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THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

A Magazine Devoted to
The Living of the Higher Life

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- (a) To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race. creed, sex, caste, or colour;
- (b) The study of ancient and modern religions, philosophies and sciences, and the demonstration of the importance of such study; and
- (c) The investigation of the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers latent in man.

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 1, No. 5

September 17, 2009

SPIRITUAL COURAGE—VIRYA

They who fear when there is no cause for fear and they who do not fear when they ought to fear—both enter the downward path, following false doctrines.

—*The Dhammapada*

THE WORD "courage" brings before our mind's eye the picture of a policeman, or a soldier who not only fearlessly fights the enemies but risks his life every day, uncertain if he will be alive the next minute. Then there are those who go mountain climbing, boogey-jumping, gliding, car-racing, thus risking their lives. We call them daredevils. H.P.B. gives several examples of courage, which she describes as *offering one's life in sacrifice* to philanthropy and duty. Thus, the captain who decides to remain alone on board of a sinking ship so that other lives are saved; or a scientist who continues his research, though fatigued to the point of death, in order to make a discovery for the benefit of humanity. All these display grand and noble impulse which makes them override the instinctive impulse to preserve life. In India, there were people of *Kshatriya* caste, who were warriors, known for their valour. But as the etymology of the word suggests, *Kshatriya* is one who saves another from injury. In the *Gathas* of Zarathushtra, *Kshtra-Vairya* is the highest power or spiritual valour (*Virya*) that descends on one "who serves his brethren meek."

Courage is not necessarily absence of fear. It is the ability to overcome fear by an act of will, and doing that, which must be done. There are many aspects of courage and all of us manifest some facet or another as we go through life. We manifest one form of courage when we are determined to achieve the goal, braving every obstacle. A person who perseveres in spite of physical handicap, or is willing to begin all over again in the face of a great financial loss or broken relationship or loss of a loved one, shows a different sort of courage. These are quiet and mighty people who never make headlines. They are the unsung heroes, who inspire us with their quiet courage.

However, we do not need courage just to protect others, and ourselves. We need courage to uphold a moral principle, to defend an innocent person, to bring about social and political reform and to begin and sustain spiritual life. One of the qualifications required of a person desiring to be a disciple is: "A courage undaunted in every emergency, even by peril to life."

A spiritual aspirant is asked to follow a double standard. He is told that if the injustice is against *him* then he must let go. There must be courageous endurance of personal injustice. But, on the other hand, if he hears an innocent person slandered and does not undertake his defense as he would undertake his own, then he is not fit to walk the path of discipleship. At times, there is a need to defend the teachings and the teachers, as was the case with H.P.B. and W.Q.J., when they were unjustly slandered and calumniated by their opponents. In the early years of the Theosophical Movement, there were people who were afraid to speak about the existence of the Masters, from doubt and fear of ridicule by religion and science. H.P.B. says that her aim in writing *Isis Unveiled* was to defend the right philosophy and to expose superstition and dogmatism in various religions. As an association, it is the duty of U.L.T. to uncloak vice and redress wrongs, to expose religious and social evils through journals and publications.

~~On the other hand, there is courageous endurance of personal~~

injustice. All the great teachers, like Jesus and H.P.B., never defended themselves. *Light on the Path* asks the disciple to surrender all weapons of offence and defense. Is it not a mark of cowardice? Would it not make us vulnerable? Generally, there is a feeling that we must be allowed to keep some weapon for our security. We may carry a gun, but if we are not quick enough then the attacker may snatch it and fire at us. Hence, *a disciple* looks for no such protection, because he realizes the fact that no matter how much we may arrange our protection, it is still superficial protection. The only sure protection is our karma, our purity, our Higher Self. If we are pure and if our Karma permits, then no harm can come to us. In a sense, it is exhibiting the highest faith in the Law of Karma, and surrendering of the personal will to the Divine will.

There is a difference between Hitler's and Gandhiji's courage. In the former case there is arrogance and false spirit of independence, which makes one feel that one can conquer the source of all opposing and fearful forces. Gandhiji's courage sprang from love of God and fear of the Law. He fought his war of Independence with two *weapons*—*satyagraha* (truth-force) and civil-disobedience that shook the very foundation of British empire. *Vajra*, the thunderbolt is the celestial weapon possessed by Indra. Among other things, it represents punitive and reformatory aspect of the Law of Karma. Shri B. P. Wadia explains that when "free, independent and fearless" people obstinately disregard the Law that works to Righteousness, they are broken by the Divine *Vajra*. When people rashly assert independence and disturb the harmony of the universe, they suffer a severe karmic backlash, which at last, teaches them the lesson of interdependence. Thus:

Increasing obstinacy weakens the Will of such persons; pitting themselves against the Law they are tossed hither and thither, are bruised and maimed by the *Vajra*, till at length they learn to fear the Law that pardons only through punishment. Fear leads to search through knowledge; then "independence" is given up, interdependence is recognized

and inspiration comes—inspiration enshrined in the mantram phrase—"Work with the Law." When the Lesson is learnt the necessity for punishment ceases and the protective aspect of *Vajra* is active. *Vajra* defends the oppressed while it strikes the tyrant. (*Thus Have I Heard*, p. 183)

Virya is energy, vigour, driving force and in Buddhism it means energy in pursuit of the good, i.e., in pursuit of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. *Virya* is defined as "the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal TRUTH, out of the mire of lies terrestrial." To practise virtues, to meditate, to practise forbearance or patience, we need energy. We have unlimited energy but it gets dissipated in useless activities. Our spiritual energy gets drained through negative emotions such as, fear, hatred, anger, jealousy, self-pity, remorse, anxiety, guilt. We stop this waste of energy by cultivating opposite emotion—love instead of hatred, confidence and faith in place of fear. Sexual indulgence and useless talk are the two main avenues through which we waste this spiritual energy.

We need spiritual energy in effecting the transition from being good people to being spiritual people. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, points out that Spiritual life is an active life. It is being active mentally and spiritually. This life is for those who are prepared to make an effort, prepared to try. This life is not for those who will sit back comfortably in their armchairs and read about other people's efforts. It is not sitting cozily near fire with a cup of coffee and plate of muffins and reading all about austerities of Milarepa and saying, how nice! How wonderful! In the Transition State, one needs courage, to leave behind familiar viewpoint and accept a more universal one. For someone who had been thinking from the personal point of view and living a self-centred life, it is not easy to give up comfort, luxury, fond habits, and think about needs of others. He is required to take courage in both his hands and leap. It is like a person going over to the other side of the abyss. He does not know what is.

on the other side, but once he has crossed over, he is sure to find beauty, peace and happiness and further adventure!

Energy is not needed just to *start* new things, it is also required for *maintaining* what we have started. In spiritual discipline we have to be prepared to try again even when we fail because otherwise advance cannot be made. "Mistakes will occur, perhaps many of them, but, as is said, 'twenty failures are not irremediable if followed by as many undaunted struggles upwards,' writes Mr. Crosbie. 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. Remember, thou that fightest for man's liberation, each failure is success, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time. (p. 68)

Much vigour is needed to fight those unseen enemies, those cruel crafty powers, which reside in us in the form of unwholesome thoughts, anxiety, desires and emotions. It is indeed difficult to conquer one's lower nature and hence, Buddha says, "Far hath he gone, whose foot treads down one fond offence." In order to fight the impurities of our nature, we must first have the courage to acknowledge their presence. The television program, "*saach ka samna*," which is the Indian counterpart of the British, "Facing the Truth," is about people who speak the truth by publicly confessing or owning up their blunders in life, their weaknesses and innermost feelings. For many people it is amazing to watch other people reveal truths they would not have the courage to reveal. When there is deceit or moral lapse, it is required that we own it up during self-examination or confess it to the person whom we have wronged. It requires moral courage.

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Virya means *Spiritual* courage, and is one of the seven Divine or Transcendental virtues. If we arrange these seven virtues in the shape of a parabola, we find that *Dana* and *Prajna* make a pair; *Sheela* and *Dhyana* make another pair; *Kshanti* and *Virya* make the third pair. The last is *Vairagya* or desirelessness, dispassion. When daring (*V7rya*) rests on patience (*Kshanti*), it is *sattvic* in nature. The patience that cultivates *Virya*, is the higher patience. Patience has three aspects—forbearance, tolerance and spiritual receptivity. Enduring patience is the highest *tapas*. Buddha said to his disciples that while going through the forest, if any of them were caught by robbers and if they should take a sharp, two-handed saw, and saw him from limb to limb, and if in his mind arose the least thought of he would cease to be Buddha's disciple. It is an extreme example of true endurance—without anger or resentment. Forbearance is positive mental attitude, an attitude of love. Spiritual Courage stems from such patience. Also, both *Kshanti* and *Virya* are progeny (daughter and son) of dispassion. We become fearless when we develop desirelessness. Lord Buddha says: "From desire arises grief; from desire arises fear. There is no grief for one who is free from desire. Whence, then, can there come fear?"

Virya is Divine Will. We do not have to manufacture this energy. Spiritual Courage is not really so much muscle power, it is the simple surrender of personal Will to the Divine Will. Mortal man can gain courage only from his Immortal Spirit. For the Divine Will to manifest one needs to surrender the personal self. Only he can hope to possess Spiritual Courage who is willing to be guided and assisted by the Higher Self, and is determined to "suffer or enjoy whatever the Higher Self has in store for one by way of discipline and experience."

"TRY" is the battle-cry taught by the teacher to each pupil.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

IMPORTANT NOTICE

We apologize for the confusion caused due to sudden change in numbering of the Volume and issue numbers of THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT. Our magazine was originally registered (with the Registrar of Newspapers for India) in Karnataka, as it was then printed in Bangalore. Later it was published and printed in Mumbai and hence it was required to be registered at Mumbai. The procedure of obtaining a fresh Registration Number required our magazine to be treated as a fresh publication. Being a legal requirement, we had no choice but to introduce the change with immediate effect. Subsequently, for technical statutory reason we were required to treat May 2009 issue as Volume 1, issue 1, and number the subsequent issues accordingly. Hence Volume 1 will cover the period from May 2009 to April 2010 and subsequent volumes will be counted from May to April (next year).

However, for the purpose of subscription we have decided to adhere to the old pattern, i.e., reckoning a volume from November to October (next year).

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ECLIPSE OF THE SUN

THE word "eclipse" comes from a Greek word meaning "abandonment." Truly, during the solar eclipse, the Sun seems to abandon the Earth for a while, causing panic and restlessness. In mythology, a solar eclipse occurs when celestial dragons swallow up the sun. Hence, the ancient Chinese would produce great noise and commotion during an eclipse, banging on pots and drums to frighten away the dragon. Solar eclipse, when the sun is obscured and even completely hidden for a while, has always been considered to be an ill omen. During this period pregnant women take special care so as not to be exposed to the sun's rays, expectant mothers get their deliveries postponed for the fear of producing a deformed child, people do not eat or drink and avoid carrying out any auspicious ceremonies, such as, wedding or housewarming ceremony. There are stories showing civilized and scientific people taking advantage of the superstitious fear to manipulate the gullible aborigines. The main character, Hank Morgan, in Mark Twain's book, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, who is about to be burnt at the stake, "predicts" a solar eclipse (i.e., disappearance of the Sun), he knows will occur. He claims power over the Sun, and offers to return the Sun to the sky in return for his freedom. When the Sun began to slowly disappear, people panicked and Morgan was set free. They were awe-struck by his "wizardry." Obviously, there was no magic, only the knowledge of the exact time and duration of the occurrence of solar eclipse enabled him to fool the gullible. The *longest total solar eclipse of the 21st century* unfolded on 22 July 2009, turning day into dark night, for 6 minutes and 38.7 seconds, and it was seen at many places in India. There is a tradition and superstition of giving food or alms to the poor during eclipse to ward off evil effects of the eclipse. At a certain place in India where eclipse watchers were let down because of cloudy day, the god-men taking advantage of it insisted that unless they were given "*dana*" (alms and food) the sun would not reappear!

There might be scientific explanation for some of these so-called superstitions. Sun is the giver of life physical and spiritual. Sunlight kills the germs, so in the absence of that light harmful germs and bacteria would tend to thrive and contaminate the food. Probably, during eclipse ultraviolet radiation is able to reach the Earth, which is otherwise prevented by ozone layer of the Earth's atmosphere, which absorbs the ultraviolet radiation, which is potentially damaging to life on earth. Hence, it is said that during eclipse, *darbha* (dry *Kusa* grass) is used to cover food articles to protect them from the harmful ultraviolet radiation. It is not surprising that the temporary disappearance of the Sun is considered to be ill omen, because the Sun is also the giver of life spiritual. Our Sun is only a reflection of the True or Central Spiritual Sun. *The Secret Doctrine* mentions the Seven *Mystic* rays of the Sun—*Sushumna*, *Harikesa*, *Viswakarma*, *Viswatryarchas*, *Sannaddha*, *Sarvavasu* and *Swaraj*. These are all mystical rays, each having a distinct application in a distinct state of consciousness, for occult purposes. The *Sushumna ray* lights up the Moon and is cherished by the initiated Yogis. "The totality of the Seven Rays spread through the Solar system constitute, so to say, the physical *Upadhi* (basis) of the *Ether of Science*; in which *Upadhi*, light, heat, electricity, etc., etc....correlate to produce their terrestrial effects. As psychic and spiritual effects, they emanate from, and have their origin in, the supra-solar *Upadhi*, in the ether of the Occultist—or Akasa." (S.D., I, 515 fn.)

The eclipse of the Sun or the Moon is a natural phenomenon. When an opaque object is placed in the path of light, it casts shadow on the other side. During solar eclipse, the Moon casts the shadow. Science tells us that the Moon is 400 times smaller than the Sun but it is also 400 times nearer to us than the Sun. Hence, when the Moon comes between the Earth and the Sun, hiding the face of the Sun completely, the result is a total solar eclipse. At that point the three bodies, Sun, Moon and the Earth are in a straight line. Though on every new Moon day, the Moon comes between the Sun and the Earth, we do not have a solar eclipse every new Moon day. This is

because the orbit of the Moon around the Earth and that of the Earth around the Sun do not lie in the same plane, but the planes of these orbits are inclined at an angle of about 5 degrees. Though both the Sun and the Earth lie on Earth's orbital plane, it is only when the Moon is also located on the same plane, i.e., when these three celestial bodies are aligned in the same plane that the eclipse can take place. We know that there is a lunar cycle of 29.5 days that is the time taken by the Moon to change from new Moon to full Moon and to new Moon again. The Moon's orbit makes an angle with the ecliptic or the Earth's orbit and crosses it at two points, which are called "nodes." The lunar orbit and the nodes do not remain fixed in space, but gradually shift westward and complete one revolution in about 18.6 years. A solar eclipse occurs only when these two cycles are favourably combined, which happens once every six months, when the Moon is near one of the nodes at new Moon and the Sun, Moon and Earth are perfectly aligned. When the Moon is at one of the nodes, but not exactly aligned to the Sun, the Moon will cover only part of the Sun's disk, causing "partial solar eclipse." (Based on the article, "Eclipse of the Century!" in *Science Reporter*, July 2008)

In Astrology, the "nodes" formed by the intersection of the Earth's and the Moon's orbits are called, *Rahu* and *Ketu*. They are not physical planets. They are called shadow-planets (*Chhaya-grahas*) as they have no material existence, but only position. In mythology, *Rahu* is the *Daitya* (demon), whose lower part of the body ended in a Serpant's or Dragon's tail. He is supposed to have stolen and tasted a little bit of *Amrita*, the water of immortality, produced during the "Churning of the Ocean," making him immortal. Sun and Moon, who detected the theft, promptly informed *Vishnu*, who beheaded *Rahu* when the *Amrita* (nectar) was still at the throat level. Vishnu then placed the two parts of his body in stellar spheres, the upper portion of his body representing the Dragon's head and the lower (*Ketu*) the Dragon's tail; which two are the ascending and descending nodes. They are the two points in the sky, represented by two Planets,

Rahu and *Ketu*, who now take revenge on Sun and Moon by occasionally swallowing them, which is an allegorical representation of eclipses. The fable had another mystic meaning, says H.P.B., since *Rahu*, the Dragon's head, played a prominent part in the mysteries of the Sun's (*Vikarttana's*) initiation, when the candidate and dragon had a supreme fight (S.D., II, 381). This is the fight between good and the evil, also allegorised by fights between Osiris and Typhon (Dragon Apophis), Ahuramazda and Angra Mainyu.

The candidate for initiation personifies the sun, who has to kill all his fiery passions and wear a crown of thorns, before he can rise into new life and be reborn. In the Puranic allegory, Viswakarma's daughter Sanjana (spiritual consciousness), who was the wife of *Surya* the sun, complained to her father of the too great effulgence of her husband. Viswakarma, the divine carpenter, crucified the sun on his lathe and cut away eighth part of his rays—creating round him a dark aureole. After that, Surya looked as though he had been crowned with dark thorns and he became "Vikarttana," one who was shorn of his effulgence. *Vikarttana* is the type of the initiated neophyte. It refers to the process in Initiation, wherein the candidate touches the lowest levels of his consciousness and after facing and purifying it, he rises with fully purified consciousness.

Is the Sun's corona, an atmosphere of any known gases? Why does it assume the rayed shape always observed in eclipses? In answer to the question a Master of Wisdom writes that it can be called neither chromosphere nor atmosphere because it is the magnetic and ever present aura of the Sun, seen by the astronomers only for a few brief moments during the eclipse. A Chela can see the same when he is in an induced trance state. What the astronomers call the red flames in the "corona" may be also seen in any other strongly magnetic body. The irregular red flames around the Sun are termed by the Master, "inner corona." Something similar is witnessed in case of a person in a strong ecstatic condition when all the electricity of his system is centred around the brain. This is depicted by the artists as aureoles about the heads of the Gods and

Saints. These flames are not always present in equal quantity because of the fluctuation of the magnetic matter in the Sun, which also determines the variety and the number of spots. During the period of magnetic inertia the spots disappear or remain invisible. The closer the emanations are to the aura-emitting body, the stronger and more effulgent they are. However, the further the emanations shoot out from the Sun, they begin to lose intensity until they fade out and hence we have the "outer corona," with rayed shape during eclipse. The same is due to magnetic matter and not due to hot particles as asserted by some astronomers.

Physical phenomena often mirror moral, intellectual and spiritual conditions. What could an eclipse of the Sun *symbolize*? The physical eclipse of the Sun occurs when the Moon passes directly between the Earth and the Sun, cutting off the light of the Sun. Let us take the Moon to represent a disciple or someone who reflects the light of truth, and reaches it to his fellow beings. Let the light of Truth symbolize the Sun. Depending upon his level of development he will reflect more or less light. Also, so long as he is faithful to his task of reflecting the light impersonally, he benefits humanity, by removing the darkness of ignorance. But when he tries to put forward his own personality, seeks to put himself on a pedestal, begins to divert the attention of the people from the teachings to himself, he, without realizing, places himself between his followers and the light of truth, causing a moral and spiritual eclipse. For those who are partly deluded, there is partial eclipse, but for those who are completely taken in by his pretensions, there is total eclipse. After a while, the Sun escapes from the clutches of the Moon, reestablishing brightness, and against the glory of the corona, the Moon is seen for what it is, a dark and sombre shadow. The Moon is forced to retire and allow once again the life-giving rays of the sun to shine forth unobstructed. Likewise, the self-seeker who sought to obscure the sun of truth is eventually exposed and must retire.

To take another analogy, let us take the personal man to symbolize

beings suffer from the partial eclipse of the higher nature by the lower. We must make our personality so pure as to be a clear reflecting surface for the Sun (Higher Self) within, instead of being an obstacle, which blocks the inner light. When the personality proves wholly useless, as happens in case of a completely materialistic and totally self-centred person, the phenomenon of total eclipse is enacted on the moral plane, and then such a personality is cast off by the Ego. When the personality ceases to take guidance from the Divine nature, it is annihilated.

Often, the phenomenon of solar eclipse is witnessed in a race as a whole, when the personality obscures the inner light, as happened in case of the Fourth or Atlantean Race, who became extremely materialistic and sensual, worshipping their own statues. It is this moral degradation which brought on the deluge, sinking the "great continent." H.P.B. points out that according to an occult "tradition" such submersion occurs whenever there is an eclipse of the "spiritual sun." (S.D. , II, 250 fn.)

THIS great, all-bright and ever-shining sun...is the visible image of the Divine Goodness, faintly re-echoing the activity of the Good....And so that Good which is above all light is called a Spiritual Light because It is an originating Beam and an Overflowing Radiance, illuminating with its fullness every Mind above the world, around it, or within it, and renewing all their spiritual powers, embracing them all by Its transcendent compass and exceeding them all by its transcendent elevation. And It contains within Itself, in a simple form, the entire ultimate principle of light; and is the Transcendent Archetype of Light; and, while bearing the light in its womb, It exceeds it in quality and precedes it in time; and so conjoineth together all spiritual and rational beings, uniting them in one.

-DIONYSIUS

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

FLOWERS—III

THOMAS Carlyle said: "The end of man is an action and not a thought, though it were the noblest." "The profession of a truth is not yet the enactment of it; and the more beautiful and grand it sounds, the more loudly virtue or duty is talked about instead of being acted upon, the more forcibly it will always remind one of the Dead Sea fruit," writes H.P.B. The Dead Sea is the highly saline lake in Palestine, into which the river Jordan ends. With very high salt content, the lake is unable to sustain any life, so the fishes brought by the river Jordan, die there. Even vegetation becomes impossible so whence can come fruits? It is not enough to *talk* of truthfulness, kindness, goodness and noble things unless it is followed by practice. You may be able to expound the virtues and teach others, but what is the use of that if it is not practiced? Mere talking is fruitless. Fine words of some people are like non-existent fruits of the Dead Sea. Cant is insincere moral talk. People delude themselves and others into thinking that they are pious, virtuous and moral by talking about it. Saki writes humorously in "The Story of St. Vespalus," who is quoted as saying, "I don't mind being revered, honoured and greeted; I don't even mind being sainted in moderation, as long as I am not expected *to be* saintly as well." People want to appear saintly without actually being so. However, it is equally important to watch out for mechanical observance of virtues. "It is easy to become a gourmand in pure living and high thinking as in the pleasures of taste or sight or sound," says *Through the Gates of Gold*. There may be slavish observance of principles as an end in itself. Some people are very particular about punctuality as to what they do at what time and so on and if on some day the thing does not happen in time, they get very upset. They become slaves to the virtue.

Buddhism speaks of seven keys. One of them is *Shila*—the key of Harmony in word and act, the key that counterbalances the cause and the effect, and leaves no further room for Karmic action. When

one does what one says, it invokes a feeling of trust in others. Consistency and reliability in one's conduct helps in building healthy relationship and it conserves precious energy which might otherwise have got wasted over anxieties in dealing with an untrustworthy person. More important, one is at peace with oneself. Truly spiritual are like flowers with colour as well as fragrance, they practice what they preach.

10. Many kinds of garlands can be made from a heap of flowers. Many good works can be gathered by a mortal once he is born. (53)

Garlands represent numerous possibilities of life. It is up to us to make beautiful garlands out of them. We see this every day. Given a set of circumstances, different individuals respond to them in their own unique manner, making, as it were, a unique garland of their own. Garland also stands for a collection of good works which add beauty and fragrance to life.

11. The scent of flowers travels not against the wind—be it tagara or mallika or even of the sandalwood tree. But the fragrance of the good wafts even against the wind. The fragrance of the good man pervades all his ways. (54)

12. The fragrance of virtue is unsurpassed even among the perfumes of sandalwood, of lotus, of tagara, of vassiki. (55)

13. Faint is the scent of tagara or sandalwood. The fragrance of the virtuous ascends to the heights of the gods. (56)

14. Mara never finds the way to those who possess real virtue, who are vigilant, who are freed by perfect knowledge. (57)

In the above verses, fragrance of good and virtuous is considered superior in its ability to travel against the wind and ascend to the heights of the gods or the heaven world. In short, the fragrance of

virtue travels everywhere. Good works and virtue leave their indelible mark in the invisible atmosphere of the world, the astral light and *akasa*, and influence others. It touches others, giving them a positive impulse in that direction and encourages those who are struggling to practice virtues. Unlike the fragrance of passion flowers, which drifts only with the prevailing current of psychic atmosphere, the fragrance of virtue has its own propelling force. This is because in every man there is some receptivity to the ideal of a higher life.

From *Tagara* plant is made scented powder. From *Mallika* (the Jasmine flower), *Vassiki* (a variety of jasmine flower) and sandalwood is made perfumes. But the perfume of the virtue is unsurpassed. However, one has to guard oneself against pride and conceit. Real virtue must make one humble, knowing well the great gulf that separates the virtuous from the spiritually wise man. Such a person remains on guard, ever watchful. By the practice of virtues and vigilance, coupled with perfect knowledge, man is protected from *Mara*—the great tempter.

15-16 *From a heap of rubbish on the road-side, a lily blooms, fragrant and pleasing; from a mass of blinded mortals arises the disciple of the truly Wise One, shining with exceeding glory of his own Wisdom. (58-59)*

Padma stands for lily or Lotus. Lotus is a symbol of purity and realization of spiritual possibilities. While its beginnings are in mud, the flower itself is a symbol of a spiritually perfect man, who has responded to the light of Sun or divine Self within. The story of evolution is an unfoldment from within without. Perfectibility is inherent in every man, just as the lotus seed carries within itself the perfect miniature of the future plant. H.P.B. beautifully explains the symbology of Lotus, thus:

The Lotus, or *Padma*, is, moreover, a very ancient and favourite simile for the Kosmos itself, and also for man. The popular reasons given are, firstly, the fact just mentioned,

that the Lotus-seed contains within itself a perfect miniature of the future plant.... Secondly, the fact that the Lotus plant grows up through the water, having its root in the //us, or mud, and spreading its flower in the air above. The Lotus thus typifies the life of man and also that of the Kosmos.... The root of the Lotus sunk in the mud represents material life, the stalk passing up through the water typifies existence in the astral world, and the flower floating on the water and opening to the sky is emblematical of spiritual being. (S.D., I, 57-58)

The most important point being made in this verse is that though the environment of the person plays an important role in helping or hindering his worldly or spiritual progress, it is not the sole determinant. In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. points out, "True evolution teaches us that by altering the surroundings of the organism we can alter and improve the organism; and in the strictest sense this is true in regard to man." However, at the same time she also says, "Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities," thus showing that inner change is more important than the outer. We are all in the habit of blaming our environment and seeking the cause of our troubles and sorrows somewhere outside. If only we had better opportunities, more facilities, financial support then we would have achieved more in education and career, and so on. All the while we shut our eyes to those great achievers, who triumphed over their unfavourable circumstances, and at times, achieved even the impossible. There are also those who remain untainted even while surrounded by wickedness and evil. In fact, there are great souls who choose to take birth in adverse and low surroundings so that they can set an example of virtuous life to others around and to learn fortitude and sympathy, says Mr. Judge.

(Concluded)

THE DEBT WE OWE

I

Duty is that which is *due* to Humanity, to our fellow-men, neighbours, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves. This is a debt which, if left unpaid during life, leaves us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts in our next incarnation. Theosophy is the quintessence of *duty*.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

WHEN we regard our lives, even from a worldly standpoint, as to the extent to which we are dependent on others for our happiness and progress, we realize that we are not really independent. We are bound to others by strong bonds of obligation to reciprocate the benefits we continually receive from them. For instance, if we reflect for a while, when we sit down for our meal how the food placed before us has come to us we see, unfolding before the eye of our mind, a long chain of human and other sentient beings, involved in producing and supplying it. The food which nourishes and sustains us has been produced by contribution of many—the loving kin who prepares the food for us, the trader, the transporter and the packer who supply food at our door step, the farmer who toils on the farm to grow the food, the draught animal which toils with him, the plant, the soil, soil micro-organisms, nutrients, the pollinating insects, the water, the air, the sun, the fire, the presiding deities of elements, and so on. Even if one of the links in this long chain of mutually interdependent beings ceases to act or malfunctions we will have to go without food.

If we turn our sight within ourselves and reflect for a while how the food we eat is assimilated we again see numerous organs of sensation and action consisting of innumerable lives all acting in perfect mutual harmony enabling us to enjoy, digest and assimilate the food and get nourished. Even if one of these malfunctions we

would suffer. When the labours of so many beings are involved in our eating just one meal, we can readily see that our very existence, well being and progress are dependent on the labours and sacrifices of countless fellow-beings. It should then be in the natural order that every one of us is duty-bound to reciprocate the continuous flow of benefits we receive from others. It is evident that any failure on our part to fulfil this life obligation to others throws us out of the harmony of life and that much of the evils which beset us, in our individual and collective life, should certainly be due to this neglect on our part. Thus:

He who enjoys what hath been given unto him by them, and offereth not a portion unto them, is even as a thief. But those who eat not but what is left of the offerings shall be purified of all their transgressions. Those who dress their meat but for themselves eat the bread of sin, being themselves sin incarnate. (*Gita*, II)

This is the universal principle of reciprocity or Brotherhood spoken of by Shri Krishna in the Third Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* as the "Revolution of the wheel," which, if we fail to keep revolving by our neglect in the performance of our obligatory duty, we live in vain. Duty, thus obligated by nature to beings of different degrees of evolutionary development, is called *Dharma*. Explaining the significance of the word, Mr. Judge writes:

Such words as *Karma* and *Dharma* are not understood. *Dharma* means *Law*, and is generally turned into *duty*, or said to refer merely to some rule depending upon human convention, whereas it means an inherent property of the faculties or of the whole man, or even of anything in the cosmos. Thus it is said that it is the duty, or *Dharma*, of fire to burn. It always will burn and thus do its whole duty, having no consciousness, while man alone has the power to retard his "journey to the heart of the Sun," by refusing to perform his properly appointed and plainly evident *Dharma*. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 9)

What then is the Duty of man and how shall he perform it? In other words, how is he obligated to reciprocate the benefits he continuously receives from other beings and how shall he fulfil that obligation and progress in harmony with the whole?

Mr. Judge, in his exposition of the meaning of *Dharma* cited above, gives some valuable hints. *Dharma* being "an inherent property of the faculties or of the whole man, or even of anything in the cosmos," it is evident that in order to know what our duty as human beings is, and how we are to perform it, we, in the first place, should acquire a knowledge of what man is *as a whole*, his origin, his evolution, his place in and his relation to the whole cosmos. With such poverty of ideas with regard to man and nature as prevails today in popular conception, owing to one-sided science or blind religious beliefs, we will never truly come to understand, on such a basis, our "properly appointed and plainly evident duty," and thus retard our "journey to the heart of the Sun." What then is man here for? Mr. Judge gives us an eagle's eye-view of the purpose of our existence, thus:

What then is the universe for, and for what final purpose is man the immortal thinker here in evolution? It is all for the experience and emancipation of the soul, for the purpose of raising the entire mass of manifested matter up to the stature, nature and dignity of conscious god-hood. The great aim is to reach self-consciousness; not through a race or a tribe, or some favoured nation, but by and through the perfecting, after transformation, of the whole mass of matter as well as what we call the soul....The aim for present man is his initiation into complete knowledge, and for the other kingdoms below him that they may be raised up gradually from stage to stage to be in time initiated also. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 65)

Therefore, unless we assume a higher standpoint in life based on a knowledge of ourselves as spiritual beings, and of the law of our being which is that of cause and effect (karma), and a conviction of

spiritual unity of all beings, and our relation and obligation to all, we will not be able to perform our whole duty in the natural order. It is in the light of this spiritual knowledge that we have to understand the teachings of the great Teachers of humanity who, having completed their final journey to the heart of the Sun, labour indefatigably to aid their less progressed brethren to fulfil their karmic destiny.

Manu in his ordinances enjoins five sacrifices (*Yajnas*) which, he says, are incumbent on every man to perform every day in order to acquit himself of the debt he owes to his fellow-beings. They are sacrifice to the supreme (*Brahma yajna*), sacrifice to our progenitors (*Pitri yajna*), sacrifice to the gods (*Deva yajna*), sacrifice to the lower kingdoms of nature (*Bhuta yajna*) and sacrifice to mankind (*Nara yajna*). It is evident that these five sacrifices enjoined by the ancient Law-giver are comprehensive, covering as they do the whole gamut of beings with which man's being is interwoven.

The sacrifices are certainly not rituals to be performed as is generally thought on the basis of dead-letter meaning of the scripture. When the Buddha beheld Singala the householder at dawn bowing to the four quarters, to the earth and to heaven, throwing with both his hands coloured rice-grains, he asked him wherefore was he doing thus. Singala replied he was following the early morning ritual his forefathers had followed in the past in order to hold off evil from the six main quarters. Then the Buddha taught him that that is not the way to hold off evil but that the true way is offering loving thoughts and acts to all. Loving thoughts and concern for fellow beings arise from an intuitive perception of our oneness with, and an internal recognition of, and a feeling of gratitude to, all beings. From this spiritual feeling arises self-compelling sense of duty to them. How else can one fulfil one's duty to others if not by actions performed for the good of all with a feeling of reverence and gratitude?

During what Plato called the "fertile period," in the course of the cycles of rise and fall of civilizations, these great truths were generally

understood. The sacrifices which were constituted by the Lord of Creatures (*Prajapati*) by which gods and men mutually nourished each other and attained highest felicity were indeed magical ceremonies, not empty rituals. But with the onset of "barren period," in which the spiritual sight of mankind is eclipsed, such magical ceremonies have become ineffectual; the occult powers and properties of nature, called gods, having departed to higher spheres. Mere outward ritual is worse than useless. Mr. Judge shows that in this dark cycle another form of sacrifice is incumbent on everyone. It is the sacrifice which is to be performed by each individual, internally, on the altar of his Higher Self, and that this is especially so with Theosophists of sincerity and aspiration. It is in the context of this inner sacrifice which each aspirant and lover of humanity has to perform that we have to understand the injunction of Manu cited above.

(To be concluded)

I LIVED on the shady side of the road and watched my neighbours' gardens across the way revelling in the sunshine.

I felt I was poor, and from door to door went with my hunger.

The more they gave me from their careless abundance the more I became aware of my beggar's bowl.

Till one morning I awoke from my sleep at the sudden opening of my door, and you came and asked for alms.

In despair I broke the lid of my chest open and was startled into finding my own wealth.

-RABINDRANATH TAGORE

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

I

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA advises meditation upon birth, death, decay, sickness and error. Shri Krishna tells Arjuna in the Second Chapter of the *Gita* that "Death is certain to all things which are born, and rebirth to all mortals," and therefore, not to grieve the inevitable. What dies or perishes is only the physical body, but the true "Self" is immortal. We are familiar only with the middle stage called *life*, but know nothing about the state before birth and after death, and hence the advice to meditate on birth and death. Before we discuss the states after death it is necessary to know that man is sevenfold. These seven constituents are: Physical Body, Astral Body (*Linga Sarira*), Life (*Prana*), Desire (*Kama Rupa*), Mind (*Manas*), Wisdom (*Buddhi*) and the Higher Self (*Atma*). In the theosophical parlance the former four elements or lower quaternary is termed as the "Personal Man," which is destructible and subject to change, whereas the latter named three constituents are termed as "Upper Triad" or the "Real man" because it is Immortal and Indestructible.

Let us now examine what is commonly termed as death. Generally, when the heartbeats and pulse stop we say that the man has died. But from the theosophical point of view this is only a beginning of death. It can be said that out of the seven constituents, the physical body has died, and the process of death moves forward from the physical to other levels. When a man is externally or bodily dead, the inner Real Man, who is imperishable, is busy internally. Before permanently leaving this body he sees his entire past life, like a movie. The Ego or *Sutratma* views the life just ended, as it was, like a spectator, without any praise or self-deception, and understands the causes set in motion during his lifetime, and sees the justice in whatever he had to suffer. This "review" enables one to understand the power and the justice of the Law of Karma. In the article, "Memory in the Dying," (U.L.T. *Pamphlet No. 23*), several instances are given to show how a dying person recalls the minutest

and long-forgotten details of his life. The "review" happens in every case, whether the person led good or bad life, and whether the death was natural or unnatural.

As soon as the Real Man's task of "reviewing" the past life is over the five constituents, minus the physical body and the life energy, pass on to the astral region called *kama loka*. *Kama Loka* is the world or plane of feelings and desires. In Theosophy it is also termed as the Desire plane because it is related to, and dominated and controlled by desires. In a relative sense this world is an invisible astral realm, surrounding and penetrating our earth. It is beyond our *physical senses* to know or understand it and yet it does exist. In *The Ocean of Theosophy*, we are told that *kama loka* is the Christian "purgatory," and is compared to a slag-pit, meaning a pit into which the waste material separated from the heating of metals is dumped. It can be said that nature has provided a pit or space to discard the negative aspects or lower desires gathered during one's lifetime. *Kama loka* has many gradations, since the people in the world differ from each other in their character and many other aspects. The gradations not only provide for the natural varieties and differences, but also for those caused by the manner of death.

The death of the physical body marks the "first death," but the process of death continues in *kama loka*, wherein there is separation of the astral body, desire nature and lower mind from the higher trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* or the Real Man, which goes to *devachan*, *swarga* or paradise, after the separation. This is termed as "second death." After the dissociation of the three higher elements, the astral body, desire nature and the lower mind integrate with each other to form an entity, called *Kama rupa* or the *Desire body*. This Desire body is akin to the "soiled garments," thrown away by the real man while moving towards *devachan* and hence our ancestors termed it Satan or Devil. It is variously termed *bhuta*, *Pisacha* in India, and as spook or ghost in the West.

During life, the Real Man is able to control the desires and temptations, but after death, with the departure of the real man, there

is no control on the desire body in *kama loka*. The desire body lacks intelligence or understanding, but it can be activated under the influence of external forces. However, it has a kind of mechanical or "automatic consciousness," because of its long association with the Real Man during life. The automatic consciousness exhibited by the *kama rupa* is similar to the automatic movement of a frog or a cock, for a few moments after it is beheaded. This *kama rupa* is a repository of the memory of the life just ended, because the astral body of man has the property of absorbing and storing all the experiences and thoughts of a person, which occur during his life and then throwing them off under appropriate conditions. Since these Desire bodies of the dead are devoid of intelligence and severed from the higher, spiritual element, they are called *Kamarupic shells*, because minus the higher elements they are like empty containers. It is these "empty containers," which come in contact with "mediums," "sensitives" and the séance room operators. Hence, those who visit the séance rooms with the hope of contacting their dear-departed ones, never really contact the Real Man or spirit, save in exceptional cases.

The *kamarupic* shells that come in contact of the séance room operators are not all alike. A classification of these shells is given in *The Ocean of Theosophy*. Those who die an unnatural death, by committing suicide, by hanging or by accident, are not in the same "after-death State" as those who die a natural death. The persons who die an untimely death are not really dead because the cohesive forces hold together the remaining six principles or elements, till the point of natural death is reached. These cohesive forces cannot be destroyed by any mechanical process. Hence, the person dying an unnatural death remains in *kama loka*, only partly dead, and the remaining principles have to wait till the end of actual natural life term is reached, whether it be one month or sixty years. At the end of this period, second death, as described earlier, takes place. Thus many years of the lifetime of an Ego are wasted in case of untimely death. It should therefore be considered how far it is proper to commit

suicide to escape the sorrows and difficulties of the world, or to kill others for some reason.

The state of the ego in *kama loka* depends upon the quality of life led on earth. Some suffer during their stay in *kama loka* while others may remain in a dreamy state. The harsh wrong-doers or criminals, with a feeling of hatred and revenge, keep repeating their criminal tendencies. When such desire bodies (*kamarupic* shells) come in contact with highly sensitive persons, they inject their criminal and murderous thoughts in the minds of such persons. Hence, Mr. Judge writes in *The Ocean of Theosophy* that such desire bodies are the greatest enemies of our culture, because of whom there is greater spread of criminal activities in the society. It is also, therefore, worth considering whether there should be capital punishment.

As the body is destroyed and the five elements (*panchamahabhutas*) from which it is made return to their original form after death, so the *kama rupa* in the *kama loka* dissolves, but the time required for this dispersal differs from person to person. The astral shells of good and moral persons are soon disintegrated whereas the shells of materialistic, selfish, cruel and bad persons take longer time to disintegrate, because these astral shells are well-organized, coherent and heavy. Thus the after-death *kama-lokic* state depends upon the real life on this earth. The *kama rupa* disintegrates and leaves behind *skandhas* which are responsible for guiding and regulating the rebirth, determining the kind of body, emotional and mental nature, and various affinities for the next birth.

As stated earlier, 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*. It is like re-entering a conscious state after sleep.

(To be concluded)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Question: Why were tears created?

Answer: Physiology tells us that tears keep the eyes moist as well as provide lubrication and protection against infection, dust and other irritants. Tears are secreted by lachrymal glands or tear glands, which are located under the upper eyelids. Tears form a film over the eyeballs. Generally tears are collected by two tiny canals, which open near the inner end of each eyelid. From these canals they are collected into the lachrymal sac to flow down the nasolachrymal duct into the nasal cavity, to be either swallowed or thrown out. However, if there are too many tears, they overflow and run down the cheeks. When tears are deficient or absent the cornea may become ulcerated and the eyes will be dry. This condition is called Dry Eye Syndrome or Sjogren's Syndrome. People suffering from this syndrome have to instill artificial tears every few hours.

The tears that flow down the cheeks, is more fluid that tear glands produce when our eyes are irritated. These are called *reflex* or *irritant* tears. When something makes us happy or sad, our tear glands will produce *emotional* tears. It is also believed that there is elimination of certain excess salts such as potassium and sodium through emotional tears along with substances such as prolactin, Leucine-Enkephalin, and manganese. William H. Frey, the co-author (along with Muriel Lanseth) of a book, *Crying, the Mystery of Tears*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985, feels that the levels of prolactin in one's system provide a threshold effect, affecting how easily emotional tears are shed in response to a given stimulus.

Lord Tennyson beautifully describes the nature and purpose

of tears, in his lyric poem, written in 1847, "Tears, Idle Tears," saying: "Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean, Tears from the depth of some divine despair, Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes, In looking on the happy autumn-fields, And thinking of the days that are no more." Tears may well be considered an outlet for bottled-up emotions, and "crying" often helps in the process of healing. *Light on the Path*, a little mystical book, speaks of "tears," symbolically. "Tears," in the language of the occultists, express the soul of emotion. For an aspirant to discipleship the first step on the path is to be able to lay aside simple human emotions. Hence, the first rule is, "Before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears." "To be incapable of tears is to have conquered the simple human nature, and to have attained an equilibrium which cannot be shaken by personal emotions." It only means that in order to develop first, the astral and then the spiritual perception, one must learn to overcome simple human emotions. The absence of physical tears indicates abnormality that must be treated. Likewise, metaphorically, "absence of tears" does not mean absence of emotions or stoicism. "To be incapable of tears" is to feel human emotions, both joy and sorrow, more keenly than other people but not be shaken or swayed by them. We know that we are not able to see things clearly so long as we are emotionally involved. A certain condition of the soul must be reached to receive guidance from the Higher Self. A diamond reflects light, can withstand great pressure and cannot be scratched easily. So also, our Soul should be firm and should remain unshaken by outside pressure as well as internal pressure, caused by inner turmoil. As *Light on the Path* says:

The eyes are the windows for the soul....If grief, dismay, disappointment or pleasure can shake the soul so that it loses its fixed hold upon the calm spirit which inspires it, and the moisture of the life [tears] breaks forth drowning knowledge in sensation then all is blurred, the windows are darkened, the light is useless.

Question: Besides the theosophical literature what other books/

philosophies is one recommended to read and exemplify?
Answer: The Second Object of U.L.T. is to promote the study of Aryan and other Scriptures, of the World's religion and sciences, and to vindicate the importance of old Asiatic literature, namely, Brahminical, Buddhist and Zoroastrian philosophies. The method suggested for carrying out this second object is by establishing a library with all the good works on world's religions, by first having few important books, to which members can make additions by donating good books they have read. The other method is to put in written form correct information upon various ancient philosophies, traditions and legends, and disseminate them in the form that can be easily understood. To make available translation of the ancient books as also extracts and commentaries from them. Besides that when we read writings of H.P.B. and Mr. Judge, we find relevant extracts quoted from ancient and modern works, which are at times, to corroborate the theosophical viewpoint, as is done in the *Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled*. There is an indirect invitation to go to the original works to derive more benefit. At certain other places in their writings the teachers have praised the works of certain authors and even recommended certain works. For instance, Mr. Judge says, "For those who desire to find the highest ethics and philosophy condensed in one book, I would recommend the *Bhagavad-Gita*, studied with the aid of such lectures as those of our Hindu Brother... Subba Row." There is no help like association with good books. Mr. Judge says that if he had a youth to train he would confine him to the reading of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Upanishads* and the *Secret Doctrine*, until he was able to make books for himself out of them and apply the principles found in them to every circumstance of life. He describes the benefit of reading the *Gita*, thus:

It will give them food for centuries if they read with spiritual eyes at all....In the night the ideas contained in it are digested and returned partly next day to the mind. It is the study of adepts. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 21)

~~However, now, Gita is part of the theosophical literature. Although~~
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it would be excellent to read holy books, Mr. Judge suggests that we may read the books that tend to elevate our consciousness.

In *Lucifer* for October 1887, H.P.B. draws attention to some interesting occult fiction, written during her time. She writes that the key-note for mystic and theosophical literature was Marion Crawford's "Mr. Isaacs," followed by his "Zoroaster." Then followed "The Romance of Two Worlds," by Marie Corelli; R. L. Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"; "The Fallen Idol" by Anstey; "King Solomon's Mines" and the thrice famous "She," by Rider Haggard; "Affinities" and "The Brothers of the Shadow," by Mrs. Campbell Praed; Edmond Downey's "House of Tears," and many others less noticeable. H.P.B. also mentions some works by theosophists and occultists, some of the works she describes as remarkable and others as positively scientific, which include, S.L. Macgregor Mather's "Kabbalah Unveiled," and Dr. Franz Hartmann's "Paracelsus," and "Magic, White and Black."

In the article, "The Tidal Wave," quoting the great English poet-philosopher, H.P.B. writes that "books are as prolific as the teeth of the fabulous dragon; sow them hither and thither and armed warriors will grow out of them." Writing in the Nineteenth century she says, "What the European world now needs is a dozen writers such as Dostoevsky, the Russian author...he spoke boldly and fearlessly the most unwelcome truths to the higher and *even to the official classes*." Thus, we are invited to read the literature that contributes to political and social refotin. We are invited to read good literature as it helps to develop *imaginative sympathy*. We may read Shakespeare and Aeschylus who are said to have been under Nirmanakayic influence. Then there are poems of Lord Tennyson, Percy Shelly, and others. It is up to us to find out suitable works from the modern writings, but most of all turn to ancient writers and old books and scriptures of various religions. Both, the *Gita* and *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* recommend *Swadhyaya* or self-study.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Archeologists, directed by Idaho State University archeologist Richard Hansen, have uncovered two massive carved stucco panels—26 feet long and 20 feet high, with images of monsters, gods, and swimming heroes—in the Mirador Basin of Guatemala's northern rain forest. The archeologists say that it is the earliest known representation of the Mayan creation Myth, and that it predates other such artifacts by a millennium. According to the researchers, the panels date to 300 B.C., and they formed sides of a channel that carried rainwater into a complex storage system, later used for drinking and agriculture. Archeologist Richard Hansen says that the carved images on the panel depict an important scene from the *Popol Vuh*, a text of the Mayan myth that was first recorded in the 16th century. Some historians dismissed *Popol Vuh* that contained ancient Mayan mythology, as a document contaminated by contemporary Spanish Catholic influences. The discovery of the panels enables one to extend the authenticity of creation myth back by another 1000 years, says Hansen. These panels, which contain part of the story where the Hero Twins swim through the underworld after retrieving the head of their father, the deity Hun Hunahpu, established key portions of a story as genuinely Mayan, writes Sam Kissinger. (*Discover*, June 2009)

In the article, "The Popol Vuh," appearing in *Theosophy* magazine, (Vol. 16, January 1928, p. 113), we are told that the *Popol Vuh* was composed by a native of Guatemala in the 17th century from traditions handed down by the priests of the Feathered-Serpent. "Feathered-Serpent" symbolizes the Great Teachers of Mexico and Central America. It was translated from the Quiche (a dialect of Maya) into Spanish by Francisco Ximenez. This work attracted the attention of the Abbe Brasseur de Bourbourg, who in turn translated it into French. *Popol* is the word for the assembly of the nobles and hence has sometimes been called *The Book of the Holy Assembly*, identical in title with one of the books of Kabbalah. In the introduction

of the original manuscript, however, the unknown author states that since the "Word of God" has been promulgated, hereafter during the cycle of Christianity, the Book of the Azure-green Veil is no longer to be seen, in which it could be clearly perceived that it had come from the further shore of the sea; which Book has been called, "The Record of Human Existence in the Overshadowing World, and How Man Saw Light and Life." It is divided into four parts, treating respectively of Creation, the Mysteries, Civilization, and the Priesthood. It introduces us at once to four creative gods, "sung and celebrated" under nine names, collectively called the Feathered-Serpent, making ten in all; and these are divided into two hosts, the solar and lunar, called twice great father of the sun and twice great mother of the moon.

H.P.B. points out that Mayas were coeval with Plato's Atlantis. Did they come from Atlantis? Some believe that Maya civilization did not develop on American soil, but that people came with a full blown culture, a mature art, architecture and religion, and a system of writing passing from the hieroglyphic into the phonetic stage. The cradle of the race seems to have been along the head waters of Usumacinta river and the Rio Grande in Guatemala and in that part of Chiapas which sloped down from the steep Cordilleras. One tradition refers both to an eastern and a western immigration; the eastern under Itzamna, whose people founded, among other cities, the famous Chi-chen Itza which preserves the memory of their rule. A curious reminder of the Atlantis is found in the statue of "Choc-Mool," the sandals upon whose feet are exact representations of those found on the feet of the Guanches of the Canary Islands. The western immigration was under the leadership of Quetzalcoatl, considered as both god and man, the first ruler of the Toltecs, and ruler in Maya centres as well. (*Theosophy*, Vol. 16, December 1927, p. 70)

America is not a Christian nation, though it is a nation founded

by Christians. However, recently, poll data showed that conceptually, at least, Americans are becoming more like Hindus and less like traditional Christians, in the ways they think about God, about each other and about eternity. Thus, for instance, *Rig-Veda*, the most ancient Hindu scripture says, "Truth is One, but the sages speak of it by many names." A Hindu believes that there are many paths to God and one can reach Him through Jesus, Quran or even by Yoga practice. None is better than any other; all are equal. A traditional conservative Christian is taught in the Sunday School that their religion is true and others are false, and that Jesus is the way, and no one comes to the Father, except through Jesus. Americans are no longer buying it. Pew Forum Survey of 2008 showed that Americans believe that many religions lead to eternal life. There are a growing number of Americans who seek spiritual truth outside church. Thirty per cent of Americans call themselves "spiritual and not religious." There is a gradual change seen in the beliefs pertaining to what happens after death. Christians believe that both body and soul are sacred and after death they are reunited in Resurrection. Hindus believe in immortality of soul but not the body. It is this soul which comes back to earth, again and again, in different bodies. According to 2008 Harris poll, 24 per cent of Americans believe in reincarnation, and more than third of the Americans now choose cremation, writes Lisa Miller. (*Newsweek*, August 24 and 31, 2009)

In the article, "The Future and the Theosophical Society," Mr. Judge wrote that though we can never hope to see the churches and the ministers rushing to join us, yet they may all gradually change. Taking stock, sixteen years after the launching of the Theosophical Movement in 1875, he pointed out that theosophical doctrines seem to have modified the thought of the day. "We do not claim to be the sole force that began the uprooting of dogmatism and priestcraft, but only that we have supplied the link, given words, stirred up thoughts of the very highest importance." His words are equally applicable to the change that is taking place today in the American attitude towards religion and spirituality. One of the points in Master's

program, as also, one of the purposes for launching the Theosophical Movement was to take the soul-satisfying philosophy of the Aryans to the West and to thus Aryanize the western mind. It is precisely the doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation, which provide the sure and logical basis for the practice of ethics. A Master of Wisdom wrote in a letter in 1884:

You can do immense good by helping to give the western nations a secure basis on which to reconstruct their crumbling faith. And what they need is the evidence that Asiatic psychology alone supplies. Give this and you will confer happiness of mind on thousands.

The Theosophical Society in its early days in America (1876) came into prominent notice by its support of the cremation of one of its members, Baron de Palm. This was the first cremation in U.S.A., under the auspices of American Theosophists. That ceremony was first scientific cremation in America, although there had been a few open-air burnings before the days of the white occupation. The article "Cremation in America" which appeared in *The Theosophist* in April 1880 described the event and the repercussions, thus:

Naturally, such a change as that from burying to burning must be a very gradual one. The public's reason is first to be convinced, then its unreasoning prejudice removed. The first bold step finds its imitators here and there, and then when the people find that nothing bad has happened to either themselves or the reformers, the change, if a good one, is adopted. This process is going on in the United States with respect to cremation.

Has India been able to stamp out Sati, almost 21 years after it brought in anti-Sati legislation? Why is Sati still a burning issue in India? Recently, a 60-year-old Sharbati bai attempted to commit sati, by burning herself on her husband's pyre, in Rajasthan's Sikar

district. However, she was prevented from doing so by the villagers and the police. After the case of Roop Kanwar who committed Sati in 1987, in Deorala in Rajasthan, the practice of Sati was legally banned. The sociologists who work in this area against Sati say that though cases of Sati have become rare, the myth remains and the glorification of the ideology continues for commercial reason. Kavita Srivastava, general secretary of People's Union for Civil Liberties, Rajasthan, who has been actively working to discourage the practice of Sati, says that most reported cases of Sati have taken place in the Shekhavati belt of Rajasthan or in Madhya Pradesh. In most of these areas the Sati is glorified, having Sati temples and conducting of *puja* (worship). Women's activists and legal experts are worried that the Sati may be revived for commercial reasons. India has at least 250 Sati temples. Some of these temples are as old as the custom itself, which is believed to have originated 700 years ago among the ruling warrior community of Rajasthan. Responding to Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts to ban Sati, in 1829, the first Governor-General of East India Company, Lord William Bentinck, declared Sati illegal in India. "Sometimes, the glorifications may be difficult to prove as the rituals are conducted in the name of individual pujas," says Srivastava. Almost two decades after the anti-Sati Act, there are discreet congregations at the Rani Sati Temple complex in Jhunjhunu, which is called the foundation of Sati, writes Divya A. (*Sunday Times of India*, August 16, 2009)

Some of the pernicious rituals have been introduced by distortion or interpolation of the Scriptures. The rite of *Sati* or widow-burning-prevalent even today in some parts of India—is where the widow burns herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. H.P.B. refutes the claim that the *drugged* widow dies quickly of suffocation before the fire reaches her body, as the pile is instantly inflamed by the *ghee* that is poured over it. The widows are never drugged, writes H.P.B., "her mind is free and clear....Firmly believing in the promise of the future life, her whole mind is absorbed in the contemplation of the approaching bliss—the beatitude of 'freedom' which she is—"