

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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KARMA—THE RELIGION OF WORKS

II

WHAT could be a *purely mental* Karma? A purely mental Karma might be due to a life spent mostly in meditation, reflecting on high themes, and in philosophical thoughts. The three fields of the operation of Karma are the body and the circumstances, the mind and intellect, and the psychic and astral planes.

According to Buddhism, mental Karma involves thoughts, intentions, desires, emotions, and attitudes. “Thoughts are the seeds of Karma.” Wrapped up in every seed of thought is Karma. We act based on our thoughts. Thinking is also an action. We may feel that these thoughts vanish, but every thought, feeling, word, or act leaves an impress on the elementals, or “lives,” described as units of energy or points of force. These “lives” are the “carriers” or “messengers” of Karma because they are the means or instruments through which the law of Karma brings reaction for our action.

We may think that it does not matter if we throw our book down in anger. The fact is that besides physically damaging the book, we also affect the “lives” in the book. It is as if, even without our speaking, our anger “talks to” these “lives.” Continually, there are atoms rushing out of the body and being replaced by new ones. Hence, the atoms, or “lives,” which constitute the book get released from the book to build some other form. Wherever these “lives” are, when we come in contact with them again, they tend to arouse

our anger. The air and space about us are filled with “lives,” which carry the message throughout the universe and will bring back the effects of our thoughts, feelings, and actions—good or bad, quick or slow. These “lives” are inseparably and magnetically connected with the individuals who used them. The highest of the Masters are not exempt from this Law. However, these Great Beings, out of compassion, charge the atmosphere with entities that have the power to produce only good effects. These congeries of “lives,” impressed with our thoughts, feelings, and actions, constitute *skandhas* or *samskaras* or attributes. There are five types of *skandhas*, which determine the nature of the body and the mental, emotional, and moral nature of the personality that the Ego is born into.

“Esoterically, thought is more responsible and punishable than act. But exoterically, it is the reverse. Therefore, in ordinary human law, an assault is more severely punished than the thought or intention, *i.e.*, the threat, whereas Karmically it is the contrary,” writes H.P.B. (*Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 142). No doubt, the consequences for the actual act and the thought are not the same. After all, if we utter angry words, then the person at the receiving end feels angry, and we have started a chain reaction. But it is quite different when we control our anger. It is one thing to *think* of killing a person or raping a woman and quite another to *actually* kill or rape. However, we must take into account the *quality* of thoughts. At times, these thoughts are not intense and powerful. When asked whether our thoughts are punishable, H.P.B. replied that our still-born (weak) thoughts are not punishable, but we are punished for “silent” but potentially strong and intense thoughts. For instance, if a person wishes for the death of another, and if he has strong Will and imagination, then his thought may bear fruit and bring harm to another person. But if the person lacks strong Will and imagination, evil thoughts come back to injure him, like a ball rebounding back from the wall. However, what we experience is the sum total or resultant of good and bad thoughts. Hence, after an intense thought of harming another or of stealing, if the person repents and

encourages thoughts of goodwill and charity, then these might weaken the effect of the previous bad thought.

Swami Krishnananda, a prominent Advaita Vedanta teacher, viewed mental Karma as the most potent form of Karma, as it is the root of all actions. According to him, thoughts, especially those coloured by desire (positive or negative), create a “psychological cocoon” that shapes future experiences and rebirths. Impersonal thinking can lead to the cessation of karmic bondage.

Bad character can be transmuted into good character by means of good thoughts, and unfavourable circumstances can be changed into favourable circumstances by doing good actions. Mr. Judge observes that “among the mental afflictions esteemed as worse than any bodily hurt or loss is that Karma from a preceding life which results in the obscurity of such a character that there is loss of all power to conceive the reality of Spirit or the existence of soul—that is materialism” (*Echoes from the Orient*, Indian Ed., p. 50). Mr. Judge seems to suggest that, as compared to very bad bodily Karma, such as being born blind or lame, or any other bodily handicap, there is mental affliction or mental Karma, which brings one to a state where one is incapable of understanding or even believing that there is something like soul, *Atman*, etc. Materialism is the denial of anything that cannot be apprehended by the five senses or physical instruments. Mr. Judge calls it “scientific materialism,” in which the mind is taken to be merely the name for the action of the brain in evolving thought; therefore, if there is no brain, there can be no mind. There is another form of materialism that explains away everything in terms of genes or neurotransmitters.

Why are human beings born with different characters? Some are born generous or selfish; some have a great capacity of mind that covers many subjects, while others display special mind and capacity, like the great musician Mozart. For science, heredity explains it all. Heredity is the passing of traits to offspring from their parents or ancestors. Once we accept that our character is

transmitted to us hereditarily, we cannot attach responsibility or punish people for murder, robbery, prostitution, etc. We might say both heredity and atavism are handmaidens of Karma and Reincarnation. Transmission of traits and tendencies by heredity is exactly the mode selected by nature for providing the incarnating Ego with proper tenement in which to carry on its work, depending on its past karma. Heredity counts for nothing if the Ego does not bring those traits, as shown by idiots or vicious children born to parents who are good, pure, or highly intellectual, and *vice versa*. But the materialists do not believe in the Laws of Karma and Reincarnation. They believe in only one life and therefore adopt the Epicurean philosophy of “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die.” For them, there is no incentive for morality. It leads to spiritual degradation.

Karma also operates on the psychic plane or the psychic nature of the person. There are many examples of psychics in America, writes Mr. Judge. Today, in our world, there is a cycle of psychism. People are born with the power of mind-reading, clairvoyance, clairaudience, etc. In most cases, it is found that these people have developed these powers by paying special attention to their development. Thus, for instance, in the past or in a given life, when a person sits with a coffee cup and passively stares into it or passively stares at a nail on the wall, he begins to see pictures in the astral light. This is abnormal because, firstly, these powers are not possessed by all in society. As Mr. Judge says, great musical ability is not common, but it is normal. So also, powers of clairvoyance, clairaudience, etc., are normal if they are developed as a by-product of one’s spiritual development. But when someone sits down to develop them by using these methods, they are forcibly developed, and hence they are abnormal. In such a case, there is no natural development from within without. If it were a natural unfoldment, the person would be able to interpret correctly what he sees in the astral light because his mind has been gradually trained to do so.

To explain Karma operating on the Spiritual plane, Mr. Judge

draws our attention to Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms, Kaivalya Pada, Aphorism 1: "Perfection of body or superhuman powers are produced by birth or by herbs or by incantation, penances, or meditations" (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 50). This aphorism mentions five kinds of accomplished yogis: those who are perfect by birth; by spiritual experiences gained through drugs, herbs, or elixirs; by incantation of the name of one's desired deity; by ascetic devotional practices; and by profound meditation. Shri B. K. S. Iyengar observes that a distinction must be made between these means of spiritual accomplishments. "Followers of the first three may fall from the grace of yoga through pride and negligence. The others, whose spiritual gains are through *tapas* [austerities] and *samadhi* [meditation], do not. They become masters, standing alone as divine, liberated souls, shining examples to mankind." Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Raman Maharshi were accomplished yogis by birth, whereas King Yayati developed supernatural powers through an elixir of life. Today, there are many who use hashish, heroin, etc., to experience so-called spiritual visions. There are many devotees who initiated through mantras, performed penance, and became spiritual masters, poets, and scholars. We have the example of the dacoit Ratnakar, who became the author of the famous epic Ramayana, writes Shri Iyengar. (*Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*)

As to the acquirement of superhuman powers by herbs, we may refer to *Isis*, pp. xxxviii-ix. In ancient times, there were prophesying priestesses called Pythia, and H.P.B. describes them as *half-mediums* and *half-magicians*. "Sitting on a tripod of brass placed over a fissure in the ground, through which arose intoxicating vapours, these subterranean exhalations penetrating her whole system produced the prophetic mania. In this abnormal state, she delivered oracles."

Underlying all the different kinds of Karma on different planes is the *Karma Yoga*, or the "Religion of the Performance of Works and Duty," which is summed up in *sloka* 6 and 7 of the Third Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which say that only he who has controlled not only his senses but also his desires and performs his duties without

concern for the result is a real renouncer and real Karma Yogi. “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.”

A person may abstain from actual sexual indulgence and therefore be a *brahmachari*, but if he is mentally attached to the opposite sex and fantasizes, then, because his mind constantly meditates on sensuous pleasure, before long, he begins to express it outwardly. He is doing *mithyachar*. We are reminded of John Milton’s quote: “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.” A virtue, for example, of celibacy, cannot be developed by remaining within the four walls of a monastery, without facing any temptation or trial. A spiritually advanced person knows more about evil than a sinful person, because the sinner sinks deep into his vice or sin, while a spiritual person is able to remain detached while observing it and has resisted evil in every phase of its manifestation.

Shri Krishna shows Arjuna the method of overcoming desires. “In the first place, restrain thy senses.” It is by means of outward senses and their inner counterparts that a great turmoil is set up first in the heart, and “the restless heart snatches away the mind from its steady place.” But, simultaneously with the control of the senses, one must control the mind and heart, lest one becomes a “false pietist of bewildered soul.” At times, we give up the desire outwardly, but within, there is a longing for sweets, cakes, alcohol, movies, etc. It is important to recognize that *ultimately*, it is the *mind*, and not the senses, that leads us astray.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE JUDGE'S HOUSE—II

WHENEVER a person of scientific temper comes across in life any question concerning unfamiliar, astonishing, and super-normal phenomena and events, he can get satisfactory answers in the light of the philosophy of Theosophy, provided he is a true seeker after Truth, *i.e.*, a true “Scientist.”

H.P.B. explains that the purpose of studying the Third Object is to keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions and to obtain the *knowledge* of all the laws of nature and promulgate the same with a view to counteract bigotry in the form of belief in miracles or anything supernatural. “Popular folklore and traditions, however fanciful at times, when sifted may lead to the discovery of long-lost, but important, secrets of nature. The Society, therefore, aims at pursuing this line of inquiry, in the hope of widening the field of scientific and philosophical observation.” (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 47-48)

Why do so many people believe in ghosts? Is there a psychological need to explain the unexplained? Ongoing international studies on the paranormal suggest that ghosts, apparitions, or spectres are not a fiction. It is said that ghosts flourish in the vicinity of people who believe in them. Most of the time the apparitions seen are of suicides or of people who died a violent death, by accident or at the hands of others. In *Isis Unveiled* (I, 69), H.P.B. describes apparitions of “unrestful ‘souls,’ hovering about the spots where they were murdered, or coming back for some other mysterious reasons of their own.” Often these apparitions are drawn to a particular spot by some attraction or association. Sceptics may scoff, but proof accumulates of the existence of an inner, unseen realm. H.P.B. writes: “The whole issue of the quarrel between the profane and the esoteric sciences depends upon the belief in, and demonstration of, the existence of an astral body within the physical, the former independent of the latter.”

According to a true incident, some people saw, for several days,

a man wearing a blue suit trying to cross the road at a place where a pedestrian was killed in an accident. H.P.B. observes that when a person dies a violent death, the last thought of such a person may be so strong that the tragedy may be re-enacted a thousand times before the thought fades out. H.P.B. tells us that a sufficiently intense thought at the moment of death “becomes objective and under favourable conditions is very apt to be seen.” Then again, it was reported that in the Council chamber at Calcutta, India, in the presence of Warren Hastings, the then Governor-General, an official along with other council members saw the apparition of his father gliding into another room. It was learnt that his father had died in London on that same day. In the “Dialogues Between the Two Editors,” H.P.B. states that a man’s phantom or apparition can appear before his dearest friend at the instant of death or the moments after his death. Such an apparition could be produced by the thought of the dying man.

But what is a ghost? Man is not just his physical body. The physical body is changing all the time in its molecules and atoms. But we would not look like the same person if there were not a pattern, or an inner model body, for the new molecules and atoms to grow into. This model body is usually called the astral body and is made up of a much finer kind of matter than the physical body. Like a sponge, it retains the impressions of all that a man thinks, feels, and desires during life. When a man dies, the Ego, or Real Man, after remaining for a longer or shorter time in *Kama loka*, falls into a condition called pre-*devachanic* unconsciousness. When this stage is over, the Real Man enters the *devachan* and enjoys unalloyed bliss and happiness. The Ego departs to *Devachan* or *Swarga* or Paradise, taking with it the spiritual aroma or noble qualities of the last personality.

Meanwhile, the physical body undergoes decay, and the astral body begins to go to pieces. It is this astral body—an ethereal body without soul—with thoughts and desires of the former owner impressed upon it, that we call the *Kamarupic* (or astral) shell or ghost. Left to itself, it disintegrates gradually, but it can be

deliberately drawn to séance rooms through the agency of the mediums. It can become visible and tangible when the condition of air and ether is such as to alter the vibration of the molecules of the astral shell. These astral shells or ghosts can speak under certain conditions, but that is only the throwing out of the impressions like a gramophone record. They are like educated parrots behind the screen, which makes us think that an intelligent man was hidden from view and speaking.

“The Real Man, in ordinary cases, goes practically at once into the *Devachanic* state. The *Kamarupa* begins to disintegrate immediately,” writes Mr. Crosbie (*Answers to Questions on The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 164). However, in rare cases, after death, the Real Man remains behind for a brief period if he has some intense unfulfilled desire or something important to communicate to someone. He forces his higher consciousness to remain awake. It is then possible for the Real Man—the Ego—to communicate with us. After this brief period, the Ego has no more to do with earth until it reincarnates. Many such instances have been reported in which a dead man is known to have appeared before his mother, or wife, or a friend, or a distant relative, to convey some important message—often far away from the actual place of his death. But in these cases, the spirit has not yet left our earthly plane and may appear in his inner, finer body—called the thought body or *Mayavi rupa*—to someone who is sensitive and receptive, to tell something important or just to be with them.

However, in the case of an absolute materialist, *or* one who has taken the first steps toward black magic or sorcery, the higher principles [Ego] are still connected with the *Kamarupa*, writes Mr. Crosbie. Black Magic, or Sorcery, is *any kind of evil influence exercised upon other persons, who suffer, or make other persons suffer, in consequence*, writes H.P.B. in the article, “Occultism Versus Occult Arts.” The judge in this story has been described as a brutal, vindictive figure who relished condemning others to death. As observed by some critics, even in death, he seeks to claim victims,

and his malevolent spirit acts as the House's guardian. In life, the judge was feared for his relentless sentencing of criminals, and in death, his spirit continues to exact punishment. The story implies that the House's evil influence was tied to the judge's actions during his lifetime. The enormous rat with the human-like glare symbolizes the malevolent force of the judge's spirit, which still lingers in the house.

A haunted house is a house often perceived as being inhabited by disembodied spirits of the dead who may have been former residents or were in some way connected with the place. The parapsychologists attribute haunting to the spirits of the dead, who have suffered from violent or tragic events in the building's past, such as murder, accidental death, or suicide. In the article "A Night of Many Wonders" (*The Theosophical Movement*, Vol. 7, pp. 148-150), H.P.B. explains that "in haunted houses the last thought of the victim of a crime may remain, and the tragedy be re-enacted perhaps thousands of times before it fades away." She gives an example of a haunted house in St. Petersburg that was originally built by one of the male friends of the Empress Catherine. On one of the walls of the house was the picture of a soldier who built the house, who was said to walk around at night. The lady who narrated the story said that many of them slept in that house for several days. Then one night they could see the soldier walking up and down. He walked through the closed door of the salon. When they looked for his picture on the wall, it was not there. Where it had been, the wall was black. He went to the middle of the room and then suddenly disappeared. When they once again looked at the wall, the picture was in its place. In our story we read that when Malcolmson noticed a patch of blank canvas in the centre of the painting, where the picture of the judge should have been, he looked around and found the judge in his scarlet robe, sitting in the oak chair. After he had killed Malcolmson, people saw the judge's portrait displaying a malignant smile.

(Concluded)

ALBERT SCHWEITZER—JUNGLE PHILOSOPHER

ALBERT SCHWEITZER was a German polymath from Alsace, which is now a part of France. He was a theologian, organist, musicologist, writer, humanitarian, philosopher, and physician. He adhered to Pauline Christianity and interpreted the role of Paul's mysticism of "being in Christ" and the doctrine of justification by faith. Schweitzer, the pastor's son, grew up in the environment of religious tolerance and developed the belief that true Christianity should always work towards a unity of faith and purpose. By the time he was thirty years old, he had obtained two doctorate degrees, in philosophy and theology. Along with his studies, he worked as a pastor at Saint Nicholas Church and as a professor at Strasbourg University.

In 1904, when he read an article published by the Paris Missionary Society highlighting the need for physicians in Gabon, a French colony in Africa, Schweitzer experienced a turning point in his life. He decided to pursue a medical career, paying the fees for his education from the money earned by concert performances and lectures. Eight years later, he graduated with specialisations in tropical medicine and surgery. In 1913, he founded his hospital at Lambarene in French Equatorial Africa, but within a year, World War I broke out, and in 1917, he and his wife were sent to a French Internment camp as prisoners of war. After being released in 1918, they returned to Europe, where for the next six years he preached in his old church, gave lectures and concerts, and wrote books, which included *The Decay and Restoration of Civilization*, *Civilization and Ethics*, etc. He returned to Lambarene in 1924 and more or less spent the remainder of his life there. One author wrote: "At Lambarene, Schweitzer was doctor and surgeon in the hospital, pastor of a congregation, administrator of a village, superintendent of buildings and grounds, writer of scholarly books, commentator on contemporary history, musician, host to countless visitors."

Schweitzer was continually in search of an ethic whose truth

should be self-evident and not based on abstract reasoning. He wanted an ethic that could be used as “a living philosophy of the people,” could become the foundation for an ethical life, and was accessible to all. While travelling up the Ogowe River in 1915, he was thinking about the spiritual crisis of civilisation that brought about the First World War; when his boat passed a herd of hippopotamuses, he had a deep feeling of awe for being in wild nature and realising that all life is equally valuable and connected. The phrase that came to his mind was “Reverence for Life.” All life is valuable, and it is only in deep thought that a person can establish an inner profound reverence for all life. He writes, “I call humanity to the ethic of reverence for life. This ethic makes no distinction between a more valuable life and a less valuable life, between a superior life and an inferior life. It rejects such a distinction, because accepting these differences in value between living beings basically amounts to judging them according to the greater or lesser similarity of their sensitivity to ours. But this is an entirely subjective criterion. Who among us knows what significance the other living being has for itself and for the whole? The consequence of this distinction is then the idea that there are lives without value, whose destruction or deterioration would be permitted.”

The attitude of Reverence for Life implies that we would never destroy any form of life—human, animal, or plant—unless it is found to be absolutely necessary. In other words, no life would be sacrificed without compassionate consideration of the life lost compared to the greater good the sacrifice may yield. He believed that we will extend the same respect to other lives as we give to our own if we conscientiously adhere to the principle, “I am life that wills to live, surrounded by life that wills to live.” In *Civilization and Ethics*, Schweitzer wrote: “Ethics is nothing other than Reverence for Life. Reverence for Life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil.”

He felt that the best way to demonstrate “Reverence for Life” to

others was by setting an example. He used his hospital in Lambarene to demonstrate this philosophy in practice. The hospital treated thousands of people and animals alike. The animals lived alongside the humans in harmony. In his book *Out of My Life and Thought*, he wrote, “By itself, the affirmation of life can only produce a partial and imperfect civilization. Only if it turns inward and becomes ethical can the will to progress attain the ability to distinguish the valuable from the worthless. We must therefore strive for a civilization that is not based on the accretion of science and power alone but which cares most of all for the spiritual and ethical development of the individual and of humankind.”

He also emphasized recognizing psychological needs of those around us. He said, “Open your eyes and seek another human being in need of a little time, a little friendliness, a little company, a little work. It may be a lonely, an embittered, a sick, or an awkward person for whom you can do something, to whom you can mean something. Perhaps it will be an old person or a child. Or else a good cause that needs voluntary workers. Do not lose heart, even if you must wait a bit before finding the right thing, even if you must make several attempts.” A few words of inspiration or encouragement, *or* being able to make the person see things in a different light, can go a long way in instilling hope for a brighter future, or could even avert a suicide or save a relationship. He was known as a “Jungle philosopher” because he developed and lived by the philosophy of “Reverence for Life” while serving as a physician and humanitarian at his hospital in the jungle of Lambarene.

He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for his altruism, reverence for life, and tireless humanitarian work which has helped making the idea of brotherhood between man and nations a living one.” These words from the formal citation from the Nobel committee for the award are by way of recognition of his philosophy of “reverence for life” and his dedication to building hospitals and providing medical care as a missionary doctor in Africa. He did not

preach or think that his example would be an ideal to many people; “he simply acted out of inner necessity,” said Albert Einstein. In other words, his dedication to his philosophy of “reverence for life” was a natural and essential drive stemming from within himself.

The ancients instinctively felt oneness, harmony, and reverence for Nature. They were satisfied with what Mother Nature gave. In fact, they took from Nature only what was needed and expressed their gratitude by helping her in myriad ways. But *our* wants have become unlimited. How can we rely on the vagaries of Nature? So, we must conquer Nature. The more we succeed in our conquest of Nature, the more we treat the lower kingdoms as “children of a lesser god.” In fact, science classifies things as organic and inorganic, living and non-living. There is no dead matter, says Theosophy. “In reality, as Occult philosophy teaches us, everything which changes is organic; it has the life principle in it, and it has all the potentiality of the higher lives,” writes Mr. Judge. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*)

To revere life is to be non-violent at all levels—thought, word, and action—and towards human, animal, and plant kingdoms. When it comes to dealing with criminals, H.P.B. suggests that “Human Law may use *restrictive* not punitive measures.” We may classify capital punishment as an extreme punitive measure. No criminal should be executed, no matter how grave the offence, says Mr. Judge. The commandment of Moses is, “Thou shalt not kill,” and makes no exception.

We justify vivisection and animal experiments, saying that they are for the benefit of humanity. Prof. C. S. Lewis argues that it is not right that one species should suffer for the happiness or comfort of another. If human beings claim their right to torment animals just because they are higher than animals, by that very superiority they should be better than the beasts and abstain from inflicting pain. If we must torture them in order to improve human life or relieve human pain, it is our grave responsibility to live a life of such superior order as to justify the sacrifice of those animals. Such a justification based on “superiority” could be dangerous, as tomorrow

we may feel no qualms in torturing or ill-treating human beings whom we consider inferior! It has happened in the past. The White race considered itself superior to the Black race. In India, a Brahmin felt justified in ill-treating a Harijan and calling him “untouchable.” The immediate effect of animal experiments would be hardening of the heart, and karmically, it may come back to us in the form of similar *helpless suffering*.

Atmanastu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati, i.e., everything becomes dear because the SELF shines in all, says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Man is responsible for the evolution of the lower kingdoms. As man progresses, he has the responsibility of raising the entire mass of manifested matter up to the stature, nature, and dignity of conscious godhood. When we kill even a small insect or a plant, we interrupt its progress. Hence the injunction: “Kill not—for pity’s sake—and lest ye slay the meanest thing upon its upward way” (*The Light of Asia*). We affect the lower kingdoms through our thoughts and feelings. Mr. Judge points out that our angry, greedy, jealous, and cunning thoughts have been responsible for making tigers more ferocious and snakes more poisonous. So, too, natural calamities, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, famines, and floods, are the result of man’s wrong thoughts and actions.

When we begin to examine life, we do so in terms of people and things that contribute to our welfare. When we take this attitude, we are at the risk of being harmed by others whose interests would come into conflict with ours. It is the lower “I” in us that wants others and the entire universe to be subservient to it, satisfying its wants. Whereas the Higher nature knows that the universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul and not for the gratification or happiness of “one” individual at the expense of others. The framework of the universe is built on “compassion,” wherein the good and growth of *all* creatures, from the smallest to the highest, is taken into account.

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

SOURCE of unhappiness in life: Unhappiness comes in everybody's life. There are no exceptions. Pain of loss, of disease, grief, self-doubt and despair, unfulfilled desires, frustrated aspirations, disappointments, pain of violated conscience, pangs of regret, longings and yearnings, and so on, in endless ways. No one is exempt from it. We are often happy with blessings of life, but it is marred by some or the other undesirable thing that comes into life unbidden to despoil it.

A sense of euphoria, contentment, and satisfaction in degrees follows when one has obtained the object of one's heartfelt desire. Over time, the new possession becomes commonplace and stale; the initial euphoric feeling fades and is soon followed by a gnawing fear of loss and anxiety to preserve it and a yearning for acquiring more.

Universal human experience testifies to the fact that given all the possessions that one wishes for—fortune, fame, luxury, wealth, every enjoyment—which we think are the source of happiness, leaves man yet unhappy with an inexplicable gnawing discontent and a sense of inner void, which all the wealth and luxuries of the world at one's command cannot quench. Finally, death—the great leveller—lays its clammy hands and ends it all.

Whence, then, is this phenomenon of divine discontent? Sages, mystics, philosophers, and poets in all ages have dwelt upon this question of whence the cause of human unhappiness. They have spoken of it in various ways, but one common strain runs through them all. That common insight of the great thinkers is that the Soul of man is not of this earth but a portion of the vast expanse of Heaven Eternal. Can a caged bird ever be happy? Its natural habitat is free air, wherein it rejoices in flying in freedom in the limitless expanse of the blue sky. So is the soul-bird.

Man's life is not limited to the body any more than the life of the bird is limited to the nest, which it builds and rebuilds season after season—for a purpose. The simile is apt. The human Soul takes up

body after body in cycles of reincarnation—for a great purpose. In the following lines, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, we read:

The Soul passeth from form to form;
 The mansions of her pilgrimage are manifold
 Thou putteth off thy bodies as raiment
 And as vestures thou fold them up.
 Thou art from old, O Soul of man;
 Ye, thou art from everlasting.

Yes, the Soul of Man is not of the earth. The Soul of Man is neither born nor does it die, but the Soul's natural home is the Eternal Spheres, knowing no limitations of time and space. The Soul's needs cannot be fulfilled by earthly pleasures and possessions. The soul's need can only be fulfilled by things of the Spirit. The spiritual essence of the experiences of each life on earth is harvested by the Soul at the end of each life on earth to be assimilated before it takes up another body for another harvest of spiritual food. So, it grows through assimilation of manifold experiences to at last evolve into universal Self-consciousness in full possession of *Paramartha Satya*—Absolute Truth, a state of All-knowingness, *Sarvatma*. Only this quest, and this alone, and nothing else, meets and fulfils the soul's need, and not the will-o'-the-wisps of earthly joys.

The way to human happiness and fulfilment: So long as Man in his blindness refuses to recognise the reality of the universality and Eternity of true Life and Being, of which the transitory and evanescent life of the body and senses is a mere passing shadow, and so long does he remain ignorant of the great purpose of the Human Soul and fritters away his mortal life in pursuits for gratification of that life which is subject to time and change, so long will man remain a ceaseless wanderer in the thorny field of mortality. Life itself is teaching this lesson to us. Pain, disappointment, and sorrow at last drive man to search for the meaning of life and its purpose. Then, as the light of truth dawns in degrees in his consciousness, he surrenders his personality to the Great Life and Law of his real Being—*Ishwara* seated in his Heart—whose pleasure

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

it is then to lead man step by step, through many lives, to assimilate the whole of Universal Being, which is the Self of All. Says Shri Krishna of those who surrender to Him, “But for those who, thinking of me as identical with all, constantly worship me, I bear the burden of the responsibility of their happiness.” (*Gita*, IX-22)

“It is only ‘with a mind clear and undarkened by personality, and an assimilation of the merit of manifold existences devoted to being in its collectivity (the whole living and sentient Universe),’ that one gets rid of personal existence, merging into, becoming one with, the Absolute, and continuing in full possession of Paramartha.” (*S.D.*, I, 54)

THE happiest day—the happiest hour
My seared and blighted heart hath known,
The highest hope of pride and power,
I feel hath flown.
Of power! said I? Yes! such I ween
But they have vanished long, alas!
The visions of my youth have been—
But let them pass.
And pride, what have I now with thee?
Another brow may ev’n inherit
The venom thou hast poured on me—
Be still my spirit!
The happiest day—the happiest hour
Mine eyes shall see—have ever seen
The brightest glance of pride and power
I feel have been:
But were that hope of pride and power
Now offered with the pain
Ev’n *then* I felt—that brightest hour
I would not live again:
For on its wing was dark alloy
And as it fluttered—fell
An essence—powerful to destroy
A soul that knew it well.

—EDGAR ALLAN POE

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

FRAGMENT ONE—IX

“TO REACH the knowledge of that SELF, thou hast to give up Self to Non-Self, Being to Non-Being, and then thou canst repose between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies, but is the AUM throughout eternal ages.”

To acquire the knowledge of SELF, it is essential to learn to distinguish the Self from Non-Self, *i.e.*, the personal from impersonal. For example, while understanding anything abstract like geometry or philosophy, we are, to a great extent, impersonal. Likewise, we are impersonal while admiring a sunrise or sunset or a piece of art. We must try to increase such impersonal moments. According to Mr. Crosbie, we are travelling on the path of impersonality, “if we are developing the child-heart; if we are learning to love things beautiful; if we are becoming more honest and plain and simple; if we are beginning to sense the sweet side of life; if we are getting to like our friends better and extending the circle; if we feel ourselves expanding in sympathy.” (*The Friendly Philosopher*, pp. 127-28)

How shall we distinguish the personal from the impersonal? When we refer to ourselves, or when we address others, we generally mean by “we” or “you” the visible corporeal personality with its specific name, form, and its distinctive idiosyncrasies. Yet, a thoughtful reflection shows that, strictly speaking, we are mistaken in identifying ourselves and others by the visible personality. The truth is that this outer form of man is only a mask that hides the real Inner Man, the thinking Self, who is invisible. To give up Self to Non-Self seems to imply sacrificing the personal to the Impersonal Self.

It is not much of a difficulty to visualize interiorly in our own mind that we are certainly not the sensations we experience, the emotions and desires that impel us to action in every direction, the thoughts that arise in us, the ideas, beliefs, and ideals we hold, or the knowledge we possess. We feel them all vividly and become identified with them, yet we can see with our mind’s eye that we are

none of these. We also can, standing apart interiorly from the incessant thought-feeling modification going on in our mind, choose not to be impelled to action by their promptings and, instead, exercise our will to think, feel, and act differently. We would not have been able to do so were not the true Self the free, unchanging, and unaffected witness of them all.

Mr. Judge teaches that in small plain duties of everyday life we can practice impersonality by not falling prey to the personal idea but, instead, thinking and acting as the Self, which is the Self of All. It is giving up the motive of personal interests and concerns. It means that the motive for action has to be for the highest good of all mankind, for all beings. We have to overcome many biases, which we have. They arise purely from the personal idea. We must be ever aware of the fact that we are constantly subject to error arising out of personal biases, have a healthy distrust of ourselves, and search for and act upon the impersonal principles of the Higher Life.

As for distinguishing between Being and Non-Being, H.P.B. gives the example of a child in the womb. If it could think, it would limit the conception of “being” to intrauterine life, as it knows no other life. The life after birth would appear to it as death and “non-being” because it has no data about life after birth; it has no faculties to comprehend such a state. Thus, the life after birth, which is the Real Being, would appear to it as Non-Being. Similarly, the Absolute Being, the Causeless Cause of all Causes, the noumenon that underlies every phenomenon and which alone gives to all whatever shadow of reality they possess, appears to our finite perception as Non-Being. We regard the real Being as Non-Being. H.P.B. gives an analogy to explain this. The atoms of gold scattered throughout the substance of auriferous quartz may be imperceptible to the naked eye of the miner, yet he knows that they are not only present but that they alone give his quartz any appreciable value. But whereas the miner knows what gold will look like when extracted from quartz, we at our level cannot form any conception of the reality of things as separated from the veil of *Maya*, which hides it, *i.e.*, we are able

to grasp only its manifested aspect. Only an initiate can see the “essence” of things, separated from the veil of *Maya*, by directing the “Eye of Dangma,” or the faculty of seership. (*S.D.*, I, 45)

It is only after giving up Self to Non-Self and Being to Non-Being that we can have the knowledge of SELF, or *Atman*, and only then can we know ALL SELF, or *Paramatma*. Shankaracharya taught that *Jivatma* is not separate from *Paramatma*, or One Reality. The Higher Self, or *Atman*, is like a ray of the sun, which may appear separate but cannot be detached from the sun. It is in the *Dhyana* stage of meditation that “one enters the light” but does not touch the flame, *i.e.*, one experiences Oneness with all the creatures. In *Samadhi*, “the ascetic loses consciousness of every individuality, including his own. He becomes—the ALL.” The perceiver, the perception, and the object of perception all become one.

Further, it is after giving up Self to Non-Self and Being to Non-Being that one can repose between the wings of the Great Bird, throughout eternal ages, or for 100 years of the “age” of Brahma, which equals Maha-Kalpa. The Great Bird refers to AUM. The footnote says that the “Bird” is *Kala Hansa* (or *Hamsa*) or Swan. According to the *Nadabindu Upanishad*, “A” represents the bird’s right wing, “U” represents its left wing, “M” its tail, and the *Ardhamatra* is said to be its head. *Kala* means time. Thus, in a sense, *Kala Hansa* may represent Brahma, or “Swan-in-time,” as well as *Parabrhamam*, which is “Swan-out-of-time.”

The term *Hamsa* hides within itself *aham-sa* (“I am he”) and *So-ham* (“he is I”). Thus, in the term *Hamsa* is contained the universal mystery of the identity of man’s essence with God’s essence. *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 78) mentions that “*Kalaham-sa*,” or “I am I” in the eternity of Time, answers to the Biblical “I am that I am.” The manifested Logos, Brahma of the Hindus, and Ormuzd of the Zoroastrians, as also each and every individual is *not different in their essence from the Absolute*, explains H.P.B.

Thus, the *Nadabindu Upanishad* compares the *Atman*, or Self, to *Hansa*, or Swan, and these two are compared to the AUM. The

Upanishad describes AUM as a Cosmic Sound, representing the totality of existence and the essence of the universe. In the article, “AUM!,” Mr. Judge quotes Raja Rammohan Roy’s views on AUM. According to him, “OM, when considered as one letter, uttered by the help of one articulation, is the symbol of the supreme Spirit.” But when considered as three-letter word, a, u and m, it implies “the three *Vedas*, the three *states* of human nature, and the three *deities*—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, agents in the *creation, preservation, and destruction* of this world.” (*W.Q.J. Series No. 17*, p. 2)

In the same article, Mr. Judge mentions that there is pervading the whole universe a single homogeneous resonance, sound, which acts as the vivifying power, stirring all the molecules into action. This is represented by the vowel “a.” But this sound “a” alters itself into “au,” where the vowel “u” represents preservation. Aryans say that upon sound, or *Nada Brahma* (divine resonance), depends the evolution of the visible from the invisible (p. 3). “The Divine Resonance, or the *au* sound, is the universal energy, which is conserved during each Day of Brahma, and at the coming on of the great Night is absorbed again into the whole. Continually appearing and disappearing, it transforms itself again and again....” The Day of Brahma lasts a thousand ages, or *Maha-yugas*. “It manifests itself not only as the power which stirs up and animates the particles of the Universe but also in the evolution and dissolution of man, of animal and mineral kingdoms, and of solar systems.” However, “when the great Brahm stops the outbreathing, closes the vocalization, by the *m* sound,” it causes the universal dissolution. This universal dissolution is known in Sanskrit as the *Maha Pralaya*, or the “great dissolution.” On p. 69 (*S.D.*, II) we read that “The Cosmic or Universal *Pralaya* comes only at the end of one hundred years of Brahma; when the Universal dissolution is said to take place.”

When it is said that the one who gives up Self to Non-Self and Being to Non-Being can repose between the wings of the Great Bird, for the “age” of Brahma, which equals Maha-Kalpa, or a period

of 311 trillion years, we may perhaps correlate it with what is said in the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 53-54) concerning *Paranirvana* or *Paranishpanna*. *Paranishpanna* is the state of *Maha-pralaya* after the *Maha-manvantara*. It is the state of Absolute Being, which appears to be that of absolute Non-Being. There is a difference between “conscious” and “unconscious” being. To be in the state of *Paranishpanna* without *Paramartha*, which is self-consciousness, is more like a state of extinction for Seven Eternities, into which the *Maha-pralaya* is divided. This state is illustrated by the analogy of an iron ball, which when kept under the scorching rays of the sun will get heated but will not feel or appreciate the warmth of the sun, while a human being will feel it. Thus, for ordinary human beings, the state of *Paranirvana* is the state of oblivion, but for those who have earned the merit by service to humanity for many lifetimes and whose mind is clear and free from the notions of personality, they become one with the Absolute but in full possession of *Paramartha*, or self-consciousness. Thus, the “repose between the wings of the Great Bird” seems to refer to conscious existence in the state of *Paranirvana*.

“Bestride the Bird of Life if thou would’st know.” The footnote explains that a Yogi who bestrides the *Hansa*, *i.e.*, one who meditates on AUM, is not affected by the Karmic influences. When a Yogi contemplates and is absorbed in the AUM, it leads to knowledge of *Atman*. The Upanishad explains how meditation on AUM can lead to liberation from karmic bondage and union with the divine.

We are reminded of *Sloka 3* in the Sixth Chapter of the *Gita*, in which Shri Krishna says that for the Yogi who is *Yogarudh*, *i.e.*, one who has attained to Yoga, inaction is the means for gaining higher perfection. The “*Yogarudh*” metaphor is borrowed from horse-riding; when one *rides* a wild horse, it will take the rider where it wants, instead of the rider riding and controlling it. In order to perfectly control the horse, one has to ride for a time with one leg in the stirrup and holding on to the saddle, and with the other leg on the ground, he has to kick himself off from the ground, then spring

up and throw his legs over the back of the animal until he sits with the steed completely between his legs. But till he mounts the horse perfectly, he is in an in-between stage of neither being totally on the horse nor on the ground. So also, in trying to “bestride the Bird,” which is *Hansa* or AUM, which is our Higher Self, there will be stages when we are not completely contemplating on AUM, and the mind is still getting agitated by desires, anger, etc. Then comes the stage of perfect contemplation on AUM, or the Higher Self, when we can know IT. But to know IT is to become IT. In other words, the Yogi who is perfectly identified with his Higher Self will act for and as the Self of all creatures, so that for him the Universe grows “I.” His consciousness has become the universal consciousness. Then he will not offer an individual focus where karmic consequences can return and thus becomes Karmaless.

“Give up thy life, if thou would’st live.” To become aware of the presence of the permanent aspect in us and to reflect the light of the divine nature, we must burn the dross of the lower consciousness. Our everyday mind is full of impressions of gossip, second-rate novels we read, or memories of sensual gratification. We have to so clean the apparatus that the light within can shine forth. This process of purification of the personality is going on, life after life. Hence, in a given life, a time comes when death of the personality is ardently desired and wished for so that the soul can acquire a better form that may allow better expression of the potentialities within.

“Man dies, and yet, he does not really die” is a paradox at the lower level. The real paradox of mystical death is, “Give up thy life, if thou would’st live.” We must give up the life of *personality* to live the life of *spirit*, or else we would be tossed about like a boat on the stormy ocean, caught in the ceaseless rounds of birth, death, and rebirth. In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Jasper Niemand mentions “the sheaths of the heart,” which man has to break one by one so as to come into direct communication with the Divine nature.

(To be continued)

ENCOUNTERS OF THE SPHINXIAN KIND

THE WORLDLY MAN

The worldly man was hurrying along the road to Thebes, immersed in calculations of how best to maximize leverage in the upcoming business deal, when he was startled by a hissing female voice that announced, “Riddle me thissss, or you shall not passsss.” Looking up, he was petrified to find a monstrous Sphinx blocking his path and gazing penetratingly into his eyes. “What do you want, Sphinx?” croaked the man, shakily reaching for his purse.

“Want?” asked the Sphinx, smiling indulgently. “What is it that anyone wantssss?”

“Money, of course,” said the man with effortless conviction and threw down a few gold coins in front of the Sphinx. “This should cover whatever it is a creature such as yourself could ever want!”

“But I want answerssss...” hissed the Sphinx. The man added a few more coins to the pile and said, “This should buy you the best philosophers in all of Greece,” relieved to be finally on the familiar ground of a business transaction.

“Alas! But no two philosophers are ever in agreement,” sighed the Sphinx, stretching herself. “See, for instance, Heraclitus believed motion underlies all, while Parmenides thought it was Being. I cannot say which of them was right,” said the Sphinx, looking off into the distance. “Though, Heraclitus certainly tasted the better of the two,” averred the Sphinx solemnly, locking her gaze into the man’s eyes as she started to groom herself.

The worldly man uncomfortably shifted on his feet and said with a nervous laughter, “Oh come now, what does it matter if Being or Motion is the primeval reality? We live in this world, which is our only reality!”

“Indeed!” said the Sphinx as she playfully jingled the coins between her paws, “And you seem to have lived this reality quite industriously.”

“As should everyone!” blurted the worldly man indignantly. “We

are all creatures of action, and the only real question is that of right action. But even such questions are superfluous since the betterment of one's condition in life is unequivocally the motive of all action. Every creature in nature strives to improve its lot. In this struggle, each one takes what they can, and those more fit live better lives. Mother Nature is impartial towards her children and lets meritocracy rule the roost. When even brutes live in accordance with this unquestionable reality, how can Man, the pinnacle of evolution, deny it? Happiness is the only aim, and its pursuit the only purpose of life. Man is an end unto himself."

"Hear, hear!" quipped the Sphinx, "Even the worldly man has his philosophy."

"Have you ever seen a bird feed another's chick?" continued the man, ignoring the slight. "Or a lion for that matter..." He bit his tongue mid-sentence, lest the menacing half-lion confronting him should take umbrage. "What I mean to say is that the pursuit of self-interest, through the use of reason, in this objective reality, is both innate and natural."

"Hmmm, this just got interesting," mumbled the Sphinx as she reclined into the classic Sphinx pose. "So, money buys you happiness?"

"No, but it certainly makes it easier to be happy," retorted the man. "Please don't mistake me for a hedonist. I, as any cultured man, know that the incessant gratification of brutish urges debases a Man's life. For all things find their consummation in the fulfilment of their unique function. And Man's singularly unique function is his mental faculty of reason, which starts with logic and grows to embrace discernment and finally the aesthetic. Money is only as good as it serves this end. Art is infinite, and any number of lifetimes cannot exhaust it."

"He *sounds* a lot like Epicurus, but does he *taste* just as good?" wondered the Sphinx to herself but said out aloud, "Logic, discernment, and aesthetics—I quite like that. What is the ultimate aim of logic?"

“What are you, a Socratic Sphinx?” sneered the man but quickly dropped his bravado, catching one look at those feline eyes. “The ultimate aim of logic is to reach the truth. But what is true is grounded in worldly realities. The closer you are to truth, the better you will be able to navigate and manipulate those realities to your advantage.”

“And what of discernment?” asked the Sphinx.

“Well, there are things that are defiled and those that are virtuous. Using logic, one should steer their life towards that which is more pure. And before you ask, such navigation leads towards the aesthetic, which is the *summum bonum* of everything beautiful. For instance, the Parthenon captures all three of these aspects. Its perfect geometry is according to logic, its Pentelic marble is of exceptional purity, and its aesthetic appeal is unparalleled. Do you think it could have been built by one who did not strive after perfection? Or that the Persians willingly parted with their gold to fund it?”

“Persianssss... I wonder how they would taste,” mused the Sphinx wistfully to herself but asked aloud, “Are truth, purity, and beauty distinct categories?”

The worldly man was stumped. This question had never occurred to him before. Thinking aloud, he said, “Well, what is true must also be pure, and what is pure must also be beautiful, and what is beautiful must also be true. The three are seemingly distinct but are essentially ONE! Heavens, I never conceived of it in this way before.”

“Quite,” said the Sphinx, “Now, can you show me this ONE thing on earth, which you say is your *only* reality?”

“I already told you,” exclaimed the man sharply, “the Parthenon is an example *par excellence*! The Pyramids of Giza and your own statue in front of them could be included as well.”

“I didn’t ask for examples of the thing, but for the thing itself,” said the Sphinx, her eyes narrowing.

“Oh!” muttered the man, sinking into a deep thought. He felt like one who had been skating on thin ice all his life, assuming it to be solid, but now suddenly the ice had cracked and he had plunged into the dark, cold abyss below.

He slowly started to vocalize his thoughts, “The deer grazing in front of the Parthenon sees not its beauty, nor the fowls that fly over it. So, this ONE thing cannot be *in* the Parthenon itself. Man alone can recognize beauty because there must be something in him which is sublimity itself. He alone can know the pure because there must be something in him which is purity itself. And he alone can appreciate the truth because there must be something in him which is verity itself. And these three are ONE. And it is the ONE thing worth wanting. Men are deluded into hankering after this ONE thing in external objects, when all along the ONE thing was always *in* mankind and *is* mankind *itself*.”

The worldly man stood up tall and said to the Sphinx, “You want to see this ONE thing on earth? See, it is *in* me, and it *is* me!”

“Ah!” said the Sphinx, “Then I want this ONE thing,” and gobbled him up!

And in the long burp that followed, these fleeting words could be discerned, “*Prudential worldliness is moral decrepitude!*”

In the original Grecian myth, the Sphinx is described as having the body of a winged lion and the head of a woman. It stations itself outside the city of Thebes and terrorizes those travelling to the city by posing a riddle and devouring those unable to answer it. Oedipus, the king of Thebes, famously solves the riddle, “What is it that walks on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening?” with the answer, “Man.”

The Sphinx is the symbol of life. In our story, the Sphinx exhibits the same two seemingly opposing characteristics of life, the destructive and the instructive. And just like the Sphinx, life also challenges every one of her progeny with the riddle that has occupied generations of thinkers, “What is the purpose and meaning of life?” Oedipus’ solution is a clue to the theosophical answer we find in *Isis Unveiled*: “*The trinity of nature is the lock of magic, the trinity of man the key that fits it.*” In Man is the key that unlocks the riddle

of life if only Man would look inward. But just like the Sphinx, life also eventually devours all her progeny who are unable to solve her great mystery.

Our story is a satirical analysis of the philosophy underlying perhaps the most prevalent attitude towards life in the modern world, namely, worldliness. The worldly man had lived hedonically and has realized the folly of such a life. But instead of lifting himself above worldly concerns, he has simply refined his taste for worldly pleasures. This solipsism is exemplified in his statement that “Man is an end unto himself,” meaning each Man defines his own purpose and moral standard. The lower nature of Man hankers after pleasure, and its very nature is separative. Hence, thinking from this standpoint, he logically defines his purpose as the pursuit of his own personal happiness.

But as life challenges him to think deeper, the worldly man realizes that the ultimate aim of Man’s life and his unique faculty of reason is the realization of *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*—the three in one, the Self of ALL, or *Paramatma*. And that this aim is only achievable through an inner journey and transformation. But when one is still fully identified with the lower self, it would be a folly to pridefully say, “*Aham Brahmasmi*.” And this final lesson is taught to the worldly man through his foolish demise. The truth of the oneness of *Jivatma* and *Paramatma* ought to be realized in the sacred recesses of one’s own heart and not be proclaimed with a “behold, I know” attitude. The moral of the story is the counter-intuitive fact that what may seem prudent for the self-of-matter is in all cases morally repugnant to the Self-of-Spirit. “The Self of matter and the SELF of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both,” says *The Voice of the Silence*.

IN banquets (meals) remember that you entertain two guests,
body and soul: and whatever you shall have given to the
body you soon eject: but what you shall have given to the
soul, you keep always.

—EPICTETUS

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Assuming that another person's opinions are immune from criticism, *i.e.*, they are free from errors or faults, is not a marker of respect. It is, in fact, dehumanising. "What would someone who never makes a mistake be like? One is to think of a superhuman, god-like being. Infallibility would seem to go hand in hand with omniscience and infinite wisdom." The other possibility is an entity that is largely unthinking. We may perhaps believe in general infallibility, that human beings are incapable of error in a wide range of matters, ranging from day-to-day decisions to ideological commitments.

Considering all human beings to be infallible may promote human dignity, but to judge their capacity for rationality requires us to take into account their capacity for making mistakes. There were totalitarian leaders who claimed infallibility. The worst tyrants demanded not only to be obeyed but also to be treated as incapable of error in every deed and saying. Errors can occur so that those giving medical advice or, say, forecasting the weather can make mistakes. Each one of us is entitled to choose and have our political, consumer, and religious preferences. But that does not mean that each person is not only sovereign but also free from errors in those preferences.

One reason for the arising of the notion of general infallibility could be cultural relativism. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the tendency of the people, anthropologists included, was to view other, unfamiliar cultures through the lens of their own culture and to misunderstand them as a result. To avert this, some basic axioms were formulated to describe how such research should be done, but these do not describe how the world is, nor what is right or wrong. According to one anthropologist, "We recognize that morality differs in every society and is a convenient term for socially approved habits. Mankind has always preferred to say, 'It is morally good,' rather than 'It is habitual,'...But historically the two phrases are synonymous." The objection to cultural relativism could be: "If what

is right for a society is whatever that society regards as right, why not go one step further and think that whatever is right for an individual is whatever that individual regards as right?" This in turn leads us to conclude that "nobody can be mistaken about anything."

To respond to relativism, we can take into account the fact that our own beliefs and attitudes can change. The attitudes we hold are not always the result of our own thinking, and we can change the same on account of persuasion.

Whenever we have reasons for what we do, that "reasoning makes us error-prone." Each decision we make involves beliefs, plans, and objectives. For instance, when one buys a microwave, it may be because one wants to avoid cooking, or because one thinks that cooking is a waste of time, etc. "A person whose choices can never be mistaken cannot have any meaningful plans or objectives, only a series of impulses." Goals are intimately connected to the possibility of error. Thus, for instance, staying out till late at night might be a mistake if one plans to attend a meeting the next morning, making it necessary to go to sleep on time.

"General infallibility creates the illusion that people are essentially mindless. It holds that we believe what we believe, and value what we value, for no reason at all, or at least for reasons that are unintelligible to anyone else....To err is human. Missteps, misapprehensions, misspeaking, momentary lapses and mess-ups are part of the fabric of life. Yet we are capable of making mistakes precisely because we are thoughtful, intelligent beings with complex goals and sincerely held values. We wouldn't be able to if we were otherwise. Regrets: we've had a few. But we are the wiser for them," writes Daniel Ward, a lawyer, in an article that appeared in *Aeon* magazine.

"The purpose of life is to learn, and it is all made up of learning.' Even those who repeat errors life after life are in the process of learning....We can learn through mistakes we make," writes Mr. Crosbie. This learning may be at a physical, mental, or spiritual level. Till we have *mastered* the art of cooking, sewing, drawing, painting,

cycling, etc., we are prone to make mistakes. To be error-free, it is necessary to have complete knowledge and the ability to translate it perfectly into action. Our body is made up of atoms, and atoms are made up of “lives” or elementals. Every atom has a life and memory of its own. Memory in these “lives,” when *innate*, is called instinct. In a habit, the nerve connections are made through exercise, when “lives” in the body are repeatedly given certain kinds of impressions, day after day. Similarly, we can train the “lives” of the body to perform certain tasks—for instance, typing, playing musical instruments, etc. The “lives” in the fingertips retain the memory and are habituated so that after several attempts we are able to perform the task effortlessly, with less chance of mistakes.

At a mental and spiritual level, there could be errors in our reasoning, thinking, perceiving, and judging. *The Voice of the Silence* compares mind to a mirror: “Mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects.” Just as a mirror gathers dust, so also the mind gathers the dust of “attachment,” “illusion,” and “biases.” This prevents our arriving at proper judgement or conclusions. For instance, when there is the “dust of attachment,” *i.e.*, when our thinking is guided by emotions, we are not able to see things clearly.

Reason is often tinged with desire-*kama* and is limited to the physical senses. It is, therefore, liable to err. This is so always, unless man learns the higher science of mastering the involuntary actions of the senses and organs and hinders at will the modifications of the brain-mind, all of which are his instruments. Man has to free himself entirely from *Kama* and merge his purified consciousness with the Higher Divine Ego and attain to faultless perception of truth. Otherwise, reason proceeding from wrong premises, deluded by hundred cords of desire, obscuring both instinct and intuition, is erroneous and leads man to sorrow and bewilderment. Purely rational knowledge has its own limitations.

Being encased in different bodies and personalities, the true light of Divinity is obscured, and the fatal error we commit is to believe that each one of us is separate from others. When that error is

overcome, we will be able to see the oneness of humanity and practice universal brotherhood. Ethics and morals are universal. Though morals are judgement of values, they are not subjective judgements based on likes and dislikes. If morals were *subjective*, it would mean that truthfulness, honesty, etc. do not exist in their own right, and we may believe them and practice them when it is convenient for us. It is not so. Moral values, or universal ethics, are *objective*, irrespective of time and place.

It appears that symbiosis made our Earth what it is, and it is also the key to our future. Two life forms living together began the process of evolution of all complex life. For two billion years the Earth's life consisted of single-celled bacteria and their cousins, archaea. When an archaeal cell engulfed a bacterial cell, in time, the engulfed bacterial cell became the mitochondrion, a tiny structure that acted as a powerhouse of that primitive cell. The mitochondria enabled these cells to grow and produce endless forms. This combination gave rise to "the complex eukaryotic cell, which ultimately gave rise to almost every living thing."

Thus, we are here because of symbiosis and are still being sustained by it. There is a symbiotic relationship between eighty percent of land plant species and mycorrhizal fungi, wherein the fungus provides nutrients and the plants provide food, and as a result we have oxygen to breathe. Symbiosis means "living together" of life forms in some harmonious, mutually beneficial arrangement, as could be seen in a clownfish nestling in an anemone or a coral reef supporting a spectacular array of life.

Symbiotic relationships must be seen as spanning a continuum from parasitism at one end to mutualism at the other, says Katie Field at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom. Mutualism is a form of symbiosis in which the relationship between individuals of different species is such that both the individuals derive benefits. However, in parasitism one is dependent and is benefitted at the

expense of another. We are able to see this continuum in Orchid seeds that are parasites that depend on mycorrhizal fungi in the soil to germinate. When they have grown leaves, some species begin to pay the fungi back, giving rise to a mutualistic relationship. There are cases where older orchids supply food to young orchids, while other species that do not develop green leaves remain parasitic their entire lives, thus displaying the “whole cycle of different phases of symbiotic function,” says Field. By learning to appreciate this process more fully, we might be able to harness it to heal our planet too, writes Rowan Hooper. (*New Scientist*, June 28, 2025)

Symbiosis, or the living together of unlike organisms, may be regarded as one form of interdependence. Every day, at every moment, we are reminded of interdependence. From the glass of water or cup of tea or bread we have in the morning to electricity, transport systems, and all the infrastructure in the city, we are dependent on others. The moment we recognize that we too need to make our own contribution, it becomes interdependence; otherwise we are parasites, or as the *Gita* points out, only thieves who receive without giving back. The law of universal brotherhood has its recognition in the system of cooperation among beings.

“On the mental steps of a million men Buddha passed through the Gates of Gold,” says *Through the Gates of Gold*, and suggests that there is never growth in isolation. Einstein’s explanation of his genius, “In science...the work of the individual is so bound up with that of his scientific predecessors and contemporaries that it appears almost as an impersonal product of his generation,” is more than an expression of modesty, says the great American novelist E. L. Doctorow. Einstein grew up in a culture where many scientists in Europe—Albert Michelson, Edward Morley, Hermann Helmholtz, etc.—had been indirectly hinting at the theory of relativity by questioning the concepts of absolute motion and absolute rest. These concepts were the building blocks and provided Einstein with the tools with which to think. The English poet and essayist Matthew Arnold says that the work of literary genius is the combination of

the power of man and the power of the moment, *i.e.*, of a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere. Newton said: “I appear tall because I am standing on the shoulders of giants.” Similarly, Buddha drew inspiration and teachings from the Vedas and Upanishads and the writings of rishis, sages, and other perfected beings.

Thus, “The particular individual in whom the final illumination appears is called a genius, an inventor, one inspired; but he is only the crown of a great mental work created by unknown men about him, and receding back from him through long vistas of distance. Without them he would not have had his material to deal with....It is impossible to separate an individual of any species from his kin.” (*Through the Gates of Gold*, p. 12)

Family, Nation, Race, etc., contribute to making an individual what he is, and when an individual in his turn is able to uproot a bad tendency from his personal nature, he contributes to the purification of the Family, Nation and Race tendencies, changing their Karma as a collectivity.

The Third Chapter of the *Gita* mentions sacrificial deeds. Thus, “The creator, when of old he had created mortals and appointed sacrifice, said to them, ‘By means of this sacrifice ye shall be propagated. It shall be to you a cow of plenty. By means of it do ye support the gods, and let these gods support you. Supporting one another mutually, ye shall obtain the highest felicity.’” It refers to an element of sacrifice inherent in the cosmos from the very beginning. Human beings have to emulate it and act with compassion, without attachment to the result, for the sake of others. It enshrines the principle of Brotherhood or reciprocity. Sacrifice means cooperation, keeping in mind the claims of other beings—plants, animals, human beings, and even gods—on us, and making our contribution to meet their requirements.

THIS is the way of peace: overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth, and hatred with love.

—PEACE PILGRIM

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