

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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PRAGNYAPRADH—SIN AGAINST INTELLECT

WHAT is it that distinguishes a man from an animal? It is self-consciousness and the power to think and choose. These arise from the mind. There are three aspects of the mind: (1) When involved in desires and passions, it is called *kama-manas*, making man an animal-man. (2) When the mind functions on its own plane—thinking and reasoning—it is mind *per se*. (3) When the mind works in conjunction with spiritual nature, it is *Buddhi-manas*, making man divine, leading to intuitive perception. Often man is described as the most intelligent animal. Animals do possess intelligence but not the kind of rationality that man has, *i.e.*, to reason from premises to conclusions.

However, an animal devoid of reasoning powers possesses instinct. Instinct is the direct perception of what is right, within its own realm. Animals have right instinct in regard to what to eat, and in regard to what is dangerous to them, because their instinct is acquired experience. H.P.B. points out that human beings have developed their reason, at the expense of instinct. In losing instinct, man has also lost his intuitional powers, which are the crown of instinct. As a result, “Instinct teaches plant and animal their seasons for the procreation of their species, and guides the dumb brute to find his appropriate remedy in the hour of sickness. Reason—the pride of man—fails to check the propensities of his matter, and brooks no restraint upon the unlimited gratification of his senses. Far from

leading him to be his *own* physician, its subtle sophistries lead him too often to his own destruction.” (*Isis*, I, 433)

According to Ayurveda, *Pragnyapradh* is considered to be the root cause of nearly all diseases. *Pragnyapradh* literally means offences (*aparadh*) committed by intellect (*pragnya*), and thus implies misuse of intellect. We make certain choices willfully ignoring our inner knowledge, gut feeling, intuition and common sense. When mind makes decisions without working in co-ordination with the discriminating faculty, it tends to disturb natural harmony. Some of the simple examples are, when one has eaten enough and is full, one still eats more food because it tastes good. To continue the habit of smoking cigarettes knowing well that smoking is harmful to one’s health, is another example. “Thou shalt not let thy senses make a playground of thy mind,” says the *Voice of the Silence*. Senses and organs produce sensation, when they contact external objects. For instance, when you put ice-cream on the tip of your tongue, the tongue reports that it is cold and sweet, but it is the mind that intervenes and says, “I like it, I want more of it.” We then tend to create excesses, when it comes to eating, smoking, sexual indulgence, etc.

In a medical treatise called the *Charaka Samhita*, the author, Charaka, known as the “Indian father of medicine,” mentions a verse to the effect that *pragnyapradh* is losing sight of *viveka* or discrimination. When a human being falls prey to one of the six enemies of man, namely, desire, anger, greed, attachment, pride or envy, he loses control over himself and is not able to discriminate between good and bad; right and wrong. Such indiscrimination leads to mental disturbance and that in turn finds its expression in diseases of the body. Sometimes a physician gives treatment based only on physical symptoms, so that the root of the disease remains intact, which flourishes into a tree whenever conditions are conducive, so that at times, diseases in a given life are the result of unwholesome actions of the previous lives.

Along these lines, Swami Shri Savitatnand describes

pragnyapradh as referring to an occurrence where one does something that is against the dictates of one’s mind, intellect or conscience. For instance, one’s conscience does not encourage one to indulge in alcoholism, gambling, philandering or betraying a person’s trust. But people often do not pay heed to the voice within and continue to indulge in sinful activities arguing that one has to be practical to survive in this world. As a result, the consequences reaped for such actions often take the form of a disease—a disease that can never be cured by medicines. He gives an instance, wherein three or four people suffered from tuberculosis that not only was incurable, but also no palliative care could bring improvement in the condition of the patient. It was discovered that each of these patients had neglected providing treatment to their mothers who suffered from same illness, even though they could afford the treatment financially. Under the justice of Karma, these individuals developed the same affliction. *The Voice of the Silence* says, “Inaction (an act of omission) in a deed of mercy becomes an action (act of commission) in a deadly sin.”

He presents one more side to *Pragnyapradh*, such as is depicted in a conflict between a powerful and powerless person. The powerful person could possess power of knowledge, power of intellect, social, political or military power. When a person intoxicated with power wrongs or hurts another person, the latter may not have the means to retaliate. But the pain inflicted on the victim sends out an involuntary curse, an ill feeling for the perpetrator. This ill feeling may show its effect on the perpetrator in the form of an incurable disease.

As we reason from premises to conclusions, we can reason ourselves into a false position from a false basis of thinking. If we start with wrong premises we are bound to come to false conclusions, however faultless the reasoning. “Reason is the clumsy weapon of the scientists—intuition the unerring guide of the seer. In other words, reason develops at the expense and loss of natural instinct, and it finally shuts out man’s spiritual perceptions....If we had to judge of

the Deity, and the world of spirits, by its human interpreters...belief in God and the soul's immortality could not withstand the attacks of *reason* for one century more. That which supports the faith of man in God and a spiritual life to come is *intuition*" (*Isis*, I, 435). When knowledge is obtained based on observation, experiment or reasoning, one can make a fatal mistake of denying all that can be apprehended only by a still higher faculty of intuitive perception.

Questioning religious beliefs and trying to understand religious dogmas does not mean rejecting religion. It is because the religious habit will not permit frank discussion and vigorous questioning that intelligent men and women throw religion overboard. So also, it is not the right kind of rationalism which rejects all that it cannot immediately and completely understand. As no surgeon in cutting up the body has found the soul, therefore, no soul exists; thus reasons the false rationalist. Yet the same mind believes in the existence of mental suffering, of emotional depression and elation, which are as invisible as is the Soul. A true rationalist always remains an inquirer—humble, reverent, confident, looking for an answer or explanation to the phenomena he has not solved. We sin against wisdom when we accept on blind faith without understanding, or turn skeptics because reason, observation or experiments fail to give answers. Wisdom is direct perception. It is an experiential knowledge, and its acquirement requires the sacrifice and devotion of a man's whole life.

Cold, calculating intellect, without the light of wisdom, without the warmth of heart is both dangerous and destructive. Mr. Judge writes, "I tell you the heart, the soul, and the bowels of compassion are of more consequence than intellectuality. The latter (intellectuality) will take us all sure to hell if we let it govern only" (*Letters That Have Helped Me*). Thus, for instance, can we decide, based on reason alone, whether a person deserves our help or charity, or not? If we have to choose between finishing our personal work and visiting a sick person, we will be our own lawyers to prove how important it is to finish the work, and thus postpone visiting the sick

friend or relative. When our heart goes out to a person in a pathetic condition, the advice is to act on the impulse. If we wait, our cold, calculating mind will put forward several reasons to dissuade us from giving charity. What if he uses it up in drinking or smoking? What if he is a professional beggar who is pretending to be sick and helpless? Mr. Judge advises, "Every impulse from above, every prompting of the Divine within, should meet at once with a hearty welcome and response. If you feel as if something urged you to visit some sick or afflicted neighbour or friend, obey the suggestion without delay....If some pathetic story of suffering has moved you, act on the emotion while your cheeks are still wet with tears. More light, more wisdom more spirituality must necessarily come to one thus prepared, thus expectant" (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 32). In other words, even if we are mistaken in giving help or charity, it is through such actions that we develop discrimination, and gain wisdom to do the right, unerringly. "*Manas* has the faculty of *viveka* or discrimination. The faculty of discernment which comes out of detachment or dispassion is *vairagya*, and brings into operation the intuition," writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

We read in the *Voice of the Silence* a puzzling statement: "Even ignorance is better than Head-learning with no Soul-wisdom to illuminate and guide it." Though Jesus said that "it is difficult for the rich man to enter heaven," there are other possessions which constitute greater hindrance to spiritual life and growth, such as, wide, all-embracing, rapidly-acting brain stored with knowledge. One could use it properly or improperly. These days we increasingly find misuse of knowledge and intellect in terrorist activities. More often than not the "master-mind" behind the terrorist attack is some brilliant young man well-versed in modern technology. The one thus misusing mental powers might be punished by a life of stupidity in one of his subsequent lives. Any disuse or misuse of thinking and reasoning power may also be regarded as an offence against intelligence. A lawyer uses clever arguments to prove an innocent person guilty, or a guilty person innocent. Enormous would be the

Karma of someone who deliberately and with premeditation influences hundreds of people, at times, misguiding them through wrong philosophy.

Pragnyapradh may also imply acting contrary to the voice of conscience, and thus being heedless of what is right. We use intelligence without wisdom. An unscrupulous person in possession of psychic powers or secrets of nature uses them for selfish or evil purposes and falls into black magic. H.P.B. defines black magic as an abuse or misuse of psychic powers, or of any *secret of nature*, i.e., using them for selfish or evil purposes. A hypnotizer who hypnotizes his subject, interfering with his free will, and uses the power of “suggestion,” to make that person steal or commit crime or murder, could be termed a *black magician*. Although scientific inventions have made our life comfortable, with its unlimited potential for destruction, it is a dangerous weapon in the hands of the unscrupulous. There are divided opinions regarding many scientific investigations, such as stem-cell research, cloning, genetically engineered crops, etc. For instance, grafting human brain cells into animal brains so as to get an insight into diseases such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, etc., has evoked criticism. It is felt that science is blurring the line between humans and animals. Researchers have stepped across the moral lines that must be defined. Do ends justify means? Are we interfering with natural processes? There are no cut and dried answers to these questions.

We have these thought-provoking words from the *Secret Doctrine*: “Great intellect and too much knowledge are a two-edged weapon in life, and instruments for evil as well as for good. When combined with Selfishness, they will make of the whole of Humanity a footstool for the elevation of him who possesses them, and a means for the attainment of his objects; while, applied to altruistic humanitarian purposes, they may become the means of the salvation of many.” (II, 163)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

LAKE MANASAROVARA AND MOUNT KAILAS

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison...the name of the second river is Gihon...the name of the third river is Hiddekel; that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria, and the fourth river is Euphrates. (*Genesis*, II, 10-14)

Withal, the birthplace of the sacred rivers is the sacred land [Tibet]. (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 42)

IN THEIR quest for man’s birthplace, ethnologists must turn further East than the Biblical Garden of Eden. Tibet has been spoken of as the cradle of the race, and search into this Eden of the Orient may yield the true original of the Hebrew allegory.

A legend quoted from the *Arya-Buddha Avantan-saka-nama Mahavaipulya-Sutra* has it that in the centre of Manasarovara of *Anavatapta* (the lake without heat or trouble), is a tree which bears fruits omnipotent in healing all human ills and consequently much sought after by both gods and men. Upon approaching the lake, 200 miles in circumference, we are told, a view opens before the traveller which can never be forgotten. Lake Manasarovara is a huge octagon, with marvellously symmetrical indentations, said to resemble very much a lotus flower in shape. Above the clear, placid water rises the mighty Mount Kailasa, guarding the north-western corner. The surrounding country is calm, dustless and rugged.

The story of the four rivers of this Eden may be the prototype of the river of four heads described in *Genesis*. The lake, goes the legend, has four outlets called respectively Mabcha Khanbab (flowing out of a peacock’s mouth), Langchen Khanbab (flowing out of a bull’s mouth), Tamchok Khanbab (flowing out of a horse’s mouth), and Senge Khanbab (flowing out of a lion’s mouth), which respectively form the sources of four sacred rivers in India. As regards these four rivers, the legend says:

The sands of silver are in the south river; the sands of gold are in the west river; the sands of diamond are in the north river; and the sands of emerald are in the east river.

The four animals from whose mouths the four mythic rivers flow are closely allied to the Kabalistic and Hindu quaternary which typify the four elementary kingdoms—earth, air, fire and water. In the diagrams in *Isis Unveiled* (II, 452-53), a human head replaced the horse, but even this apparent discrepancy is clarified when the horse is shown to be symbolic of a Rishi.

Although the sources of these legendary rivers are incapable of verification, the headwaters of several rivers of India, including the Indus and the Brahmaputra, do arise from mountains surrounding the lake. Thus is traced, in part, the sacred relation between India and its occult parent, Tibet.

Austere Mount Kailasa, which rises above Lake Manasarovara, was once a mighty battle ground.

The *war of the Titans* is but a legendary and deified copy of the real war that took place in the Himalayan *Kailasa* (heaven) instead of in the depths of Cosmic interplanetary Space. It is the record of the terrible strife between the “Sons of God” and the “Sons of the Shadow” of the Fourth and the Fifth Races

H.P.B. says that every subsequent national tradition on the subject of the “War in Heaven” has been built from legends borrowed and blended together from the exoteric account of this war waged by the Asuras against the gods. In metaphysics Kailasa means “Heaven,” the abode of the gods.

The very name Manasa-sarovara (phonetically Manasarovara) provides us with the serpent of this Aryan Eden. H.P.B. explains that Manasa-sarovara is

a sacred lake in Tibet, in the Himalayas, also called *Anavatapta*. Manasa-sarovara is the name of the tutelary deity of that lake and, according to popular folk-lore is said to be a *naga*, or a “serpent.” This, translated esoterically,

means a great adept, a sage. (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

Many nations have their sacred lakes, symbolic of the waters of space over which broods the serpent—the creative principle. Some of the grandest Peruvian ruins centre round Lake Titicaca; and the Egyptians and Greeks had their sacred temple lakes. Apollo swears thus to Phaeton in proof of his fatherhood. “To put an end to your doubts, ask what you will, the gift shall be yours. I call to witness that dreadful lake, which I never saw, but which we gods swear by in our most solemn engagements.”

Tucked away in a foot-note is a hint as to how this region in Tibet came to be venerated as a holy Paradise.

The Seven Swans that are believed to land from Heaven into Lake Mansarovara, are in the popular fancy the Seven Rishis of the Great Bear [constellation], who assume that form to visit the locality where the Vedas were written.

Because these sacred scriptures are claimed to have been written on its shores, the lake is a great place of yearly pilgrimage for the Hindus. The Vedas in their present form were compiled at least five thousand years ago. It was, however, dozens of thousands of years ago that the oldest, Rig Veda, was delivered by great Sages on the banks of Lake Mansarovara. It was not until after the sinking of the Atlantis that these teachings were recorded by the first Initiates of the Fifth Race.

At the beginning of every race the Adepts descend, powerful Manasas, Mind-born Sons, introducing a Golden Age. In these high plateau of Central Asia was born physical humanity. They were also the centre from which the Fifth Race spread. A civilization more cultured and brilliant than the world has since seen flourished here for many thousand years. Libraries, jewelry, ruins, now hid by desert sands, now revealed by exploration, all point to an extremely-advanced culture in mysterious Central Asia. From the fourth Atlantean Race the Aryans learned all “the bundle of wonderful things.” They knew the science of navigating the air, the hidden

virtues of precious and other stones, mineralogy, geology, physics and astronomy. H.P.B. writes under the word “Tchertchen” in *The Theosophical Glossary*:

An oasis in Central Asia, situated about 4,000 feet above the river Tchertchen Darya; the very hotbed and centre of ancient civilization, surrounded on all sides by numberless ruins, above and below ground, of cities, towns, and burial-places of every description. As the late Colonel Prjevalski reported, the oasis is inhabited by some 3,000 people “representing the relics of about a hundred nations and races now extinct, the very names of which are at present, unknown to ethnologists.”

But the time for the full exposure of these hidden treasures is not yet; the veil of mystery still wraps closely about this region.

It is also said, in the legend of Lake Manasarovara previously cited, that giant lotus flowers bloom in the lake, as large as those in the paradise of the Buddha Amitabha and that the Buddha and Bodhisattvas are seen there sitting on those flowers. In the surrounding mountains are found the “hundred herbs” and also the birds of paradise singing their celestial melodies. *Anavatapta*, then, is described as the only real paradise on earth, with a living Buddha and five hundred saints inhabiting Mount Kailas on its north-west, and five hundred immortals making their home on Man-ri, that rises on its southern shore, all enjoying eternal beatitude.

Travellers have described the wonderfully inspiring character of the region and reported that “unutterably holy elevation is to be felt there.” For centuries it seems to have been a centre of spiritual culture. Buddhist Arhats sought refuge in the Kailas range where they erected monasteries after their religious exodus from India, which began as early as 300 B.C. Their purpose was to propagate the new faith beyond Kashmir and Himalayas. From there Buddhism reached China in 61 A.D. when Kasyapa, at the invitation of the Emperor Ming-ti, went there to acquaint the “Son of Heaven” with the tenets of Buddhism.

Is there naught to hope for but barrenness forever for this garden of the gods of Fifth Race humanity? Is desolation all that will remain of former glory? Not so, wrote H. P. Blavatsky, endowing this region with mighty prophecy.

Sambhala (Sk.): A very mysterious locality on account of its *future* associations. A town or village mentioned in the *Puranas*, whence, it is prophesied, the Kalki Avatar will appear. The “Kalki” is Vishnu, the *Messiah on the White Horse* of the Brahmins; Maitreya Buddha of the Buddhists, Sosiosh of the Parsis, and Jesus of the Christians....It is in Sambhala that the future Messiah will be born....Occultism places it in the Himalayas.

Arghya Varsha—“the land of libations”—is the mystery name of that region which extends from Kailas mountain nearly to the Schamo Desert—from within which the *Kalki Avatar* is expected.

And she quotes from the *Vishnu Purana*:

When the close of the Kali age shall be nigh, a portion of that divine being which exists, of its own spiritual nature...shall descend on Earth...(Kalki Avatar) endowed with the eight superhuman faculties...He will re-establish righteousness on earth, and the minds of those who live at the end of Kali Yuga shall be awakened and become as pellucid as crystal. (*S.D.*, I, 378)

NEVER lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful; for beauty is God’s handwriting—a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower and thank God for it as a cup of blessing.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

THE IDEALS, which have lighted my way, and time after time, have given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Kindness, Beauty and Truth.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

MAN—THE HERO

IN THE EPICS, myths and legends of every people, of whatever age or whatever race, Man is the Hero. The great stories are all allegorical and symbolic of the journey of man to the world of the Gods, *i.e.*, Perfect Men. They tell of the many tests and trials which he must undergo, of the experiences and powers he must gain, of the indispensable knowledge he must acquire through his own efforts and sacrifices, of his conquest of his lower tendencies, in order that the *Purusha*, the Spiritual Person he *is*, may shine forth. And all this so that he will in the end be able to return will-fully to the world of ordinary human beings, with the power to help others to follow in his footsteps—become Saviours of mankind in their turn.

No great civilization has failed to leave on record some account of the One Great Adventure, some poem, some song, about the Great Hero—Man. The Norse *Eddas* and Sagas of Scandinavia; the Finnish *Kalevala*; the Greek epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the Indian *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; all tell the same tale: the evolution of Man. They depict Man in all his phases, in every age, at every degree of development, in every predicament, undergoing every trial. They tell of his unfoldment from within himself and his mastery over the inferior powers of nature. They show that at the end of the Great Adventure he becomes fit to help, teach and inspire his fellows who are travelling behind him on the same journey.

It seems strange that though these universal records of the destiny of man exist for our instruction and benefit and that even after we have begun to appreciate what they mean and portray, we do not quite grasp what is their implication as applied to ourselves, each one of us. It is a difficult idea for us to assimilate that we, “I”—am to begin to see myself as one who, through sacrifice and suffering, must gain the knowledge and power to create myself into a Hero in order to fulfil my destiny and make myself able in the true sense to help, guide and teach those who know less than I do. But until we begin to recognize this fact and start to dwell on it, begin to look at

it in the light of the reason and logic of the mind, and “sense” some of its significance and inspiration in our heart, we will not begin in dead earnest the sacrificial Journey. Nay, more, we will not understand, except in an intellectual, theoretical way, why the stories deal so much with demons, dangers, pitfalls, enemies, delusions and illusions—all of which must be met and dealt with by Man who undertakes the Great Adventure.

The great Heroes of all times are made to meet the equivalents of the “Labours of Hercules,” the temptations of Christ in the wilderness or of the Buddha under the Bo-tree. The “dark night of the Soul” is experienced by each and all, and many have been found to cry out that they have been forsaken. This, too, is one of the great Trials. But man must *become* an Adept—he can never, never be made one—and he can become only through his own efforts, courage, strength, faith and vision.

Let us then read and study the legends, stories, myths, epics, songs and poems that have been saved for us by our Predecessors. Let us keep in view the vision they give of our true destiny. Let us heed their warnings, discern the deep psychological truths implied in their tales. Thus we shall learn much that will lighten the Path of the Soul. It has been written: the Way is the Middle Way; the Path is the Path of Compassion. We only dimly glimpse as yet what these sayings mean—but we must learn their full meaning before we can become real Heroes. And it is also written: “Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself.” Brooding over the tales of the adventures of the Heroes will help us to understand our destiny better and make clear how we may follow in their footsteps.

THE MAN with insight enough to admit his limitations comes nearest to perfection.

—JOHANN VON GOETHE

SKANDHAS AND VASANAS—SOME REFLECTIONS

III

THE most common objection to belief in rebirth is that if we have lived before why do we not remember our past lives? Memory, says H.P.B., is included within the *skandhas*. Memory is the record pertaining to a particular existence. At every new birth there is a *new* body, a *new* brain and *new* memory. In a new birth a *new* record pertaining to that existence is developed. However, our Higher Ego is omniscient and has the memory of all our past lives. Reminiscence is the memory of the soul or the Higher Ego.

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

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

At birth, we bring, characteristics or *skandhas* from previous lives, and from them as a germ or basis a new set of characteristics for the new life are built. Traits that have been built up through many lives cannot be changed in a day, in one life time, no matter

how great the present effort. For each one of us, there is always a “circle pass not” for any given incarnation, and that is one reason why one does not achieve perfection in a single birth. The old atoms or “lives” resist change. Of the *skandhas*, some last throughout the span of a man’s life. A person born with deep-seated tendency of slander and gossip, of impatience, of sensuality, of lying, of jealousy and anger, may have to struggle longer and harder to overcome these negative character traits. And then, in spite of a whole life’s effort the person who has brought strong *skandhas* for impatience, say, may succeed in acquiring only a little patience. Hence, Mr. Judge says, “Be patient, even with yourself.” But no effort is lost. In the next birth, it would be somewhat easier to overcome this tendency. On the other hand, there are those *skandhas* which are replaced by other *skandhas* in a comparatively short time. What applies to negative traits also applies to positive tendencies. The Buddha says, “Fair virtues waste with time, foul sins grow purged thereby.” Unless there is a strong and deep tendency towards calmness or truthfulness or honesty, the old impressions wear out, so, one must be vigilant and make constant effort to preserve that virtue.

To acquire “a good moral character that is permanent disposition,” one is required to lead a pure and virtuous life from *moment to moment*, and not once in a while. Professor C. S. Lewis observes that someone who is not a good tennis player can play a good shot, now and then. But a “good player” is the man whose eyes, nerves and muscles have been so trained, by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied upon. They have a certain tone or quality, even while he is not playing—just as a mathematician’s mind acquires a certain habit or outlook, even when he is not doing mathematics. So also, one who perseveres in doing good action gets in the end a certain quality of character.

Along the same lines we can explain strong likes and dislikes, affinities and aversions. *Vasanas* are a bundle of tendencies or desires, which drive a person to think, feel and act according to the nature

of the *vasanas*. A fisherwoman is at home with the smell of fish, and she fails to appreciate the fragrance of flowers, while it is the reverse situation with a flower-seller. Thus, it would be perfectly right to say that a man is what he is because of his *vasanas*. *Vasanas* create desire, and if a person is not vigilant, but permits the desire to “take root,” then that desire produces agitation in the mind, and ultimately the body is forced to carry out actions to satisfy the desire.

Vasanas are habitual tendencies which are believed to predispose a person to particular patterns of behaviour in the future. They are subtle inclinations imprinted in the mind, like a stain. If someone smokes, there will be a habitual tendency or an urge to smoke every day, usually around the same time. On a higher level, they explain why some people are kind by nature, and others are cruel. It is a tendency to behave in a certain way that triggers similar actions in future.

When the body or flesh is repeatedly impressed with certain impulses through thoughts, it repeats those impulses, mechanically or automatically, and brings back the temptations. Hence, it is not easy for a person who is deeply steeped in evil to undergo a sudden transformation and become equally powerful for good. It is very difficult to reverse the *kamic* impulses given to the molecules of the body. An attempt to give the opposite impression, suddenly and violently, may prove detrimental to one’s psychic health. It is a known fact that even constant and repeated determination fails to make a drunkard give up the practice, while a non-drinker can be led into this habit without much effort.

Shri Ramana Maharshi explains this by means of an illustration. He says that the obstacles to self-realization are the habits of the mind or *vasanas*, and the latter can be obliterated by learning to concentrate the mind on That which is free from *vasanas*, but the process is gradual. Suppose a cow plays rogue and strays into neighbours’ fields to graze. She is not easily weaned from her stealthy habit. Think how she can be kept in the stall. If forcibly tethered in the stall, she simply bides her time to play the rogue. If she is tempted with fine grass in the stall she takes one mouthful on the first day

and again waits for the opportunity to run away. The next day she takes two mouthfuls; so she takes more and more on each succeeding day, until finally she is weaned from her wicked tendencies. When entirely free from bad habits she might be safely left free and she would not stray into neighbours’ pasture land. Even when beaten in the stall, she does not afterwards leave the place. Here the mind is the cow playing the rogue; the thoughts are the neighbours’ pasture; one’s own primal being free from thoughts is the stall. Our mind is accustomed to stray outward by the force of the latent *vasanas*. So long as there are *vasanas* contained within they must come out and exhaust themselves.

In spiritual discipline we have to be prepared to try again even when we fail because otherwise we cannot make progress. In *The Voice of the Silence* we find graphic description of a spiritual aspirant fighting the inner foes, till his last breath. Thus:

The fearless warrior, his precious life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe, drive him from out his stronghold, vanquish him, ere he himself expires. Act then, all ye who fail and suffer, act like him; and from the stronghold of your Soul chase all your foes away—ambition, anger, hatred, e’en to the shadow of desire—when even you have failed. (p. 68)

“Even to the shadow of desire” implies that when we are able to overcome the *vasanas*, desires, and negative tendencies, in their gross form they lurk, unknown to the spiritual seeker, in their subtle form. One has to fight the *vasanas* till they are eradicated in their subtlest form. In one of his books, Swami Shri Savitanand writes that in the *Mahabharata* war it is recorded that the torso, of one in ten thousand warriors, was seen to be fighting even after the head was separated from the body. He observes that this automatic action of “*kabandh*” or torso is very suggestive. It is symbolic of the fact that just when a spiritual aspirant has progressed far on the path, and is confident that he has overcome desires, and obliterated his *vasanas* or tendencies, he experiences sudden coming to the surface

of a latent tendency which was hiding in some corner of his being. He is taken by surprise. Such a person may experience sudden outburst of anger, an attack of jealousy or sexual attraction. There are examples of Rishis who fall, after reaching a high position. It is said that Rishi Visvamitra practised asceticism for 64,000 years and yet when he came across beautiful *apsara* Menka, he got attracted to her and fell for her beauty.

One of the many reasons why an Ego seeking birth is drawn to a family may be that most of its predominant tendencies and character are similar to and in harmony with those of the family. Thus, following the avenue of entrance into life that offers least resistance, the Ego is born in such a family. In an article that appeared in October 1931 issue of *Theosophy* magazine, we read an interesting observation made of the impact of artificial birth-control practices. Writing about the situation in the year 1931, the article goes on to say that “the population of India rose by 30,000,000. The Russians are now increasing at the rate of 3,500,000 per year, faster than any other country in the world in proportion to population. What is the cause? Can we see no connection between a falling birth rate, due to artificial practices, among the Western Aryans, and an unexplained increase in other Aryan stocks? *An Ego of Aryan Skandhas cannot find incarnation in another race; but if forced out of one Karmic line it must enter another.* Thus, if an Ego is due to incarnate in a certain racial stock, and is prevented by deliberate action, it must find the next best fitted place in another of the same blood. One wonders what the sleek, self-satisfied American woman, who refuses to bear children for her own social convenience, would say to her true Karmic offspring toiling in the muck and filth of Hindu fields, or labouring upon Russian steppes. It is a speculation worth her consideration; along with the Karmic consequences which must accrue to herself as a result thereof. What is true of America is true of other Aryan nations also, though probably far more as a result of *natural* decline.”

A violin string tuned to a particular pitch when vibrated will set

in vibration another string tuned to the identical pitch. So also it is true of the lives which are impressed with our good or bad tendencies. These lives are attracted to another form in tune with them, following the law of consubstantiality, and create a kind of magnetic sympathy. Some of these lives are absorbed by our fellow-men, some by animals, and others by lower kingdoms. Thus, lives which bear impresses of envy, hatred, anger or passion tend towards lower level. They are drawn to forms of ferocious and noxious animals, such as, lions, tigers, serpents and scorpions, giving them an impulse in that direction. Today, if tigers are *more* ferocious or serpents *more* poisonous, then *we* are responsible for them. Likewise, these lives stir human minds to base activities. The lives that bear our impressions, good or bad, are our ambassadors, who carry our blessing or curse to other living entities. We are continually helping or hindering others in building their character, not only by our actions, but also by our thoughts—for good or ill. By not resisting the temptation to take bribe or tell a lie, or by allowing a material or sensual thought to enter the mind, we are giving an impulse to some weak person with similar tendency to indulge in sin. The converse is also true. Every attempt to overcome vices in us sends out an impulse for good that strengthens another individual who may be fighting similar weaknesses. Mr. Judge writes:

We attract what we love, and we may derive a greater strength from the vitality of thoughts infused from without than from those self-produced within us at a time when our nervous vitality is exhausted. It is a solemn thought, this, of our responsibility for the impulse of another. We live in one another, and our widely different deeds have often a common source. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*)

(Concluded)

RE-EXAMINE all you have been told...dismiss, what insults your soul.

—WALT WHITMANN

THE DEBT WE OWE IN LIFE

THERE IS indeed a general awareness among people that we do not live alone, by ourselves, for ourselves, but are dependent for our wellbeing and prosperity on others, near and remote, at every stage of our life, and that we are under a certain obligation to reciprocate the help and benefit we receive. The measure of moral quality of a human being is in the degree of development in him or her of the virtue of gratitude and a sense of obligation to redeem it. In the ancient Eastern cultures the ethical principle of reciprocity is deeply ingrained. It is inculcated as a religious duty.

In the Chinese tradition, the Confucian ethical principle of filial piety is ingrained in the people, and it is assiduously cultivated from infancy. Reverence for and obedience to one's parents is the uppermost duty of any Chinese son. This is generally true in all Oriental cultures. The basis of the ethical principle is evident. Sacrifices that parents make to give life and bring up children, casts a deep reciprocal obligation on the latter to be respectful and caring towards them, especially in their old age. The ethical principle of mutual filial obligation is, in fact, the foundation of a healthy society.

However, the virtue of filial piety is much eroded in Chinese society at the present time, due mainly to the spread of materialism following cultural revolution, and industrialization, and the fast pace of urban life on the model of Western civilization. In the western lands individualism is the fundamental societal value. In the Eastern Culture the individual is not considered an isolated entity but a member of an extended family, of neighbourhood, of clan, of community, extending back in time to include ancestors. Reverence for and worship of ancestors is a predominant ethical value in all ancient cultures. It begins with the nearest kin, the parents, and extends far and wide to include all. In India the greatest honour is paid to the parents and to the teachers for thousands of years as a sacred duty. In the ordinances of Manu, and in the Puranas, the filial virtue is exalted, neglect of which, it is said therein, degrades

man and society. Says Manu (*Laws of Manu*, chapter 2):

The teacher, the father, the mother, and an elder brother must not be treated with disrespect, especially by a Brahmana, though one be grievously offended (by them) (225). The teacher is the image of Brahman, the father the image of Prajapati (the lord of created beings), the mother is the image of the earth, and an elder brother the image of oneself (226). The trouble (and pain) which the parents undergo on the birth of (their) children, cannot be compensated even in a hundred years (227). Let him always do what is agreeable to those (two) and always (what may please) his teacher; when these three are pleased, he obtains all (those rewards) which austerities (yield) (228). By honouring his mother he gains this world, by honouring his father the middle sphere, but by obedience to his teacher the world of Brahman (233). All duties have been fulfilled by him who honours those three; but to him who honours them not, all rites remain fruitless. (234)

Evidently the ethical injunctions of Manu, far from being arbitrary statements, have their basis in the natural law of reciprocity or Brotherhood. Though much of it is lost in India for the same reason stated in the foregoing, vestiges of this ancient virtue of reverence for parents and teachers still survive.

Even a little reflection is enough to show that our indebtedness extends much beyond the circle of family and neighbourhood to include the whole of Nature and humanity. Our existence is dependent on the life, labour and sacrifices of countless beings, who together form the complex web of Life. All are interrelated and interdependent. On the occult plane it is seen and felt as a dynamic reality, though on the utilitarian plane of humdrum life it is not readily seen but intuitively felt by the human heart.

Our individual life cannot strictly be regarded by us as our own. There is not one atom in our body which is not borrowed by us from the ocean of One Life, and it is given us as a loan to enable us to live and reap experience for our progress. Thus, our indebtedness

to all life is deep and far-reaching. It is but reasonable and just that we repay in ample measure the debt we owe to all life. Repaying one's debt to life is Duty, as Duty is defined as that which is due to others. Through performance of duty each one lives for all and all for each. This mutual interdependent reciprocal action is the "Wheel of Duty" which it is the bounden obligation of everyone to keep revolving. All miseries and sorrows of the world stem from failure to perform one's duty due to ignorance and selfishness. A good illustration of it may be seen in the harmonious order and rhythm of the reciprocal action of the innumerable lives in our body:

Every microscopic cell, therefore, has a consciousness and intelligence of its own, and man thus consists of innumerable "lives." This is but physiological synthesis, logically deduced no less from the known facts in physiology and histology than the logical sequence of the philosophy of occultism. Health of the body as a whole depends on the integrity of all its parts, and more especially upon their harmonious association and co-operation. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, p. 16)

This is an excellent practical illustration by analogy of the harmonious order of macrocosm as a whole in which diverse beings of all grades and stages of evolution on all planes, from the lowest to the highest, including man, progress together to higher life by living and sacrificing for one another. Sickness of the world and desecration of the earth under the thoughtless iniquities of man, which sad spectacle we are witnessing today, is due to the failure of man to realize his responsible place in the universal scheme of things and perform his Duty.

A deceased tissue is one in which a group of individual cells refuse to co-operate, and wherein is set up discordant action, using less or claiming more than their due share of food or energy. Disease of the very tissue of man's body is neither more nor less than the "sin of separateness." (*ibid.*)

This analogy of the cause of the disease of the human body—

discordant action of cells in the body—is a perfect illustration of the many evils which afflict human society and the cause of man-induced natural disasters. Each individual being is like a cell in the great body of the macro-cosmos. Kingdoms of Nature, like so many cells in the great body of the universe, instinctively obey the general laws governing the whole. The natural world left in its pristine state, therefore, evinces a perfect balance and harmony. The same nature suffers imbalance causing much suffering on man and beast due to thoughtless human action. It is egotism and selfishness in thought and action by man due to the illusion of the sense of separateness, with which he is imbued at the present state of his evolution, which is the prolific source of endless human suffering, which retards the progress of all. We can plainly see around us, everywhere in the world, the sad spectacle of large masses of people languishing in poverty, robbed of opportunities, and stunted in mental and moral development as a direct result of excessive greed, indifference and selfishness of the well-to-do sections who have the means and power, if they only will, to relieve the terrible social inequality. Much worse than physical suffering, resulting from selfishness, is the loss of moral sense. This was well known in higher civilization of the past ages. Hence the ethical principle of mutuality and sacrifice formed the bed rock of ancient cultures. This is found in every ancient religion.

In the ordinances of Manu five sacrifices are prescribed as mandatory duties to be performed by every individual and householder. It is said that by the study of the sacred knowledge (Veda) one pays his debt to the great teachers of mankind; by worshipping one's Manes, and begetting a son, duty is done by one's ancestors; by sacrificial offering in the fire, to the gods; by extending hospitality to guests, to mankind; and by sacrificial offerings, to kingdoms of nature.

When the spirit of the injunctions of Manu is understood we will realize that instead of being mere blind ritualistic worship productive of no good, they turn out to be sacrifice to be performed by each individual within himself with spiritual knowledge, by which he

fulfils his whole duty to man and Nature. The only way we can pay our debt to the sacrifices of the great Sages, who watch over, teach and guide mankind on the path of higher evolution, is to study their sacred teachings, and try to live up to the laws of Higher Life we learn from such study, which purifies men's hearts and minds, making for true reform and harmonious progress of all in the world. This is the meaning of the teaching of the Upanishad that *Satyam* and *Dharmam*—perception of Truth and action along the line of that perception—are inseparable pair. Thus we pay our debt to the great Rishis, the Solar Devas, the spiritual fathers of the human race.

The true meaning of the worship of the ancestral spirits, Theosophy points out, is grateful acknowledgement of the progenitors of the physical line of evolution of humanity, called Lunar Pitris, who evolved ethereal human forms as the eternal basis and the model for the Astral body of man, which is formed at each new rebirth of the Ego (*S.D.*, II, pp. 88 and 92). Man redeems the debt to the fathers of the human race, according to Manu, by living the higher life and bringing forth worthy progeny for the benefit of the world, and purifying his subtle body by higher thought and action as to make it as pure as the prototypal model furnished by the *Pitris*, for the reception and shining forth of the light of the Divine Self.

Gods are the hierarchy of celestial beings, “hosts of these Sons of Light and ‘Mind-born Sons’ of the first manifested Ray of the UNKNOWN ALL, are the very root of spiritual man” (*S.D.*, I, 106). Man, therefore, is a compound of the essences of these Celestial Hierarchies. They are not to be worshipped in the anthropomorphic sense but “All are entitled to the grateful reverence of Humanity,” (*S.D.*, I, 280) and man redeems his debt to them by “ever striving to help the divine evolution of *Ideas*, by becoming to the best of his ability a *co-worker with nature* in the cyclic task” (*ibid*). By so living a life of higher purpose in the true spirit of Universal Brotherhood man redeems his debt to all mankind, and to the lower kingdoms of nature which look upon man for their higher evolution to man stage.

“The man who does not go through his appointed work in life—

has lived in vain,” says *The Voice of the Silence*. Every individual has his appointed work in life—his *Sva-Dharma*—in every stage in life, in whatever condition, his own Karma has placed him. Constant practice of purifying one's motive of selfish intent in action, getting rid of defects of character, cultivating the virtues of *paramitas*, resigning oneself to the behests of the Higher Self, placing reliance on the absolutely just law of Karma, all with a motive of causing thereby the good of the world, is a duty cast on every man and woman. Theosophy teaches that the roots of all spiritual and material advancement lie in the inculcation of these higher and nobler conceptions of public and private duties. That is the one and the only road to happiness of all, and the line of higher evolution of humanity.

It is this action and interaction, this true brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental Theosophical principles that every Theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 232)

THE RACE of mankind would perish did they cease to aid each other. We cannot exist without mutual help. All therefore that need aid have a right to ask it from their fellow man; and no one who has the power of granting can refuse it without guilt.

—SIR WALTER SCOTT

BELIEVE, when you are most unhappy, that there is something for you to do in the world. So long as you can sweeten another's pain, life is not in vain.

—HELEN KELLER

ONLY a life lived for others, is a life worthwhile.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

OUR GOD AND OTHER GODS

III

“THE WHOLE Kosmos is guided, controlled, and animated by almost endless series of Hierarchies of sentient Beings, each having a mission to perform....they are the agents of Karmic and Cosmic Laws. They vary infinitely in their respective degrees of consciousness and intelligence; and to call them all pure Spirits without any of the earthly alloy ‘which time is wont to prey upon’ is only to indulge in poetical fancy,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, I, 274-75). She seems to suggest that these Hierarchies of celestial beings are not pure spirits, without earthly alloy. To make an “alloy” means to reduce the purity of the metal by mixing it with a base metal. For instance, Copper could be turned into inferior metal like Bronze by mixing with some base metal like Tin. When there is an earthly element, it is perishable, or it wears away with time. The fact that some of these celestial beings are either *incipient men* who will have to pass through human stage, while the other, higher gods, have passed through human stage, shows that they have reached that stage only after being contaminated or after having passed through many forms and consciousness in manifestation. In other words, they are not totally disconnected from earth and men. In fact, “angels are men of a superior kind.” The only difference is that they do not have personalities like human beings and also they are free from human emotional nature. One thing which allows them to remain free from humanly emotions is that they are not in gross bodies. In the *Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. points out that “unless a God descends as an *Avatar*, no divine principle can be otherwise than cramped and paralyzed by turbulent, animal matter. Heterogeneity will always have the upper hand over homogeneity, on this plane of illusions.”

Neither the angels nor the Absolute has personality or human traits such as anger, jealousy, wrath, etc. Angels are called slaves and creatures of Karmic Law. A slave is a person who obeys without

argument, without rebellion. In the same way, these Celestial Beings are subservient to the Law, *i.e.*, they would never contravene the Law. There are stories where these gods grant “boons” or “*vardan*” to their devotees, but this boon is granted, not by contravening the law. The boon is granted because of a devotee’s past merit, or due to mortifications undertaken by him in that life. But just as he himself becomes instrumental in getting the boon, so also does he become responsible when he misuses the powers endowed on him by way of boon. A person performing severe penance may get the boon of a long life, but never of immortality, because it just does not fit in the framework of the universe, where, all that is born, must die. In *Light of Asia* we read:

Seek nought from the helpless gods by gifts and hymns,
Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruits and cakes,
Within yourselves deliverance must be sought.

Man can neither propitiate, nor command *devas*, because they have *become* “Karma,” which means that they will never bend the law for themselves or for others. Since law of karma is just, merciful and impartial, so are these beings, impartial and impersonal.

But H.P.B. tells us that though these are all “gods,” they are not to be worshipped, because “Eastern philosophy rejects the idea of a personal and extra-cosmic deity.” Quoting from the *Bible* she writes, “There be Lords many and Gods many.” Therefore, in order to worship we have to either choose and worship many gods, and thus follow polytheism, or as is done in Israel, choose one tribal or racial god from them, and at the same time go on believing in the existence of multiple gods, but ignore them and consider only your own god as the highest and the “God of Gods” (*Transactions*, pp. 52-53). Each of these “gods” is finite, *i.e.*, limited in space and time. With *pralaya*, or dissolution of this world, all these gods disappear. Even Brahma, Vishnu, etc., are merged into the Absolute. By immortality of gods we mean that they exist till the end of a *Kalpa*. Therefore, H.P.B. writes, “Neither the collective Host, nor any of the working powers individually are proper subjects for divine

honours or worship. All are entitled to the *grateful reverence* of Humanity....” (S.D., I, 280)

Once we understand the true nature of these divine beings, we must learn to revere their presence in everything. One of the aims of rituals and sacrifices in olden days, known by the name of *Karma-Kanda*, was to remind us of the debt we owe to the beings of the invisible worlds, on whom we are dependent, and who in turn are dependent on us. The Indo-Iranians of old believed that the world was created and sustained by many gods and goddesses and that these divinities must be propitiated by sacrifices and offerings. Shri Krishna says, “Beings are nourished by food, food is produced by rain, rain comes from sacrifice, and sacrifice is performed by action” (*Gita*, III). In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, Mr. Judge explains that it is not as if food will not be produced if sacrifice, according to Vedic ritual, is not performed, but that *right food*, leading to bodily conditions enabling man to live up to his highest possibilities, will not be produced. It is produced only in the age where the real sacrifices are properly performed. We may conclude that if the sacrifices that thus nourish the gods are omitted, these “gods” must die out and go to other spheres. As these sacrifices are totally disused now, the “gods” must have long ago left this sphere.

In a sense, an offering made to these gods is only a symbol that acknowledges the role of various powers and forces of nature, in maintaining the universe. In the beginning, trees were worshipped as animated things, so that each tree was regarded as a conscious and living thing. Tree-spirits were considered to have powers—of making the rain to fall, the sun to shine, flocks and herds to multiply, and women to have smooth delivery. Our reverence for gods manifests in our reverence for Nature, and in the good use we make of our bodies, faculties, powers, etc. Manu in his ordinances enjoins five sacrifices or *Yajnas*, which must be performed by every human being to fulfil the debt he owes to various gods and goddesses, as also, to other beings, and they include *Pitri yajna* or sacrifice to our progenitors, *Deva yajna* or sacrifice to the gods and *Rishi-yajna* or

debt we owe to great Teachers. In order to pay our debt to *Pitris*, who endowed man with an astral form as also with the light of mind, we should constantly endeavour to purify our thoughts, feelings, desires and actions, which in turn will lead to purity of astral body and life energy, producing purer magnetism and purer physical body. The seeds of spiritual knowledge, art, science, agriculture and architecture exist in the divine nature of man, burnt into imperishable centre of his consciousness, by the divine Instructors, eighteen million years ago. These exist as *innate* ideas. Why do we not show forth this knowledge? We may understand it by the analogy of light surrounded by a glass covering. For the light to shine forth we need to clean the soot on the glass. The light of wisdom is covered by layers or sheaths or vehicles, which need to be purified.

God, or One Reality is all Krishna, Buddha, Ganesa, Jesus, and all the *Avatars* put together and beyond. And in this form only we should try to see It. That is why Krishna says, “I established this whole Universe with a single portion of myself and yet remain separate” (*Gita*, X). In other words, by such manifestations the source remains un-diminished. Yet, this Divinity is present in each one of us in all its majesty. So Shri Krishna says, “I am the ego seated in the hearts of all beings” (*Gita*, X). This is *Atman* in each one of us, the Spirit in the body, the perceiver, which itself remains unchanged but perceives all the changes. It is the source of all the powers, to act, to feel, to experience, to perceive, etc. So the powers *to make*, *to unmake* and *to remake*, which are the powers of divinity, are all within us.

If the muddy waters of rain mingle with pure water then it will dirty the pure water. So also our lower principles, as it were, dirty the Higher, in the sense that the power to think and choose is misused by our mind, which remains entangled in worldly allurements, and likes and dislikes. It is for the incarnated mind to turn for help towards the Divine Self. Lower mind must be made porous and receptive so as to take the influx of the divine. Our Divine nature is like a reservoir

kept at the top of a hill where water is stored. One can use this water to irrigate the fields if only one would but open the gate. So also, we should open the “gate” to let the light shine through. In the process of spiritual development, we must take the help of this great reservoir of light and not attempt on our own. If asked, help is given. However interior the process of spiritual development may be, it is not unaided.

(Concluded)

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IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

We are privileged to live in the Age of Abundance—be it an ice-cream, a toothbrush, shoes or our choice of life partner. But has it made us happy? asks Haimanti Mukherjee. While making a choice of ice-cream from a three-page menu, she says that she regretted choosing the more exotic-sounding flavour instead of sticking to the tried-and-tested one. Social scientists who have been studying the effects of living in the Age of Abundance say that too many choices paralyses the human mind and pushes us to opt for something that may not be good for us. Harvard law student, Pete Davis says that the definite characteristic of this generation is that it lives in an infinite Browsing Mode—going from one movie choice to another only to be exhausted after half an hour of surfing, picking none, and giving up.

The constant feeling of tiredness within us is a result of the mind meandering through innumerable choices through the day, says psychiatrist Dr. Sanjay Chug. In his book, *The Paradox of Choice*, American psychologist and professor of social theory, Barry Schwarz, says that with more choices, people inevitably fantasise about a better option out there which they did not choose, and hence the regret. A bad decision leaves us with regret and negative feelings, which is followed by the paralysis in decision making because no one wants to make a bad choice.

Deepika Chopra, doctorate in clinical psychology, suggests that “the more you make choices directly stemming from what is truly important to you, the easier decision-making will become.” According to Pete Davis, “we must decide to choose one thing that we can commit to, and take it from there...because committed people do not get confused or bored.” The more, the better...or worse? asks Haimanti Mukherjee (*Times Life, Sunday Times of India*, September 23, 2018)

The Age of Abundance is characterized by an insatiable desire for the “new.” Very quickly things get out-dated. We are wearied of

and lose interest in gadgets, products, or amusements. Never have we witnessed so many varieties in eatables, perfumes, clothes, etc., as in the recent past. Have we become more innovative or are we manufacturing “new” brands only to cater to the senses—which crave for different sensations? A car is meant for transporting us from one place to another. Do we really need to discard the old model for the *new*, unless it is more fuel efficient, or meets our specific need, such as ease to drive? Gadgets are bought and changed frequently, more as status symbols. Our choices are guided by our desire nature, but ideally, they should be enlightened by our divine nature, which leads to true discrimination, as well as contentment. People like Gandhiji, who followed the principle of simplicity, were of the opinion that till a thing served the purpose, it should not be discarded. It is said that once when he had misplaced a small piece of pencil, someone offered him a new pencil, which he refused to accept, but searched high and low till he found that pencil stub.

Has living in the age of plenty made us happy? Even if we are able to make right choices and enjoy different brands of soaps, biscuits, perfumes, shampoos, clothes, cars, etc., ultimately it does lead to satiation or still worse a feeling of emptiness. According to Dr. Erich Fromm, a psychoanalyst, today, the majority of people going to a psychiatrist are not “sick” in a conventional sense. “They complain of being depressed, having insomnia, being unhappy in their marriages, not enjoying their work, and any number of similar problems.” What they really suffer from, says Dr. Fromm, “is an inner deadness. They live in the midst of plenty and are joyless.” Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist, points out that ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for. There is in each one of us, “will to meaning.” Man needs something to live for, and pursuit of wealth, comfort, pleasures and power is ineffectual in filling this void.

When you look at your reflection in the mirror, you are aware, who it is that is looking back at you. The sense of self is unmistakable. Self-awareness is one of the biggest mysteries of the mind. How

did it arise, and what is it for? Besides human beings, there are a few animals, which recognize themselves in the mirror. Self-awareness may have evolved in the brightest animals with the biggest brains. If so, then it represents peak of mental complexity—the highest form of consciousness. However, though the ability to recognize oneself in a mirror is generally taken to be an indicator of self-awareness, that idea is being challenged. For instance, developmental psychologists argue that it does not necessarily reveal an awareness of self that extends beyond the here and now.

“Many psychologists and anthropologists hold that there is a hierarchy of consciousness that corresponds with increasing brain complexity.” Animals with simple nervous system and involved in raw sensory experiences, are considered to be at the base of the hierarchy. Few minds are sophisticated enough to experience the world differently—through an introspective lens, and even these may have a limited sense of self. “Only at the peak of mental complexity do we find minds able to construct a lifelong narrative of experiences centred around an abstract concept of ‘self’—these are the elite. This difference in the size and complexity of the brains must have been based on the differing evolutionary demands that the animal has to meet in order to survive.... There is one particular demand that seems to have led to the evolution of complex brains and could also have created the conditions for a sense of self to arise. That challenge is dealing with minds of others—be they prey, competitors or other members of your social group.” To achieve this, the brain needed to evolve from being simply a thing that experiences sensation to becoming their observer.

Self-awareness may be an *apparently* complex phenomenon that emerges from the brain. Mind can glean the echo of billions of neurons responding to each other with electrical signals. The signals flow along different set of connections, but some paths are well-trodden. In humans, the predominant connections seem to be those used to contemplate the minds of others—the same connections used to contemplate ourselves. What emerges from this is a pattern that

seems constant. To you, that is your sense of self. Thus, our brain conjures up the sense of self. Self-awareness is not the pinnacle of consciousness, it is just an accidental by-product of evolution, and a figment of our minds, writes Sofia Deleniv, a doctoral student at the University of Oxford. (*New Scientist*, September 8, 2018)

The sense of “self” may just be an illusion created by 100 billion neurons at work, wrote Johnston professor of Psychology at Harvard, Steven Pinker. Neuroscientists locate our consciousness in the brain and not in the soul, saying that sensations, thoughts, joy and pain are the result of physiological activities in the brain tissues. Consciousness can be manipulated by physical means. We think, feel and see differently when the brain is affected by chemicals, such as caffeine, alcohol or Prozac. Thus, science seems to locate the sense of “self,” and the sense of “I” in the brain—making “mind” redundant.

Brain, says Theosophy, is an instrument of the mind. What is it that distinguishes a man from an animal? It is self-consciousness and the power to think and choose. These arise from the mind. It was only when man had developed a brain of much *better* and *deeper* capacity than that of any other animal, that he was given the light of mind by Divine Beings—*Manasaputras*. As a result, man was endowed with self-consciousness and with the power to think and choose. Can an improved quality of *brain* endow an animal with humanlike consciousness and cognitive capacities, such as, the ability to feel pleasure and pain (like human beings), rationality and richness of relationships? It is mind that affects the quality of the brain and not *vice versa*. “The depth and variety of brain convolutions in man are caused by the presence of *Manas*, and are not the cause of mind,” writes Mr. Judge.

Though animals have mind, it is still in the latent state. It is only in the human kingdom that the monad (*Atma-Buddhi*) is *individualized*, and as a result man is endowed with self-consciousness and apperception, whereas in the animal kingdom we speak of “monadic essence.” However, in animals, this process of *individualization* of monad is gradual, and in the higher animals

it almost comes to the point of being individualized. Hence, some of the animals *seem* to exhibit self-reflective consciousness.

In an essay published in *Aeon* magazine, the author, Paul Sagar, points out that the fantasy of living forever, or the desire for immortality, can be a curse, rather than a blessing. In Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, the protagonist meets with the peculiar race of “Struldbrugs,” and they are humans who live forever. Contrary to his belief that these must be the happiest people, Gulliver discovers that these beings never stop ageing, and sink into decrepitude and insanity, shunned by normal humans. Likewise, Alfred Tennyson’s poem *Tithonus*, brings out physiological and psychological decay brought on by an endless life, as also the horror and loneliness of being trapped in such a state. The English moral philosopher, Bernard Williams suggests that living forever would be awful, because we need new experiences in order to have reasons to keep on going. He says that we would lack “categorical” desires, *i.e.*, desires that gave us reasons to keep on living, and possess only “contingent,” desires, *i.e.*, things we might want to do because we are alive, but are not enough to motivate us to stay alive. The moral philosopher Samuel Scheffler at New York University has suggested that the real problem with a fantasy of immortality is that human life is intimately structured by the fact that it has a fixed time limit, hence everything that human beings value makes sense only in light of our time being finite and our choices being limited.

If both philosophy and culture show that immortality is a curse, then why do we still desire it? It appears that we desire immortality because we are afraid of death. If we were immortal then we can escape both, that fear and the object of fear. However, some believe that immortality is desired because there is an outrage and anger that something is being taken away from me, “they are stealing my I.” The harsh reality is that death comes either “too early or too late.” The desire for immortality might be a desire to control when we ourselves will die, to have the capacity, like Bhishma in

Mahabharata, for “death upon desire.” “Bhishma’s boon seems coherent as something we might want for ourselves. It would eradicate fears of dying before we are ready, at the same time as preserving a capacity to call it quits when we have had enough,” writes Paul Sagar, a lecturer in political theory in the department of political economy, King’s College, London.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* advises a meditation on birth, death, decay, sickness and error. We are afraid of death because we are identified with the body and the personality; and physical death implies separation from everything that we depend upon for our sense of “I.” In Simone de Beauvoir’s novel, *All Men Are Mortal*, the Italian ruler, Raymond Fosca, who was afraid of death, found that time on earth was too short for achieving anything great for the glory of his city. He drinks the elixir of life, bought from a Jew, and becomes immortal. In the two centuries that he lived, he waged wars, built new buildings, but did not achieve anything spectacular, nothing which he could not have achieved in few years. He came to the conclusion that those only, who must die, are capable of truly loving life, undertaking great works and running risks. The author suggests that meaningful human existence depends upon the prospect of death and its attendant joys and anguish, without which freedom and action have no value. In fact, a story or a poem must also have a moving and conclusive end. Are we not bored when a television serial or a novel drags on endlessly?

The *Gita* says, “Death is certain to all beings and rebirth to all mortals.” Life is related to form, and form must die. Death of a physical form is a necessity. The permanent spiritual aspect in us—the soul—feels imprisoned during life. For the soul, “Death comes as a deliverer and a friend.” Spiritually advanced beings, who have given up the life of personality, live in spirit, and experience life eternal. They hold “life and death” in their hands, and are able to take birth in pursuit of a divine object and leave the body when the work is over, at their own wish.