

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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DESIRE FOR PRAISE

WHAT should be our attitude towards praise or blame? Should one shun them? Sometimes we find ourselves *seeking* praise: how do we overcome this tendency? Both praise and blame, when used constructively, play an important role in helping one's worldly as well as spiritual progress. Scriptures abound with advice on our attitude towards praise and blame, both as *givers* and *receivers*. However, we find more explicit guidance available as to our attitude towards *blame* as compared to praise, probably, because “blame” is regarded as the negative quality in the pair. But surprisingly, while one is able to handle criticism with a little understanding, often it is appreciation and its expectations that prove to be a stumbling block.

We readily see “mote” in another's eye but are oblivious to a “beam” in our own eye. As a result fault-finding and criticism comes more naturally to us than admiration, appreciation or praise. A few words of praise go a long way in encouraging a person and in boosting their confidence. On the other hand, words of criticism often tend to demoralize and discourage, though constructive criticism has its own value and place in the process of improvement and growth. Words of encouragement, expressing one's belief in the capability or virtue of another, are an indirect form of praise, and can really work wonders. The words, “I know, you have it in you,” or “Come on, you can do it,” coming from a well-meaning friend or an elder never fail to boost our confidence and strengthen

our belief in ourselves. On the other hand, children who are repeatedly told that they are “good for nothing,” live true to the words.

There is the wonderful story of frogs. A group of frogs were travelling through the woods, and two of them fell into a deep pit. When the other frogs saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead. They would never manage to come out. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump out of the pit with all their might. The other frogs kept discouraging them. Finally, one of the frogs paid heed to their words, and gave up. He fell down and died. The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could, in spite of discouraging words of frogs outside. Finally, when he managed to get out, the other frogs asked, “Did you not hear us?” The frog explained that he was deaf, and that all the time he thought that frogs outside were trying to encourage him!

Desire for praise is looked upon as a natural urge which must be addressed. Professor C. S. Lewis puts it thus: “The most obvious fact about praise...strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour...I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.” It has been observed that genuine praise can work as an incentive for better performance, but it is a tool which should be used discriminately, else it can create in a person reliance on reward and appreciation. There is a risk of becoming addicted to praise, or what they call, “praise junkies.” Motivational psychology research shows that once basic psychological needs are satisfied, the sense of belonging and approval of others, seem the strongest psychological motivations.

However natural the desire for praise may be, when we begin to *expect* praise, for certain special things we do, and do not receive it, there is terrible disappointment. Some of us literally thrive on praise, and that is a folly. In a sense, we are giving the remote-control of our happiness in the hands of others. No matter how much of an expert we may be in our own field of activity, there is always someone better or equal, and that we see when a painter, writer,

poet, dancer, singer, lecturer, preacher, musician, doctor or a lawyer, sooner or later, reaches a plateau. Great writers and philosophers, who might have thrilled humanity with their inspiring thoughts and ideas, eventually, come to a dull clinging to familiar thoughts, and enter a “tread-mill of thought.” “The cloud that surrounds him is as fatal as death itself, and men who once sat at his feet turn away grieved, and have to look back at his early words in order to remember his greatness,” says *Light on the Path*.

A person who has been able to cultivate a certain amount of healthy self-esteem is not likely to be dependent on other people’s appreciation. We are asked to be careful about developing exaggerated self-esteem and self-image, thus: “Self-gratulation, O Disciple, is like unto a lofty tower, up which a haughty fool has climbed. Thereon he sits in prideful solitude and unperceived by any but himself,” says the *Voice of the Silence*.

The first step in overcoming praise-addiction is recognition that one is addicted to praise, if not all the time, but in certain areas where one feels one excels or where one is habituated to being appreciated. The next step is to tide over the emotional disturbance that is likely to be caused when one is not admired or appreciated, or praised less frequently. There might be feelings of disappointment, anger, sadness or low self-esteem, but at that time it is important to resist the temptation to go looking for praise directly or indirectly. It takes some inner strength to resist the temptation to seek praise, and when it is kept up long enough, as Martha Beck, the author of “Steering by Starlight” says, “Your hungry soul will find its real food.” The soul, the real man is in no need of praise. As the *Voice of the Silence* says, “Shun praise, O Devotee. Praise leads to self-delusion. Thy body is not self, thy SELF is in itself without a body, and either praise or blame affects it not.” A person stops seeking praise, when he has learnt to efface his *ahankara* or egotism. Mr. Crosbie puts it thus:

We have to stand all tests alike—praise as well as blame.
Oft-times praise is the hardest to stand, because it is so easily

applied to the “personal idea,” while blame is easier cast aside....We should not be elated by praise or success, nor cast down by blame or failure, because either of these is an application of the “personal idea”—an identification of oneself with the event. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, pp. 18-19)

It is important to note that student-aspirants are tested as to their attitude towards praise and blame. They are tested the most in their public work of promulgation. They have to be careful while receiving appreciation for the work, because, as Mr. Crosbie puts it, “Adulation fosters ambition....Ambition to shine, to be looked up to,” because personality is the last foe to be conquered. As a result, very promising student-aspirants could, and have, strayed away from the path, falling prey to the glamour of praise. The emphasis therefore, is on cultivation of impersonality. But in trying to cultivate impersonality, students should not be unappreciative of the work of others. There must be in the hearts of all of us warm appreciation of the least work done by a beginner, as well as of the heavy tasks performed by older students.

It is a useful exercise to study the effect on ourselves of praise or blame, because then we become aware of the weaknesses and the strengths of our own natures. We may find out that there are areas in our life, skill and talents with which we have cultivated a kind of self-identifying attachment. We are sensitive of criticism pertaining to that skill or talent, but so also, there is a special expectation of praise and admiration for the same. Whenever these are missing we are depressed.

Such introspection gradually makes us realize the peace experienced by one who is equal-minded, the same in honour and dishonour, “to whom praise and blame are as one...content with whatever cometh to pass.” The more we realize that we are only the instruments or channels through which the divine works, the less is the frustration on being criticized or on absence of praise. A student-aspirant has to put his heart and soul in the study of philosophy, and

then bring his ideas and reflections as an offering, in every meeting. The attitude must be, “It is the work of the Masters that we are carrying on.” Then there will be no fear of personal defeat, nor anxiety for personal success.

Certainly, we are not asked to ignore, but instead to learn to evaluate the praise or blame of others around us. A Master of Wisdom puts it thus:

Do not set your pride in the appreciation and acknowledgment of that work by others. Why should any member of the Theosophical Society, striving to become a Theosophist, put any value upon his neighbours’ good or bad opinion of himself and his work, so long as he himself knows it to be useful and beneficent to other people? Human praise and enthusiasm are short-lived at best; the laugh of the scoffer and the condemnation of the indifferent looker-on are sure to follow, and generally to out-weigh the admiring praise of the friendly. Do not despise the opinion of the world, nor provoke it uselessly to unjust criticism. Remain rather as indifferent to the abuse as to the praise of those who can never know you as you really are, and who ought, therefore, to find you unmoved by either, and ever placing the approval or condemnation of your own *Inner Self* higher than that of the multitudes. (*Some Words on Daily Life*)

Instead of being elated or otherwise, by praise or blame, we can learn to regard them as providing us with another point of view, giving us an opportunity to extend our area of observation. Taking this position—that we can learn from praise or blame—enables us to become detached to a certain extent, taking us a step closer to becoming “equal-minded.” When we learn to evaluate another’s praise or blame, over a period we are able to identify those who indulge in exaggerated praise or blame, and these are the people who are least able to judge with discrimination, the nature of our performance. Even those few, who are able to judge wisely, are not able to evaluate the *motive* with which the action was performed. It

is difficult to come across a *wise* person, but by our experience we may identify people who seldom praise or blame, and when they do so, we should pay attention and profit by their impartial observation. But that does not mean that we should ignore the opinion of others, but learn to judge it for whatever it is worth.

Philosophically analyzed, who or what in us is desirous of praise? It is our personality. There is in each one of us a self-identifying attachment to our body, ideas, emotions, achievements, skills, etc. Our self-worth is generally measured by others, and also ourselves, on the basis of the derived “self.” There are experiences in life that open our eyes to the fact that our identity runs deeper than our appearance, our achievements, our ideas or feelings. Another thing to learn is to perform our actions, our duties, for their own sake, because they are there to be performed. “Let, then, the motive [and motivation] for action be in the action itself,” says the *Gita*. Instead of looking for appreciation, we should be satisfied, doing our best, cheerfully and carefully, doing something because it is there to be done. A Spanish priest, Father Wallace, who lived in Gujarat, India, for over 40 years, has written an essay on “Excellence,” in which he says that it should be the endeavour of each one of us to aim for excellence in any work we do, irrespective of reward, recognition or praise, and also irrespective of whether anyone is going to look at it or not. When statues made by the great sculptor and artist, Michelangelo, were stolen and sold, he thought of etching his name on each statue, but then decided against it, and instead determined to create such statues, which would carry with them the distinctive mark of his excellence, so that people should immediately recognize, on seeing the statues, to be the work of Michelangelo.

Another thing that may help in overcoming our desire for appreciation is learning to appreciate another person and his achievements. We must make it a point to notice the good in others rather than their weaknesses. *Mudita* or sympathetic joy is a feeling of joy in the happiness, achievements and well-being of others.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE HERMIT WHO BROKE HIS VOW

A DERVISH once dwelt in a mountainous place with solitude for his bedfellow and companion; he had grown weary of the breaths of men and women, since the soft zephyr of grace was wafting to him from the Creator. Now upon that mountain grew many trees and fruits, many mountain pears, innumerable indeed.

“Lord,” the dervish declared, “I have made covenant with Thee that so long as I live I will not pluck any of these. Excepting those fruits that the wind has caused to fall, I will not pluck any from the upstanding trees.”

For a while he kept faithful to his vow, until the trials of Destiny came upon him. For five successive days the wind caused not one pear to fall; so fierce was the fire of his hunger that endurance deserted him. He glimpsed several pears on a twig, but still he controlled himself with fortitude. Then the wind came along and bent down the end of the branch, whetting his natural appetite to devour the fruit. Hunger, weakness and power of Destiny’s pull conspired to make the ascetic unfaithful to his vow. He became false to his vow and covenant, and plucked the fruit from the mountain pear. In that same moment God’s chastisement descended on him, opening his eyes and tugging his ear.

Twenty thieves and more were mustered in that place dividing among themselves the goods they had stolen. An informer had apprised the commissioner of police; the police officers fell upon them promptly. The prefect cut off the left foot and right hand of every one of them, and a great commotion arose. By mistake the ascetic’s hand was also cut off; the prefect moreover was just about to amputate his foot. At that very moment a high-ranking officer, came riding, and shouted to the policeman.

“Dog, look at what you are doing! This man is Sheikh So-and-so, one of the great saints of God. Why have you severed his hand?”

The policeman rent his uniform and went in haste to the

commissioner, reporting the matter at once. The commissioner came barefoot, begging to be excused. “I did not know,” he said, “God is my witness. Pray absolve me of this abominable deed, noble saint and headman of the population of Paradise!”

“I know,” said the saint, “the cause of this injury. I recognise my own sin. I broke the sanctity of God’s oath, therefore his judgment took away my right hand. I broke my covenant knowing it to be evil, so that that ill-omened audacity recoiled upon me. Governor, may my hand and my foot, my brain and my skin be offered in sacrifice to the Friend’s decree! This was my destiny. I absolve you. You did not know. It was no fault of yours. He who knows all things, knew this too; His command is absolute. Where is the strength to wrestle with God?”

Since the ascetic’s hand had been cut off on account of his throat’s gluttony, he closed the door of complaint. He became known amongst the people as the Amputated Sheikh; the calamities caused by his gullet made him famous by that name. A visitor found him in his hut one day weaving a basket with both his hands.

“Enemy of your own life,” the Sheikh addressed him, “you have come poking your head into my hut. Why have you ventured in with such indecent haste?”

“Out of the excess of love and longing,” said the visitor. The Sheikh thereupon smiled. “Come in now,” he said. “But see that you keep this thing secret, noble sir. Till I die, tell this not unto any man, neither to a comrade, a loved friend, or a worthless nobody.”

Thereafter other people peeping through his window became informed of how he was weaving. “Thou, Creator, knowest the wisdom in this,” the saint cried, “For all that I conceal my secret, Thou hast revealed it.”

Divine inspiration came to him, saying, “There were a number of people who, on account of this affliction, were beginning to disbelieve in thee, saying, ‘Haply he was an imposter in the Way, so that God has exposed his shame among the brotherhood.’ I do

not wish that that flock should become unbelievers and in their evil thoughts go into perdition. Therefore, We manifested this miracle, by giving thee a hand at the time when thou art working, so that these luckless men with their real evil thoughts may not be repulsed from the Lord of Heaven. Aforetime indeed without such miracles I was giving thee consolation from My Self; this miracle I have given thee for their sake, and on that account I have committed to thee this lamp. Thou hast transcended the fear of bodily death. Dark thoughts of the scattering of head and foot have gone from thee; a shield right strong has come to thee, to ward off dark thoughts.”
[Taken and averidged from, *Tales from the Masnavi*, by A. J. Arberry, published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961.]

* * * * *

This apparently simple story deals with deeper aspects of karma and discipleship. The story shows the importance of a vow or a pledge, which is a kind of agreement with one’s divine nature. A vow cannot be taken casually by one who is determined to walk the spiritual path. In the worldly sense, the one breaking a vow, may hardly be regarded a “sinner.” Moreover, how could the punishment for plucking and eating a fruit, and thereby breaking one’s promise, be something as severe as losing one’s hand? Karma is action and reaction. However, this reaction is not mechanical but takes into account the motive, the person’s state of knowledge or ignorance, and his inner development. The Karmic responsibility is in proportion to his knowledge. The more the knowledge—of right and wrong—the less will be the “mercy” of the law. For instance, the severity of the karmic backlash in case of a Bhikkhu stealing bread when hungry, would be more than in the case of an ordinary man—because the Bhikkhu has taken up the discipline to control his lower appetites. This might be the principle behind the stories about a great karmic backlash for a trifling sin. We come across several instances in the *Mahabharata* of comparatively progressed beings, experiencing severe karmic consequences for trifling sins. Thus, Gandhari, the

mother of hundred Kauravas, had the misfortune of witnessing the death of all her hundred sons and she trace the cause for in her fifty-first life, in which she had inadvertently poured water on an anthill and killed hundred ants for which she was now punished by death of her hundred sons. Thus, “Every pledge or promise unless built upon four pillars—absolute sincerity, unflinching determination, unselfishness of purpose, and moral power... is an insecure building,” writes H.P.B.

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STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

THE WEB OF LIFE—II

THE RAJASIC human being, unlike a *tamasic* person, is energized by a very colourful and emotional principle of desire. He is constantly in action, in movement, and this desire principle which energizes him gives this man a strong desire for gain; he tries by all means to possess objects of sense. He is greatly interested in the impressions he is receiving from outside, and he reacts to those impressions, following his own desire principle, and when one follows passion or desire the result invariably is pain, sorrow, anguish. This person is not indifferent and cold, he is suffering very bitterly. He wants to keep himself active and has inordinate desires. As Krishna points out, this means he is not only attached to the results of these actions, but he also wants to begin something new all the time, to have some new experience, to start some new activity. His life is thus one which is never quiet, never restful, never peaceful, but a life in which he is constantly moving, doing something with unquiet and unrest. This *rajas* quality really belongs, in a way, to the moral life of our own modern civilization. For, if we look at the characteristics of this civilization, we shall recognize the signs and the marks of the *rajas* quality, in which, too strong a desire for constant activity is shown, and individuals are looking for nourishment for their own emotional and sentimental nature. They love crowds, big gatherings, noises of all descriptions. Still, if these qualities of activity, of strong desire and passion, are virtues for the person who is living that senseless, cold existence, similar to the existence of a plant or tree, these characteristics are not virtues but vices when we have reached the stage of evolution that we have already attained. So we should aim at acquiring the qualities of *sattva*, and thereby detaching ourselves from the qualities of *rajas*, of desire and passion, which bind the soul strongly to the body.

The *sattvic* man is the one who has overcome not only sensation and blind impulse, but also feeling, emotion and sentiment. He has

attained the region of thought and reflection, and thereby he shows forth knowledge, a sense of justice and unselfishness. This person is holy, pure and good, and yet, Krishna explains to us that even this person is strongly attached to the personal nature, through his very appreciation of that which is wise, and that which is good, and thereby pleasant to his own better nature. Just as it is necessary to overcome the inertia and senselessness of the *tamas* quality and enter into the emotional life of *rajas*, so also, it becomes necessary to overcome emotion and desire, and enter the quiet and the equipoise condition of *sattva*. Further, it becomes necessary to overcome and surmount *sattva* itself.

Inside of the continuous motion and mobility of the *rajas* quality, this *sattvic* being moves in a harmonious and steady way and he engages himself in constant study and labour, and his life is one of contentment and peace. Thus we see how those very things which are vices or weaknesses in one of the stages are the virtues which will help the person in the stage below to surmount attachment to the body. All these characteristics, once acquired and used for the purpose of the soul, if allowed to run to excess, become vices, and once more attach us strongly to the personality. The fate of these three classes of beings has also been described in this discourse. States after death, given here correspond exactly to that given in the Eighth Discourse, which also gives a three-fold division.

Krishna says that the *tamasic* beings sink below after death, and that they return in wombs which are deluded. The *rajasic* being goes to the middle sphere, and he comes back into bodies which are strongly attached to action through desire, and the consequences of desire-prompted actions. The *sattvic* being mounts on high. He goes to those spotless spheres, where live those who are acquainted with the highest truths. But although these *sattvic* beings, through their own purity and goodness, obtain liberation for themselves, as explained in the Eighth Discourse, these beings, entering into final peace and bliss of Nirvana, will have to return at the time of a new period of manifestation. Thus, if we wish to become immortal beings

then we should not become just *sattvic* beings, but become like unto Those who are referred to in the first verse of this discourse, the *Mahatmas*, the perfected men. To become immortal and enter the company of the Great Ones, we must aim at overcoming the very quality of *sattva*, which is still a binding and an attaching quality. There are three classes according to the three *gunas*, but there is a fourth class, the highest condition, which we know as the Path of Discipleship, or the Path of the Masters.

He who would become a Master, he who is trying to fit himself to become a *chela*, must cease identifying himself even with the good quality of purity, light, *sattva*; he must overcome all three qualities of nature and enter that sphere which we call the sphere of pure *sattva*. This pure *sattva* contains all that is good, not only in *sattva* quality, but also in *rajas* and *tamas*. Such a person begins to use properly all three qualities because he does not identify himself with any of the three. Such a person neither runs after knowledge and wisdom, and that which is true and good, and nor does he try to avoid that which is unpleasant and untrue, which is the opposite of wisdom. He is ready to use these qualities wherever they appear for the benefit of his work itself. Of that man Krishna says in verse 19:

When the wise man perceiveth that the only agents of action are these qualities, and comprehends that which is superior to the qualities, he attains to my state.

This word, the “wise” man, is in the original *Drashta*, meaning the *seer*—it would be well to connect this word seer with the word “*Upadrashta*,” the Spectator of all things. In the words of *Isis Unveiled*, the soul has merged itself with the sovereign and immortal lord, thereby gaining for itself, *absolute immortality*. A Chela, a disciple, uses these qualities for his work in the service of humanity, and he can use all three, whether in his own study, in the application of the great truths of Theosophy, or in their promulgation. From the quality of *tamas*, he can gain sufficient strength to stand and wait, to be slow before he begins action, and can learn to be patient. From the quality of *rajas* he gains the constant persevering effort in

study and in doing good to others. And from the quality of *sattva*, he gains true equipoise which enables him to remain steady and content whatever may be the circumstances in his work or in his own personal life. Such a person does not long for any of these qualities when they disappear, nor attach himself to them when they appear. Krishna describes such a person in verses 24 and 25:

Who is of equal mind in pain and pleasure, self-centred, to whom a lump of earth, a stone or gold are as one; who is of equal mind with those who love or dislike, constant, the same whether blamed or praised; equally minded in honour and disgrace, the same toward friendly or unfriendly side, engaging only in necessary actions, such an one hath surmounted the qualities.

In the following verse Krishna says that such a person is his servant, thereby making clear that the one who has entered the fourth stage is not indifferent, though he appears to have become passive and negative, because if he is the servant of Krishna, which means the servant of the Masters, he must be constantly engaged in that service, which is not the *rajasic* inordinate activity, of the second stage, but is a steady equipoised service. Such a person, says Krishna, “has exclusive devotion for me.” He worships Krishna exclusively. But what is the true meaning of “worship”?

The correct use and the real spiritual meaning of words in a language get obscured and are forgotten, as the nation using that language forgets the spiritual truths. Thus, words which are sacred and holy are used in a very irresponsible manner, and come to mean very different things from their original meaning. Such is the word “Worship.” Today, to the mind of the average person, this word conveys the idea of offerings and prayers, in temples and churches, to the image of some saint or hero. Worship, from the true spiritual significance, simply means becoming worthy of relationship with the Masters, and when Krishna says that we should worship him, we translate his meaning, explaining that we should worship the Masters, *i.e.*, endeavour to become worthy of relationship with the

great Masters. This is indeed the one aim of all true and sincere students of Theosophy, for the final goal on the path of chelaship is complete union with the consciousness of the Great Masters.

How is that union to be obtained, if we do not begin, here and now, to show forth in our own nature, in some measure at least, some of the qualities embodied by these great Beings? That is what is meant by worship. That is how we can become worthy of relationship with the Masters. We are really like unto buds. We must blossom forth and become the flowers and then the fruits, and this comparison of flower and fruit is really a very good one to sum up the idea of perfection. The beings whom we speak of as *sattvic* beings those who gain liberation through the quality of purity and goodness and truth are like unto the new seeds contained in a fruit, that is, before they produce another flower and another fruit, they must go through the whole process of evolution once more. Masters are not the seeds, not the flowers, not the fruits, not even the tree, the roots of the tree, the trunk or the branches. If we consider a tree we may say that the roots of that tree are the *tamas* quality; the sap which energizes and gives life to the whole tree is the quality of *rajas*; the flowers and the fruits are the quality of *sattva*. But the Masters are not even the fruits. They are a Principle which combines the whole of this Eternal Sacred Tree, a tree which from its own flowers and fruits produces shoots, which fall down into the earth to rise again and go forth to new parts of that same tree. Thus, the tree never dies, but is immortal. This tree is called the Ever-Living-Human-Banyan or the *Ashwattha* Tree, the Eternal Sacred Tree which really symbolizes the powers and the nature of the Living Mahatmas, and it is that Tree of Life, that Immortal Tree which has been described in the Fifteenth Discourse.

(Concluded)

ON TEMPLES AND TABERNACLES

III

MOSES, an Initiate into Egyptian mysteries, is supposed to have constructed in the wilderness a tabernacle, copying the Pyramids of the Egyptians, and after him the Jewish High Priests constructed Solomon's Temple. The temple of Solomon is allegorical, and neither King Solomon nor his Temple had real existence. We are told in the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 396 fn.) that traces of such a man "are nowhere to be found outside of the Bible," and in *Isis Unveiled* (II, 391) we read that the detailed description, we have been given of the Temple of Solomon, is purely allegorical and "whether or not there ever was a real temple of that name, we may well leave the archaeologists to decide." Mr. Judge writes that "somewhere in the misty time to which the Jewish records refer there lived and moved among the people of the earth one who was an Adept and given that name afterwards." (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 9)

In one sense, the body of man is the temple of God, the divine essence. Theosophy teaches that the building of the human body was a gradual evolutionary process, occupying millions and millions of years, proceeding in silence. "This is the real explanation of the old Jewish, Masonic, and archaic saying that the temple of the Lord is not made with hands and that no sound of building is heard" (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 29). Man is mortal and immortal; visible and invisible, composed of seven principles. These principles are: body or *Rupa*, astral body or *Linga-Sarira*, *Prana* or Vitality, *Kama* or desires and passions, *Manas* or Mind, *Buddhi* or Spiritual Soul and *Atma* or Spirit. The tabernacle of man is also a *quaternary* or made of lower four principles, in which dwells the God or Trinity. The physical body, astral body, *prana*, *kama*, etc. are the sheaths of the soul. The goal of evolution is to acquire self-conscious immortality, while in the body, *i.e.*, to so purify the lower principles as to allow the light of *Atman* to shine forth.

Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali (Book II, Aphorism 3) mentions

Abhinivesha, which means the "tenacious wish for existence upon the earth." Mr. Judge mentions that the tenacious wish for existence upon earth is inherent in all sentient beings. "There is in the spirit a natural tendency, throughout a *Manvantara*, to manifestation on the material plane, on and through which only, the spiritual monads can attain their development." It is the indwelling Spirit which evolves the instruments (bodies) for Its use, and impels them towards higher perfection. Thus, it appears that the desire for sentient existence, which impels the Ego towards greater perfection flows from *Atma-Buddhi* (Monad). However, the desire for material existence and sense-life flows from the personal man, which can drag down the Ego, and is the cause of its entanglement in the wheel of life and death. Thus, it is the lower Ego, with its fierce Selfishness and animal desire to live a Senseless life (*Tanha*), which is "the maker of the tabernacle," as Buddha calls it in *Dhammapada* (*S.D.*, II, 109-10). The tabernacle in man has to be made so pure that the divine within can manifest. The process of human evolution aims at producing at last, a perfect human race, of Buddhas and Christs.

The seeds of spiritual knowledge, art, science, agriculture and architecture exist in the divine nature of man, burnt into imperishable centre of his consciousness, by the Divine Instructors, 18 million years ago. These exist as *innate* ideas. Why do we not show forth this knowledge? We may understand it by the analogy of light surrounded by a glass covering. For the light to shine forth we need to clean the soot on the glass. The light of wisdom is covered by layers or sheaths or vehicles, which need to be purified. Thus:

The building of the Temple of Solomon is the symbolical representation of the gradual acquirement of the *secret* wisdom, or magic; the erection and development of the spiritual from the earthly; the manifestation of the power and splendour of the spirit in the physical world, through the wisdom and genius of the builder. The latter, when he has become an adept, is a mightier king than Solomon himself, the emblem of the sun or *Light* himself—the light

of the real subjective world, shining in the darkness of the objective universe. (*Isis*, II, 391)

In her book, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, H.P.B. writes about some of the very ancient Cave temples of India. According to the unanimous opinion of archaeologists, Karli is the most ancient and best preserved of Indian cave-temples. H.P.B. describes this temple as being oval in shape, 124 feet and 3 inches in total length, and 45 feet and 6 inches in width. The majestic entrance, resting on four massive pillars which form a quadrangle, is fifty-three feet wide, with a “lion column” in front of it. According to the architect-archaeologist, James Fergusson, this temple is older and better preserved than any other, and may be assigned to a period of about 200 B.C. Archaeologists are unable to determine whether this ancient temple was built by the Buddhists or Brahmins. There are secret libraries and subterranean passages at Karli. In fact, it is believed that every cave-temple in India has its subterranean passages running in every direction, and those underground caves and endless corridors have in their turn *their* caves and corridors. Why then could not Ellora, Elephanta, Karli and Ajanta have been built on the subterranean labyrinths?

In the same book H.P.B. mentions *Gharapuri* or Elephanta cave with its very ancient temple. “*Gharapuri*” translated means “the town of caves,” according to the Orientalists, but according to the native Sanskrit scholars, it means “the town of purification.” It is a very ancient temple, and hence none of the archaeologists has been able to make even an approximate estimate of its antiquity. And yet, *Gharapuri* is mentioned in the epic poem *Mahabharata*. According to another legend the temple of *Trimurti* (*Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Siva*) was built on Elephanta by the sons of Pandu, at the end of the war described in *Mahabharata*. Elephanta is so named by the Portuguese because of a huge rock cut in the shape of an elephant.

Comparing the rock-cut temples of Elephanta, Kanheri and Karli caves, H.P.B. writes that “it is not necessary to be either a specialist in architecture or an eminent archaeologist to be convinced at first

glance that such temples as Elephanta are the work of Cyclops, requiring centuries and not years for their construction.” At Karli, it appears that everything was built based on the carefully thought out plan. At Elephanta, however, it seems as if thousands of different hands were at work, at different times, each following its own idea and fashioning after its own plan.

The Kanheri and many other cave-temples were erected, without a doubt, by the Buddhists. “But Elephanta is much older and must be classed among prehistoric monuments, dating from the epoch immediately following the ‘great war,’ *Mahabharata*,” writes H.P.B.

Imposing ruins of the temple of Nagkon Wat, located in eastern Siam, is shrouded in greater mystery as to its builders. Learned men have failed to answer the questions: “Who built Nagkon-Wat? When was it built?” However, the pictures on the walls of the temple seem to point at far greater antiquity, as there are preponderating scenes from ancient Hindu mythology, figures sculptured in the Egyptian manner, man-fish deity comparable to Dagon of ancient Babylon, sculptured several times on the walls, as well as the Kabirian gods of Samothrace. (*Isis*, I, 561-66)

“Thus is it that all the religious monuments of old, in whatever land or under whatever climate, are the expression of the same identical thoughts, the key to which is in the esoteric doctrine. It would be vain, without studying the latter, to seek to unriddle the mysteries enshrouded for centuries in the temples and ruins of Egypt and Assyria, or those of Central America, British Columbia, and the Nagkon-Wat of Cambodia. If each of these was built by a different nation; and neither nation had had intercourse with the others for ages, it is also certain that all were planned and built under the direct supervision of the priests. And the clergy of every nation, though practicing rites and ceremonies which may have differed externally, had evidently been initiated into the same traditional mysteries which were taught all over the world.” (*Isis*, I, 561)

(*Concluded*)

CULTURE OF TOLERANCE—AN ETHICAL IMPERATIVE

TOLERANCE is defined as a fair, objective, and permissive attitude towards those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one's own. It implies an open-minded consideration of the views, beliefs, customs and practices of others, and a large-hearted accommodation of them as a legitimate part of the social environment, as much as one's own. The opposite of it is bigotry; which is complete intolerance of any creed, belief, or opinion that differs from one's own. Both these qualities—the one a noble sentiment, expansive and elevating, while the other, mean, narrow and constrictive—are present in human nature in different degrees. It is not difficult to perceive that people holding these two mutually opposite attitudes carve out for themselves two different destinies, and create two different social environments—the one harmonious, unifying and progressive, and the other divisive, discordant and regressive. The predominance of one of these two qualities in the character of an individual is the outcome of his education and upbringing. A society imbued with the culture of tolerance is necessarily harmonious and progressive, and, contrariwise, regressive and self-defeating.

If India, the oldest living civilization in the world today, is still surviving and flourishing, despite its vast cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, even after many invasions and conquests of the land by foreign hordes, it is mainly because of its culture of tolerance. This virtue has been a characteristic feature of the Indian ethos as it has been nurtured by precept and by example, by countless generations of great sages, saints and reformers. They have trodden this ancient land from time immemorial with their vision of the essential unity of all beings, inculcating among the people reverence for all life, seeing divinity in all, and brotherhood of humanity. India has always welcomed with open arms migrants, refugees, seekers of asylum, influencing and enriching them with her spiritual values,

and assimilating, in her turn, their arts and culture.

Cultivation of the virtue of tolerance is an ethical imperative because, being a virtue of our moral nature, its cultivation is absolutely necessary for individual happiness, social harmony and world peace. Though tolerance has been a characteristic feature of Indian culture, signs of intolerance and parochial attitudes often show up among a section of people in India. Reason for this is evident. It is due to loss of spiritual knowledge and wisdom. With the loss of wisdom, meaning of events and vicissitudes of life are not understood, lessons of historical events and experiences are missed, and are misinterpreted. Negative attitudes which thus develop in people's minds from ignorance vitiate society with mutual distrust, intolerance and hatred between individuals and communities. Enactment of laws by the State to contain social disturbances which ensue can only be a palliative. Legislation cannot reform human nature. Nor are mere academic learning and scholarship of much avail without the light of wisdom to illuminate the mind. One may be very learned and still be biased in perception, and parochial in attitude. What is required, then, is diffusion of spiritual knowledge and discernment through right education which dispels ignorance that darkens the mind and the intellect, and reveals the truth in all things.

Fundamental truth of existence is Universal Brotherhood. Theosophy teaches, "Humanity is a great Brotherhood by virtue of the sameness of the material from which it is formed physically and morally" (*The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 146). True education and reform consists in demonstration of this profound truth of existence on logical, metaphysical, and scientific grounds, and aids mankind in the realization of it. It develops godlike qualities latent in man and promotes true progress, the end of which is perfection of man. That is the purpose of all true education. "Unless, however, it [mankind] becomes a Brotherhood also intellectually, it is no better than a superior genus of animals" (*ibid*). So long as Brotherhood is not cultivated, just so long true progress is hindered by divisions, disunity and conflicts.

Universal Brotherhood as a fact of existence cannot be easily demonstrated by empirical methods, though indirect evidence can be furnished from known facts of life. But such outer evidences, and reasoning based on them, do not speak to the human heart and move conscience. It is a question of an intuitive perception and an awareness of an all-pervading unity underlying the infinite diversity of life. The truth is that mankind is formed essentially of one and the same universal, eternal essence. Therefore, whatever affects one man or a nation affects all other men and nations, as surely as a stone thrown into a pond sets up ripples, which move every other drop of water in it. True education consists in elucidating and drawing out the perfection of all-Seeing Spirit latent in every individual, enabling one to see one Self in all, and all in one's Self, and discerning one Truth which underlies all religions. "If the root of mankind is *one*, then there must also be one truth, which finds expression in all the various religions" (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 45). When these truisms are well known and understood, religious tolerance naturally follows, and a realization that harm that we may do to another—whether as an individual or a nation—is harm done to oneself, no matter whether the "other" is an offender himself or not; and, conversely, adverse conditions and difficulties which we often encounter in life are seen and recognized to be the just outcome of our own actions done in the past, all of which are necessary for soul's experience and evolution in the school of life. Right knowledge of Universal Brotherhood and the Law of Karma are absolutely necessary to correctly understand the cause and the source of evils of life, and their remedy.

The law of Karma is the great Adjuster as it brings about the harmonious adjustment of the disturbance in universal harmony produced by our actions with unerring, undeviating, inexorable justice. The doer of good receives the effects as so much pleasure and happiness; the evil doer suffers pain and suffering in exact proportion to the pain he caused by his thoughts and actions, and the victim of his evil deed is compensated in exact measure for the loss and injury he suffered. While we cannot escape destiny—which

is self-made—and are compelled to suffer or enjoy the fruits of our actions, we yet have discrimination, intelligence, and judgment to understand the absolute justice of the moral law of causation, and the Will to set in motions causes by such thoughts and actions in the present as would produce better conditions, happier circumstances, and greater opportunities in the future. Blind indeed are they who habitually quarrel with the circumstances of life, and, feeling themselves the victims of injustice, either resort to escapism or avenge the wrong they think is meted out to them by retaliation. This is folly born of ignorance. "But verily there is not an accident in our lives, not a misshapen day, or a misfortune, that could not be traced back to our own doings in this or another life" (*S.D.*, I, 643-44). When Sage Parasara, whose father had been devoured by a Rakshasa, resorted to magical ceremony to destroy the whole race of them to avenge his father's death, his grandsire, Vasishtha, intervened and bade him to abandon the sacrifice with a sage advice:

"Let thy wrath be appeased. The Rakshasas are not culpable; thy father's death *was the work of Karma*. Anger is the passion of fools; it becometh not a wise man. *By whom, it may be asked, is anyone killed?* Every man *reaps the consequences of his own acts*. Anger, my son, is the destruction of all that man obtains....and prevents the attainment of emancipation. The sages shun wrath. Be not thou, my child, subject to its influence. Let not those *unoffending* spirits of darkness be consumed; let thy 'sacrifice' cease. Mercy is the might of the righteous." (*Vishnu Purana*, Book 1, Chapter 1; *S.D.*, I, 415-16)

In our ignorance we think that we are entitled to retaliate and punish those who hurt us, forgetting that the hand that smites us is our own, and thereby hurt ourselves the more, and cause our enemy whom we sought to avenge to be compensated by reward, by the impersonal Law. To a person, who understands the workings of Karma, exercise of tolerance, charity, mercy and forgiveness comes naturally, and he places his entire reliance on the just and merciful

Law, which, through harmonious adjustment of all differences, makes for highest progress of all. This is the path of Love, which the Buddha taught.

“He reviled me, he beat me and conquered and then plundered me,” who express such thoughts tie their mind with the intention of retaliation. In them hatred will not cease. “He reviled me, he beat me and conquered and then plundered me,” who do not express such thoughts, in them hatred will cease. In this world never is enmity appeased by hatred; enmity is ever appeased by Love. This is the Law Eternal. The many who know not this also forget that in this world we shall one day die. They do not restrain themselves. But those who recognize the Law end their quarrels soon. (*The Dhammapada*, Verses 3-6)

The wise who know the truth forgive and forget offences suffered by them, in which they see the working of the retributive justice they themselves had earned by their own wrong doing in the past, learn the lesson implicit in the painful experience, and move on, free from hatred or malice, thus wiping away so much of their Karmic debt. Acts of charity and forgiveness transform enmity into friendship. Thoughts of hatred and revenge, on the other hand, poison one’s soul, perpetuating ignorance and misery. Persecutions suffered by people in the past at the hands of perpetrators in the name of religion, racial prejudice or for gain are not to be avenged, in view of Karma.”Teach to eschew all causes;” teaches the *Voice of the Silence*, “the ripple of effect, as the great tidal wave, thou shalt let run its course.”

Historians view historical events as just happenstances, and fail to see in them the moral law of cause and effect set in motion by individuals and groups by their own actions. The Wise, however, seeing into the world of causes can trace every incident to the producing cause, however far back in time it may have been produced; and, as effects are wrapped up in, and not succedent to causes, they can know in advance the effects, which our present

actions will produce in the future, on moral, mental and physical planes. They teach us to learn from the unavoidable good and evil experiences which come to us as effects of past actions, and grow in wisdom. Guru Nanak had prophesied in the early 16th century that the people in the north-western province had brought on themselves, by their unjust, oppressive, sinful deeds, their own Karmic punishment in the shape of invading hordes from the north who would wreak havoc on them, and that none could avert it (*Guru Nanak Dev, Life and Teachings*, by Kartar Singh, pp. 157-159; and *Baburvani hymns*). In his compassion he remained with the masses while they suffered untold misery and pain at the hands of the invaders, shared their sorrow, suffered with them, gave them spiritual solace with his outpourings of soul-stirring devotional songs, stirred the conscience of the conqueror, Babur, to repent for the suffering he had inflicted on innocent people, and secured relief to the sufferers. The Guru’s act of boundless compassion is an illustration of the power of Love, which conquers enmity and hatred. Gandhiji exemplified the power of Truth and Non-violence in the freedom struggle of India, which was emulated by the South African leaders in their struggle against Apartheid. They laid the foundation for a new South Africa, putting behind them the bitter memories of the past—of hatred, guilt, fear and revenge, divisions and strife—through resolution of crimes and mutual offences committed during the freedom struggle in a spirit of exemplary tolerance and entire forgiveness, and a declaration that “there is a need for understanding but not for revenge, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *Ubuntu* but not for victimization.”

TOLERANCE is good, if understood rightly....Some think it to be intolerance to point out to others holding different views any errors of statement or fact. But Truth never yet agreed with error...Truth agrees only with Truth. So if we firmly believe...that we are in possession of Truth, it would be a false tolerance which would withhold it in the face of error.

—ROBERT CROSBIE

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: What is the meaning of *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*?

Answer: *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram* is a mystical trinity, which describes the nature of the Self or *Atman* in man. Spiritual life and progress involve moving from the outer, gross world, of name and form, to the inner, subtle world, which ultimately leads to the centre of our being, or Higher Self. Literally translated, *Satyam* means Truth; *Shivam* means goodness, benevolence or blessedness, and *Sundaram* means beauty. *Satyam* is Absolute Truth or that which always exists, unaffected by space and time, and the substratum of the whole existence. It is the Truth which cannot be conceptualized, but can be experienced. *Satyam* may be taken to refer to that mystical experience in which an individual soul sees itself identical with the Universal Whole and bows in reverence to THAT. A mystic who experiences the truth begins to express it or manifest it in his action. He begins to regard with equal mind, “a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and even an outcast who eats the flesh of dogs.” Thus, when truth is translated into action and expressed through every activity in life, it becomes *Shivam*, *i.e.*, auspicious. A person who exemplifies truth by living the life of oneness, harmony and reverence for Nature, becomes an evidence for the existence of Truth. *Shivam* is a mystic in action. Whatever activity is undertaken, it is done with the awareness that reality is at its deeper level, so that simple actions performed by this individual acquire a *beauty* of their own. Thus, *Sundaram* or beauty is probably that which arises out of one’s being and one’s actions, which are grounded in Truth or divinity.

In the *Symposium*—one of the dialogues—Socrates himself is being instructed by Diotima, a mystic. They agree that man advances

from, let us say, admiring the beauty of a handsome youth or a beautiful girl, to admiring the idea of a shape in the abstract, to admiring the beauty of conduct, to admiring the beauty of principles, until we approach the ultimate principle of all principles—BEAUTY. Thus the Greek tradition had already thought what an English poet wrote many centuries later: “Euclid alone saw beauty bare,” *i.e.*, that the highest experience of beauty is mathematical. It is not the *particular* colour or the *particular* texture. Some people say that Bach is a great musician, and others think that Jazz is great music. How is one to determine? But Plato firmly expressed that there is an idea of beauty that exists on its own plane, quite apart from what anybody thinks.

If we take this concept a step further we can say “beauty” is an aspect of the One Reality. One who is grounded in Truth, moves away from the (personal) self and is able to dispassionately admire beauty all around him. Only an impersonal admirer of beauty is able to discern beauty in the whole of creation, because he is able to see *inner* beauty. Swami Shri Savitanandji writes that we are mistaken when we look upon *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*, as three separate words. When we try to understand these words separate from each other, we are attracted to external beauty which we try to enjoy through the senses. But on the other hand, when we consider these three words together, and are able to appreciate that they are complementary to each other, we begin to realize that external beauty is the beauty of a person, object, surrounding or nature, and *that* beauty cannot be “*shiv*” or auspicious. *Shiv* means benevolent conscious energy which spontaneously brings about bliss. *Satyam* means *Sat*, which means unchanging, permanent and immortal. That beauty which is not permanent is not really speaking *Sundaram*. Such beauty, at best, is only an illusion produced by the five senses and the mind. Swamiji gives an example of young, beautiful girls who participate in, and win beauty contests. After forty or fifty years, someone who was elected the most beautiful woman in the whole world, is no longer judged beautiful, because the beauty that we

admired was not *true* beauty, it was not the beauty referred to in the aphorism, “*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram.*” It is the beauty which was appreciated through the senses, and that is why, even when she was elected the most beautiful woman of the world, not *all* participants, observers or selectors found her to be beautiful. Thus, true beauty or *Sundaram* is that which is blissful, auspicious and permanent, that which does not diminish or disappear with time.

But every beautiful thing contains in it that element of true beauty for those who are able to perceive it. When we look at a beautiful flower, face or form, while we appreciate outer beauty, we should, at the same time, also try to see or imagine in them the reflection of the divine beauty. Then that beautiful thing or person will no longer remain an instrument of sense pleasure, but will become a reminder of divine beauty. It is said that once some people, who were jealous of Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, tried to test him. They brought before him a young girl, who was extremely beautiful and scantily dressed. It is said that Ramakrishna Paramhansa first glanced at her, and then began to stare. People who had brought her there asked the girl to move a little to the side, and then some more, till she stood behind Ramakrishna Paramhansa. But to their amazement they found Ramakrishna Paramhansa continuing to stare at the same spot where she had stood before. In fact, he was not looking at the girl, but was in a trance. When asked, “What were you staring at?” he replied, “A little while ago a very beautiful young girl was standing before me. As soon as I glanced at her, I thought, ‘if this girl is so beautiful, how much more beautiful must be my Mother (goddess Kali) who has created her?’ With this thought I slipped into a trance, and I do not know what happened after that.” Swamiji says that *we* must also endeavour to cultivate such perception.

Question: In the *Puranic* stories gods and sages change forms. What is the purpose? Is it possible only for gods to change forms, and how is it accomplished?

Answer: Scriptures abound with the stories of gods and *devas* changing forms, for various purposes, good and bad. The variety of

gods and goddesses are various powers and forces of nature. The forms into which sages or gods transform themselves are often symbolic. There is the incident in the life of the Buddha, where his cousin Devadatta shot down a flying swan with an arrow and claimed that the bird must belong to the slayer, while the Buddha argued that it should belong to the one who saved its life. When the courtiers could not settle the issue of the hurt swan, a great ascetic appeared and decided the issue in favour of the Buddha. When the King wanted to make a present to him, he was nowhere to be seen, but instead saw a snake gliding away. The poet writes: “And someone saw a hooded snake glide forth—The gods come oftentimes thus!” There is an allusion to the symbology of the snake. A full initiate [a wise man] is called a “Naga,” a “Serpent” and a “Dragon” in esoteric philosophy. There are also stories of gods changing shape for some specific purpose, which might carry some deeper meaning.

There are stories of gods changing shape for deceitfully obtaining something, or for the purpose of destruction. For instance, Vishnu takes the form of a beautiful *apsara*, Mohini, an enchantress, to trick and beguile. In the myth of the churning of the ocean, the pot containing *Amrita* (the nectar of immortality) was stolen from gods by the demons. Vishnu gets back for the gods, the pot from the demons, by taking the form of Mohini and deluding them. In another story, Vishnu transforms himself into Mohini and charms the demon Bhasmasura who had obtained as a boon, the power to turn anyone to ashes, by touching their heads. Mohini invites him to dance with her with the condition that he would imitate her every move. In the course of the dance, she places her hand on her head and when Bhasmasura mimics that action, he reduces himself to ashes.

Gods change form to teach their disciples a lesson or to test them. For instance, once Adi Shankaracharya and his disciples were returning back after their bath in the river Ganges, when Lord Shiva in the guise of a *Chandala* (an outcaste) approached Shankara, and the latter quickly moved aside to avoid touching him. The *Chandala* noticed that and said, “Sir, you expound non-dualism, but your

actions make no sense. You think that contact with my body will make you impure, failing to appreciate that both your body and mine are composed of five elements, and the *Atman* in me is identical with the *Atman* in you. So, then what are you shrinking from?” Shankaracharya was humbled and the *Chandala* appeared before him in the form of Shiva. There are several stories of gods and goddesses appearing as an old man or woman and begging, to test the attitude of their devotees towards the downtrodden.

In the *Oriya Mahabharata* written by Sarala Das, there is an episode where Arjuna, during his wanderings, comes across a strange animal which is a composite of nine animals, and hence known as *Navgunjara*. It has the head of a rooster, the neck of a peacock, the waist of a lion, the hump of a bull, the tail of a serpent, one leg of an elephant, second of a tiger, third of an antelope, and with a human hand holding a lotus. It is the form taken by Krishna to teach Arjuna that ultimate Reality is One, but it appears different to different people, depending upon their innate *svabhava* or nature.

Theosophy explains the change of form on the basis of “glamour.” In Indian mythology, the gods every now and then, appear in various guises by means of “glamour,” which is charm on the eyes, and which causes the eye to see what is not really there. This change of appearance is not an actual change, but merely glamour affecting the eyes of the person who sees it. Glamour is a power possessed by some to bring witchery or charm over the eyes, writes Mr. Judge. The phenomena connected with *glamour* have been partly referred to in Patanjali’s *Yoga Aphorisms*, and Aphorism 21 in Book III explains the power of disappearance. It declares that in order to be able to see an object not only is it necessary for rays of light to proceed from the object to the eye, but also light must proceed from the eye towards the object. If the light from eye, falling on the object, is *cut off*, then the object disappears. But when the character of the luminousness of the light coming from the eye is *altered*, then the object is altered in shape or colour for the perceiver. (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 85)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Awesome awe is the emotion that gives us superpowers. Awe is so powerful it alters your sense of self, connects you with humanity and boosts your mind and body. A US novelist John Steinbeck’s response to California’s giant redwood trees, which soar more than a hundred metres towards the sky, was, “[They] leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always. From them comes silence and awe.” Anyone who felt transported by a stunning view, by soaring music or a grand scientific theory can understand Steinbeck’s response. Philosophers and writers have long been fascinated by our response to the sublime, but scientists are only now realising the profound effects of this emotion. Feeling awestruck can dissolve our very sense of self, bringing a host of benefits from lowering stress and boosting creativity to making us nicer people.

However, in the modern world, the word “awesome” is used somewhat loosely. Psychologist and pioneering researcher, Dacher Keltner, at the University of California, Berkley, and Jonathan Haidt, at New York University, described awe as the “feeling we get when confronted with something vast, that transcends our frame of reference, and that we struggle to understand. It is an emotion that combines amazement with an edge of fear. Wonder, by contrast, is more intellectual—a cognitive state in which you are trying to understand the mysterious.”

Keltner observes that awe expands our attention to encompass a bigger picture, reducing our sense of self, and that may be the reason why watching an awe-inspiring nature video or gazing up at tall eucalyptus trees, left people feeling more connected to others in general, and more inclined to help. “The desert is so huge, and the horizons so distant, that they make a person feel small,” wrote Paulo Coelho in *The Alchemist*. “The voice in your head, self-interest, self-consciousness, disappears. Here is an emotion that knocks out a really important part of our identity...as a result we feel more connected to bigger collectives and groups,” writes Keltner, about

the feeling of awe.

Though the concept of self-transcendence and feeling of awe has traditionally been associated with religious and mystical experiences, it is becoming increasingly evident that such experiences are available even to non-religious and atheistic persons. Keltner is concerned that in the modern world we are more likely to be gazing at our smartphones than at giant redwoods or a starry sky, and hence be disconnected from nature, and nature, he feels, is one of the most potent sources of awe, which makes us humble and charitable. “There is a growing realisation that awe has all sorts of benefits for individuals and society,” writes Jo Marchant. (*New Scientist*, July 29, 2017)

Most of our thoughts and feelings are self-centred and self-regarding. We must learn to “think away from ourselves.” We oscillate between pain and pleasure, likes and dislikes, almost like a pendulum. When a pendulum is at the centre, it momentarily ceases to oscillate. In a human being, the pendulum of consciousness ceases to oscillate when we experience impersonal feelings, and at times even forget ourselves. This happens when we are lost in admiring a sunrise or sunset, a beautiful landscape, or when we forget ourselves in helping others. Awe-inspiring moments could be impersonal moments, which help us to move away from ourselves, and take us a step closer to the divine within. *The Voice of the Silence* asks us to “seek in the *Impersonal* for the ‘Eternal Man’; and having sought him out, look inward: thou art Buddha.”

Often, contacting awe-inspiring art, literature or intellect, or being in the presence of awe-inspiring architecture, sculpture or vast spaces, is a humbling experience, which helps to remind us that “you are a very small affair in the world.” While the feeling of awe is powerful and beneficial to an extent, we should not be over-awed by anyone or anything. Ultimately, all awe and wonder for the things outside, should lead us to awe and wonder for the Divine within, which is the real source of all beauty, strength, grandeur or majesty which we find around us. “People travel to wonder at the height of

the mountains, at the huge waves of the seas, at the long course of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and yet they pass by themselves, without wondering,” said Saint Augustine of Hippo. Often, good moral behaviour is the result of *reverential awe* for God, in which there is more *fear* than reverence for God. Likewise, reverential awe for a person makes one surrender one’s judgement and intuition.

It appears that the human mind has tremendous ability to heal the body. However, the rational, volitional, thinking mind does not account for much in the realm of healing. Scientists feel that by combining in a right way, the human tendency to imitate with the immense power of culture, one can exploit untapped resources in the mind, and bring human healing responses to near-miraculous proportions. On May 14, 2013, the 38-year old actress, Angelina Jolie, who had recently lost her mother to breast cancer, and who was told that she was a carrier of the BRCA1 gene, associated with high risk for breast and ovarian cancer, announced that she would undergo breast removal surgery to prevent cancer, although she was perfectly healthy at that time. In the next 15 days, following the announcement, there was a sharp rise in BCRA tests in the United Kingdom alone. In an age of abundant medical data, the sharp shift in public attitudes about genetic testing following the endorsement by a celebrity became known as the Angelina Jolie effect. For a behaviour to be imitated it needs to be displayed by prestigious persons, who may be looked up to as reliable sources of information.

Meditation, hypnosis and placebo effects are among the many varieties of mind-body regulations that are of high interest to scientists and doctors. Placebo effects are stronger when the experimenters look like real doctors and the settings appear clinical. Technologically elaborate placebos, such as sham surgeries, work better than pills. In 2008, Harvard psychologist Irving Kirsch ignited controversy by pointing out that in clinical trials, SSRI (Selective Serotonin

Reuptake Inhibitors) medications used for treatment of depression performed only slightly better than placebos, and hence both drugs and placebos appeared to have become more effective over time. Jay Olson, an experimental psychologist found that the symbolic power of mock brain technology and clinical settings can be very effective in the treatment of headaches, stress, anxiety, and involuntary behaviours like nervous tics.

In a clinical experiment, conducted by Jay Olson and his team, a 9-year-old boy who suffered from chronic debilitating migraines, was informed, six months before the experiment, that he “might have a chance to be selected for a very expensive new cure” in which an elaborate machine would “teach his brain how to heal itself and push out the pain of his headaches.” During the experiment he was invited to lie in the mock scanner. It was found, four weeks after his second session, that the boy experienced no more migraines!

People may object to the use of suggestion on moral grounds. “Suggestion-assisted healing cannot, and should not, be used for well-understood conditions that demand medical attention and respond well to pharmacological treatment. Culturally-attuned, accessory-assisted suggestion cannot mend broken bones, prevent malaria, or substitute for insulin, chemotherapy or physiotherapy. But it can help people who suffer from syndromes and chronic conditions that elude current medical understanding and treatment,” writes Samuel Veissiere. (*Psychology Today*, July 2017)

Some bodily ailments have a close link to man’s unhealthy mental or emotional state. There are some diseases, which are transmitted from parent to child by heredity. There are congenital diseases, which afflict children. We also have diseases, which have their roots in our imagination. H.P.B. says that half, if not two-thirds, of our diseases are the fruit of our imagination and fears.

There are a numbers of cases of “faith-cure” to be found in the records of human history. Faith in the doctor, faith in the healer, faith in a holy place or an object canalizes patient’s will and brings about remarkable cures. Once Sir Humphry Davy cured a paralytic

patient by merely placing a thermometer under his tongue, day after day, and which the ignorant patient considered to be the treatment of his disease. Placebo pills have successfully removed disease without any actual medication. Vitamin injections have convinced naïve patients into firmly believing that their “medicinal” injections will remove the disease and thus they have actually been cured by their belief. H.P.B. beautifully sums up this particular aspect of healing, by saying, “Healing, to deserve the name, requires either faith in the patient, or robust health united with a strong will, in the operator. *With expectancy supplemented by faith, one can cure himself of almost any morbid condition.*” (*Isis*, I, 216)

Is visualizing success or thinking positive, counter-productive? We are always advised to think positive, and “positivity” is equated with success. Motivational gurus advise everyone to visualize success at the time of starting something new. But psychologists who have researched this subject for years report that the “think positive,” or “visualize success” approach does not deliver results. In an article published in *Aeon*, Gabriele Oettingen, professor of psychology at New York University and the University of Hamburg, writes: “Indulging in undirected positive flights of fancy is not always in our interest.” Oettingen and her colleagues consistently found: “The more people ‘think positive’ and imagine themselves achieving their goals, the less they actually achieve....Positive thinking relaxes us and drains the energy we need to take action.” Psychologists say that “positive thinking” or “dreaming about success” fools us into thinking that we have already achieved our goals, so we do not work as hard as people with “more negative questioning or factual thoughts.” Moreover, those dreaming of success were found to be initially less depressed, yet they were more depressed a month later.

To improve one’s performance and to achieve goals a technique called “mental contrasting” is recommended, which helps and encourages a person to direct more energy towards goals that are

achievable, instead of encouraging one to live in a fool's paradise. Mental contrasting enhances awareness of obstacles in our path, as also, awareness of what we need to do to overcome them. (*Sunday Times of India*, August 27, 2017)

“Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst,” perhaps expresses the true implication of “thinking positive.” When we make a positive formulation, *it is a direct affirmation of the will*. Once we take the positive mental position saying, “I can do it,” or “it can happen,” the whole of the emotional nature must be brought in perfect harmony with this. *When the desire is intense, the will comes into action*. Mr. Judge says that when you ardently desire to do some good thing, “your strong desire will strike like Vulcan upon other hearts in the world, and suddenly you will find that done, which you had longed to be the doer of.” Positive thoughts and feelings call forth, best efforts; moving that which seemed impossible into the area of the possible.

We have to think positive, feel positive, believe and have faith, but this does not mean getting attached to the results or asserting our will. There is a difference between the statements: “I *must* get a first class” and “I *can* get a first class.” In the latter we do our very best and leave the results to the Law. In the former case, it is assertion of the personal will.

Preparing for the worst is equally important, which Mr. Crosbie seems to recommend. He writes: “I used to look calmly and dispassionately at the very worst picture I could conjure up as happening to myself, and found it helpful in getting rid of ‘fear of consequences.’ I mentally took account of the very worst, saw myself in it with all that it entailed, went through it in all its parts leaving myself alone, dishonoured, stripped of everything. Those very things have happened to me, but I knew them, had outlived them, and went on undismayed. Had I not done it, I would not be where I am today.” (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 85)