

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPLATION

FOR THE PRACTICE of *Raja-Yoga* or true Occultism perfect concentration of mind is imperative. It is impossible to take even first steps in practical occultism without achieving perfection in concentration. Though all true seekers desire perfect control of mind, many blunders are committed because allegorical statements in the ancient instructions are not properly understood. Thus, for instance, in the Sixth Chapter of the *Gita*, it is recommended that the person should sit in solitude for meditation. The seat must be in a clean place, neither too high, nor too low. The book goes on to instruct: “Keeping his body, head and neck firm and erect, with mind determined, and gaze directed to the tip of his nose,” he should meditate. Contemplation does not mean the act of gazing. It is quite possible that “gazing” or “staring” came to be associated with the word “contemplation,” because when one is deeply absorbed in thought, one *seems to be* staring or gazing at something in empty space. Thus, gazing is the effect of the act of contemplation, and not the cause which produces contemplation. When this instruction is followed literally, by keeping the eyes half-open and gazing at the tip of the nose, many have come to suffer physical discomfort, such as, headache, giddiness, exhaustion or tension, developing lethal passivity and becoming cross-eyed “in the worlds physical and metaphysical.”

In the article, “Contemplation,” Damodar Mavalankar cites an

example of a person who carried out the injunctions enjoined in the *Gita*, literally, only to discover that he was gradually losing self-control. Even though he discontinued his “contemplation,” he could never again regain his normal and healthy state of mind and body. In another case, after beginning the practice of contemplation, the person began to hear musical bells and seeing abnormal sights, without control. The real meaning of the word contemplation is “continued attention of the mind to a particular subject,” or “attention to sacred things.”

At a simple level, *Dharana* or concentration consists of selection of an idea and fixing the mind on it. Contemplation or *Dhyana* is to hold the mind, or continued attention to that idea and expansion of the idea. When we decide to contemplate on the idea of “Brotherhood,” in expanding the idea, we find ourselves going at a tangent, and losing the main thread. Thus, Brotherhood may remind us of H.P.B. and that in turn of Russia, and that of the Airplane, and that of our last visit abroad, and in no time we are completely at a tangent.

Buddhism has an analogous concept of “awareness” or “mindfulness.” Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, graphically brings out our inattentiveness in performing daily tasks. Suppose we are writing a letter, and just then the telephone rings. After lengthy conversation with our friend, we are thirsty, so we go to the kitchen, drink water, and put the kettle on for a cup of tea. Just then we hear a nice song being played on our neighbour’s radio. We go to the room and switch on the radio, and listen to the song. We listen to one song after the other, unmindful of the unfinished letter and the boiling kettle, and just then the doorbell rings, and we find that a friend has called to see us. We sit and talk to him and offer him a cup of tea. When we enter the kitchen we see the boiling, or even burnt kettle, and *then* we are reminded that we were to make tea for ourselves, and *then* we are reminded of the unfinished letter! To succeed in concentration and contemplation we need to be aware of our thoughts, feelings and actions during our waking life.

Damodar Mavalankar draws our attention to the scientific process delineated in the article, the “Elixir of Life,” which when understood correctly gives a clue to the esoteric meaning of meditation and contemplation. Though the discipline suggested in the article discusses occult methods for prolonging life period beyond the common, some part of the discipline also seems to be applicable to attain to contemplation. The essence of the discipline to attain to true contemplation requires that “physical, mental, moral and spiritual” development must run on parallel lines. “The physical man must be rendered more ethereal and sensitive; the mental man more penetrating and profound; the moral man more self-denying and philosophical.” (*Five Years of Theosophy*, p. 17)

One of the premises in this discipline is to remember that what we call man is a “compound being,” not only because he is made up of congeries of lives or material units, but also because he is made up of seven forms or seven parts which are interblended with each other. Each of the ethereal or finer bodies lies in the inter-atomic space of the next grosser form. The atoms of the ethereal body interpenetrate the atoms of the gross body, and hence, for instance, we say that the astral body interpenetrates the physical like fibres of the mango in the mango pulp.

Science tells us that in seven years all the atoms of the body are replaced by new atoms. In other words, man changes his physical body continually, but the change is gradual and imperceptible. The *inner astral man* is also constantly developing, wherein old atoms are replaced by new ones. “The attraction of these new sets of atoms depend upon the Law of Affinity—the desires of the man drawing to their bodily tenement only such particles as are *en rapport* with them or rather giving them their tendency and colouring.” The iron will to become perfect must be operating continually in the aspirant, without a single moment’s relaxation. When contemplation is not practiced, we do not exert the iron Will. But even then the atoms are attracted and emitted. At that time, instinctive as well as other desires must be controlled, so that only those atoms are attracted which are

conducive to progress. Thus, in the hours when one is not contemplating, “the inner man requires unremitting watch, so that no conscious or unconscious thought may attract atoms unsuited to its progress.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 12*, p. 4)

As a person abstains from the gratification of his base physical desires, a time will come, after a certain period, when all those particles which were given lower impulse due to indulgence in vices, will have departed. Since the base desires are abstained from, the particles of the physical body are gradually refined, and following the law of consubstantiality, the new particles attracted to the body, which replace the old particles, will not have in them the tendency to repeat the said acts. When a person abstains from entertaining “gross” thoughts, feelings and actions, he will tend to diminish relative density and coherence of outer shell or physical body. It appears that gross body is sustained by gross thoughts and actions, as also, gross food. The diminishing of the actual number of particles or molecules forming the gross body is compensated by the increased admission of more ethereal particles. Thus, the quantity of particles lost by the gross body is compensated by the increase in particles of ethereal body.

For the purpose of purification, what are the physical desires to be abandoned and in what order? First and foremost, the person must give up alcohol in all forms. Consumption of alcohol causes the rush of life energy, which in turn causes stress, which can be sustained by very dull, gross and dense elements of the body. As a result, from the surrounding atmosphere, gross particles are attracted to the physical frame, which thwarts the purpose of etherealizing of the body. Likewise, meat-eating can give rise to violent passion and energy of action, which tend to make the body “gross.” Sexual desire tends to deplete the vital energy that is dissipated through diverse channels. This again tends to attract gross particles to the body, because pleasurable physical sensations are possible only through gross physical body.

The austerities such as standing on one leg, concentrating on the

navel, etc. can make the Will strong. But to get rid of the inward desire is the essential thing. It is no use fasting, *as long as you require food*. Instead of fasting, the first step suggested is to simplify the quality of food—fruit and milk is considered to be the best. Then, very gradually, the body must be trained to consume less and less quantity of food.

It is comparatively easy to perform bodily mortifications by denying your body the comforts of food and clothes. In the olden days, we might have examples of high caste people, who would rather starve than accept food from the low caste people. This shows control over the bodily wants, but the sense of pride and the sense of separateness have remained intact. As William Law puts it,

We may learn the reason why many people not only lose the benefit, but are even the worse for all their mortifications....They practise them for their own sakes, as things good in themselves; they think them to be real parts of holiness, and so rest in them and look no further, but grow full of self-esteem and self-admiration for their own progress in them. This makes them self-sufficient, morose, severe judges of all those that fall short of their mortifications. (*The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 130)

H.P.B. hints at the true mortification, when she says that the duty of a theosophist is to put into practice the loftiest moral ideas and to drink without a murmur up to its last bitter dregs whatever the cup of life may hold for him. Occasions for practising mortification come in our day to day living. We don't have to starve ourselves, but we should be able to do without food when the occasion arises. We should not get irritated or angry if the food has a little more or less salt. We should not be disappointed if things don't go the way we wanted, or when others don't live up to our expectations. Mortification is thus, more a matter of mind than of the body.

There must be elimination of other base tendencies such as, fear, avarice, pride, envy, uncharitableness, ambition and curiosity. Normally, our astral body is inextricably interwoven with the

physical body, cell for cell and fibre for fibre, like the fibres of a mango in the pulp. Every unwholesome emotion has an impact on the astral body and prevents it from becoming coherent. For instance, while the astral body is developing into coherent body, if one gives vent to anger, then there is violent shaking and pulling apart of the coherent particles of astral. Likewise, fear tends to shrivel up, coagulate and contract the body. So long as there is envy, the astral form takes on cloudy appearance, instead of being pure and clear, and attracts to itself malevolent beings (elementals), which in turn tend to wake up in the aspirant every evil passion, writes Mr. Judge.

In *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 7*, we are shown how we can purify our desires, step by step, beginning with killing out the desire for the material possessions. The second step is to overcome subtler desires, such as, those for power, knowledge, love, happiness or fame. How to achieve this? The answer is, “Life itself teaches these lessons,” because even when we get what we want, we are likely to lose it, *or* it may not be what we had expected it to be, *or* it loses its charm once we have obtained it. Thus, our life experiences show that it all turns to dust and ashes in mouth. Gradually, after many such experiences, we begin to intuitively perceive that satisfaction is attainable only in the infinite, so that at last, we begin to use our “Will” to centre all our desires on the Eternal. “Desire only that which is within you... which is beyond you... which is unattainable,” says *Light on the Path*.

The article, “Contemplation,” speaks of being “in” the world, but not “of” the world. The first requisite is to acquire the purity of thought, word and deed, and to cultivate the feeling of unselfish philanthropy, because only that can help us to cultivate Universal Love and overcome the illusion or Maya. “To have the highest ideal placed before oneself and strive incessantly to rise up to it, is the only true concentration recognized by Esoteric philosophy.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 12*, p. 6)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“FUN”—AND HAPPINESS

“I HAD been going to ask you to help me, dear, this afternoon, but I guess I can manage without you. Go on your picnic and have a good time!”

“Oh, I am so glad you’ll let me go Mother! It will be such fun!”

Thirteen-year-old Sharada ran gaily to the next compound to tell her young cousins that she could go with them on their picnic. As she opened the gate to go home for a wrap, she met Lakshmi, whom they all liked, coming in. She also had been invited for the outing, but was coming to say she could not go.

“Won’t your mother let you come?” demanded Mohini, adding without waiting for the answer, “I think it’s too bad! Ask her again and tell her we all want you!”

“No, no,” Lakshmi hastened to explain. “Mother would have let me go, I know, but I didn’t ask her because when I came in I saw she was too busy. She was getting ready to make pickles this afternoon, thinking I’d be home because it’s Saturday; and I knew she would need me to look after the twins and perhaps to help her too. I would have liked to go, very much, any other day.”

“I’ll go and ask her,” impulsive Sharada exclaimed and she had almost reached the gate when Lakshmi overtook her. “Young people need fun!” Sharada protested; but Lakshmi succeeded in persuading her to turn back. Sharada went back to the others reluctantly and Lakshmi, with a smile and a gay wave of her hand to Sharada and the others, ran down the street towards home.

It was a busy afternoon for Lakshmi but one full of quiet happiness. She helped prepare the ingredients for pickling, enlisting the eager if rather awkward assistance of her small sisters, who felt important to be helping; relieved her mother at stirring the pot and adding fuel to the fire; and between-whiles played out-of-doors with the youngsters. The time flew and she could scarcely believe that it was nearly time for the sun to set when the picnickers came past,

looking tired and truth to tell, a little out of sorts, responding rather listlessly to Lakshmi's gaily shouted greeting.

"Did you have a good time, Sharada?" she asked her friend when she strolled over to see her, when it was nearly dusk.

"It was not much fun," Sharada admitted. "Maybe we were all trying too hard to be happy. Fun gets tiresome if you have too much of it. And I kept thinking, too, how hard my mother must be working without me. I really did not enjoy myself at all. And when I got home I found that Jayashree, who wasn't asked because she was too little, had been helping mother nicely and they had a little picnic of their own out in the garden and such a happy time!"

"Why that's funny. I was happy too!" Lakshmi exclaimed, as if she had not thought of it before. "I was too busy to ask myself if I was happy, but now I see I really did enjoy every minute of the afternoon."

"I wonder why you did and I didn't," Sharada said slowly. "Could it be that people can't catch happiness when they try, and then find it perched like a bird on their shoulder when they aren't looking for it?"

"I couldn't answer that one," said Lakshmi laughingly. That evening Sharada put the question to her mother.

"Could it be because Lakshmi and Jayashree were doing what they thought was right, and I was only thinking of having fun?"

"What do you think, Sharada?"

"I think that must be the answer, Mother, but, if you knew it, why didn't you tell me not to go?"

For one thing, dear, I was remembering that Mr. Judge had said that even if one could value attractions at their own worth he was not called upon to blight other people's enjoyments. He said, too: "Their time will come, as yours has, so hasten it for them if you can, by making life brighter, more joyous, better." But if I had told you not to go would you have learned the lesson that you say you have learned?"

"N-o," she answered honestly. "I guess I would have been so

sorry that I was not allowed to go when I wanted to, that I shouldn't have enjoyed myself at all at home! Anyway, I have learned that if I want to be happy, I have to do my duty and to be helpful."

"That is only half the lesson, dear. Would you like to hear what H.P.B. said about that, Sharada?"

Oh yes, please, Mother!"

"Her mother took down from the shelf her well-worn copy of *The Key to Theosophy*, and read: "The object of doing our duties to all men and to ourselves the last, is not the attainment of personal happiness, but of the happiness of others; the fulfilment of right for the sake of right, not for what it may bring us. Happiness, or rather contentment, may indeed follow the performance of duty, but is not and must not be the motive for it."

"Does it mean that we have to forget about being happy ourselves and only do what we think is right and help other people?"

"That's the way I understand it, dear."

"Well, it seems to me that is just the way you act all the time, Mother. And you seem happy too. Then I guess I was partly right, wasn't I, when I told Lakshmi that perhaps people couldn't catch happiness when they tried to? It would fly away like a bird. But perhaps when they weren't looking for it they might find it perched on their shoulder!"

"That is one way of putting it, I think."

"Well, it isn't going to be easy Mother, but honestly, I'll try!"

We mistake pleasures for happiness. Anything that pleases our senses, mind and heart gives us happiness. If we want lasting happiness we must be prepared to surrender pleasures of smaller worth (*preyas*) for the sake of pleasures of the greater worth (*shreyas*). True happiness results when even for a few moments we forget ourselves, because at that point we are able to establish contact with our higher nature—the God within. We sometimes experience

this bliss when we become successful in meditation. We also experience this happiness when we forget ourselves in helping someone or in doing good works without any self-interest. Nothing earthly can give us this peace and joy. So long as we are searching for happiness, we are bound to be unhappy. But when we cease to make happiness our goal, we have it as a kind of byproduct.

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STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

CRAVING—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Tanhavaggo* or “Craving.” The Note on the title of the chapter tells us that *Tanha* means Craving. It is regarded as the origin of suffering and its extinction should be the aim of man. Of the four Noble Truths, the second and the third refer to the existence, origin and continuity of craving. *Tanha* is “the will to live, the fear of death, and love for life; that force or energy which causes rebirth.” Nyanatiloka’s *Buddhist Dictionary* gives them as (1) *Kama-tanha*, desire for sensual existence, (2) *Rupatanha*, desire for fine-material existence and (3) *Arupa-tanha*, desire for immaterial existence. Hence the injunction in *The Voice of the Silence*: “Kill love of life; but if thou slayest *Tanha*, let this not be for thirst of life eternal, but to replace the fleeting by the everlasting.” *Tanha* is a vast field and is related to *Karma*, *Skandhas* and *Nidanas*. In *Light of Asia*, speaking about the “Cause of Sorrow” we are told:

What grief springs of itself and springs not of Desire?
Senses and things perceived mingle and light
Passion’s quick spark of fire:
So flameth Trishna, lust and thirst of things.

The doctrine of Conditioned Co-production says that if a thing exists or an event occurs, it is dependant upon some precedent cause or event. The chain of causes begins with ignorance and leads to Karma-formation. This ultimately gives birth to *Nama-Rupa* or the personality. And the body, with its six organs of cognition, *i.e.*, five senses and the mind leads to sense-experience due to contact (*sparsa*) of sense-organs with objects of senses. From *sparsa* arises pleasant or unpleasant feeling (*Vedana*). Depending upon *Vedana* arises desire or thirst (*Trishna*) for the pleasant sensation, and that in turn leads to our clinging (*Upadana*) and grasping or attachment to the objects of the world and creates in us the desire to be born (*Bhava*). We are asked to break the link between *sensation* and *craving* in

order to become free from the necessity of rebirth. This can happen if we experience the sensation but do not allow craving to arise. In this chapter we are shown various ways in which we form bondage that leads to rebirth.

1. *The craving of a thoughtless man grows like the Maluva creeper that eats up the tree on which it fastens. From life to life he is like a monkey seeking fruits in a forest. (334)*

In the vegetable kingdom, we come across a variety of parasitic creepers which fasten themselves upon the host tree and depend upon that tree for its existence and sustenance. They are called parasitic because they obtain their sustenance without making a useful return. Buddha uses the simile of the *Maluva* creeper—a parasitic creeper—to explain what the creeper of passion can do to us. The fast-growing *Maluva* creeper may lead to stunted growth and even death of the giant *Sala* tree on which it lives. However, when *Maluva* seeds sprout and put forth a soft downy shoot which winds around the *Sala* tree, the tree sees no harm and even thinks that “the touch of this *Maluva* creeper is pleasant.” It is only later, when the creeper has grown all around it, made a canopy over it, broken its branches, and begun to kill the *Sala* tree, does it realize the real danger and pain. The Buddha warns that although sense pleasures may give immediate satisfaction, they can cause problems later. He asks us to be careful that *Maluva* creeper of sensual pleasure does not get hold of us.

2. *Whosoever is overcome by the fierce and poisonous craving finds his sorrow increase like the abounding Birana grass. (335)*

3. *But whoso overcomes in this world the fierce craving difficult to subdue finds his sorrows fall off like water-drops from a lotus leaf. (336)*

4. *This I say unto you all who have gathered here—Be blessed! Dig up the root of Craving as one in search of the*

sweet-scented *ushira* root digs up *birana* grass. Thus *Mara* will not destroy you even as the stream destroys the reeds on the banks. (337)

5. *As a tree though hewn down grows again when its root is firm and uninjured, even so if the root of craving is not destroyed the pains of life grow again and again. (338)*

Fierce and poisonous craving is the desire gone out of control. Such a passion eventually destroys the person, as the *Maluva* creeper destroys the *Sala* tree. Sorrows of such a person increase like the abounding *Birana* grass. The *Gita* says: “He who attendeth to the inclinations of the senses, in them hath a concern; from this concern is created passion, from passion anger, from anger is produced delusion, from delusion a loss of the memory, from the loss of memory loss of discrimination, and from loss of discrimination loss of all!” Hence, the only effective control measure calls for “complete removal” of the parasitic plant from the host, or removal of weeds and grass, such as *Birana* grass, which would obstruct the healthy growth of useful tree such as *Sala* tree or a plant such as *Ushira* plant. Similarly, in order to avoid complete destruction, we must strive to get rid of the fierce craving by uprooting it through practice of detachment. When detachment is complete, sorrows fall off like water drops from a lotus leaf.

A Bhikkhu is told: “Cut down the whole forest of desire, not single trees; danger lurks in that forest. Having cut down trees and uprooted the weeds of desire you are free.” By self-examination and introspection, the disciple is expected to become aware of his lower and personal desires, and to strive to uproot them as one would uproot *Birana* grass. Half measures will not do. If we recognize our desires to be bad, yet choose to repress them, they will remain in our heart like smouldering fire under a thin layer of ash. A small whiff of temptation will set them ablaze once more and undo the discipline of a long time. Therefore, a tree has to be uprooted and not simply hewn down, leaving the roots intact, which may grow again. Fragrant *Ushira* plant is considered to be one of the important

medicinal herbs in India since ancient times. It is one of the best refrigerant herbs which cools and calms the entire body and mind.

6. *The man in whom thirty-six streams run on towards pleasures, with his thoughts fixed in passion, is himself carried away. He has wrong views. (339)*

Thirty-six streams are the six organs of sense and the six objects of sense in relation to a desire for sensual pleasures (*kama tanha*), a desire for becoming this and that (*bhava tanha*), and a desire to get rid of or annihilation of what one considers as unpleasant (*vibhava tanha*). Six senses are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Six objects of sense are form (of visual object), sound, smell, taste, touch (bodily impressions) and mind objects (mental objects or thought). There is *kama-tanha* that pertains to six organs of senses and six objects of senses; there is *bhava tanha* that pertains to six organs of senses and six objects of senses; and *vibhava tanha* that pertains to six organs of senses and six objects of senses—twelve each, making total of thirty six streams of desire.

Kama-tanha is craving for sense pleasures and seeking things that please our senses. When we taste something delicious, a desire arises for more. When we listen to a beautiful piece of music, a desire arises for more. We seek to intensify our pleasures through repetition. However, we realize that the second or third time the pleasure is not quite the same, but we persist. “When a man drinks his first cup of pleasure, his soul is filled with the unutterable joy that comes with a first, a fresh sensation. The drop of poison that he puts into the second cup, and which, if he persists in that folly, has to become doubled and trebled till at last the whole cup is poison,” says *Through the Gates of Gold*. When we experience the law of diminishing returns in one kind of sense pleasure, we seek to vivify it through endless varieties and variations. Desire grows on what it feeds and instead of going away, our desires get intensified.

Bhava-tanha is a desire “to become something” which gives us happiness. We may want to become rich, powerful, famous,

beautiful, peaceful, calm, pleasant and even loving. Thus, these desires are not necessarily bad or selfish. But, in pursuing them, we are caught up in pleasures of different kind. This is beautifully summarized in *Through the Gates of Gold* thus:

It is as easy to become a gourmand in pure living and high thinking as in the pleasures of taste or sight or sound. Gratification is the aim of the virtuous man as well as of the drunkard; even if his life be a miracle of abstinence and self-sacrifice, a moment’s thought shows that in pursuing this apparently heroic path he does but pursue pleasure. With him pleasure takes on a lovely form because his gratifications are those of a sweet savour, and it pleases him to give gladness to others rather than to enjoy himself at their expense. But the pure life and high thoughts are no more finalities in themselves than any other mode of enjoyment; and the man who endeavours to find contentment in them must intensify his effort and continually repeat it—all in vain. (pp. 33-34)

Vibhava-tanha is a desire “to get rid of” something. We want to get rid of our suffering in order to become happy. Thus, “becoming” and “getting rid of” are closely related. We may want to get rid of our sickness, anger, greed, envy, hatred. We want to get rid of poverty, pollution, noisy surrounding, traffic jams, corruption and so many things that make our life difficult. We live in the grip of these desires from life to life.

The spiritually wise is equal-minded, and beyond these three types of desires. Thus:

He who tastes it and who will not drink unless it is in the cup finds life enlarge and the world grow great before his eager eyes. He recognizes the soul within the woman he loves, and passion becomes peace; he sees within his thought the finer qualities of spiritual truth, which is beyond the action of our mental machinery, and then instead of entering on the treadmill of intellectualisms he rests on the broad

back of the eagle of intuition and soars into the fine air where the great poets found their insight; he sees within his own power of sensation, of pleasure, in fresh air and sunshine, in food and wine, in motion and rest, the possibilities of the subtle man, the thing which dies not either with the body or the brain. (*Through the Gates of Gold*, pp. 23-24)

In Buddhism, *Bhava-Tanha* is a desire which has at its roots a wrong view of the permanence of the soul (*sassata ditthi*—wrong view of eternalism). Believing that the soul within is permanent and enduring, one takes delight in sense pleasures of this life and desires similar enjoyments in future life. One wishes to enjoy a happy and prosperous life now and in future, by being born in favourable conditions here and hereafter. Through their craving, they create conditions or *Karma* or mental deposits which lead them to rebirth, again and again.

On the other hand, *Vibhava-tanha* is said to be accompanied by the wrong view of non-existence (*uccheda ditthi*) which holds that nothing remains after death; there is complete annihilation. This is the doctrine preached by Ajita, the leader of a sect during Buddha's time. Like *Charvaks* of India, they consider death to be the end. Therefore, instead of wasting time in doing good works for future existence, one must enjoy life to its fullest extent is the reasoning offered by those who believe in the impermanence of the living self (*atta* or *Atma*). Even in their case, the pursuit of pleasures creates conditioning or mental deposits which leads to rebirth.

Only the correct understanding of true nature of self can result in the right kind of detachment that frees a man from the necessity of rebirth. Such a person lives in the world but is not of the world. The life of King Janaka is an example for us to emulate.

(*To be continued*)

ALLEVIATION OF POVERTY

A LARGE number of people suffer from want of basic necessities of life all over the world. Hunger, homelessness, malnutrition, destitution and disease stalk hundreds of millions of people. No country is free from the scourge of poverty. A world Bank report of 2008 estimated that over one billion people are in absolute poverty, of whom about four hundred millions live in India alone. Even countries which are considered to be advanced are not free from the problem of poverty. The report says that in the United States one in every five children lives in poverty. Poverty alleviation is one of the major programs in the national agenda of every nation, and international efforts are being made towards that end through the United Nations Organizations. Numerous philanthropic individuals and organizations are seen making commendable efforts in the alleviation of poverty, disease and destitution of the less fortunate sections of society, and they have to their credit stories of significant successes in poverty reduction. Despite many such successful programs which have brought relief to significant number of poor people, the spectre of poverty continues to haunt hundreds of millions of others, and their numbers seem to be growing no less.

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, updated in January 2013, reports that despite progress achieved since the endorsement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by world leaders at the U.N. in September 2000, human poverty still remains widespread in certain parts of the world. It says that though the number of the extremely poor has dropped by 650 millions in the last three decades through concerted international efforts, still over a billion people live in extreme poverty in the midst of globalized progress and development. The UNDP report makes a significant observation as to the cause of hunger and poverty haunting such a large human population:

Economic growth will not produce jobs and cut poverty unless it is inclusive and equitable, and unless the needs of

the poor and the marginalized are at the centre of development priorities. When men and women have equal opportunities and freedom, economic growth accelerates and poverty declines more rapidly. UNDP thus works with developing countries to integrate the standards and principles of human rights such as non-discrimination, participation and accountability in design and implementation of development policies and programs.

Schemes of social development which have not at their heart equity, justice and compassion, which while seeming to benefit a few privileged sections of people, giving thereby a deceptive appearance of progress, cannot but result in deprivation of a large weaker and vulnerable sections of society and drive them into arms of poverty and misery. As pointed out in the UNDP report, poverty is not merely inadequate income; it is a deprivation of access to basic needs of life, to knowledge, health, dignity, human rights, and lack of voice and of democratic participation; and that unless social and cultural causes which produce these social evils are addressed, and made the central theme of social amelioration, through a change of mind and heart, all efforts at poverty reduction will not only be fruitless, but might even be aggravated, as is glaringly evident in the contemporary world today.

The social, cultural and economic causes which generate social inequality and injustice, and which, need to be addressed for harmonious and equitable social development, are, unfortunately, not fully understood, and, as such, not correctly addressed, says the UNDP report. The causes it mentions are indeed not the root cause but the effects of a still deeper moral cause, which is produced by human action in violation of the principle of human solidarity, and the law of human interdependence and Karma. It is precisely the lack of understanding of this vital moral law which brings about all the social evils that baffle social activists and philanthropists. Modern social and economic theories and practices, blind as they are to these moral principles, themselves, through their very programs of so-

called development they plan and implement, generate the social inequalities and injustices.

While it is true that the good and evil experiences, pains and sorrows that individuals face in life are the direct outcome of individual Karma—the just outcome of one's own actions in the present or in some prior life—yet, great suffering that befalls masses of people through deprivation, hunger and retarded development of mind and spirit are not exactly due to the individual Karma of individual units of the unfortunate sections of the population. It is due to the working of what is called the collective Karma. H.P.B. explains that Karma of individuals is inseparably bound up with the collective Karma of mankind as a whole, such that action of one reacts for good or evil on the whole, and the condition of the whole, in turn, affects each individual. In this we see the scientific basis of the ethical law that each individual is responsible for the condition of the whole, and that individual well-being is unthinkable apart from the well-being of the whole, for which each individual is duty-bound to strive and labour. She says:

Do you not perceive that the aggregate of individual Karma becomes that of the nation to which those individuals belong, and further the sum total of National Karma is that of the World? The evils you speak of are not peculiar to the individual or even to the Nation, they are more or less universal; and it is on this broad line of Human interdependence that the law of Karma finds its legitimate and equitable issue. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 200)

Moral, mental and physical effects of every action of every individual is not confined to the individual alone but affects the whole of mankind, just as a pebble thrown in a still pond sets up ripples which spread and cause disturbance throughout the pond. It is called Distributive Karma. By hurting or wronging one man, for example, we hurt not only one individual but the whole humanity. The one and only remedy for it lies in the realization that weal or woe of individuals is indissolubly bound up with that of the Nation

and of mankind, and that only when each individual lives and labours for the good of all that the awful spectre of collective suffering and misery abates, and in that alone, the individual finds his own true happiness and fulfilment, by reaction.

It is held as a truth among Theosophists that the interdependence of Humanity is the cause of Distributive Karma, and it is this law which affords solution to the great question of collective suffering and its relief. It is an occult law, moreover, that no man can rise superior to his individual failings, without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part. In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of sin, alone. In reality, there is no such thing as "Separateness"; and nearest approach to that selfish state, which the laws of life permit, is in intent or motive. (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 200-201)

General ignorance of this vital law of our being, which, therefore, forms no part of social ethics at the present time in the world, is the cause of the terrible social inequality and injustice prevalent in every society, despite the many concerted philanthropic efforts made, and huge amounts of money spent by many agencies towards social emancipation. If it were merely physical deprivation of the poor the gravity of the problem would be much less; but it is otherwise; stunted or arrested mental and spiritual development of weaker and poorer sections of society, besides material wants, directly results from the neglect of social duty on the part of the more fortunate sections of society. It is "moral ingulfment," as pointed out by the Teacher, which is "a thousand times...more permanently evil than the like physical catastrophe." (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 203)

If instead of selfishness and careless indifference which rules in the lives of the well-to-do sections of society generally, justice, kindness and love were the ruling sentiment, coupled with an awakened moral responsibility and concern for the weaker and poorer classes, there would then be no cause for creation of such awful spectre of human degradation. "It is the rich who have to be

regenerated, if we would do good to the poor; for it is in the former that lies the root of evil of which the "disinherited" classes are but the too luxuriant growth. This may seem paradoxical, yet it is true, as may be shown....It is the head that has to guide the feet, and the latter are to be hardly held responsible for their actions. Work, therefore, to bring about the moral regeneration of the cultured but far more immoral classes before you attempt to do the same for our ignorant younger Brethren." (*She Being Dead Yet Speaketh*, pp. 20-21)

The root of evil lies in moral and not physical cause. What is needed, therefore, is a wide diffusion of the knowledge of the reality of the essential oneness of humanity and of the law of reciprocal human interdependence, by which individuals, especially the educated and cultured classes of society, realize their moral obligation and duty for the general good of all, and contribute towards it in money, labour and example of deeds of love and altruism of their own lives. It is by this means alone, points out the Teacher, that the balance of National Karma can be struck, and social justice, equity and true progress of all is ensured.

Such is the moral responsibility of each individual man and woman; action of each has marked effect on the destiny of the nation to which one belongs and that of the mankind as a whole. Therefore, it is not "Ownership," which is the pillar of the modern political economy, which creates and perpetuates iniquitous society, but the philosophy and practice of the ethic of Trusteeship, which is the foundation and the moving spirit of the lives of men of wisdom and nobility, which transforms the society into a just and a humane one.

Theosophists who realize and are inspired by these truths have, therefore, cast on them by Karma onerous responsibility to live the higher life with a view to inculcate, by the example of their own lives, the higher and nobler conceptions of public and private duties, which lie at the root of all spiritual and material improvement of society as a whole.

THE ADEPTS IN THE BIBLE

NOAH

THE UNIVERSAL tradition points to the existence of spiritually advanced beings, possessing great knowledge and powers. Their existence is readily believed in by the simple, illiterate men and women of the East, while the educated and the progressed, especially of the West, tend to brush it aside as the evidence of the gullibility of men. Theosophy affirms that there exists a Fraternity of Perfected Beings. Periodically, they come to mankind as Teachers and Saviours, in the garb of Divine Kings or Holy Mendicants, to impress upon human minds the same sublime truths. The literature of the Orient, especially of India, is full of the accounts of these Great Beings, variously known as *rishis*, sages, Adepts, Initiates and Mahatmas. Of these great beings, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Solomon and Jesus are only examples, mentioned in the Bible.

The first six books of the *Old Testament* narrate how the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. The following seven books continue their story in the Promised Land, and include the messages of the prophets. The last eleven books contain poetry, theology, and some additional historical works. *Pentateuch* comprises the first five books of the *Old Testament*, viz., *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. They contain narratives combined with rules and instructions.

The Theosophical Glossary points out that the Hebrews call the *Talmud*, unwritten or oral law, while they call the *Pentateuch* the written law. Both were received simultaneously by Moses on Mount Sinai from Jehovah, *who wrote the one and delivered the other orally*. In the Proem to *The Secret Doctrine* (pp. 10-11) H.P.B. mentions that the Indian, the Mazdean and the Egyptian are the oldest religions of the world, followed by the Chaldean, which is the outcome of the former three, and which is entirely lost to the world now. The Chaldean is followed by the Jewish religion, the esoteric aspect of which is to be found in the Kabala, based on Babylonian Magism,

while exoterically, as found in *Genesis* and the *Pentateuch*, it is a collection of allegorical legends. “Read by the light of the Zohar, the initial four chapters of *Genesis* are the fragment of a highly philosophical page in the World’s Cosmogony,” writes H.P.B.

The first, second and third chapters of *Genesis* are disfigured imitations of other cosmogonies. The fourth chapter, beginning at the sixteenth verse, up to the end of the fifth chapter give purely historical facts, which have never been correctly interpreted. They are taken, word for word, from the secret *Book of Numbers*, of the Great Oriental *Kabala*. Every woman mentioned in these accounts represents land or city; every man represents a race, a branch, or a subdivision of a race. (*Isis*, I, 579)

The *traditional* origin of the Kabala closely resembles the opening sentences of the fourth discourse of *The Bhagavad-Gita*. According to the account, the Kabala is divine Wisdom which was first taught by God to a company of angels. Adam caught glimpses of these truths and passed his vision on to Noah. Noah communicated it unto Abraham, who in turn taught it to the Egyptians. Moses gained his knowledge in Egypt and passed it on to his seventy elders. From them the Kabala was transmitted orally until the year A.D. 80, when some of the teachings were committed to writing. At this point tradition stops and actual history begins. And from that history we can complete Krishna’s sentence and say: “In the course of time the mighty art was lost.” If we leave aside the traditional view, then the *actual* origin of Kabala could be traced back to the beginning of the Fifth Race, about one million years ago, when the knowledge accumulated by thousands of generation of initiated Adepts was recorded in written form using secret sacerdotal *Senzar* language. It is said that the unwritten or orally transmitted Kaballah was transmitted by the Chaldees or Magi or Aryan Adepts who first settled in Babylonia, thousands of years before the Jews. Abraham obtained his knowledge of Kaballah from the Chaldees, when he lived in the city of Ur. Moses acquired his knowledge in Egypt. The first person to be initiated by Moses was his elder brother Aron.

(*Theosophy*, August 1937)

Noah appears in the book of *Genesis* as the son of Lamech and he is represented as the Patriarch, who is chosen by God to perpetuate the human race. When God decided to destroy the earth, upset by the wickedness and violence of mankind, Noah, being a person of blameless piety, gets divine warning of impending disaster. God asks him to build an ark and carry in it male and female specimen of every species on earth.

In Chaldea, Xisuthrus is the last of the ten kings of the dynasty of the divine kings. God Hea foretells of the coming deluge to Xisuthrus commanding him to prepare a vessel and save himself with a few elect. *The Theosophical Glossary* mentions that “the story of Xisuthrus, now deciphered from the Assyrian tablets, corroborates that which was said of the Chaldean deluge by Berosus, Apollodorus, Abydenus, etc., etc. (See eleventh tablet in G. Smith’s *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, page 263, *et seq.*). This tablet covers every point treated of in chapters six and seven of *Genesis*—the gods, the sins of men, the command to build an ark, the Flood, the destruction of men, the dove and the raven sent out of the ark, and finally the Mount of Salvation in Armenia (Nizir-Ararat); all is there.”

Some of the myths concerning floods and deluges seem to refer to sinking of the Third and the Fourth Continents. According to the story in the “Mahabharata,” while Vaivaswata Manu was engaged in devotion on the riverbank, a fish appears and pleads to be saved from a bigger fish. He saves and places it in a jar, where growing larger and larger, he tells him of the forthcoming deluge. H.P.B. points out that it is the well-known “Matsya Avatar,” the first Avatar of Vishnu and many other things besides. Vishnu orders a ship to be built, in which Manu is said to be saved along with the seven Rishis. H.P.B. explains that the seven Rishis stand for *seven Races*, the seven principles and various other things. In one sense it refers to the Atlantean flood and Vaivaswata, the great sage on Earth, who saved our Fifth Root-race from being destroyed along with the remnants of the Fourth or Atlantean Race (*S.D.*, I, 139-40). But

Vaivaswata Manu is also shown as saving mankind or the portion of it (that would constitute the Fourth Race), when the Third Continent, Lemuria, perished 700,000 years before the commencement of Tertiary (Eocene) age, by Deluge (*S.D.*, II, 313). Thus, Chaldean Xisuthrus and Hindu Vaivaswata are comparable with the Jewish Noah of the Bible. Noah symbolizes both the *Root-Manu* and the *Seed-Manu*, or the Power which developed the planetary chain, and our earth, and the *Seed Race* (the fifth) which was saved while the last sub-races of the Fourth perished,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, II, 597)

There is the passage in *Genesis* which mentions Noah’s planting of vineyard and also getting drunk on wine. H.P.B. explains that Noah is Chaldean *Nuah*, floating on the waters, in his ark, where the ark is the emblem of the *argha* or moon, the feminine principle, while Noah is the “spirit” falling into matter. As soon as he descended on earth, he planted a vineyard, and drinking the wine, got drunk, *i.e.*, pure spirit getting intoxicated as soon as it is imprisoned in matter. The Seventh Chapter of the *Genesis* is but another version of the first. In the first chapter, we have: “...and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit (of God) moved upon the face of the waters,” while in the seventh chapter it is said, “...and the waters prevailed...and the ark (with Noah—the spirit) upon the face of waters.” In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. mentions that Hermas says of “God” that he “planted the Vineyard,” *i.e.*, he created mankind. Noah also plants a vineyard—the allegorical hot-bed of future humanity.

Noah has three sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet, which are considered to be ancestors of three races of mankind. The words, “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God *make coats of skin*, and clothed them,” (*Genesis*, iii, 21) imply that the spiritual man had reached, in the course of evolution, to that point where matter predominating over and conquering spirit, had transformed him into the physical man. The *Book of Jasher*, mentions that these garments of skin are taken by Noah into the ark, who had obtained

them by inheritance from Methuselah and Enoch, who had them from Adam and his wife. Ham steals them from his father Noah, and gives them “in secret” to Cush, who conceals them and passes them on to Nimrod. H.P.B. explains that Adam, Enoch and Noah are the antediluvian (before *the flood*) patriarchs, and each of them stands as the representative of a race, each of which was less spiritual than the preceding race. Noah, though a good man, could not be compared to his ancestor, Enoch, who “walked with God and did not die.” Noah inherited the “coat of skin” but did not wear it, and thus represents the ethereal, still spiritual antediluvian race, while his children were *post*-diluvian. The Coat of skin was worn in secret by Cush, which implies that his spiritual nature had begun to be tainted by the material. It is passed on to *Nimrod*, who is the most powerful and strongest of the physical man, and represents the last remnants of the antediluvian giants or Atlanteans (*Isis*, I, 149-50). Enoch is a generic title applied to a “Seer,” or “Adept in the Secret Wisdom.” Noah is heir to the Wisdom of Enoch, who belongs to the cycle of the Fourth Atlantean Race, while Noah belongs to the Fifth Race. (*S.D.*, II, 532)

Abraham, who was originally called Abram, is considered to be the first of the Hebrew patriarchs. In the article, “The Legend of the Blue Lotus,” as also in the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 200) H.P.B. points out that the name Abram is neither Chaldean nor Hebrew, but rather Sanskrit epithet and a title meaning *a-bram*, *i.e.*, a non-*brahmana*, or a *brahmana* who is *de-brahmanized* or has lost caste. The Semites—especially the Arabs—are the later Aryans, who were degenerate in spirituality and perfected in materiality. To these belong all the Jews and Arabs. The twelve Jewish tribes are descendants of the *Chandalas* of India, of the time of Rishi Agastya. They were the bricklayers whose persecution began some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, and who immigrated to Chaldea some 4,000 years before the Christian era.

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: We are told that while living the spiritual life, a true disciple should strive to appear as “nothing” in the eyes of others. How does one achieve this?

Answer: “That power which the disciple shall covet is that which shall make him appear as nothing in the eyes of men.” These words from *Light on the Path* is “a hard saying” to many. It may seem to be “a strange power to covet!” for most of the worldly men. To make one’s mark in the world, to be recognized as “Somebody,” if not as a “Very Important Person,” is the hope and secret ambition behind the endeavours of many social climbers, businessmen, and even writers, poets, actors and artists. To appear as “nothing,” is to be able to maintain equanimity to the praise or blame of others. In one way or another we are not able to let go of our pride or self-identifying attachment to our appearance, possessions, wealth, skill or knowledge. Our self-worth is generally measured by others, and also ourselves, on the basis of derived “self.” A model who is rejected with the remarks that her hair is not silky enough or skin is not glowing enough, might slip into depression, saying, “I was rejected.” When we associate “I” with the body, ideas or feelings, we tend to become most vulnerable. It could also be the reverse. When we are praised and put on a pedestal, for our beauty, eloquence, intelligence or skill, our personal worth is immeasurably increased.

To appear as “nothing” in the eyes of others we should be able to develop selflessness and impersonality. Our ego has various ways of asserting itself. There are people who overtly proclaim their supremacy in knowledge, power, position, and even virtues.

Sometimes self-praise is far more acceptable than mock self-depreciation, where the person is actually looking for contradiction from the hearer. Both these weaknesses reveal the strength of *Ahankaric* tendencies. Mr. Judge has proposed a very simple test to find out if we are impersonal. His advice is to learn to overcome the habit of “pushing oneself forward.” In a conversation, we should try to remain in the background, and encourage the other person to speak. When he has finished speaking about himself or his experience, we should make a sincere attempt to desist from speaking about ourselves and our experiences. “Try to recollect that you are a very small affair in the world, and that the people around do not value you at all and grieve not when you are absent. Your only true greatness lies in your inner true self and it is not desirous of obtaining applause of others.” A very simple exercise is suggested to starve the personal nature. We are asked to begin every day by resolving: “Just for today if my feelings are hurt, I will not show. Just for today, I will do somebody a good turn and not be found out. Just for today, I will do at least two things, I don’t want to do.”

It is very important to first recognize and then realize that behind the personal “I” there is the real or spiritual “I.” Mr. Judge suggests that every day and as often as you can, *think, think, think*, “I” am not the body, the mind, the emotions, the intellect, praise or blame, but I am THAT. When we are identified with the true Self, we are able to take the position of witness, an observer, and renounce the feeling of *kartabhav* or “doership” in our actions. This meditation also enables us to rise above the sense of separateness. A spiritual aspirant or even a disciple, who may be well advanced, is also not free from pride. Pride, Egotism or *ahankara* is the last foe to conquer. A disciple may feel that he is more pleasing to the guru or knows more than his fellow disciples. Aspirants could be proud of their knowledge, powers, and even their virtues. According to the stories in the *Puranas*, Vishwamitra, who was a *Raja-rishi*, at last obtained the title of *brahmarishi* from sage Vasishtha himself, only after he had conquered his egotism.

Mr. Crosbie suggests that for developing impersonality we should try to develop the child-heart; we should try to be more honest, plain and simple; we should try to extend the circle of those we love and never demand any position for the work done for Theosophy. Another way of killing *ahankara* is to learn to forget ourselves in working for others. Let us try to develop humility and true devotion. Can we be a grain of incense which the Masters can use in their task of purifying the world? Can we be a small flower which They can use to beautify the world? Are we content to be the servants of Their servants? If we can burn up like incense and not feel that we are non-entities, if we are prepared to be thrown away like a dead flower and not feel that we are useless, if we are content to serve Their servants and not feel that progress is not achieved, then the death of egotism is near at hand.

Question: How do we remain true to the highest moral principles without antagonizing others or creating animosity? Is it inevitable?

Answer: When virtues are practised for their own sake, when principles are adhered to for their own sake, without any ostentatious display of spirituality then, to an extent, we do not attract the attention, and hence the envy or animosity of others. Often, the person who practises certain virtue, say, of honesty or contentment, tends to emphasize it so much that others around him are made aware in a subtle way that *they* lack those virtues. There is a “holier than thou” attitude or a feeling of self-righteousness. Those who are greedy for money, or fame or power are criticized or looked down upon by this person who is honest and non-corrupt. A self-righteous man makes for himself a bed of mire. On the other hand, the person who himself follows the spiritual principles, unflinching, but without the feeling of superiority, with no attempt to enforce them on others, may even succeed in setting an example.

However, we are all Arjunas. When we try to follow a spiritual principle, say, of always speaking the truth, then we are waging a war against our tendency to speak lies or half-truths, indulged in for

a number of years or even life-times. We experience an inner conflict. In an ordinary person, the good and bad tendencies exist as complex collective force, but when one decides to achieve some spiritual goal, these tendencies separate out into good and bad tendencies—into *Kaurava* and *Pandava* armies. Whenever one aspires towards a higher life, the good tendencies flourish, but it is like a death sentence for the bad tendencies.

Likewise, when we try to live up to the highest moral principles, we also come in conflict with the others in the world, whose values in life are very different from ours. When everyone in an organization takes bribe, the price we pay for remaining “clean” is, undergoing the trauma of being isolated, being taunted and persecuted. And yet there have been a few who have braved it all, sticking to their principles. A person, who earns meagre salary and has a large family to support, might be persuaded to take bribe by family members. Whenever other people’s interest is at stake, we are likely to be criticized or even persecuted for the practice of morality. Our friends, relatives and family members who view life differently, will be instinctively in opposition to us. Since we are interconnected on the physical, mental and moral planes, we affect others and we, in turn, are affected by them. Thus,

...His struggle for goodness jars upon the whole body of badness in his environment, and draws its fury upon him. If he is content to go along with his neighbours and be almost as they are—perhaps a little better or somewhat worse than the average—no one may give him a thought. But let it be known that he has been able to detect the hollow mockery of social life, its hypocrisy, selfishness, sensuality, cupidity and other bad features, and has determined to lift himself up to a higher level, at once he is hated, and every bad, or bigoted, or malicious nature sends at him a current of opposing will power. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 6)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

The fourth commandment of the Bible says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work.” The word Sabbath is mentioned in the creation narrative of the Bible (*Genesis 2:2-3*), having created everything, God stops, rests and blesses this day. Resting, God takes pleasure in what has been made. There are debates over whether Saturday or Sunday is the “right” day for observing Sabbath. Several Christians observe the Sabbath day on any one chosen day of the week, and consider the Sabbath as a principle to be observed in spirit rather than the letter. We may well call Sabbath day as “Stop Day,” because it suggests that after working hard for six days in a week, take a day off from work to rest, and soak in the beauty of the world God made. In ceasing work, we make the space to notice the things we want to be thankful for; and to truly feel God’s presence in our lives, more markedly and fully than on any other day.

Narcissism, pragmatism and excessive restlessness have been labeled the three obstacles to Sabbath observation by Rev Ron Rolheister. Narcissism is self-preoccupation, and living within our own little world. Pragmatism is the urge to solve all problems and achieve goals, which leaves no “extra” time. Restlessness results from the modern culture of emails and cell phones which tend to demand immediate response.

The Hebrew word for Sabbath simply means “stop, cease, desist,” and which means desist from all kinds of work which distracts us from just being. It is most difficult for modern man to desist from work, and hence it is suggested that on each Sabbath, replace one activity or task, such as paying bills or emailing, with one refreshing, purposefully soul-feeding activity like a morning walk or time with a good book. If we do that we will realize that we are no longer over-worked, anxious and stressed humans, but just “holy” and blessed human beings, writes Marguerite Theophil. (*The Speaking*

Tree, Sunday Times of India, August 18, 2013)

The Jews borrowed their Sabbath from the ancients, who called it *Saturn's day*, and they observe it on Saturday, while the Christians observe it on Sunday. The Jews reckoned their days by number, as day the first (*yom ahad*); day the second (*yom sheni*), and so on. The seventh day was called *yom shaba*. When Moses mentions that the Lord God rested on the seventh day or Sabbath after creating the world for six days, it was a *blind* to hide the true meaning. H.P.B. points out that the Hebrew word SHABA has several meanings. It may be translated as *old age*, as well as rest. *Sab* also means *gray-headed*, and hence, *Saba-day* was the day on which the gray-headed men or “aged fathers” of a tribe were in the habit of assembling for councils or sacrifices. We may compare it to lunar festivals in India where meetings are known to have been held on every seventh day. Moreover, lunar month can be divided into four quarters of seven days each, and with every new quarter of the moon there are changes in the atmosphere, as also all throughout the universe. Hence, on the seventh day, which is the most powerful of the prismatic days, the Adepts of the “Secret Sciences” meet, as they met thousands of years ago, to become the agents of the occult powers of nature, and commune with the invisible worlds. This explains the real reason of the significance attached to the seventh day of the week. In fact, the *Sabbath day* was not observed as the day of rest by the early Christians. They said that the elements are never idle and keep no Sabbath. If one is guilty of fraud, let him reform; if one is an adulterer, let him repent, *and then he will have kept the kind of Sabbath truly pleasing to God.* (*Isis*, II, 418-19)

In the article, “Sunday Devotion to Pleasure,” H.P.B. refers to advice of religious heads that although Sabbath day is essentially a Day of Rest for overworked man, it should not be passed in complete relaxation. He must also follow “religious observance.” H.P.B. argues whether it is right for man to so devote himself to his work for his own personal benefit, as to have no time or strength left for prayer and meditation during the six days, and to set apart the seventh

day for that purpose. If the person has worked in a manner so that his work becomes worship or prayer, then devoting the Sunday to innocent pleasure, by spending a day in the country, appreciating the beauties and bounties of nature, is an education which brings him nearer to God than mere mechanical observance of religious practices.

Vulnerability is the capacity to walk through life without armour or defence, knowing that just being ourselves is enough, writes Suma Varughese. The author writes what an enriching experience it was when she decided to reveal to her family and friends, all her frailties and weaknesses—her lack of discipline and self-control, her inability to focus or concentrate, her flaming temper and low self-esteem. She discovered that when we are vulnerable, we give others also the permission to be vulnerable, and when both parties are vulnerable, lovely gifts like trust and intimacy flower out. Vulnerability is the result of facing reality squarely in the face and recognizing that we are not perfect or heroic. It is the capacity to embrace our humanness. And yet, living vulnerably is not easy because we do not want to lose the world’s love and approval. It is so much easier to play safe. However, there comes a time when being safe is not the highest priority, but instead, being authentic, honest, standing by one’s values, taking a stand for growth, appears far more important, and that gives us the courage to take off our armour. There have been those who have discovered through experience that when we quietly accept wrong accusations by others, we allow them to give vent to their own negativity, such as, anger, frustration or jealousy.

Ironically, we come into the world utterly vulnerable. There is nothing more vulnerable than a human baby. Yet, these vulnerable babies have the power to change the atmosphere and also moods of the people around. Brene Brown, a professor of social work, and author of the book, *Daring Greatly*, feels that gratitude, faith, and

clarity of values are some of the tools we can use to eliminate fear and embrace vulnerability. She considers vulnerability to be the centre of meaningful human experiences. In human relationships, vulnerability is essential, because though there is potential of being hurt and getting a broken heart, there is also the potential of receiving a deep love.

Vulnerability does not mean that we cease to be afraid or ashamed. It only means that we are willing to throw our fears and shame into the furnace, where alchemically, they are converted into the inner strength and power. We cannot be indiscriminately vulnerable to all people. We would have completed our vulnerability journey when we experience a sense of being invulnerable by throwing open our arms to life unconditionally, and finding within ourselves the strength to cope with all that it throws our way, writes Varughese. (*Life Positive*, August 2013)

We instinctively try to fortify ourselves against physical, mental and emotional hurt. And yet, experiences of life show us that it is not possible to be *completely* invulnerable. We are vulnerable in our weaker moments. Overpowering passion can create a moment of weakness, and so also, frustrated desires, aims and plans. An otherwise balanced person then commits murder, rape or suicide. We are tempted and tested in the weakest points of our character. It is our “vulnerable point” our “Achilles’ heel,” through which nature gives us the opportunity to grow.

Being vulnerable gives an opportunity to learn some of the toughest lessons of life, especially in human relationships. At times, we may choose to be vulnerable for building better human relationship. Professor C. S. Lewis points out that to love at all is to be vulnerable. You may wrap your heart carefully with hobbies and little luxuries, avoiding all entanglements. No doubt, it will be safe in the casket of your selfishness—safe, dark, motionless and airless, but it will also become impenetrable and irredeemable. Vulnerability has transforming power. We should use it to gradually transform love and passion into compassion. In fact, *Light on the Path* asks

the disciple to learn to be completely vulnerable. He has to undergo a yearly ceremony in which he has to give up all weapons of offence and defense. He has to learn never to raise his voice in self-defense or excuse, or in condemning or criticizing another person. From this ceremony he returns to the world as helpless and as unprotected as a new-born child. It is only when one develops the power of vulnerability does he become fit to acquire *spiritual* powers. At the root of it lies the acceptance and realization of the unity of mankind.

Each year, one in 200 babies is born with a form of disease in its mitochondrial DNA. When mitochondrial genes carry a defect they could lead to eye disorders, cardiac malfunction, diabetes, gastrointestinal and muscular diseases. Britain plans to be the first country in the world to preempt genetic disorders in the children by offering controversial “three-parent” fertility treatments to families who want to avoid passing on of incurable diseases to their children. The methods, currently only at the research stage in the laboratories of Britain and United States, involve implanting genetically modified embryos into women. The process involves fertilizing the two eggs with sperm, creating two embryos, one from the parents and another from the donor. From the Donor’s embryo the nucleus which contains genetic information is removed and destroyed. Since the parents’ embryo contains unhealthy mitochondria, only the nucleus is removed from parents’ embryo and a healthy embryo is created by adding the parents’ nucleus to the donor embryo, which is finally implanted into the womb. The mitochondria act as energy generating batteries inside cells. This treatment is called three-parent IVF (In-vitro Fertilization) because the offspring would have genes from a mother, a father and a female donor. The method involves intervening in the fertilization process by removing faulty mitochondrial DNA which can cause inherited conditions such as fatal heart problems, liver failure, brain disorders, blindness, etc.,

and thus prevent transmission of mitochondrial diseases along the maternal line. Critics say the new technique is ethically suspect and will eventually lead to a eugenic “designer baby” market. It is felt that in trying to genetically alter human beings we are crossing the ethical line. The British government, however, says that this method must be allowed under strict regulation. (*The Times of India*, courtesy Reuters, June 29, 2013)

There are divided opinions for many scientific investigations like stem-cell research, cloning, genetically engineered crops, etc. In some of the cases there is interference with natural processes, and we seem to be playing god. It is futile to hope to solve the problems of heredity, and what is the cause of hereditary transmission, based on mechanical and material view. It is a mystery to plant breeders as to why they cannot improve plants in terms of size, beauty and speed of growth without sacrificing some valuable properties in some other direction. For instance, in the “improved varieties” of garden musk and roses, the gain was at the loss of scent in these flowers. For a long time now, we have succeeded in growing larger tomatoes, as also other fruits and vegetables, which however, are tasteless as compared to natural varieties of the same.

Moreover, Heredity and Atavism are merely handmaidens of Karma and Reincarnation. Physical, mental and moral defects passed on to the child by the supposed family heredity are the result of the karma of the Ego in prior lives. Transmission of trait and tendency by means of parent and body is exactly the mode selected by nature for providing the Ego with the instrument in accordance with the previous karma. Even if we succeed in interfering with the hereditary transmission, we are, at best, postponing the precipitation of karmic consequences for that individual, which will have to be faced in some other life, or perhaps in some other form.

HE knows not his own strength who hath not met adversity.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON