

**Vol. 15**

**September 2023**

**Rs. 3/-**

**No. 5**

**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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Vol. 15, No. 5

September 17, 2023

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### THE GAME OF LIFE

A GAME is a type of play activity with one or more participants that try to achieve one or more goals by acting in accordance with the rules. The other components of games are challenges, interaction, victory or defeat. Normally, games are played for entertainment but they are often educative. The latter either teach a subject or some skill. A game is invented or created by one or more individuals. If “life” is a game, who created it? What is the aim? Who decides the rules of this game? What are the criteria for deciding winning or losing the game of life? If we really reflect upon these questions, we find that these are thought-provoking and metaphysical questions.

The term “life,” in the given context, must refer to the entire cosmos or world. According to Vedantin philosophy, the world is a mere spontaneous creation of *Brahman* or the Absolute Reality. It is a *Lila* or sport of *Brahman*, as distinguished from a self-conscious, volitional effort. God does not create the world like a potter creating a pot, in which the idea of the pot (called the efficient cause) is in his mind and he uses clay (material cause) to form the pot, which is outside of him. *Brahman* or rather Brahma, Its manifested aspect, creates the world like a spider weaves the web, wherein both the plan and material for the web comes from the spider. Brahma “expands” and becomes the universe woven out of his own substance. This creative activity of the Divine is called *Lila* or the play of God. The Divine becomes the world, which in the end, again becomes the Divine.

Life is a unique game, which cannot be played without the involvement of the creator of the game. The “creator” does not participate directly and yet without Its presence the game cannot even begin. The *Brahman* or *Paramatma* is present in everything in the world as *Atma*, just as the light and heat of the Sun pervades everything and everywhere through its rays. *Brahman* is full of all perfections and is not compelled to act out of any worldly need or desire in the way that humans are.

Since the divine has nothing to learn or gain, the play or *Lila* is the desire of the divine to express Itself through various instruments. There is only One Life in the world which sustains everything. Everything in the manifestation has proceeded from the same Divine Source, moving towards the same goal. The great Ocean of Life is separable into constituent drops and that separation is effected through the process of evolution. In the evolutionary march, we find that there is better and better expression of consciousness, with a tendency to separate into drops of *individualized* consciousness. Thus, we find that in minerals the consciousness manifests in terms of sympathy and antipathy; in plants, as sensation; in animals, as instinct and in human beings there is individualized consciousness, making man a self-conscious being, capable of thinking and choosing, and with the awareness of “I am I.” Each human being is truly a constituent drop of that ocean, and hence, just like every drop of ocean contains all the elements contained in the ocean, so also, each of us has every power and potentiality of the divinity within him. The game of life really begins when the human stage is reached, and then each human being becomes a player or participant, and the goal of this game is to achieve self-conscious godhood, *i.e.*, realization while in the human body that “I am verily the *Brahman*.”

To achieve this goal a player is not required to add anything new from the outside. However, effort needs to be made only to *unfold* what is locked up within, as potentiality. Each player is in possession of the powers of creation, destruction and regeneration, flowing from the divine within. Gradually, as a player ceases to identify

himself with the personality, and begins to identify himself with the Divine, unchanging Self, he begins to manifest power, glory and wisdom of that Divine Self. In all those spiritually advanced and self-realized beings, in whom there is a realization that “I am That,” there is perfect expression of the Self.

Game of life is complicated. On the one hand it appears that the Cause of the universe is the *Lila* of the Divine, but as we human beings begin to play the game of life we are made to reflect that *all* that is happening around us in this world is not solely his *Lila* but must be attributed to human beings who are required to play the game according to the Law, called the Law of Karma, which is the Ultimate Law of the Universe. Karma is the law of action and reaction or cause and effect. Each one has to become individually aware of the goal to be achieved, as they play the game of life.

Life seems to be a hurdle race. The hurdles are weaknesses within our nature as well as challenges of life, faced while we strive to adjust to our environment and also with other people around us. To play the game according to the Law, primarily means to recognize that this is a universe of Law, which exists for evolution through experience and liberation of the Soul. All those souls in the lower kingdoms—mineral, vegetable and animal, are also “players” and part of the game of life. In their case they progress from one level of the game to the other by “natural impulse,” or by the intelligence and guidance of the divine within, till they reach the level of human beings. The “souls” in lower kingdoms are playing within a narrow framework, having limited power of choice and absolutely no power to go contrary to the rules of the game or freedom to break the Law. Interestingly, this is a game based on co-operation and not competition. Once the soul reaches human level, the rules of the game change for reaching the ultimate goal, to become a winner. At human level, as already stated, the soul acquires additional powers: power to think, choose and also self-consciousness. All further progress is by self-induced and self-devised efforts checked by its Karma.

Human players are at a very high level of the game. Their

winning or losing is within the framework of the Law of Karma and depends upon how they exercise their power of thinking and choosing. No player can hope to win without seeking the co-operation of the creator of the game of life, the divine within, as also without learning to co-operate with and aid other human and sub-human players.

There is a poem “Nine Gold Medals,” written by David J. Roth based on a true incident, which some claim to be only partly true. The incident took place in the Special Olympics held at Spokane, Washington, in 1976. When nine differently abled athletes lined up to start the race, one runner fell down right after it started. Upon seeing this, all the others stopped running. They went back and helped the one who fell down stand up on his feet. After that, all of them walked hand-in-hand to finish the race. All the nine athletes were awarded a gold medal, in recognition and appreciation of their exceptional show of empathy and compassion. In the game of life such compassion becomes spontaneous when there is a recognition that the “sense of separation” is an illusion, because all the human and sub-human players are essentially and potentially divine and one of the unexpressed rules of the game is that a player, advances most rapidly when he stops to help other players and he becomes one with the Supreme most surely when he loses himself in working for other players.

The article, “On Philosophical Anarchism” (*The Theosophical Movement*, September 1958), suggests that family, tribe, community, nation, etc., are all playgrounds for the unfoldment of the individual, who may be regarded as a player. There is a dual process: first the individual entwines himself with these various institutions and then he extricates himself from each of them, when he has nothing more to learn. Each of these institutions has certain virtues that the individual, passing through it, must acquire. He, as a soul, repeatedly takes birth in that environment till he acquires the virtues afforded by that institution. All the time the individual, as a player, is learning how to co-operate—in the family with a few, in the tribe with a few

more, as a nationalist with many, and finally as a humanitarian with all. But slowly, as he has finished taking the necessary experience and imbibed the necessary virtues afforded by the institution, he begins to extricate himself. Then, having learnt the lessons from the family-State, the individual-player involves himself with nation-State and race-State and acquires the virtues of that State through the instrumentality of fellow citizens. The keynote of the first process is union and co-operation with others, while that of the second process is *unity*, “as a result of which the individual, self-reliant, self-satisfied, flowers as the Free Man, the perfect Citizen of a Lawless Kingdom.” A similar idea has been expressed in *Light on the Path*: “It is written that for him who is on the threshold of divinity no law can be framed.”

There are those who feel that if we treat life like a game, we rob it of its meaning and moral value. But there are various kinds of games. Some are only for enjoyment, while there are those designed to teach people the meaning and purpose of life. In India there is a dice game called the *Gyan Chaupar*, popularly known as Snakes and Ladders. It was played for entertainment and also to instruct people on morality, the term “*gyan*” means “knowledge,” of spiritual and moral nature. Each block or square carries a numeral along with spiritual philosophy and is connected with the theory of Karma and the philosophical life of human beings. The central concept of the game is the liberation from the wheel of birth and death.

The *Gyan Chaupar* board is of various types, having a grid pattern, with at least seventy-two squares. The topmost part of the board is the heavenly abode or the *moksha dwar* (door to liberation), representing the head of the cosmic being. Likewise, at the bottom there is a *narak dwar* (door to hell). Each player starts from the bottom *Narak Dwar* and takes turns to roll dice. According to the number generated he moves forward and ultimately reaches the goal of uniting with the Supreme Deity. Players aim to move their pieces towards ultimate liberation. A piece may be taken to represent the “soul.” However, along the journey, the pieces could move up a

ladder, which represents virtuous actions or karma, or they could move down a snake, representing vices or unwholesome karma. Step by step, the players move from the lower levels of consciousness to higher levels of spiritual enlightenment and finally to liberation. In this game, it may so happen that one's piece may be at a place that is only a square or two away from liberation, when in the next move one goes down a large snake, to the bottom. "The smallest wave of longing or regret for Maya's gifts illusive... will make thee thy three prizes forfeit—the prizes thou hast won." In other words, in the game of life, each player is required to have cultivated perfect detachment to be able to conquer *maya* or illusion, otherwise, even slightest longing can drag him down from the state of self-sacrifice, patience and morality he may have reached. It is only after reaching the stage of *Samadana* that he becomes constitutionally incapable of deviating from the path.

What makes life joyful and fulfilling is challenges, problems, hurdles, struggles, pain and uncertainties, without which winning and losing will have no meaning. Each player weaves the web of destiny depending upon what reaction or response they give to various situations in life. "Sow a thought, reap and act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." Today's destiny is made by our choice in the past. Today's choice weaves our destiny in the future. If a man makes the choice to go in the right direction, he goes forward, else he goes backward.

When Karma has ripened and begun to precipitate, all we can do is to experience the effects with the right attitude, instead of complaining or grumbling. With the attitude of resignation, we will not resort to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, to cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge the karmic consequences. A player can and should make every legitimate effort to change the existing situation, but at the same time learn to accept the inevitable and use the situation as raw material and extract necessary lessons. It might consist in learning the lessons of fortitude and sympathy, or detachment and patience, and so on. When intense efforts are made, the influence of the Karmic tendency is shortened.

## THE GAME OF LIFE

People who play a game are at different levels and have different capacities. In the game of life also, there are different types of players based on their *gunas* or qualities. They are of five basic types: Those in the lowest regions of the universe, below the quality of *tamas* or darkness; beings who are centred in the quality of darkness; beings who have come into the stage known as the *rajasic* state, where the quality of *rajas* or desire becomes the energizing force; beings who have transcended the desire and entered the pure sphere of *sattva*, or truth, and finally those beings who have overcome and transcended the three qualities and stand above *sattva* itself. It is necessary for each player to pass through these levels, in the process of evolution, but it is not necessary for him to fall below the quality of *tamas*.

The highest “players,” that have transcended the three qualities, are the Masters of Wisdom, in whom there is perfect expression of the divine. They are the winners of the game of life. Those who are close to becoming the winners, crossing the finish line, are the ones who have entered the sphere of truth. At the other end of the scale are those players who have fallen below *tamas*, the quality of darkness, indifference and ignorance of the divinity. They are the black magicians, the “lost souls,” who have lost the game of life. For them, Shri Krishna says in the *Gita* that “Indulging in pride, selfishness, ostentation, power, lust, and anger, they detest me who am in their bodies and in the bodies of others. Wherefore I continually hurl these cruel haters, the lowest of men, into wombs of an infernal nature in this world of rebirth. And they...more and more deluded in each succeeding rebirth, never come to me.” This is final annihilation, which is worse than hell. The rest of the “players” are those human beings, who belong to the middle sphere, moved by the quality of *rajas* or desire and passion, with the tendency to go forwards towards the great Masters, and also, unfortunately, the tendency to go towards their own lower nature, progressing and regressing, till they learn to take the game seriously.



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## “THY KINGDOM COME”

### III

THY Kingdom Come follows the archetypal hero’s journey which in all instances including this story, represents the active, self-impelled evolutionary progress of every human monad back to its primeval source. The saga starts with the monad finding itself individualized, separate and incarnate, possessed of wondrous faculties but with no recollection of whence it came. The fall is the result of a philanthropic desire to combat the dark forces of passion, here represented by the vermin quarry, and to rid his lot of its infestation. But in his struggles, he finds himself sucked into the vortex of life that hurls him through the four elements, which in the story appear as water of the river, air as he falls off the cliff, earth on which he awakes and fire that he first sees upon waking.

But immediately upon incarnation, he becomes dual-natured—himself and the old man, the lower and the higher self. And yet, the lower recognizes not the higher, and the higher can only help the lower in the degree to which it surrenders itself to the former. The old man answers only the question posed to him and never gives unsolicited advice, just as the sun only warms those who walk out of the shade into its light. The old man’s answers are poetic but also cryptic and veiled in symbology, for truth cannot be transmitted in any language save that evoked in the heart. So, the first verse holds the mystery of the origin of man, veiled in the Greek symbology of the river Lethe which is said to induce forgetfulness on the transmigrating souls.

Our hero first assumes the name Chandra or Moon, representing the fact that while man is of dual-origin, Solar and Lunar or Spirit and Matter, in his current state, he identifies himself with matter alone and through struggles and suffering gravitates towards the Solar, thus redeeming Spirit through flesh. This fact is reflected in our hero’s real name, Sanath Kumara, the virginal solar deity. Further along, Chandra is seen entering the body, here represented as the

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city with nine entrances, called in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Nava-Dwara-Pura*. And while he is in fact the rightful heir to this estate, due to lack of self-knowledge, he uses all his faculties to serve the very usurper of his throne—the Kamic principle in Man. In his “*beclouded*” state, he mistakes foes for friends and fights his benefactors on behalf of his one true enemy, which is *Kama*. Consequently, he achieves name, fame, wealth, power and social standing but these are as ephemeral shadows compared to the Kingdom of Heaven to which he is the rightful heir.

But just as Prometheus had prophesied the coming of a hero who would bring about the fall of Zeus, the old man would have prophesied the return of a hero who would subdue and command the king’s army. Chandra fulfils the prophecy but as a general who is yet to realize the truth that he is in fact the rightful king. This is the condition in which humanity today persists. Mistaking falsehoods for truth, foes for friends, as if in a stupor—“the dreamlike feebleness that fetters the blind race of mortals” (*S.D.*, II, 413). In this condition, every victory is in reality “self-defeat” and every apparent loss is gain. The reader is invited to pause here and reflect on this poignant state of Humanity. This is the unspeakable woe that the Arhan feels “for the living dead” in *The Voice of the Silence*. Unless one feels this as “pangs in thy heart,” one cannot arouse oneself to the ardent desire of learning truth which is *Mumukshutvam*.

In the first instance that Chandra again meets the old man, he is aloft his steed and like the crowd with the Eye Doctrine in *The Voice of the Silence*, “repeats in pride ‘Behold, I know.’” But in the second instance, after going through calamities, suffering and hardship, Chandra is on his knees, beseeching the old man for answers. And it is only then that the old man guides him. Even in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna only starts his guidance after Arjuna has thrown down all defenses, all pride and in deep anguish surrenders himself to Krishna as his disciple. But in prideful false knowledge, our selfish actions cause suffering, either directly or indirectly to others and hence through Karmic chains perpetuate

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our own miserable, conditioned existence as the “living dead” and hence the old man admonishes, “*Misery thou wreakes, so this misery can prolong.*”

Saturn as Chronos, Time or Kala is said to devour his own progeny, meaning time itself dissolves all that it creates. Chandra’s fortunes change as do all our fortunes in life, for nothing is static or permanent in the manifested universe which is forever *becoming*. But just like the calamity that befalls Chandra eventually leads to his own redemption, so do all hardships that come our way. It is in this spirit that we should welcome adverse circumstances, as that which “we ourselves desired,” as suggested by W. Q. Judge. If at this juncture in the story, Chandra knew what you the reader knows, he would welcome these adversities as his friend and redeemer. Humanity in general is like Chandra at this point in the story and hence we should not be too hasty to judge any circumstances that life organically brings about.

In the second part, we see the struggles, anguish and agony that accompany the awakening to inner life as an unavoidable consequence of the personality or the Self of Matter progressively dissipating to make room for the Self of Spirit. That path leads through psychic and subjective realms, full of enemies we have ourselves created, the “Karmic progeny of all our former thoughts and deeds.” But the Divine is ever-present from the very beginning, albeit in the still small voice of our conscience. And as we focus more of our attention on this higher center and begin to follow the dictates of our true self, all these enemies coalesce into a unified opposing block, just as all Kauravas did on the eve of battle. The *Bhagavad-Gita* has this very struggle as its inner meaning.

In the story, Chandra wages his inner war under the Tree of Life, which is the same as the Sephirothic Tree of the Kabalists, representing the Cosmos as well as Man. As the Hermetic saying goes, “as above, so below.” Man, the Microcosm is a copy of the Cosmos, the Macrocosm. And since the teleological purpose of the Cosmos is for the experience and emancipation of the soul, the

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Microcosmic Tree is shown to grow, flower and bloom under the Macrocosmic. Chandra labours under the Tree of Life to be born again in the realm of Sat, as did Buddha. And when seen as the Microcosm, the Tree of Life in the story represents our hero's inner progress, suggestively being tended to by the old man or the Higher Self, echoing the verses from the Gospel of St. John 15:1-17.

Our hero's inner struggle culminates in his facing the “dweller on the threshold” which is the mocking demon of illusion, *Mara*. He is incarnate of the aggregate of passions, material tendencies and mental deposits accrued by the ego in all its combined incarnations on earth, including the distributive aspects thereof. *The Voice of the Silence* describes it thus: “*Mara* is...personified temptation through men's vices, and translated literally means ‘that which kills’ the Soul. It is represented as a King (of the *Maras*) with a crown in which shines a jewel of such lustre that it blinds those who look at it, this lustre referring of course to the fascination exercised by vice upon certain natures.” Every disciple must face and conquer his self-created *Mara* before he can enter the threshold. In the story, *Mara*'s first wave of attack is *Tamasic* in nature, which seeks to confuse, bewilder and stagnate the hero. The next wave is *Rajasic* wherein the full armamentarium is used against Chandra with violent force. And the last is *Sattvic* which seeks to insidiously bind him with enticements of high philosophy, benevolent acts and virtue. As we read in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the disciple has to overcome all three *Gunas* (qualities) and their effects, to become *Nistraigunya* before he can advance on the path.

Once our hero remembers his true identity, he is shown to become Sanath Kumara. But was there any change in the fundamental reality? Was he not Sanath all along and Chandra was simply an illusion? In Vedanta this is called “Rajju-Sarpa-Nyaya.” When we see a rope in darkness, we mistake it for a snake and are terrified. But when the lights are turned on, the snake disappears and only the rope remains. In that case, did the snake ever exist? It only existed so long as the illusion existed, but it was as real during that time as

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any ontological existence. *The Secret Doctrine* teaches that “as we rise in the scale of development we perceive that during the stages through which we have passed we mistook shadows for realities, and the upward progress of the Ego is a series of progressive awakenings, each advance bringing with it the idea that now, at last, we have reached ‘reality;’ but only when we shall have reached the absolute Consciousness, and blended our own with it, shall we be free from the delusions produced by Maya.” And hence, the saga continues.

(Concluded)

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As a fond mother, when the day is o’er,  
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,  
Half willing, half reluctant to be led,  
And leave his broken playthings on the floor,  
Still gazing at them through the open door,  
Nor wholly reassured and comforted  
By promises of others in their stead,  
Which, though more splendid, may not please him more;  
So Nature deals with us, and takes away  
Our playthings one by one, and by the hand  
Leads us to rest so gently, that we go  
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,  
Being too full of sleep to understand  
How far the unknown transcends the what we know.

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW  
“Nature”

## DON'T LOOK OVER THE FENCE

“THOU art the Way and the Wayfarer!” “Thou must become the Path!” These are the injunctions given to the travellers on the Path of Self-realization. Students of Theosophy especially would do well to remember them because they have to be wary of the pitfalls on the way—the inner way. These come in many forms and many ways. The lower nature is insidious and subtle in its expression, and can assume many forms. When the traveller becomes completely enmeshed in the net of illusions and has felt for a while the sensation of pleasure, he suddenly experiences a fall, and the fall is all the more hurtful because he cannot see the reason for it; and he is, therefore, confused and shattered. He usually blames a neighbour or a friend or an associate for his downfall. It is at this time that self-examination becomes necessary. Sincere self-examination reveals that none is to be blamed except one's own personality.

The most common obstacle that the student of Theosophy encounters is self-importance, the feeling of “Behold, I know!” He has mastered the tenets of Theosophy. He has come to know intellectually the esoteric truths. He has a knowledge of the right and wrong of actions. He has striven to live the life, to the best of his ability, and knows that he has traversed some distance. It is now that the danger arises. He pauses for a while on the difficult path and looks around. He sees co-travellers struggling. The pathways are many and he is tempted to look over the fence and view the terrain of his neighbour. What he sees shocks him: ill-kept gardens, wrong ways of work, stupidity, lethargy and other shortcomings that are accepted as a part of human nature. Revolt grips him and he hastens to condemn and to attempt to correct the failing of other men. He finds faults with them and feels that, as he knows the Truth, he has a right to be their guardian. He strives to correct other men, not with the compassionate understanding that comes only with the full realization of the heart doctrine, but with the rod of a policeman who keeps guard. He hastens to sit in judgment over others and

DON'T LOOK OVER THE FENCE

thinks he can reform them in the light of the knowledge that he has acquired and by virtue of the distance that he has traversed on the path, paying scant attention to the Theosophical injunction and advice: “Judge not, speak little, love much and work.”

He judges his neighbours and speech becomes necessary for the incessant pointing out of other people's faults, in an effort to reform them; love diminishes at the magnitude of their vices that go unbridled; and work becomes that of condemning and correcting others and trying to do their duties better than they, in order to show them the right path. And in all this, the student loses sight of his own goal and his own path; his progress is retarded, and he gets enmeshed in his own feelings of wrath and anger.

It is important for us, therefore, to understand that we have no right to look over other people's fences and do other people's duties while we have our own path to travel and our own duties to perform. If we fix our eyes upon our own next step and tread the way without looking around, we may travel in peace and comfort. Everyone struggling to go forward has a way of his own, and it is not right for a fellow traveller to try to weed out another's garden *unless he is called upon to do so*.

Compassionate understanding comes when one has looked into the hearts of men wisely and fully. Until then no one has a right to reform other men, because such reform will not bear fruit unless accompanied by the tolerance and love which spring from self-knowledge.

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THE GRASS is not, in fact, always greener on the other side of the fence. Fences have nothing to do with it. The grass is greenest where it is watered. When crossing over fences, carry water with you and tend the grass wherever you may be.

—ROBERT FULGUM



**EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS**  
**DEVACHAN—I**

ABOUT *Devachan*: Please look up *Vernal Blooms*, p. 162. H.P.B.'s words are quoted by Judge: "All workers for the Lodge, no matter of what degree, are helped out of *Devachan* if they themselves permit it." Applying them to yourself, as you are a worker for the Great Lodge of Masters, never mind for the present of what degree, you will be helped out of *Devachan* if you yourself will permit it. On Their side the condition is that you are a worker, and also They must have your sanction. Now, to be a worker has to be understood in its proper context and background. There has to be the quality of one-pointed devotion which not only enables but compels the aspirant from within to serve the Cause of Brotherhood, *i.e.*, the Brotherhood of Humanity, which is exemplified, focused, in the Lodge of Brothers who all think, feel, teach and act out of One United Will or One United Spirit of Life. The transcendent Lodge labours for human brotherliness on earth. An aspect of the Lodge becomes immanent in the human kingdom on earth by direct incarnation, as in the case of H.P.B., or by the indirect influence of disciples living and labouring on earth. So to be a "worker of the Lodge" implies something very definite. It means living and labouring for and according to the Great and Sacred Knowledge of the Lodge. Therefore it implies that the worker is a strenuous labourer convinced of the Lodge and the Masters and that his own faith is of this particular substance-essence. I am stressing this point because H.P.B.'s words are apt to be taken lightly by all and sundry. Next, the desire-aspiration must be formulated in incarnated existence. The feeling must arise, "I want to serve." This implies numerous kinds of sacrifices; among them, the renouncing of the repose, joy and assimilation of *Devachan*. In its turn this implies an *inner* clarification of the aspiration in terms of the knowledge of why and what is *Devachan* and how to facilitate its renouncing. The faculty-virtue of adaptability is necessary. Quick reincarnation implies that

one must become more and more ready to deal with any type of body and environment. This power (adaptation in modern science) has to be developed by study and exercise. Register—it is an inward process. We are not to verbalize casually: “I am developing adaptability for I am going to renounce *Devachan*.” The Centre within must be formed and It must repeat to itself this resolve and this process. This achieved, one can become ready for the very difficult task of *not* going to *Devachan* at all and then we need not be pulled out. See Judge’s letter, No. 11, on p. 39 about “extraordinary help,” etc. I hope you will get at least something satisfying in the above.

To turn to the philosophic question about *Devachan*: Who can be called a worker for the Great Lodge? One who recognizes the existence and power of that Lodge; what type of influence it exerts; what the nature of its cyclic labour is. Our mode of service undergoes a radical change with this knowledge and recognition. What do the Masters want? See *U.L.T. Pamphlet Nos. 22, 29 and 33*; these are Their words and convey not only Their Motive but also Their Method. If one labours for Them he is bound to come to love Them; if one’s devotional nature begins to aspire to love Them, soon he will come to serve Them. There is also the important pamphlet which deals with the subject: “Let Every Man Prove His Own Work.” This surely distinguishes between a political reformer or a social servant on the one hand and the student-server of the Wisdom-Religion.

Next point—about permission to be helped out of *Devachan*—which you raise: The fundamental principle of occult kinship is respect for human free will. Masters never influence that will; They ever and always respond to self-determination; the right kind of soul-determination always brings a response. Through his earnest and attentive study of the Esoteric Philosophy the student learns how life after death affects, through Karma, his future lives. So his devotion and knowledge lead him to perceive the facts about *Devachan*, its dream state, etc. So, it is on *this* side of death that the

present-day servant of Theosophy must determine and resolve, intelligently, that he would like to be helped out of *Devachan*. The after-death condition is subjective. Resolution and action in its support must be taken in embodied life and waking consciousness.

To be pulled out of *Devachan* is distinct from not falling into the sleep of *Devachan*. Think out what is implied in not entering *Devachan* during the process of the death of the body. This process is by analogy and correspondence in the lower what the Great Renunciation is in the higher. To have a good insight into this subject you will have to examine *de novo* the whole process of bodily death and post-mortem states. “Unfulfilled aspirations” get fulfilled in the waking life by the “self-induced and self-devised ways and means” of discipline and service. Then, there is the factor of exhaustion and renovation and renewal of spiritual stamina. Finally, the astral body undergoes a change; see Judge’s “Culture of Concentration.” What is to be done and how is a vast and deep subject.

Renouncing of *Devachan* is not only for chelas. H.P.B. says that every earnest and sincere server for the Lodge is pulled out. Doing without *Devachan* is a much more difficult thing; one has to stay in self-consciousness till Masters use our Karma to arrange the suitable environment. This staying in objective waking condition without falling into the sleep of *Devachan* is not only difficult but has its perils. One must have genuine aspiration to serve all human souls and this aspiration must find expression in the service of the Great Lodge of Adepts. This is the first, the basic requirement. Next, we must have adaptability, which implies *Vairagya*, to be where required, and capacity to grapple with the new environment in which not only life is to be lived but service to the human souls is to be rendered.

You should not wait but begin to work on the idea *now*. Developing adaptability is good for other reasons than *Devachanic* preparation, You are going on with your own Theosophical study, application and service; therefore you are bound to become more and more fit. “Time is no object with me,” said Master once. We need not stop to consider when to begin, but must begin now. How?

According to the best we know. Increase of knowledge will reveal new ways and modes. Don't you worry about being fagged out. If you proceed in the right way, a superior quality of *Prana* will flow into you. On this item there is something valuable in *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 29*. Motive, ideation, imagination change the quality of *Prana*. Those who are capable of waking us and pulling us out of *Devachan* know when to do so. If our devotion to the guru is deep and complete we will say, "Do what you like with me." Is it not that which Krishna refers to in the 18th chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita*? Keep on renewing and increasing and raising your spiritual stamina by right endeavour day by day. What does it? Devotion does it.

Is not Karma teaching us and unfolding in us the quality of adaptability, slowly, very gradually? We are but hastening the process of mastering our environment. Ordinary human life has its own speed; for candidates, neophytes and chelas the speed increases. One such may be, often is, called upon to go anywhere and do pieces of work there. New physical surroundings raise obstacles and without the virtue of adaptability failure and frustration results. Quick rebirth implies the same astral which has become accustomed to certain conditions; it requires these; a new environment makes it not only uncomfortable but useless. Therefore adaptability is most valuable and becomes necessary.

The formation of the Inner Centre is the most important thing. And adaptability can be developed by our watching and rightly accommodating ourselves to our environment. From within without is one factor; necessity is another; and above all the how of it requires knowledge. Patience within implies obtaining with our own impatience suitable conditions. To work *with* the Law is different from working *with* others; it implies working with others, but according to the principles of the Sacred Science. In developing adaptability we acquire some knowledge of practical occultism.

It is *not* an easy task to adapt ourselves to persons and to environment. You require love which understands, for persons; and a personal application of the Aphorisms on Karma to environment.

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

Love which understands is not blind love which grows to cupidity; it expands, unfolding compassion. Again, to adapt ourselves we need that Higher Indifference or *Viraga* of which Judge and *The Voice of the Silence* speak. To develop adaptability our own inner attitude to life needs to be considered. Most people have no definite attitude. As *Light on the Path* puts it, each man is a philosopher and this springs from his attitude, but there is no consideration of it; its very existence is not recognized or suspected. Change of attitude implies mental adaptability and so also our own character.

(*To be concluded*)

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The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for every thing, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not,—Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

“The World is Too Much With Us”

## SAINT EKNATH—LIFE AND TEACHINGS

### V

A VERY important and practical form of writing by Saint Eknath includes *Bharud* and *Abhangas*. Bharud is an ancient form of poetry that was used by saints for social enlightenment. Saint Eknath has written some three-hundred bharuds with different themes. His bharuds were street performances delivering moral and spiritual messages through song and dance. Bharuds use metaphors for philosophical statements about the relationship between worldly concerns and spiritual life. Bharud is also considered to be a kind of satirical form of presenting the faults of lay human beings. One of the bharuds is entitled “Dadla,” which means husband. An English translation reads:

Crumbling house, broken roof, No shrine to place my god!  
Nope, I do not want a husband, good woman...  
Torn sari, frayed blouse, No thread to darn it with!  
Broken cot, its weaving undone,  
No soft mattress to lie upon!...  
Beautiful pearls, gold ornaments,  
No trace of such ornaments in his land!...  
Nope, I do not want a husband, good woman...  
Eka becomes one with Janardan  
This ecstasy is not to be found there!

In this bharud, a woman says that she is not satisfied with her husband and that she does not want a husband. At a simple level, this bharud tells us about the condition of a woman who after marrying, gets a husband and along with him come children and all the worldly concerns which leaves her no time for God or to pursue spiritual life. That is why she would rather not have a husband and therefore the worldly responsibilities.

However, its symbolic interpretation has been given in various different ways. Accordingly, it appears that the “crumbling house” represents human form or body and clearly, we do not know how

to take care of the health of the body and that is because of ignorance or *avidya*, represented by “broken roof.” We need wisdom. There is no place for a shrine of God. Here “God” may be taken to represent faith and devotion, and a shrine represents one’s mind or heart. In other words, there is no place for basic spiritual values in our heart. This woman has become aware that she has wedded “Dadla” or husband, symbolising lack of spiritual discrimination or *viveka-buddhi*, and hence wishes to let go of thoughtlessness and to acquire Spiritual discrimination. She is unable to stitch her torn clothes, due to lack of thread which implies lack of discrimination resulting from absence of self-discipline. She realises the need for help and guidance. The pearls and the ornaments which give worldly happiness, symbolise the knowledge which she lacks, which can give her permanent happiness. In short, to become one with *Paramatma* and to reach the state of Absolute consciousness one has to be able to overcome the obstacles of thoughtlessness and worldly desires.

There are bharuds dealing with deep metaphysical, philosophical and spiritual concepts which are conveyed using symbols. One of them is entitled “Kolhateen.” At a simple level, the Kolhati are an Indian nomadic community that belong to central India and Maharashtra. Traditionally, they are professional entertainers and acrobats. The word “kolhat” comes from a word meaning bamboo pole, which they use for jumping. It appears that a kolhati woman is called Kolhateen, whereas the male is called Kolhatee. Saint Eknath seems to be comparing the play and games of Kolhateen with the work of Maya in creating the universe. In Eknath’s bharud, “Kolhateen” is *saguna maya* or *Paramatma*’s *Adi Sakti*, also known as *Mulaprakriti*. H.P.B. points out that the universal root-principle, *Mulaprakriti*, as undifferentiated cosmic essence is identical with *Parabrahmam*. However, when from passive *Mulaprakriti* it has become *avyakta* (an active evolver), it becomes (*gunavat*) or endowed with qualities, and becomes *Prakriti*. The bharud says that the world was created or came into existence when *Paramatma*,

the ONE, desired to become many. The universe is itself the manifestation of the Divine, which willed, *Ekoham Bahusyam*; “I am One, let Me become many!”

According to Sankhya Philosophy, *Prakriti* is said to be the ultimate cause of the world of objects. *Prakriti* is constituted of three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The evolution of the world is owing to contact between *Purusha* (Self) and *Prakriti*. Saint Eknath seems to suggest that the moment the Divine makes *sankalpa* or wills to become the many, the three *gunas* which are in a state of equilibrium in *Prakriti*, are disturbed, and each *guna* tries to preponderate over the rest, and only then the world comes into existence. Thus, *Prakriti* or *saguna maya*, produces the universe with the help of the Divine or *Purusha*. Just as a Kolhateen performs her dance and acrobatics with a bamboo, so also *Prakriti* has started her game or play by bringing into existence the universe, symbolised by a bamboo. *Prakriti* has started her play, individually and collectively, of four voids, namely, *sthula* (gross or physical), *sukshama* (astral), *karana* (causal) and *mahakarana* (great causal). It appears that these four represent four bodies of man (microcosm) and also of the universe (macrocosm). Along with that *Prakriti* has also produced *Brahma*, the creator, from *Rajoguna*; Vishnu, the preserver, from *Sattvaguna* and Siva, the destroyer from *Tamoguna*.

Then Eknath says that not getting caught in this play of Maya but remaining only a spectator comes the “Kolhatee.” When he comes, he starts playing the drum saying, “Soham” or “I am *Paramatma*.” This Kolhatee is *saguna* (with qualities) aspect of *Nirguna Brahman*, and he has eternal memory of him being *Paramatma*. *Kalahansa* is vehicle of *Parabrahmam* and the latter is called *Hansa Vahana*, or one whose vehicle is *Hansa*. That is because *Saguna Brahman* though, symbolizing whole of creative power, and creator of the universe, is still substantial and therefore is the vehicle of *Parabrahmam* through which the latter finds expression. Saint Eknath says that it is not possible to see even “Kolhatee” the manifested aspect (with attributes) of the *Nirguna*



*Brahman*, with our fleshly eyes, but only with the eye of spirit or eye of pure consciousness.

To know IT is to become IT. In the last few verses, Eknath seems to compare “Kolhateen” with *Kundalini Sakti* which is described as jumping so high as to go beyond twenty-one swarga to *Mahadakash*. This refers to *Kundalini* after entering the lotus of the heart-centre, changing the form and becoming formless Sakti. Then the window to the *Brahmarandra* readily opens. She enters the *chidakash of Brahmarandra*, as the river enters the sea. “Making herself steady in the *Brahmarandra* with the conviction that ‘I am *Brahman*’ she opens her arms and embraces the *Brahman* there. Then with the destruction of the veil of the five great elements results the union of Shiva and Shakti. And she along with the *Chidakasha* becomes merged in the bliss of *Brahman*. . . . The embodied self, by means of the human body, enters the abode of the *Brahman* and becomes united with it.” (*Jnaneshwari*, Chapter VI, sloka 15)

Saint Eknath has written many *abhangas*. One of them is about a temple built on a tamarind leaf. Tamarind leaves are very small and oblong with rounded edges, Saint Eknath compares a tiny tamarind leaf with a mother’s womb. In that small womb a temple, meaning a human body, is built or formed by God. When a human body, or a child’s body forms within a mother’s womb, first the head is formed and then gradually other organs and parts of the body are formed. But as we grow our childhood period is lost in playing, while the time of youth and adulthood is lost in achieving mundane goals and chasing worldly, ephemeral pleasures. By the time we have an inkling of the presence of the divine within the temple of our body, it is time for the temple to disappear, *i.e.*, it is time for the soul to leave the body. Saint Eknath advises that before the time comes for us to leave this body, each one of us must take refuge in a true Guru. When there is association of two stones, meaning two human bodies, then in a true sense a miragelike world (*samsara*) or existence really begins. Just as a mirage does not exist, yet gives rise to the illusion of its existence, so also, in one sense,

the world *appears* to exist even though it has no real existence of its own. Who is able to cross this miragelike world or existence? Saint Eknath says it is crossed by the son of a barren woman. The son of a barren woman is a metaphor for *Ahankar* or egotism that makes one feel that all things happen because “I make them happen,” and “not even a leaf would move if I were not there.” This is “misplaced pride,” and “imagined accomplishments” because none of us, without the aid of the Divine can make anything happen, and hence it is compared to the “son of a barren woman” something absolutely non-existent or impossible.

Eknath then tells us that a female deer with two mouths, which is a metaphor for *vasanas* or worldly desires, comes to drink water, taking the mirage to be a pool of water. A desire is called two-mouthed because if it cannot be satisfied physically through sense organs, then it will turn to mind and seek mental satisfaction. Thus, even when a person sits down to remember God’s name, so long as he has not controlled his desires, he may be mechanically repeating the name, but his mind runs after objects of desire.

Then he says that when we take refuge in a true Guru, knowledge or Wisdom that is lying latent in us comes alive, or we become aware of it. Hence, we are told that “a blind could see and a deaf could hear.” In a way, it also shows that one does not need to have any of the physical or psychic senses to get Self-Knowledge or *Atma-Vidya*. Eknath continues to say that the “lame” pursued or chased the knowledge. Here, “lame” is a metaphor for our mind, which can go anywhere, anytime, in a second. When one’s mind is withdrawn from worldly concerns and pursues Guru’s instructions with one-pointed attention, one is able to reach the goal of Self-Realisation. Hence, Eknath advises all of us to live the life according to Guru’s instructions because only then we may become aware some day of the presence of the divine within before the time comes for us to leave this body.

(Concluded)

## SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

SLAVERY is the subjection of one or many to do the will of, and labour for, another under duress, and at a more or less loss of natural rights of man. There are many kinds of slavery, like a hydra headed monster. Well known and much talked of is political and economic slavery. A common feature that engages one's attention when reading *Histories* of Herodotus is the frequent wars kingdoms of the times fought with each other in which the victor expatriated to his kingdom the able-bodied men from the vanquished state as slaves to labour in farmlands and for other labour-intensive works.

Colonialism, defined as subjugation and exploitation of a nation, its people and its wealth by another stronger nation is another form of political and economic slavery of the subjugated people. It is a historical phenomenon that stretches around the globe and across time. In modern times colonization and exploitation of weaker Afro-Asian and Latin American countries by the stronger European powers has been a global phenomenon till a few decades back. It was physical colonization of land and wealth of the colonised people and legitimised slave trade. Though physical colonisation in such a crude form is over, yet it is still prevalent, albeit metamorphosed into a subtler form through the instruments of hegemonic unequal international trade treaties, differential monetary policies, and geopolitical manipulations—called Gunboat Diplomacy by contemporary historians.

There is yet another form of slavery. It is indiscriminate submission to established social norms, customs, cultural stereotypes, religious beliefs and traditions, to which the masses conform unquestioningly, and by the intelligentsia also, compromising with conscience, for fear of ostracism or unpopularity or for the sake of preserving personal reputation and self-interest. It may be racial or colour prejudice prevalent among people of mixed races. In India it is the rigid caste based social order that has unjustly, for centuries, oppressed and deprived opportunities to the so-called lower caste

people by the fewer privileged, the worst form of which being “untouchability,” constituting unfortunate pariahs of Indian society.

One of the worst forms of social slavery is consigning hundreds of millions of poor labouring masses to addiction to intoxicating drinks for the sake of earning substantial revenue by the state by the sale of liquor; a form of slavery which leads to moral, spiritual and physical ruin of man, as also destruction of families.

Our present times is unspiritual, the chief characteristics of which is that the consideration of ethical principle of ends and means does not generally figure in people’s lives, and in the state’s policies and programmes. Ends justify the means is now the ruling principle. Such questions as how spending money earned by such immoral means as the sale of liquor that destroys millions of families and ruins individual lives, on social development programmes, which can be productive of beneficial results, do not enter into the calculations of the policy makers and planners of the development projects of the state. It is generating obstructive national Karma that hinders true progress and happiness of all.

Modern political economy whose objective, and criteria of progress, is ever expanding industrialisation and insatiable consumption of goods and services has driven the whole population to slavery—slavery to the machine, to self-gratification, and digital social media culture. Look wherever we may, it is undeniable that the world is in the thrall of slavery.

What, then, is freedom? How can we be free? This is a profound question, the answer to which cannot be found in terms of the idea of progress that moves the world today; which is unbridled individualism and consumerism. Common idea of freedom in vogue now is individual freedom, implying absence of all constraints, except such as are imposed by the state for safeguarding the general interest, in the pursuit of personal happiness, and interests, and to live according to one’s convictions. This is considered as the hallmark of freedom and progress.

But what is the reality? Effects of action of an individual are not sealed off as to be confined to the individual alone but proliferate in all directions, like the ripples spread out when a stone dropped on the still waters of a lagoon, affecting for good or ill all beings of the visible as well as the invisible world. All beings are unfolding expressions of One Life in various stages of evolution, bound together in a bond of universal brotherhood and law of reciprocity, all evincing a progressive march towards a higher life. This is the reality, the truth and the law of our being, whether we know it or not. Hence our thoughts and actions at variance with the immutable laws of higher life, which inevitably are when selfish gratification is the motive in action, cause infraction of the harmonious universal order which adversely react on us as Karmic retribution, to which we become bound and suffer, as much as we are bound by the evanescent pleasantries of life that are the fruits of good actions; thus endlessly turning the wheel of involuntary reincarnations under Karmic law.

The fate of the ethic of such an idea of personal freedom is graphically portrayed in a painting, titled, *The wheel of fortune*, by Edward Burne Jones. It is an allegorical depiction of the vagaries of life, with individual lives elevated and cast down alternately as the wheel relentlessly turns. “There’s legions now,” insightfully says Shakespeare, “of beggars on the earth, that their original did spring from kings, and many a monarch now, whose fathers were the riff-raff of their age...”

Therefore, what is cherished as personal freedom devoid of obligations and duties to fellow beings, is no freedom but slavery—and, much more, the mother of all other forms of slavery. The state enacts laws and enforces them to end slavery in society in its various forms, like child labour, prostitution, bonded labour, drunkenness, corruption, usury, and so on. Well-meaning individuals and organizations make noble efforts to ameliorate the condition of the victims of slavery, but the evil persists because the moral cause of the problem remains untouched.

Arjuna asks Krishna what is that impalpable force which impels a man to sin against his conscience and will. “It is lust which instigates him,” answers Krishna. “It is from the quality of *rajas*, insatiable and full of sin. Know this to be the enemy of man on earth.” In another chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* Krishna says that desire, anger, and covetousness are the three gates to hell. These passions also manifest in subtle ways in us as prejudices, biases, selfishness, vanity, and so on, as our hidden enemies.

So long as we have not emancipated ourselves from these defects of our lower nature so long, we remain slaves ourselves to them, and so long the evil of slavery in multifarious forms persists in society. World reform begins with efforts of individuals to reform themselves. It is the duty we owe to Nature and to humanity to strive to emancipate ourselves from that one chief source of all human ignorance and misery, namely, the personal idea that generates the sense of separateness and selfishness in us, by acquiring knowledge of the true nature of Self, which is the Self of all, and the law of our being, and enlightened performance of duties obligated by Nature and by Karma devoid of self-interest, with the view to benefit the world.

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WHY prove to a man he is wrong? Is that going to make him like you? Why not let him save face? He did not ask for your opinion. He did not want it. Why argue with him? You cannot win an argument, because if you lose, you lose it; and if you win it, you lose it. Why? You will feel fine. But what about him? You have made him feel inferior, you hurt his pride, insult his intelligence, his judgment, and his self-respect, and he will resent your triumph. That will make him strike back, but it will never make him want to change his mind.

—DALE CARNEGIE

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

“What is the purpose of pilgrimage?” asked K. Geethanjali as she returned from her Chhota Char Dham pilgrimage, covering Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, which are four places of pilgrimage in India. On her pilgrimage she wondered why the deities are placed in such hard-to-access places requiring pilgrims to go through hardships, to have their *darshan*. She was concerned about the ponies carrying their burdens up and down the narrow paths and pitied frail young mountain folks who carried pilgrims in their baskets. The pilgrims were compelled to walk where the mountain trails had become slushy with rain. “Are we mad to have embarked on this trip, when Ramana and other Advaita masters point out that we carry the very one and the same God within us?” was the question to which she did not get the answer as they travelled from one place of pilgrimage to another. She realised that the city folks led a very privileged life compared to the mountain folks who were struggling to make ends meet, deprived of educational and job opportunities.

It was only on returning home from the pilgrimage that the voice within reminded her that it was all about letting go. Letting go of likes and dislikes and adapting to the situations, which included accepting the same type of food every day. She admits that it was very difficult for her to accept the dark face of life when she came across a dying horse “which had collapsed due to exhaustion, with no one to care for it,” and other horses trampled on it, as they moved ahead along the trail. Was there a reason for darkness? Though she had no answer she had faith that God must have His reasons for all that was happening around them. She learnt to feel compassion for others in spite of their peculiarities and to let go of her expectations. She was convinced that she would be taken care of through the toughest of times, and she indeed was. Ultimately, she acquired such calmness that she started enjoying tough parts of her pilgrimage almost as much as she enjoyed the happier parts.

When she returned home from pilgrimage, hoping to have a long period of rest, she was required to attend to a sick elderly relative. “That I realised was a litmus test. It was about applying what I had learnt on my pilgrimage to real life.” For, Life is a pilgrimage and one has to be able to accept tough times in Life with as much grace as during the pilgrimage, writes K. Geethanjali. (*Life Positive*, August 2023)

A pilgrimage is *tirtha yatra* or journey which is performed for the purpose of self-purification and to increase one’s proximity to God. Places of pilgrimage are powerful spiritual centres and radiate an elevating influence. They may be regarded as “spiritual seminaries” for devoted and earnest searchers after truth, though may not be of much benefit to superstitious people seeking personal salvation and benefit. It is asserted that at most of the famous places of pilgrimage there is an Adept, who is ready to guide and give spiritual insight to all pure-hearted pilgrims visiting the place. Many times, at these places of pilgrimage the spiritual eye of the pilgrim is opened, and many valuable lessons of life are learnt during such journeys.

Whether a journey will be a mere travel or a pilgrimage depends upon the inner attitude. It has been said that a journey accomplished on foot is travel, but that accomplished with heart is pilgrimage. “The object of the traveller is his own entertainment; that of the Pilgrim is mental enlightenment, moral uplift and above all some spiritual realization of the Divine,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. “Pilgrimage is metaphysical sightseeing...A stressful journey, possibly through hostile territory, or under taxing climatic conditions, overcoming all kinds of hardships and hazards, is a way to test character at all levels, under the most varied circumstances,” writes Richard Lannoy and adds that the difficult journey itself is supposed to generate power, heat or *tapas*. A pilgrimage can well become one form of spiritual discipline, and is useful for those who are not able to undertake daily discipline by way of meditation or the reading of the scriptures. (“The Meaning of Pilgrimage,” *Pilgrim’s India*)



Pilgrimages are constant reminders to humanity that each one of us in our essential aspect is an “Eternal Pilgrim.” Like sparks from the great fire, humanity is an emanation from divinity on its return path thereto. “The whole of India is dotted with...sacred shrines, to which pilgrimages are made,” writes Mr. Judge. These pilgrimages are a symbolic representation of the life of man from birth to death, and also that of the eternal pilgrim from the beginning to the end of a *Manvantara*. Our present life is only a scene in the great drama, which stretches over several lives. Hence, life is compared to a pilgrimage and man is called an Eternal Pilgrim. Like a bee gathering honey from the flower, the Eternal Pilgrim gathers experience from every life. Besides being a teacher, a mother, or a scientist, each of us is a pilgrim-soul on a pilgrimage.

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Could fake medicine (placebo) be as effective as the real thing? A placebo can be a sugar pill, a saline injection or a glass of coloured water. Experiments have shown that placebos can be more powerful than active drugs and may help to reduce our dependence on medications. Though the placebo effect is still a mystery to a large extent, it has been described as a phenomenon when the brain convinces the body that a fake treatment is authentic, which stimulates relief. “Experts say we should harness the strategies that generate the most powerful placebo effects in drug trials and incorporate them into clinical treatments for patients suffering from a range of chronic conditions.”

Placebos work best in all conditions controlled by the neurological system, such as, pain, irritable bowel syndrome, depression and Parkinson’s disease. Research has shown that in placebo effect expectations play a significant role. “If you think a pill can cure you, it is more likely to do so.”

In many studies patients were given several doses of a real painkiller followed by a placebo. They responded to the placebo as if they had received the analgesic. This shows that placebo effect is

more durable when one starts with active treatment or intervention because then it has been found that placebos use the same neurological pathway of the brain that the medication did.

Can placebos work if patients know they are taking one? Some studies have shown effectiveness of “open-label placebos” also called “pure” placebos. Knowingly taking a placebo or fake medicine may not work for everyone. However, it is believed that use of “pure” placebos would reduce the amount of medication that has been used for common conditions. If the patient trusts his physician, then a placebo can work. The doctor-patient relationship can make a lot of difference in therapeutic outcomes. Some placebo study experts believe that it is one of the ways we can incorporate placebo effect into practical treatments, writes Lia Grainger (*Reader's Digest* September 28, 2022)

Studies conducted in earlier years have shown that in many patients, the placebo triggers the brain to release pain-fighting chemicals called endorphins, which have been discovered to be natural painkillers. Experiments conducted with placebos have shown that in many conditions the most potent healing agent is the doctor himself, and he can often get good results with whatever he prescribes, especially when he shares the patient’s belief that the treatment is effective.

Mr. Norman Cousins wrote in one of his articles that “Placebo scholars believe that the placebo is powerful not because it ‘fools’ the body but because it translates the will to live into a physical reality. And they have been able to document the fact that the placebo triggers specific biochemical changes in the body. The fact that a placebo will have no physiological effect if the patient knows it is a placebo only confirms something about the capacity of the human body to transform hope into tangible and essential biochemical change. The placebo is proof that there is no real separation between mind and body. Illness is always an interaction between both.” (*The Theosophical Movement*, March 1978, pp. 197-98)

Dr. Robert A. Hahn wrote in an article about “nocebo effect,”

meaning “I will harm,” which is opposite of “placebo effect” meaning “I will please.” “While placebo relieves symptoms of illness by creating expectations of improvement, a nocebo does harm by creating the opposite expectation....The harm...can even be fatal—for example, surgical patients are reported to die on the operating table because they expect to die.” (*The Theosophical Movement*, December 1999, pp. 70-71)

Theosophically perhaps, we may explain placebo effect in terms of faith. “At the base of your nature you will find faith, hope and love,” says *Light on the Path*. Faith is inherent in every human being. With faith the power of the will is strengthened, and we are then able to overcome all obstacles. Sir Humphrey Davy, who was preparing to operate on a paralytic patient with oxygen gas, put a thermometer under the patient’s tongue to record his temperature. The patient was impressed with it and he declared with enthusiasm that he was already feeling better. So, Davy continued putting the thermometer under the patient’s tongue, day after day, and the patient was completely cured in few days, without the operation.

Faith fixed on *anything* will bring results. “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.* The tomb of a saint; a holy relic; a talisman; a bit of paper or a garment that has been handled by the supposed healer;... or a few words impressively pronounced—either will do. It is a question of temperament, imagination, and self-cure. In thousands of instances, the doctor, the priest, or the relic has had credit for healings that were solely and simply due to the patient’s unconscious will. The woman with the bloody issue who pressed through the throng to touch the robe of Jesus, was told that her ‘faith’ had made her whole,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 216)

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Does freedom work best within rules? Free-will is a powerful thing. *Bruce Almighty* is a 2003 American fantasy comedy film

in which Bruce Nolan, a television reporter is offered the chance to try being God himself for one week. However, he is restrained from interfering with free will of people. At first, he uses his powers for personal gains. Later, when his fiancée, Grace, moves out of his life, he is shattered and tries his supernatural powers to win her back, but does not succeed. At that point, God appears before him. Bruce asks God, “How can you make someone love you without affecting free-will?” God answers: “Welcome to my world, son. If you come up with an answer to that one, let me know.” The Infinite One has bestowed freedom on His finite creatures who are free to make choices.

However, freedom works best within rules. A parent is not curtailing the freedom of a child when they enforce certain safeguards for the child’s play area—they are only defining boundaries within which the child can operate. A game, such as football, can be enjoyed when players adhere to the rules.

“Isn’t it strange that we choose, but sometimes dislike the consequences of that choice? As some say, we are free up to the point of choice and then the choice controls the chooser. Yes, free choice leads to fixed outcomes,” writes Vimalkumar. It is the component of freedom which brings meaning to life and human relationships, else we would be all reduced to robots that are programmed to perform certain functions. We all value individual freedom but we are also aware that freedom without restraints can become extremely risky. “Without the gravitational constraint, one is like a kite in the sky with its string snapped, floating about, subject to other physical factors. We need our moorings to exercise freedom....Let us put our freedom to good work within safe and necessary boundaries, rather than to play God,” writes Neil Vimalkumar. (*The Speaking Tree, The Times of India*, August 16, 2023)

Some believe that God has given us free will. If that is so, why does he punish us for some of our choices? Are we absolutely free to choose what we want? Theosophy teaches that there was a point

in the course of evolution, when man was given the light of mind by Divine Beings—*Manasaputras*—in a manner comparable to one lighted candle lighting up many. As a result, man was endowed with self-consciousness and with the power to think and choose. It is by making use of free will that man has a chance to move towards the Divine as also the freedom to move away from the Divine. “I am able to love my God because He gives me freedom to deny Him,” said Rabindranath Tagore. However, every choice brings its consequences in accordance with the Law of Karma. A person may think ten times before he makes the choice, but having made it, that choice becomes his destiny, by which he is bound. Today’s choice weaves our destiny in the future. If a man makes the choice to go in the right direction, he goes forward, else he goes backward. Destiny is woven in the minds of men with good and evil thoughts.

The fact is that we are conditioned, to an extent, by our previous right or wrong actions so that our present choices are, as it were, determined or influenced by the past. Hence, H.P.B. points out that man is a free agent during his stay on earth, but “there are *external and internal conditions* which affect the determination of our will upon our actions.” In other words, the exercise of free will is conditioned or limited by the *external* circumstance, as well as, the *inner* capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa illustrates it by the example of a cow tethered to a pole with a long rope. The cow feels she is free to roam anywhere but the perimeter of the area in which she can move is fixed. Similarly, he explains, every human being has a free will but the length of rope is governed by God (or Law, based on our previous actions). It is the freedom of choice which allows a most wretched person to turn the corner and become righteous. In fact, when we learn to act with complete awareness, we can become Karmaless by not doing our actions with the feeling that “I am acting,” and renouncing interest in the fruits of action. We, then, cease to offer individual focus where the Karmic consequences could return.