little *original* thought anywhere... Whatever system of thought is presented to us, that we adopt. We follow the suggestion given, with no attempt to reach the basis of that which is suggested” (*Universal Theosophy*, p.108). John Stuart Mill points out that when traditions and customs become the rule of conduct, individuality should assert itself. “He who does anything because it is a custom, makes no choice.” Emerson, too, emphasizes *self-reliance* and says, “It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” Jesus’ advice to spiritual aspirants is: “Come ye out from among them and be ye separate.”

Light on the Path states that we are influenced by a thousand and one voices around us, but we have to follow only our own sense of right and wrong, by trying to arouse our intuition. We need to consult wise people, good books and above all our own inner nature. We may go wrong in our judgment, but the important thing is to learn self-reliance and self-rule.

We inhabit a universe that is intelligent and works according to laws and patterns with mathematical precision. Mathematics is evident in nature. For instance, there are 23 chromosomes in our body, no more and no less. Each element has atomic number, and with just a change in mathematical structure of atoms, countless substances exist in variety of forms. The seed seems to contain invisible, intelligent design, as it were, the software of an entire tree. When we make observations and apply reason we find that order emerges spontaneously in nature, and encounter such variety of complexities that we are forced to admit that some form of intelligence must be guiding such processes. Some people argue that we need not bring in God to explain intelligence. If we argue that human beings have been able to create “artificial intelligence” and computer, we must not forget that “intelligent design” is behind that creation. If we are the source of artificial intelligence, where is the source of our intelligence?

There is no randomness or chaos. The laws of the universe have clockwork regularity. For men like Spinoza and Einstein, the order and harmony, which are expressed by the laws of the universe, denoted God. In a letter to Solovine, the Romanian philosopher and mathematician, Einstein said: “I have no better expression than ‘religious’ for this confidence in the rational nature of reality and in its being accessible... to human reason. When this feeling is missing, science degenerates into mindless empiricism.” The difficulty in accepting that intelligence is at work in the universe is that science has kept consciousness out of its domain. Mathematician-philosopher Roger Penrose says, “A scientific world view which does not profoundly come to terms with the problem of conscious minds can have no serious pretensions of completeness. Consciousness is part of our universe, so any physical theory which makes no proper place for it, falls fundamentally short of providing genuine description of the world.” God has been variously described as a master magician, spinning *maya*, the lord of dance eternally present in the dance of life and death, as also a musician, who is the source

of sound or *Nada Brahman*. He is all of this, but He is also the ultimate mathematician, writes Narendra Murty. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, September 1, 2013)

Our universe is the universe of law. The anthropic principle seems to emphasize the existence of intelligence behind the orderliness of the universe. There is evidence of law and order from all branches of science. For instance, it is argued that if the electromagnetic force were even slightly weaker than the gravitational force, stars would have burnt a million times faster, burying the universe in darkness a long time ago. Theosophy teaches that God is Law. God is all-pervasive and so is Law. In fact, in the manifested Universe the presence of God is felt through the Law, which works impartially and unerringly. It is this law which makes the universe orderly and gives it meaning. It would be miserable living in a universe where one day water felt cold to our touch, and another day burnt our fingers!

There is plan or pattern for the *universe*. The modern Intelligent Design theory is the revival of an argument made by the British philosopher William Paley, in 1802, that unlike the stone, a watch appears purposely assembled and would not function without its precise combination of parts. Hence, “the watch must have a maker.” Paley argued that along similar lines, the complexity of certain biological structures implies *design*. Darwin’s answer to Paley’s argument was that natural selection could create the *appearance* of design. Darwin posits a *series of natural forces working blindly—without aim and without design*. In the article, “Which is Vague, Theosophy or Science?,” Mr. Judge describes this as a wild and fanciful theory. There is not a single proof in the present life, in any of the lower kingdoms, of blind forces beginning work without design and finally producing a beautiful design, visible in the smallest form we see. The evolutionary theory put forward by Theosophy admits of both intelligence and pattern. The whole Kosmos is guided, controlled and animated by an endless series of Hierarchies of sentient beings or conscious Divine Powers who are agents of

Karmic and Cosmic Laws and they are “intelligent Beings who adjust and control evolution.”

We seem to be churning out thoughts all the time. The purpose of a thought is to create, to affect a change and produce a meaningful reality. The potential of a thought has a close and direct connection with its purity. A pure thought is not fragmented, distracted or ripped by doubt and so is powerful. Just like the pure extract of a substance is strong, so that just a drop of it is sufficient, so also, a few concentrated thoughts can produce significant results. Thoughts are like seeds, and like seeds they need the air of re-inforcement and repetition, the water of determination, and the sunlight of patience to grow into action. A task is realized when pure thoughts that head in the same direction are created, concentrated and then acted upon. Divergent and conflicting thoughts are like strong winds that cause the original sapling to droop. The waste thoughts, such as, thinking about the past, deliberating over others’ behaviour or commenting on things that do not concern us, tend to dampen the passions ignited by pure thoughts. Pure thoughts are heart-to-heart. They arise from the pure core of a being and touch similar chords on reaching their destination. Good wishes, which are consciously created thoughts for one’s own self and others, and which have immense power to transform circumstances, are the best example of pure thoughts. Concentrated good wishes have the power to heal the hearts, damaged by acidic memories and bitter emotions. There is an urgent need to learn to create and sustain pure thoughts, because serving through the mind is the dire need in a spiritually polluted environment of the world. In the quiet hours of the morning, it would be a good exercise to shower peace over zones of conflict, to spray spiritual love in the areas that lack harmony, and to send happiness to those who have lost hope and joy. (*Purity*, September 2013)

Thoughts are the seeds of Karma and are at the very foundation

of our destiny. How do we build fate or destiny? “Sow a thought, reap and act; sow an act reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” Destiny is woven in the minds of men with good and evil thoughts. One needs to transform one’s thinking and feeling and thus weave a better destiny.

Our good wishes and thoughts become more powerful when they are backed by strong will. H.P.B points out that every man or woman is endowed, more or less, with a magnetic potentiality, which when helped by a sincere and especially by an intense and indomitable *will*, can become the most effective magic lever in human hands. We should use that *will* to send out good wishes for the New Year to all. In Buddhism, *Metta* or loving kindness is a powerful positive emotion. We are asked to develop loving kindness towards all living beings. There must be overwhelming desire and wish, “May *all* the beings be happy.” *Metta Bhavana meditation* helps to cultivate loving kindness. In this meditation, one has to visualize the image of one’s own self, then the image of a friend, a neutral person, a “difficult person,” and send out thoughts of friendliness and kindness towards that image. In the last stage, one has to expand the circle of loving kindness so as to include all the people in the family, in the building, in the locality, in the office, in the city, nation, and the whole universe.

It can happen that we might be away from the place where help is needed, but our pure and noble thoughts could bring wonderful results, inducing others to act. Mr. Judge mentions that some of the orphanages in India are supported only by prayers. The thoughts of prayer are carried by strong, constant faith into the receptive minds of other people, who are then moved by the subconsciously injected thought to answer the request, and thus financial or other help reaches the orphanage.