

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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DIVINE VIRTUES SHILA—PERFECTION OF MORALITY

SHILA is “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.” From the foundation of *Dana*, love for all because of the oneness of essence, begins the approach of *Shila*, “harmony in word and act.” If we have really grasped the idea that what affects one affects all, this harmony should not be difficult of achievement. The virtue of true charity asks the aspirant to respond to the sufferings of others and to love unconditionally all that lives and breathes. But when we try to translate into word and act, what is learnt by mind and heart, we find it difficult. We are unable to act as we know and say we should, because for generations, we have lived another kind of life—that of self-centredness. It takes time to get accustomed to a new life, yet detachment and continued effort will eventually bring success.

Egolessness being the supreme spiritual value, ultimately, the importance of ethical acts is to be determined by the extent to which they are conducive to the attainment of egolessness. Conventionally performed moral actions become *immoral* when performed in egoistic manner, with the attitude of moral superiority. Perfection of Morality means to however great an extent morality is practised, the person does not think of himself “virtuous.” He will mix with thieves and prostitutes with the same sublime unself-consciousness

with which he consorts with saints. He will never make of his righteousness a whip for the backs of the unrighteous. When moral life is guided by wisdom, it becomes perfect morality, writes Sanghrakshita, a Buddhist teacher.

Shila is a transcendental virtue and may be described as “a good moral character that is permanent disposition.” Moral qualities like truthfulness, equanimity, honesty, etc., appeal to us all. But, *Shila* implies leading a pure and virtuous life from *moment to moment*, and not once in a while. It does not take a spectacular mistake or slip on our part to let in bad influences. Living a pure life, continuously, creates a shield. Then, evil thoughts, words and deeds of others do not affect us; they would be like dust thrown against high wind. Professor C. S. Lewis observes that there is a difference between doing some *particular* just and temperate action, and *being* a just and temperate man. Someone who is not a good tennis player can play a good shot, *now and then*. But a “good player” is the person whose eyes, nerves and muscles have been so trained, by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied upon. They have a certain tone or quality, even when he is not playing—just as a mathematician’s mind acquires a certain habit or outlook, even when he is not doing mathematics. So also, one who perseveres in doing good actions gets in the end a certain quality of character. It is this quality of character that is the real virtue of *Shila*. Buddha describes such a man as one for whom “occasions to act with like or dislike arise not.”

It is because we are required to practise the virtues from moment to moment that the task becomes difficult. Often this leads to despair. The opposite of despair is hope, which tells us that we must not doubt our ultimate capacity. *Virya* or spiritual energy is essential in living a morally pure life. Creativity is the function of energy. Energy is not only required to start something new, but also for maintaining what has already been begun. In spiritual discipline we need to make efforts over and over again.

“Beware of change! For change is thy great foe,” says *The Voice*

of the Silence. Change is essential for spiritual growth, but on the other hand, we must take care that change does not begin to apply to things we want to preserve. For instance, once we have decided, after due deliberation, to follow a particular discipline, there should arise no doubt or conflict in our mind. Once settled, it must be like Pythagoras’ theorem, verified and accepted by an advanced mathematician. Before accepting the theorem he has tested it, and hence, does not verify every time he makes its application. Similarly, once having accepted the moral principles, we must have courage to practice them even in the face of opposition from the family, society, religion, community, etc. Says Ralph Waldo Emerson: “It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” In practising morals, the highest and only true judge is our own divine nature.

Morality practised out of fear is useless. A child who follows the discipline out of fear, such as, washing his hands before meals, is bound to skip it, when he is sure of not being found out. Virtues followed out of fear in childhood make one submit to authority, even in one’s adult life. Religion often makes use of psychological fear to make people follow religious injunctions.

Actions are judged as right or wrong, moral or immoral, depending upon the motive. We may give lakhs of rupees in charity to help the needy, or for fame, or simply because we have wealth in excess.

Shila is the key of harmony in word and act. Our words and actions must be in accord with each other. The hypocrite is one whose actions belie his words; the good man is one whose “nay is nay and yea is yea.” But in the higher sense action is the working out of words. Therefore we are asked to put our good intentions into practice. As Jesus said, “Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” We must not

allow our good intentions to remain mere intentions but act on them. As Carlyle says: “The end of man is an *action* and not a *thought*, though it were the noblest.” A Master writes, “good intentions count little with us....” Harmony in word and act also means “keeping your word.” If we have made a promise to a friend of taking a certain book for him, we must remember to take it. Mr. Judge says that “the promises I make to myself, I consider them as important as the promises I make to others.” Here, he speaks about importance of a vow or a resolve.

Shila has been defined as the key that counterbalances the cause and effect and leaves no further room for karmic action. The counterbalancing of cause and effect implies acting and speaking in such a way that the cause and the effect are counterbalanced. If we take the cause as being the circumstances we are placed in, then our reaction to them must be perfect, neutralizing the cause, so to say. Instead of complaining or grumbling there must be acceptance or resignation. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power, but if not then we can use the situation as raw material and extract the necessary lessons.

We are acting all the time. But, when we act, so as to pass the burden of our karma to others, we are not balancing the cause and the effect. For instance, while we are standing in the queue for a ticket it may so happen that just when it is our turn to buy the ticket it is time for the ticket-window to close. In such a case, we need to accept the situation that comes to us under karma. Instead, if we plead with the clerk on the counter to keep it open for a little while longer and issue us the ticket, we have created fresh karmic debt, and failed to “counterbalance the cause and the effect.”

Perfection of morality leads to spiritual integrity. A spiritually integrated person does not depend on anything *outside* for his happiness. A spiritually integrated person uses all—money, power, approval, success, love, friendship—but is not dependent on them. The *Gita* describes the man confirmed in spiritual knowledge as one who “forsaketh every desire which entereth into his heart, and

of himself is happy and content in the Self through the Self.” Likewise, the importance of overcoming desires has been also described in the *Dhammapada*:

Not only by discipline of moral principles, nor only by resolutions and vows; not only by much study, nor even by attainment in meditation, or in seclusion and solitude, do I release myself from bondage unto Bliss. This is not attained by worldlings. O Bhikkhu, be not deceived in self-confidence as long as you have not reached the extinction of desire. (Verses 271-72)

Shila and *Dhyana* must go hand in hand. Merely restraining our words and deeds is useless if the mind is full of craving, aversion, lust, etc. The fight is in the mind. What is needed then is the “mental training,” and that consists of three steps—Concentration, Contemplation and Meditation. On the other hand, we sit for meditation and wonder why we do not succeed. How can we suppose that with half-an-hour of meditation, but spending the remaining hours the way we like will enable us to concentrate? Concentration of mind should be preceded by *Yama* or religious observances, which include truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, non-receiving of gifts, etc. *Niyama* includes cleanliness, austerity, study and self surrender to God. Not only should there be purification of other base tendencies such as fear, avarice, pride, envy, uncharitableness and ambition, but also an effort to purify our desires, step by step, beginning with killing out the desire for the material possessions, and gradually overcoming subtler desires, such as, those for power, knowledge, love, happiness or fame.

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)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

WHAT IS GOD?

“WHAT do you mean by God, Anne?” The girls were walking arm in arm along the country road and Anne’s remark had been, “How good God is to give us this nice holiday away from the noisy, dirty city!” The challenge took her aback and she looked at her questioner in surprise. “Whatever makes you ask such a question? Of course I mean God that made us and takes care of us.”

“But what *is* God?” persisted Ethel.

“Why, I guess you’d call Him the best and greatest person in the world. Of course, you cannot see Him until you go to Heaven, but He is everywhere.”

“But if He is everywhere how can He be a person? Aren’t all the people you know in just one place at a time?”

“Of course. May be I am mistaken about His being a person, but I certainly have gotten the idea of Him in Sunday School. Anyway, whether you call Him a person or not, He can do anything.” The words were hardly out of her mouth, when a little cripple came out on the porch of a farmhouse they were passing, rude crutches supplementing his little shrunken legs, which were obviously unable, in spite of braces, to bear his weight.

“If God can do anything, why doesn’t He make that poor little fellow strong and well like other boys? Ethel demanded.

“Honestly,” confessed Anne, “I have often wondered about that. But if you ask them in Sunday-School why God lets so many people be sick and miserable, they just tell you it’s a mystery and we must not inquire into it. Why do you suppose He takes such good care of us and lets there be so many poor children? It really does not seem fair, though I suppose I ought not to say it.”

“It would not be fair, and if there was any person wicked and cruel enough to make a little boy all twisted up like that one, I should not want anything to do with him!” declared Ethel.

“Why, Ethel!” breathed Anne, aghast at her boldness. “Don’t

you think God made him like that?” And, at her friend’s vigorous shake of the head, added, “If you don’t believe in God, why do you think that little boy is so crippled, and we are well and happy—at least, I *did* feel happy until you got me all stirred up about God.”

“I can’t say why that particular little boy has that particular kind of a crippled body, but I do think the only just explanation of things is that everybody gets what he has earned by the way he has acted.”

“But how about a baby?” There was a note of triumph in Anne’s query. “There is a little blind baby on our street. How did it deserve never being able to see at all?”

“Of course I don’t know just what he must have done to earn that,” replied Ethel, thoughtfully, “but he certainly must have done something to cause it when he lived before.”

“Before he was a baby?” questioned Anne impatiently.

“Why, yes. Reincarnation alone can explain that. Unless you want to believe in a God who would be so cruel to a little new baby as to make him with eyes he couldn’t use, the only way out is to accept as something to work on, the idea that we have all lived before and done things we are getting the effects of now. Just as what we are doing now will make us happy or miserable in our next life. I wish you could ask your questions in Theosophy School! They don’t say, ‘everything is a mystery and you must not ask.’”

“Well,” said Anne slowly. “It sounds interesting. I don’t know anything about reincarnation, but I’d like to learn. I would love to be able to see that things are just. I can’t be really happy to think God is taking care of me while He is neglecting or hurting lots of other people. I guess I must have said He was good to give us this holiday because I had heard people talk like that, and I did feel happy and wanted to express it.”

Most of the time, a person’s idea of God is what he has learnt from the religion in which he is born. For some people, God is a gigantic being—kind, merciful, just, loving, all-powerful, all-

knowing, and omnipresent. He is considered to be the creator of the world and all beings in the universe. But if God is a person, no matter how powerful and mighty, he must necessarily be in space, making space to be mightier than God himself. Then a new question arises. Who created space and who is the creator of God himself?

Also, if God is kind and merciful, whence came evil? To say that “evil” is the work of Devil is to say that there are two Gods, or at any rate, Devil is an equally powerful being who is able to work against the Will of God himself. And if Devil is an independent entity then that God cannot be omnipresent; and if that God has been unable to deal a death-blow to Devil, he cannot be omnipotent. If he creates a new soul for every new baby, one wonders why some are born rich, healthy and in favourable circumstances while others are born in poverty, or with deformity or congenital disease or without limbs or born as idiots. Some people say that it is the “will” of God and that we must not question his wisdom. Some religious sects go one step further and declare that some men are fore-ordained by God to go to heaven, while all the others would go to hell after their death, no matter what they do in this life.

Others believe that there is only one life and unless we live that life in a righteous manner, God will cast us in eternal hell. They then live in the fear of God. They observe all the customs and rituals enjoined upon them in their scriptures, lest their God would get angry and curse them. All these things make their God no better than a mighty tyrant or a despot who conducts the affairs of the world as per his whims and fancy and whose sense of justice is inferior even to an ordinary man who does not condemn another for no fault of theirs or at least tries to mete out punishment in proportion to the crimes committed.

Epicurus, the Greek philosopher, said: “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is not omnipotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” Like the Greek philosopher Epicurus, the atheists

argue that if an omnipotent and benevolent God exists, why should there be so much suffering and evil? The theists try to explain it on the basis of free-will in man. In Theosophy, God is an Impersonal, Eternal, Boundless, Omnipresent and Unchanging Principle. God is Law. God is all-pervasive and so is Law. In fact, in the manifested Universe the presence of God is felt through the Law, which works impartially and unerringly.

Whatever we are in body, in character, did not come by chance or accident, but from within the soul in which the Law of Divine Justice operates. We read in the Bible:

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man, which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (*John*, 9:1-3)

Now this is a strange answer. Remember that this man was *born* blind, so this man himself (already born blind) could not have sinned before he was born. But that does not preclude that in a previous life, in a past incarnation, he could have sown the cause of his present blindness. Jesus says, “the works of god should be made manifest in him.” The Law, which is Divine Justice, produced that man’s blindness, and by the operation of the same Divine Law working within him he can overcome that blindness, by setting into motion fresh good causes or actions. There are two important facts: (1) We ourselves and none else made us as we are in body, in morals, in mind; (2) our diseases of the body, weaknesses in moral character, etc., are results of ignorance, of our acting without knowledge in the past.

All of us are blind in some part of our complex Nature. So long as we are not perfect, so long there is blindness in us. Most people suffer badly not only through the bad karma of past lives but through false beliefs and lack of right knowledge in this life.

ON STEADINESS

[Reprinted from *The Irish Theosophist*, pp. 192-93, July 1896]

STEADINESS? Well, what of it? I have told you many times, but you have not listened. I will illustrate by your own actions.

You were told to write regularly at a certain time of day on a definite subject, and in a definite manner. What did you do? First you began as told, the next day it was ten minutes later than the time appointed. You had no definite subject, did not write with care. Then what happened? You did not get it correctly either in subject-matter, detail or appearance. The following day you began once more, the effort having to be made again as though never having been tried before. Writing is a small matter, you think, but it counts. This is lack of steadiness.

You were told by one who knows to be reserved to all, you agreed to this, stood the test for a few hours, perhaps a day, when suddenly you let all fly and forgot both the advice and the person advising. Steadiness? I think not.

My dear, of what use are you to be if you do not get hold of yourself at once? I cannot always be with you, nor can I always be telling you; each must learn to stand alone, each must carve these things out for himself. I had to do it, why not you?

Steadiness should be so much a part of your nature by this time that nothing could shake you. You are steady in devotion to the work, but that devotion will be of great use only when you can apply it to the simple affairs of life.

The person who is useful in this work is he who hears all, says little, but when having to speak says what is necessary, then stops.

Steadiness is that power gained where action is regulated by the power to stop. The special genius is not of value unless to that can be added evenness of purpose, calmness of action. This can be acquired by all who begin in the affairs of life, as I say.

When I told you to write, I knew what would happen, for it is a law that the first effort is the supreme effort. It is difficult to get the

machine to act in accordance with the mind except by this supreme effort. You “have failed in the test” have you? Yes; well, what of that? You see thus the difficulty; you know now by that failure the effort necessary to success. Will you go on or stop?

Do you want to know the meaning now of steadiness? Your own experience in this has taught you. I cannot explain more. Let it sink in and you will know the meaning and need for steadiness.

A.

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STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE BRAHMANA—V

36. *Him I call a Brahamana who has done with likes and dislikes, who is cool, who for renewed existence is seedless; he is the hero who has conquered the worlds. (418)*

TO BECOME seedless for renewed existence is to have become Karmaless, because, for an ordinary person karma or action is like a seed which must fructify in this or some other life in future. In other words, his actions are like seeds for re-birth. When we are living, we are constantly generating new karma and experiencing the effects of past karma and exhausting them. Karma means action. It also means results of action. There are three types of Karma: *Sanchita Karma*: that which we have generated in the past and have not yet come to fruition; *Agami Karma*: that which we are generating now, the results of which we will experience in future; and *Prarabdha Karma*: that which has come to fruition. Till all these three are exhausted, we are born again and again. They are closely tied to the individual who created them. Action and reaction are with reference to an individual as a centre from which the Karma emanates and towards which the effects may return to restore harmony. But, when the person loses all sense of separateness and identifies himself with the whole universe, his actions are universal, impersonal and for the good of all. He stops being a focus, an individual centre, to which effects may return. He becomes like a circle with centre everywhere and circumference nowhere. Fruits of his good karma are shared by the whole world. Such are the self-realized beings who have conquered the worlds and can take up or leave the body at will.

37. *Him I call a Brahamana who knows the mystery of death and rebirth of all beings, who is free from attachment, who is happy within himself and enlightened. (419)*

38. *Him I call a Brahamana whose real state gods*

(Devas) do not know, nor Gandharvas nor men; his depravities destroyed, he is an Arhat. (420)

To know the mystery of death and rebirth is to have complete knowledge of the working of the law of Karma; to know the causes that lead to birth and death; to know the states before birth and states after death. Having reached that stage, there is perpetual happiness that is not dependent on any external thing or being. It is a state of enlightenment. Neither the *Devas* (incipient Gods or minor Gods), nor *Gandharvas* (celestial musicians) know his state as they are far inferior in their degree of development as compared to the Enlightened One or an Arhat. The subject of *Devas* was dealt with in detail in the chapter on the “The Enlightened Ones.”

39. *Him I call a Brahamana who has nothing of his own pertaining to the past, the present and the future, who is possessionless and detached. (421)*

Perfect detachment in thoughts, words and deeds enables the Brahamana to give up everything—possessions, likes, dislikes, preferences, including fixed mode of thinking and emotions. His spiritual insight enables him to know the reality underlying all things, beings and events. He is able to respond wisely, intelligently and compassionately. While ordinary man carries with him vast amount of karmic luggage, the Brahamana moves about freely without the load of karmic entanglements. He has freed himself from all bondage.

40. *Him I call a Brahamana who is fearless like a bull, who is pre-eminent and of dauntless energy, who is a sage-seer, who has conquered all, even death—the sinless one, the enlightened. (422)*

The description is not that of a struggling disciple but that of a perfected being—the Enlightened One. Such a one is fearless because his actions are in harmony with Divine Will. He has reached a stage wherein he is constitutionally incapable of doing wrong. He has become a co-worker with Nature, which in turn helps him

in all his actions. He is fearless like a bull because he possesses the spiritual energy or *Virya*. His fearlessness signifies great moral courage and inner strength which can take on the *whole world* if it is necessary. He fears to lose nothing—he is passionless. Fear comes from attachment, affection, indulgence, desire and craving. The perfected Brahmana becomes pre-eminent because he possesses transcendental virtues acquired through effort of many lives and self-discipline. “He holdeth life and death in his strong hands,” says the *Voice of the Silence*.

41. *Him I call a Brahmana who knows his former lives,
who knows heaven and hell, who has reached the end of births,
who is a sage of perfect knowledge and who has accomplished
all that has to be accomplished. (423)*

In proportion to the spiritual attainment, the man begins to remember one or more of his past incarnations. Having attained Enlightenment, the Buddha knew all his past lives. Such a being is an efflorescence of an age. He has attained all that can be attained by man. He has power over space, time, mind and matter. He possesses both knowledge and compassion. Such was the attainment of Gautama the Buddha, beautifully described in *The Light of Asia*, thus:

Many a House of life
Hath held me—seeking ever him who wrought
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;
Sore was my ceaseless strife!
But now,
Thou Builder of this Tabernacle—Thou!
I know Thee! Never shalt Thou build again
These walls of pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits, nor lay Fresh rafters on the clay;
Broken Thy House is, and the ridge-pole split!
Delusion fashioned it!
Safe pass I thence—deliverance to obtain.
(Concluded)

ON VOLUNTARY DEATH

LAST MONTH, the Supreme Court of India decided to adjudicate the legality of active and passive *euthanasia*, while the Government of India objected to the exercise, saying that the court has no jurisdiction to decide this. It is for Parliament and legislature to take the call after a thorough debate and taking into account multifarious views. The Supreme Court has decided to throw the issue open for a country-wide debate. Euthanasia is also called *mercy killing*, and is of two types. *Passive* euthanasia refers to the practice of causing death by withdrawing artificial life support in case of a person in a *permanent vegetative state*, with no chance of recovery. *Active* euthanasia refers to the practice of painlessly putting to death persons suffering from painful and incurable disease or incapacitating physical disorder, by injecting lethal medicine to trigger cardiac arrest.

The organized movement for legalization of euthanasia commenced in England in 1935, and then the Euthanasia Society was founded. The first countries to legalize euthanasia were The Netherlands in 2001 and Belgium in 2002. In 1997 Oregon became the first state in the United States to decriminalize physician-assisted suicide. In 1939, in Nazi Germany, Hitler ordered “mercy killing” of the sick and the disabled, and hence it is felt that instead of using the word euthanasia, in the medical and legal world, we should call it “end-of-life decision.”

R. K. Mani, ex-President of the Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine and lead author of the paper presenting Society’s position on end-of-life and palliative care in intensive care units, is of the opinion that there is an urgent need for guidelines to address the issue of terminating life support. Refusing to accept treatment and foregoing life-support does not amount to suicide. “A patient has right to refuse treatment and it is binding on the doctor. If you put the patient on ventilator against his or her wish, it is an assault,” says Dr. Mani. Though there have been random cases of a person

recovering after being on life support, he is of the opinion that withdrawing life support may be acceptable. Thus:

Before life support people lived and died naturally. With advance of medical care and life support, there is a possibility of it being used inappropriately....How many ventilators do we have in this country? If a patient is destroyed financially will the government help? It is a resource-loss to use life support inappropriately. When there are salvageable people we must divert resources to them. Healthcare is not about machines. It is about compassion and appropriateness of care. So many patients want to go home to die. (*The Times of India*, July 20, 2014)

Confronted with the complicated circumstances in the case of Aruna Shanbaug, formerly a nurse at Mumbai's KEM hospital, the Supreme Court rejected active euthanasia but allowed passive euthanasia—the withholding of life-sustaining treatment—in exceptional cases. Aruna Shanbaug has no speech, vision or mobility, but for years now, she has been fed and cared for by KEM hospital's nursing staff. It is felt that where the patient is not in a condition to give his/her explicit consent, we must have cogent legal framework to decide what constitutes a case for passive euthanasia. Though justification for passive euthanasia is generally based on a patient's "right to die with dignity," and on mitigating the patient's suffering, it is felt that in many cases the request for passive euthanasia may be based on the "futility" of life, where the family members might feel that it is futile to expect the patient to recover from persistent vegetative state.

Another difficulty is the possibility of not being able to diagnose if the patient is really in the persistent vegetative state. In 1996 study, experts at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability, in London, discovered on examining that of the 40 patients that were diagnosed vegetative, 17 had been misdiagnosed. They were in a condition described as LIS or Locked-in Syndrome. Are people being written off while they are still living and thinking? If so, then it raises

disturbing uncertainties over issues such as organ donation and euthanasia. While many healthy people may feel that it would be better to die than be kept alive in such a condition of being trapped in the body, majority of victims (patients) do not see it like that. A study by Laureys, head of the Coma Science Group at Liege University hospital in Belgium, found that "patients typically self-report meaningful quality of life and their demand for euthanasia is surprisingly infrequent." Another patient suffering from LIS described later that it was unbearable to hear the doctor conclude that one was going to die and to consider turning off the life-support machine. Though the chances of recovery of LIS patients is very low doctors need to take care that in the bodies that appear to be mere shells there are minds still living, thinking and trying to be heard. Apart from the financial burden it is not true that it is no use keeping alive a person in a vegetative state, writes Richard Woods. (*The Times of India* [*The Crest Edition*], courtesy *The Sunday Times*, February 2010)

The morality, legality and practicality of physician-assisted suicide have always been debated. A doctor's calling is to heal and never to harm. Doctors bind themselves with the Hippocratic oath, which was framed, as far back as 400 B.C., which states that "I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel." Like the adept-king or philosopher-king, there is a need for philosopher-physician, who is compassionate and intuitively able to perceive what is best for the patient. Passive euthanasia may be allowed in *rarest of rare cases*, because there is always the danger of its being misused by ordinary people as well as the doctors.

Pain needs to be seen in a right perspective by both the patient as well as the attendants. "Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self," says Mr. Judge. By trying to end life, the soul is deprived of its opportunity to go through the experience of coping with the illness and learning its lesson—what it is to work through an extremely sick body, or having the body but not able to

use it. We leave behind unexhausted Karma—which is like leaving a debt unpaid—so that in some future life we will be placed in a similar situation by the unerring law of Karma, till the lesson is learnt. It is perhaps an opportunity for the family members also to learn something in attending to a terminally ill patient, and be willing to suffer along with him, helping him to bear his suffering. Even in an apparently useless life, even in cases of people who are old, disabled or suffering from illness, there is a purpose. The purpose of life is to learn, and it is all made up of learning.

As the debate for legalizing passive and active euthanasia has been revived, those favouring it argue from a different perspective. An article that appeared in *The Times of India* (July 17, 2014) shows how several petitioners have argued that Indian laws are based on the Anglo-Saxon judicial system. In biblical world view, suicide is self-murder, and a sin because it is against the commandments of god. In Judaism, those who committed suicide were buried in a separate cemetery, and denied proper burial rites. On the other hand, Indian culture always had a place for voluntary death. For instance, the *Mahabharata* refers to the Pandavas and their wife Draupadi proceeding, in their old age, to the Himalayas to meet death. Likewise, it is argued that in Hinduism man's life was divided into four stages and that his intake of food gradually diminished as he moved from the stage of a student to that of a householder, and then as a forest-dweller or a retired person, he almost shunned food, as he was mainly engaged in meditation. This is seen as implicit encouragement of voluntary death.

It is argued that attaining to *Samadhi* by spiritually advanced beings, such as, Saint Dhyaneswar, has been part of the heritage of Indian thinking, and that it must not be regarded as voluntary suicide, because it is through yogic practices that an advanced being voluntarily discards the body. There have been several instances of Jains resorting to the practice of *Santhara* or *Sallekhana*, which involves giving up food and drink and then dying peacefully, which is considered highly meritorious.

In the above cases, the decision to end life appears to be outward expression of inward detachment. For instance, a person who decides to adopt *santhara* is someone who has begun to understand the inherently illusive and painful nature of earthly existence. It is argued that *santhara* cannot be considered suicide because it is done with one's full intent and knowledge, whereas suicide is emotional and hasty. However, Vimal Sagarji maharajsaheb, a Jain monk, is of the belief that there is a thin line between *santhara* and suicide, because in certain cases people embracing *santhara* have faced immense mental and physical test while observing *santhara* and they were not at peace with themselves. "So, whether *santhara* is suicide or a holy practice to attain moksha, I feel, is for the person embracing *santhara* to answer for himself," says Vimal Sagarji (*The Times of India*, [The Crest Edition], March 20, 2010). It is not easy to comment on the practice of *santhara*, especially, when no categorical answer is available in the theosophical books. However, *santhara* seems very close to the concept of "dying at one's own wish." We have heard of great or spiritually advanced beings "taking *samadhi*," when they slip into a state of meditation, and the soul leaves the body. *Light on the Path* mentions that a person in whom crude wish to live and to experience pain and pleasure has departed, he takes up the body only in pursuit of divine object, to accomplish the work of "the Masters." Once the object for which the birth was taken is accomplished, such a person can withdraw his "will to live" and thus leave the body.

The case of an ordinary person seems different. Even in an apparently useless life, even in case of people who are old, disabled or suffering from illness, there is a purpose. For ordinary people the purpose of life is to learn, and it is all made up of learning. An ordinary person is compelled to take birth because of his unexpended karma and *Tanha* or the desire to live and have experience. In the article "The Elixir of Life," we are told that we only die when our will ceases to be strong enough to make us live. So, for most of us, death comes when for some reason, for one

single instant, our “clutch on life” or the tenacity of the will to exist, is weakened. Thus, a person in whom there is a *strong realization* of the sense of completing the life-task, or the feeling of worthlessness of one’s existence, that realization will produce death as surely as poison or a rifle-bullet. Thus, more intense and true is the realization, less would be struggle in leaving the body.

However, when such withdrawal of desire is the mood of the moment, there must necessarily be an inner conflict. As Mr. Judge suggests, if the person who says life here is worthless were offered life on some other planet in most harmonious, beautiful and gratifying circumstances, he would find his deep seated *wish for life* suddenly blazing up, and he would express his wish to continue living.

To an “inquirer” who felt that in some cases suicide “is not only justifiable, but also morally desirable,” H.P.B. answered that both murder and suicide are never justifiable, from the occult point of view. No man has a right to put an end to his existence simply because it is useless. She mentions that there is a law among the savage tribes of the South Sea Islanders, to put to death, with warlike honours, their old men and women. They do so out of ignorance. She differentiates between a person who *takes away* his life because it is useless, and the other who *offers his life in sacrifice* to save other lives or to fulfil his duty. For instance, the captain who remains alone on board of a sinking ship or a physician or a nurse who remains by the side of a patient dying of an infectious disease. In these cases the impulse which prompts them to override the strong and instinctive impulse of self-preservation, is grand and noble, writes H.P.B. (*H.P.B. Series No. 15*, pp. 33-35)

Now and then it is good to pause in our pursuit of happiness
and just be happy.

—GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

POSITION OF WOMEN IN OUR SOCIETY

II

THE VOICE of Feminism is simply the collective rejoinder against the unjust and long-standing suffering and smothered voice of women who have been meekly enduring oppression from their own family. The feminine agitation is a legitimate way of seeking attention of the society to the plight of the socially despised and “branded” women, and for the redressal of their honour. Historically speaking, when individuals, society or the so-called “long hand of the law” do not reach out to adequately protect, or at least to record the unjust misery of the fellow human beings, some kind of agitation or protest erupts in the people of sensitive conscience. Unfortunately, even such just movements go out of hand if they are not based on moral worth, and if the collective action is not in responsible hands.

Ultimately, it is up to the united will of women themselves to create the climate of mutual trust and good-will within the family, beginning with young children. It is also their duty to arouse in our insensitive society the concern for the welfare of the less privileged, everywhere, and to demonstrate the reasonableness of their just demands for their rightful liberty and equality in adequate measure. Feminism is, therefore, a part of the universal “Freedom Movement,” to claim the “right of liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness” for all. Therefore, it is also a part of the Theosophical Movement, which being continuous, “it is to be found in all times and in all nations. Wherever thought has struggled to be free...there the great movement is to be discerned,” writes Mr. Judge.

Feminist demands should be based on the moral law that no one has a right of “ownership” over the life of another, whether an individual or the ruling authority. Even children are given to us on trusteeship basis, not as possessions. Why a married woman should become “property,” for free use or misuse, by the man who has “taken his woman on oath” as a life companion, and in reality for

the higher purposes of life together. These are not just “impractical ideas,” to be admired, but are the foundation of the just and happy family life, and necessary for human progress.

Of course, any artificial or exaggerated flaunting of the “female power” and stance invalidate both the person herself and the very purpose of the true Feminist Movement. For, it will bring disrepute to their genuine cause. There must be proper and effective ways to assert one’s legitimate claims and to draw attention to the Feminist principles and values. Some feminist enthusiasts in the west have adopted a sort of defiant method of imitating the male behaviour and attitude, and even the dress mode! How can such a folly liberate or make women equal in society or in mutual relationships? “To feel free is to be oneself in the context of one’s own capacity and personality,” said late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, ex-prime minister of India. The real strength is to be liberated inwardly, before confronting the forces of opposition. Here is the stable base to fortify the “feminine power” (*stree-sakti*) and an effective means to claim their rights for all women. Also, the true inner fulfilment happens whenever women assume their natural role and identity.

On the other hand, why should women be confined to follow the stereotype role and image socially enforced in a male-dominated world? Women must learn to be resilient as per the life’s variegated conditions and needs. Ordinarily, traditional values are fixed on the conventional roles and rules, such as the stereotype identity and duty of every house-wife. Everyone is supposed to honour the “family pride,” and the unbroken, “sacred” customs which are supposed to serve the peace and comfort of the family. To such tradition, the family comes first in life! And man (male head of the family) alone is considered to be capable of being at the helm of affairs! But when the spirit is lost and mechanical loyalty to “family tradition” prevails, then the honour that feminine status deserves is given a lukewarm response.

The remedy, therefore, lies in arousing the conscience of the society and to inculcate in our girls from their young age, their

ability to present the adorable image as a gentle lady, but always inwardly strong in her capacity to stand, and to endure all. It is this inner stamina and virtue that will make them superior in more ways, even though not acknowledged in their home and society. To arouse the conscience of our society, what is most effective is the projection of the role models of brave women from history, myths and in daily life. However, still more effective and relevant message is the one that arouses in the feminine world their own sense of worth and indispensable role in happy family life, as also, in prosperous nations. For, every woman has in her, as yet unrevealed, strength of will and character. It is not for nothing that “Sati” and “Sakti” are honoured and worshipped since ages in the East. By incessantly presenting the stirring image of the great women down the ages, we can induce in the masculine psyche the adorable feminine picture, and arouse in the struggling women the will to emulate the “women of substance,” who have contributed to the progress and the well being in the family and in the civil life of the world.

In her article, “Progress and Culture,” H.P.B. advises church-going deluded women of her times to stop going to the priests or to participate in the Church movement, which degrade the fair name of womanhood by repeating and publishing the derogative words of the so-called “saints” and church-fathers. The silent protests of this kind, by women, are effective ways against these immoral acts of Church that demean women-folk, and thereby encourage the male “chauvinism.” H.P.B. felt that this simple non-co-operation also can paralyze the luxurious show of the Church orthodoxy which thrived, at least in her time, mostly by the blind feminine faith in them.

Besides being a good housewife with the innate “wifely” virtues, and her intuitive centre of concern being her family welfare and prosperity, a woman is also an individual human soul, in need of the conditions favourable to the fulfilment of the deeper needs of her higher nature, and sometimes unfolding of the hidden genius,

i.e., “consummate intellectual, creative or other power more exalted than talent.”

These needs and talents can be expressed in the feminine ways and flavour, *i.e.*, with delicacy, tenderness, devotion and selflessness which are the hall-mark of womanhood. Professionally too, they tend to be more conscientious, and acknowledged to be more trustworthy. Historically, women have proved to possess a great degree of moral stamina and endurance to brave suffering, as also, self-surrendering devotion. These have been expressed through the sacred hour of worship and in the art of healing, counselling, sooth-saying, nursing care and consoling. But even in the creative works of arts, like dance, drama, poetry, vocal performance, etc., they carry unmistakable touch of feminine elements and demeanour.

Theosophically speaking, there is no gender-related spiritual entity—male or female soul, the human soul being sexless as the re-incarnating Ego. The latter chooses its vehicle and abode with the particular gender traits under the compulsion of the laws of Karma and affinity, so as to gain the needed experience, in and through the body and psychic inclinations. In human kingdom, the separation of sexes took place just before man became a “thinking” being. Thereafter, the feminine characteristics got exhibited not only in their psycho-biological functions but even in their pursuit and self-chosen profession like nursing, counselling, etc. But otherwise, as an individual being, some women have admirably overcome the hurdles, and excelled in whatever they have undertaken wholeheartedly.

As to the adorable examples of such inspiring women, we can cite increasing number of remarkable ladies, in recent times, who have distinguished themselves even in the corporate fields. There are such secretaries, managers, administrators, who have been acknowledged as assets to their organizations, without greatly sacrificing their feminine duties at home. These women have earned reputation and honour not only for themselves but its benefits are shared by their families, who may or may not have given them

freedom and support to develop their talent and preference. Dr. Marie Curie, who was twice awarded Nobel Prize for the discovery of radio-activity, at the cost of her life, is a glorious instance of what talented woman could achieve when given an opportunity, and through sheer will to pursue her aspiration. If Marie Curie were strictly confined to the four walls of the kitchen, bedroom and to child-rearing, by her great and noble husband, Dr. Pierre Curie, instead of encouraging her as loyal and loving colleague in their joint scientific endeavour, the world would have lost such a “gem” of a genius.

Poet Thomas Gray must have had in mind the sad loss of the unknown and unheralded women (and men) when he wrote “Elegy in the Country Churchyard.” Thus:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
To waste its sweetness in the desert air.

Today, the world is richer in many ways, thanks to the great contributions and achievements of the women celebrities in diverse fields. But it needed real courage to pursue their noble dreams, sometimes even against the odds, and even the sneers of the male bastion and family. The common factors that prompted them to achieve are the hard-earned freedom and the courage and will to achieve. Freedom, indeed, is a great asset gained either through struggle, or just a good fortune to have belonged to an understanding family and the liberal society in modern times. But still it needs strong will and inner strength “to hold her own in the men’s world.”

(Concluded)

GREAT thoughts speak only to the thoughtful mind, but great
actions speak to all mankind.

—EMILY P. BISSELL

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: How can we change the present “hell” situation of the world, today, into “heaven” once again?

Answer: “Heaven” and “hell” are considered to be the states of consciousness or realms of existence in which the soul finds itself after the death of the body. But these are also mental states we experience while on earth. When they are experienced too strongly, we seem actually to be living in “heaven” or “hell,” for the time being. We may perhaps compare “heaven” with the “world of gods,” mentioned by the Buddhists, which represents a happy and pleasant state of mind, a state of relaxation, content and repose. Likewise, the state of acute mental suffering, of nervous frustration and mental breakdown is compared to the “world of tormented beings or hell beings.” The Buddha says, “Ho! Ye who suffer! Know Ye suffer from yourselves.”

The “hell” situation in today’s world is partly marked by poverty. H.P.B. states that in the so-called civilized countries, there are large numbers of people suffering from poverty, misery and disease, lacking even basic necessities of life—food, clothing and shelter. On the other hand, many others are leading lives of careless indifference, material luxury, and selfish indulgence. Those who “have,” wealth, comfort and luxuries of life have neglected their social duty towards the “have-nots.” The remedy lies in awakening the feeling of brotherhood. Every good or bad thought or action helps or hinders not only one’s own self, but also others, just as a depressed person in a family goes a long way in depressing others, because we are interconnected on the inner planes of our being.

The problem arises when one self is set against another self. Each one must strive to identify himself, less and less, with his educational and cultural background, family, community, religion, nation, etc. The feeling of “me” versus the “others” would be considerably reduced.

The situation of “hell” is created through selfishness, murder, rape, brutality, *i.e.*, man’s inhumanity to man. Besides, we regard as evil all things that are disagreeable to us, but which at times teach us great lessons. The advice given by the spiritually wise is that if one is wronged or persecuted, and if it affects only oneself, then instead of resisting one must try to study and understand the evils, all the while trying to forget one’s self and desiring to help others who might be placed in a similar situation. Because, when we try to resist these evils, we create greater evils. Resistance means complaint, anger and objection to the inevitable, disagreeable or sorrowful things of life that come to us.

When an individual learns to *respond* rather than *react* to the situation or people, he is able to create heaven in hell’s despair. Violence, evil, wars, conflicts, all have their roots in the minds of men. A Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, tireless advocate of non-violence, suggests that Journalists must report in a way that invites readers to reflect why terrorist activities continue, and make them see that they have their roots in anger, fear, hate and wrong perceptions. We must prevent anger from becoming a collective energy. The only antidote for anger and violence is compassion. “Every reader has seeds of fear, anger, violence and despair, and also seeds of hope, compassion, love and forgiveness. As journalists you must not water the wrong seeds. It is not what is the story, but how you tell it is important,” says the monk. It is equally applicable to reports of crime, rape or murder. When we reduce violence in us, and try to be calm and compassionate, we induce others around us to change.

We can change the “hell” of *Kali-Yuga*, or the period of moral darkness and degradation into “Heaven” of Golden Age, or the

period of innocence and moral purity, by setting into motion pure thoughts, words, deeds, as also, noble ideas. Self-reform must precede world-reform. We may not be able to bring back the Golden Age for the entire race, but we can do so for ourselves. It is difficult to overcome the influence of the age, because the astral light, which keeps the record of the thoughts, feelings and actions of the ages past, acts as a hypnotizing agent so that we find ourselves acting blindly under the suggestion cast upon us by these past impressions. However, we are told that we cannot do much *against Kali Yuga*, but we can do much *in it*, as *Kali Yuga* is the shortest of the four Yugas with the rate of vibrations (cause and effect) being four times faster than in other *yugas*. And hence, we are promised that “A sincere lover of the race can accomplish more in three incarnations under *Kali-Yuga*’s reign than he could in a much greater number in any other age.”

Question: What are the different kinds of time? What is their significance?

Answer: Generally, we reckon time in hours, minutes and seconds, following the rotation of the earth around its own axis. When the earth goes around the sun, it is one year, which gives us four seasons. In *Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms* (Book III, Aphorism 53), mention is made of *kshana*. Mr. Judge comments that in this aphorism Patanjali speaks of the ultimate divisions of time, *i.e.*, moments (*kshana*) and the order in which these moments precede and succeed. The moment, that cannot be further subdivided, is smaller than a second, nanosecond or pico-second of science. It may be looked upon as minutest particle of time. We are aware of, and can distinguish, such periods as days or hours. There are born mathematicians who can perceive the succession of minutes and can tell without a watch how many minutes would have elapsed between any two given points in time. A yogi is able to distinguish between successions of *moments*. Moments succeed each other in sequence, and these sequences put together constitute time. Thus, moments are like spokes in the wheel of time. The movement of

moments, in present, past and future constitutes chronological time. The yogi remains attentive to the moment and does not allow his attention to slip into the movement of moments and thus conquers chronological time.

Besides, hourly, monthly and yearly time, we can divide time broadly, into past, present and future. “Past, present and future” are clumsy words, says a Master of Wisdom. The subdivisions, which seem natural, are man-made and purely subjective. It is impossible to point out the dividing line between the past and present, or the present and future. Even as we say, “now,” it has moved into the past. Our divisions of time are relative to the observer’s point of view. In the experience of the mystic, past, present, and future merge in the Eternal Now.

There is also psychological time. Besides defining time by the motion of the earth, we can define it in our conception. *Time is something created entirely by ourselves*, says a Master of Wisdom. Time seems to *fly* in happier moments, while it seems to drag on, ever so slowly, during painful experiences. Thus, one moment of intense agony may appear as an eternity to one person, while months and years may seem to fly like one brief moment to a person surrounded by bliss.

Cycles are the clocks of karma. Cycles are not arbitrary divisions of time, but they mark the periodic return of events, impressions and actions. Cycles mark the moments of cause and effect. Having the knowledge of Karma and Cycles, the yogi can predict a future event. One of the most practical applications of the concept of time is in understanding the value of cycles. By paying attention to cyclic or periodic return of impressions, we can save time and effort in training of mind and body. If we eat at regular times, our digestive system is ready and active so that the food is digested well. If we study at a fixed time every day, then the mind comes ready for work so that more work gets done.

Question: If the purpose of life is growth and development through learning from experiences, then how do we explain still-born

babies, and babies who live only for a few days or weeks?

Answer: We take birth, primarily, to reap the consequences of causes set in motion, through right or wrong thoughts, feelings and actions, in past lives. It is true that the universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. Also, that the purpose of life is to learn and that it is all made up of learning. In bringing up an unruly child, a mother has an opportunity to cultivate patience. Some situations teach us fearlessness, or honesty or contentment or detachment. But, it is not necessary that we always learn the lessons *consciously*. In case of insanity, or state of idiocy, the Ego working through the body learns something in trying to express itself through such an instrument. Likewise, in case of still-born babies, and babies who die within few days or weeks after birth, there is terrible disappointment for the Ego to have got the body, only to lose it again, almost immediately. Could it be, perhaps, the consequences for misusing or torturing one's own body or the body of another? Could it be, perhaps, that the Ego of that still-born baby was involved in abortion, in some previous life, as a mother or a doctor? There could be many such causes which may explain infant death.

Looked at from the side of the parents, the birth and early death of the infant, are at once a pleasure, a discipline and a punishment. If the loss is properly accepted, then the discipline results; if rebelled against, then only punishment is felt. The good karma of the past, we might say, were only strong enough to bring the pleasure of child's birth, and which having exhausted, there is loss of child. As far as the Ego is concerned, it might have been an attempt to begin life in that family, which may well be a short step toward better environment than what it had experienced before, *or*, by early death, the Ego might have escaped from a family where it would have only met with obstacles and suffering, explains Mr. Judge.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

The words "Hindu" and "Hinduism" mean different things to different people. For the Rashtriya Seva Sangh (RSS) chief, Mohan Bhagwat, all those who live in Hindustan are Hindus. For RSS activist Dinanath Batra, *Hindu* is a crusading word, evoking a campaign against Macaulayite secularists who have monopolized Indian thought and education. The word "Hindu" denotes the opposite of the rootless and the westernised. Sangh activists like Batra believe that it is their *dharma* (duty) to restore Hindu *sanskriti* (culture) to the school curriculum. After thousands of years of globalization, how shall we define "Indian" and "western"? Amartya Sen pertinently asks, "Does the use of penicillin amount to westernization? Is tea non-Indian because it was brought to India by the British?"

Education is not about providing the right texts to create ideal Bharatiya/Hindu citizens. "Education is how we acquire knowledge, how we learn to ask questions. One of Hinduism's greatest inheritances is the pride of place given to the questioner, the free thinker, the reformer, the iconoclast," writes Sagarika Ghose. *Vaad, vivaad samvad* [debate and discussion] have always been part of Hindu traditions. Buddhism and Jainism have always questioned religious orthodoxy, so also, *Bhakti* (devotional) saints have questioned the role of priests, of caste and of elaborate rituals. Arjuna asked questions before fighting the battle, and in the *Upanishads*, we have Gargi who fearlessly challenged her *guru* Yajnavalkya to a debate. Hinduism's religious democracy has created numerous reform movements: the *Arya Samaj*, *Brahmo Samaj* and the *Swadhyay* (self-study) movement of Pandurang Shastri. Scholar and author Jonardon Ganeri says, "What defines Hinduism is its polycentricity, multiple centres of belief and practice....Hinduism is a banyan tree...under which a great diversity of thought and action is sustained." In the present day, however, we find the true spirit of Hinduism, that of freedom of

thought, being stifled. Instead, there is an atmosphere of fear, bans, diktats created by orthodoxy, an orthodoxy unknown in that glorious multiplicity known as *sanatana dharma*, writes Ghose.

“Indianising education should mean to create the questioning spirit of Gargi, of Arjun, of Shastri, of Ram Mohan Roy, who questioned fearlessly. Hinduism has always stood for intellectual freedom....It is in fact decidedly un-Hindu to ban, to exclude and to suppress any form of knowledge,” writes Ghose. (*The Times of India*, August 20, 2014)

It appears that the word “Hindu” is a geographical term and did not refer to a “religion.” The word “Hindu” is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, which was the word used by the Persians to refer to Indus river, which flows partly in India and partly in Pakistan. Hence, the term “Hindu” was used to denote all those people who lived beyond the river Indus, and the religion practiced by them was Hinduism. “Eventually ‘Hindu’ became virtually equivalent to an ‘Indian’ who was not a Muslim, Sikh, Jain or Christian, thereby encompassing a range of religious beliefs and practices,” writes Gavin Flood.

Theosophy teaches that before the Vedas existed, there was Wisdom-Religion or the *Bodhi-Dharma*, which was the source of Brahmanical lore. Properly speaking, the title of “Eternal Religion” could be given only to the Mother Source of all religions, viz., *Theosophia* or the Wisdom-Religion; but of all the exoteric faiths, Brahminism, we might say, is the first-born of the Aryan family of religions, and bears a very close resemblance to the Mother, and that is why the Hindus call theirs the Eternal Religion or *Sanatana Dharma*. H.P.B. called India, or ancient *Aryavarta*, “the *Alma-mater*” or cradle, of not only civilization, arts and sciences, but also of all great religions of antiquity (*Isis*, II, 30). We are told that people of ancient *Aryavarta* were often described as Eastern Aethiopians or dark-skinned Aryans. “Babylonian civilization was neither born nor developed in that country. It was imported from India, and the importers were Brahmanical Hindus.” (*Isis*, I, 576)

“It is a well-known fact that even in extant Hinduism, every soul finds its own especial nourishment. From fetishism, through polytheism and pantheism to the highest and the noblest concept of Deity and Man—in Hinduism the whole gamut of human thought and belief is to be found. For every class of worshipper and thinker Hinduism makes a provision; herein lies also its great power of assimilation and absorption of schools of philosophy and communities of people. And another aspect of this phase consists in the power old India wields in impressing the mind of distant countries, and moulding the heart of foreign cultures. To the real India there are no aliens, for whatever others believe and think is to be found in some phase of Hindu religious philosophy. Of her spiritual commonwealth it can truly be said that it encompasses the whole world. There is not a philosophy, a science or a magical art of Chaldea, Persia, or Greece whose original counterpart cannot be traced to some Sanskrit source.” (*Theosophy*, May 1931)

The Times of India in partnership with a leading hospital observed August 13 as Organ Donation Day. Organ donation is considered to be a noble act. It is a *divine blessing*, something facilitated by cosmic forces that our body accepts the treatment, the medicine and the healing, when we are hurt. Another such blessing is chloroform, which has made medical surgery possible, and which is “one of God’s best gifts to His suffering children,” said Scottish surgeon John Brown. The medical procedure of organ transplantation also figures in the long list of divine blessings. Organ transplantation is the removing of an organ from the donor’s body and giving it to another for the purpose of replacing the recipient’s damaged or absent organ. Today, science has made it possible for a human being to donate twelve kinds of organs, which include eye, kidney, heart or liver to another person. It was the Creator who invested the human body with this potential. “Since the Creator created this capability in the human body, it is also

required that we should discover this possibility and utilise it for our benefit,” writes Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. He says that the Islamic teachings suggest that every man and woman must live in society as giver-member. In fact, in Islam there is a concept called *sadqa jariya*, or continued charity, whereby one donates something and its benefit reaches people even after the death of the donor. Modern medical science has added a very useful item, that of organ donation, to the list of *sadqa jariya*.

Would the donation of the organ after death affect the soul? “What happens to a body after its death only affects that body, not the *Atman*, the Self, which is eternal....You should think of how happy the patients who receive the organs will be when their life is saved by a new heart, a new liver or a new kidney.” writes Mata Amritanandamayi. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, August 10, 2014)

“It is always ‘right’ to try and alleviate suffering whenever we can, and to do our best for it,” writes H.P.B. Regarding diseases cured by hypnotism she says that if the disease is Karmic, it is only postponed, and returns in some other form, not necessarily as disease, but as some other form of suffering (*H.P.B. Series No. 9*, p. 38). In other words, when we resort to means which are out of the ordinary, in order to relieve suffering, there is a possibility that the Karma of the person is only *postponed*, and that he will have to bear that suffering in some other form, in some subsequent life.

The moral question of survival in a desperately sick person often comes up for consideration. Is it right to keep on prolonging one’s physical existence, at any cost, even if it results in lowering of the quality and life-span of another being—be it man or animal? We, as moral beings, have to answer this question individually for ourselves and have to accept the personal responsibility of and the consequences to the donor as well as the recipient of another’s organ. If science persists in organ transplantation, the transplanted “organs” should be those of a “good” man, and *willingly* given. We are continuously imparting good and bad psychic impulses to

our bodily organs through our thoughts and feelings. So also, “every organ in our body has its own memory....every cell must of necessity have also a memory of its own kind,” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*). The engrafted organs can affect their new owner with thoughts and feelings he had never before experienced. There have been cases where the recipient’s body rejects the transplanted organ. As mentioned in *The Theosophical Movement*, November 1969:

According to a Stanford University psychiatric team, some heart transplant patients become psychotic. They suggest that an anti-rejection drug called “prednisone” may cause psychotic behaviour such as delusions, insomnia accompanied by fear of a murder plot and a belief that the patients had received not only a new heart but also a new personality. Psychiatrists report, too, that there is in general a higher incidence of emotional problems in heart patients than in any other group of surgical patients. (*Science Digest*, July 1969)

Some patients having undergone organ transplants have been known to develop characteristics of the donor whose organ they had been given. Rebecca Noel, a healer of the cellular memory, explains that the memory from the old cell, is passed on to the new cell being born, so that the disease is replicated again and again, even though the cell is entirely new, and this continues indefinitely until the cell programming is interrupted.

Forgiveness is an act of will, as also, an attitude of compassion and understanding with which we choose to react to the world. In fact, it is a process by which we evolve towards tolerance and acceptance. Forgiveness releases us from being victims of our past, and helps us to transcend from our lower selves to the divine in us. George Macdonald, Scottish author and mentor of Lewis Carroll, writes: “It may be infinitely worse to refuse to forgive than to murder, because the latter may be the impulse of a moment of heat, whereas the former is a cold and deliberate choice of the heart.”

Forgiveness is not always easy. For instance, it is not easy to forgive the murderer or rapist of one's near and dear one. But the only alternative is to become like those offenders, cruel and unfeeling. Forgiveness releases you from the fetters of hatred, or of pain, shame and humiliation. Psychiatrists tell us that people who refuse to forgive and forget become bitter, they wallow in self-pity and often develop disorders like paranoia and persecution complex. They lock themselves up in a self-made prison of isolation and alienation.

In order to be able to forgive, one must stop being judgmental; develop the spirit of tolerance and acceptance; control the impulse to fight back and strive to get God's help to be able to dissolve deep-seated bitterness. It is important to remember that forgiveness is not weakness or passivity, but requires spiritual strength, writes Dada J. P. Vaswani, the head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission. (*Life Positive*, August 2014)

Lord Buddha says that when our mind is tied with the intention of retaliation all our mental energies are taken up by that single emotion, destroying inner peace. Empathy is the gateway to forgiveness. We may condemn the *act* but not the *actor*. Forgive, forgive and largely forget, says Mr. Judge. Some of us cannot forgive and forget for many years and many months. Gradually, we must discipline ourselves and learn to forgive in few days, then within few minutes, and so on. There is this suggestive verse in the Lord's Prayer, which says: "Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us." Mr. Judge says, "The very fact that the oppressor, the unjust, the wicked, live out their lives is proof of mercy in the great heart of Nature. They are thus given chance after chance to retrieve their errors and climb...to the height of perfection." Confucius said: "To the good I would be good; to the not good I would also be good, in order to make them good."