

**Vol. 17**                      **September 2025**                      **Rs. 3/-**  
**No. 5**

**A Magazine Devoted to  
The Living of the Higher Life**

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“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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Vol. 17, No. 5

September 17, 2025

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### KARMA—THE RELIGION OF WORKS

#### I

ALL WORLDS, right up to Brahma, are subject to Karma. Manifestation begins with Brahma. Thus, all the gods, the whole of the manifested world, and Brahma are subject to Karma. However, *Paramatma*, or *Parabrahm*, that which is above Brahma, is not subject to Karma. The Spirit, or *Atman*, in man, being the Ray of *Paramatma*, is also not subject to Karma. It is unchanging, eternal, and all-knowing. Everything in the world of objects is changing. We are identified with our body, emotions, name, fame, power, money, etc., which are only *relatively* real, because though real on our plane, as compared to the Absolute Reality, they are unreal.

We are identified with things that are only relatively real, and function almost always on the relatively unreal plane. Our ordinary life is like the dream state, in which we laugh and cry, we enjoy and suffer, and all that appears to us as extremely real while we are dreaming. As compared to the waking state, the dream state is unreal and is comparable to worldly, material life. Thus, the life of the material world debars us from knowing the Reality. And yet, this “material existence is a necessary evil, and the one in which alone emancipation or salvation can be obtained,” and it is governed by Karma, writes Mr. Judge. (*Echoes From the Orient*, Indian Ed., p. 49)

Why is material existence a necessary evil to obtain salvation? How is Karma connected with it? Material existence must imply

life in the physical world. Patanjali says that the universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. The objective world with its objects is necessary for us to have concrete experiences. For most of us, the real learning takes place on the concrete, objective plane. Ultimately, we have to realise unity or non-separateness. It is matter, or prakriti, which tends to divide the ONE into many and produces the illusion of separateness. On the plane of Spirit, we are all one and of the same essence. But on the material plane, we are separate, and our goal is to overcome this illusion of separateness. The whole of the evolutionary journey consists in purifying the material nature so that it is no longer an obstacle. The journey of the soul through various instruments and the garnering of experience through them happen in accordance with the Laws of Karma and Reincarnation. When we act with separative feelings, we create karma that is binding, compelling us to take birth again and again. When we learn non-separateness and act for and as the SELF of all creatures, we become Karmaless.

The question may arise: Why is *Atman*, or the *Atma-Buddhi* Monad, not affected by Karma? What is it that is under the influence of Karma, which evolves and reaches perfection? What is evolution? Occult philosophy teaches that nothing can evolve unless it has first been involved, indicating that life is from the spiritual potency and that the process of unfoldment is guided by intelligent forces under the immutable Law, which is known as the *doctrine of Emanation*. Thus, there is first involution—involvement or the descent of spirit into matter—and then evolution, which consists in the expression or actualization of what is potential through perfection of forms.

In the *Gita*, Shri Krishna says, “I am *Adhiyajna* in this body.” The descent of spirit into matter is an act of sacrifice. Monad (*Atma-Buddhi*) is the Eternal Spectator, which neither progresses nor develops and is not even affected by the changes of states it passes through. *It is not of this world or plane*, and is thrown down onto our Earth as a plank of salvation for the personalities in which it indwells. It is for the personalities to cling to it and partake of its divine nature and obtain immortality. (*S.D.*, I, 175-76)

Our personality consists of the lower principles, which include the physical body, astral body, passions and desires, and the mind, and are called the “Sheaths of the Soul.” The seeds of spiritual knowledge, arts, sciences, agriculture, and architecture exist in the divine nature of man, burnt into the imperishable centre of his consciousness by the Divine Instructors eighteen million years ago. These exist as *innate* ideas. Why do we not show forth this knowledge? We may understand it by the analogy of the lamp 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 the sheaths or vehicles, which need to be purified.

Our brain is the instrument of the lower mind, which uses it to reason from premises to conclusions and also perceives things seen by the senses as an “idea” in the brain. But the lower mind itself is a vehicle for the Higher Ego. The Ego, though all-knowing, will not be able to use the brain to its full capacity unless it has experience. It is only when the Ego has passed through various experiences of life and learned from them that it acquires the power to utilize the brain to its full capacity. “Men are wise in proportion, not to their experience but to their capacity for experience.” It means that the amount of wisdom acquired is not determined by the number of experiences undergone, but rather by the ability to learn from and integrate those experiences. Thus, on the one hand, we need to increase the capacity of the Ego to use the instrument through assimilation of the life experiences, and on the other, to work towards achieving the purity and soundness of the instruments or vehicles so that they are able to perfectly reflect the light and knowledge of *Atma-Buddhi*, or the Monad.

This whole process of change and evolution is governed by the Law of Karma, which affects the lower principles, while the spiritual nature of man (*Atma-Buddhi*) is never affected by Karma, because that spiritual centre of man is a neutral point. Without it, actions could not be; yet It is not the cause nor the experiencer of actions. Actions are initiated by man-being, operating from the basis of some particular “principle.” The action initiated, from whatever principle,

high or low, the reaction will make itself felt in that same principle, the point of disturbance. It then produces a concatenation of causes and effects in the physical, mental, and moral results by which the Ego becomes bound. But when actions are spiritually initiated, *i.e.*, when they are wholly unselfish and universal, moved by the impulse from the Higher Self, and made physically operative on any plane, there is no disturbance of equilibrium. When an action, on the contrary, is *personally* initiated and made physically operative on any plane, there is a disturbance of equilibrium, and the reaction reaches personal man. (*Theosophy*, June 1929)

This truism is beautifully imparted in an allegory in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. In a dialogue, Prajapati says that the Self (*Atman*), which is free from sin, old age, death, grief, hunger, and thirst, that Self is to be searched for. The gods sent Indra, while the demons sent Virochana to learn about this Self. Prajapati asked both of them to look into a vessel of water and tell him how much of the Self they could find when they looked into the water. They replied that they could see their whole self, down to the nails and hair! Prajapati said that was the Self, deathless and fearless, and that was the *Brahman*. Virochana went away with the conviction that the body was the Self. But Indra was not satisfied. He asked Prajapati that just as the Self becomes decorated when the body is decorated, even so the Self is maimed or becomes lame when the body is maimed or becomes lame, and the Self must perish when the body perishes. In the reply to Indra's inquiry, Prajapati gave higher instructions about the Self, saying that the Self, when *embodied* is affected by pleasure and pain, and yet pleasure and pain do not touch the bodiless Self. Indra soon realized that the Self does not become blind, lame, or maimed, nor is it displeased or stricken when the body experiences all this. Nevertheless, it appears *as if* it were stricken, *as if* it were hustled, *as if* it were feeling unpleasantness, *as if* it were weeping.

We say that Spirit is the power to act, while soul is acting; Spirit is the power to know, while soul is knowing. If we understand the

process of evolution, then we will know that what requires cultivation is the Soul or Ego, and not the *Atma-Buddhi* or monad.

The whole process of obtaining emancipation or salvation through material existence is governed by Karma, and therefore, it is important to understand, accept, and obey the decrees of Karma, says Mr. Judge. (*Echoes From the Orient*, p. 49)

Karma works on the physical, mental, psychic, and spiritual planes. When we see a person with a deformed or sickly body but a brilliant intellect, it indicates the operation of bad Karma on the physical plane but good Karma on the mental plane. It could be the reverse. In *The Ocean of Theosophy*, Mr. Judge gives an example of the Borgias. “An unhandsome or deformed body often enshrines a glorious mind and pure soul, and a beautifully formed exterior—such as in the case of the Borgias—may hide an incarnate devil in character.” The Borgias were a powerful and influential Italian family of Spanish origin, prominent during the Renaissance, and were particularly known for alleged crimes, including murder and poisoning. There are various combinations of Karma at work, at a physical, mental, and moral level. Mr. Judge gives the example of a person born with a deformed body, which is the result of his own Karma and that of his parents. Such a person reviled, persecuted, or injured a deformed person so persistently or violently as to imprint in his own immortal mind the deformed picture of his victim. When this Ego is born again, it carries with it this picture, which causes the newly forming astral body to assume a deformed shape “by electrical and magnetic osmosis through the mother of the child.” Such a deformed child is born to these parents because of the similar Karma of persecution and reviling of a deformed person on their part in the past. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, Indian Ed., pp. 93-94)

However, it is extremely difficult to find examples of *purely* physical, *purely* mental, and *purely* spiritual Karma. A purely physical action could probably be an act done spontaneously or instinctively. Purely physical Karma would be that which results from our removing from the ground a banana peel, which otherwise

could have caused some person to fall and be hurt, writes Mr. Judge. “Tale of the Banana Peel” from *Hitopadesa*, an ancient Hindu collection of tales [retold in *Eternal Verities*], tells us about a child running after a butterfly, who kicks aside a banana peel lying on the path and runs on. Soon, a blind old man came that way, who would have slipped and fallen into the ditch had the child not impulsively removed the peel. For this unconscious deed, the Karma worked in his next life to save the boy from being hurt by a stumbling stone on that very path. In another instance, there is a desert warrior, mounted on his camel and pursuing his enemy. He could see that the camel was exhausted after a day-long chase. When he came across a banana peel on the way, he stopped and allowed the camel to eat the same. Meanwhile, the enemy escaped, but for his kindness, the warrior was reborn as a beneficent teacher of gods, men, and beasts. Quite contrary to these spontaneous or unselfish deeds of kindness, when a learned Brahmin comes across the banana peel in his path, he reflects that we reap the fruits of our own actions in the next life; therefore, he removes the peel, thinking, “If I take this peel from the pathway, I shall have done a deed of merit and be rewarded by Karma in my next life.” For this crafty thought of self, the proud Brahmin was born in a lower caste in his next life. Lastly, we have the example of a Yogi, who is on his way to a village, quietly pondering over the teachings he was going to preach. While his mind was ideating on the teachings, his senses were alert so that his eyes noticed a banana peel on the path. He removes the same and puts it aside, while his mind and heart remain undisturbed. As a result, whatever things are touched by the Yogi, in that or any future life, will be blessed by the contact and themselves be led to find and follow the path of service. These examples show how the same physical action could bring varied results based on the inner state and motive of the person.

(To be concluded)

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### THE JUDGE’S HOUSE—I

THE JUDGE’S HOUSE, a classic ghost story by the Irish author Bram Stoker, is considered to be one of his best-known works of short fiction. It was first published in a magazine in the year 1891 and later republished in *Dracula’s Guest and Other Weird Stories* in 1914. The story is about a mathematics student, Malcolm Malcolmson, who is seeking a quiet place, away from distractions, to prepare for his examination. He comes to a little town called Benchurch, quite unfamiliar and unknown to him, and spends the first night at the only inn in that town. The next day he goes out in search of a suitable house that he can rent for a few weeks. “There was only one place which took his fancy, and it certainly satisfied his wildest ideas regarding quiet; in fact, quiet was not the proper word to apply to it—desolation was the only term conveying any suitable idea of its isolation.” This house is uninhabited and exceptionally desolate. The house agent is delighted to hear that Malcolmson wants to rent the house. He tells him that the house has been empty for so long that “some kind of absurd prejudice has grown up about it, and this can be best put down by its occupation—if only...by a scholar like yourself, who wants its quiet for a time.” Malcolmson pays the rent and gets the name of an old woman who might tend to his needs.

The innkeeper, Mrs. Witham, is shocked to hear that Malcolmson will be living in the Judge’s House. She tells him that more than a hundred years ago a judge lived there “who was held in great terror on account of his harsh sentences and his hostility to prisoners at Assizes. As to what there was against the house itself, she could not tell....There was a general feeling that there was something....” Malcolmson assures her that he will be too busy with mathematics to be disturbed by anything mysterious. He engages Mrs. Dempster to attend to household work, who tells him that she is not afraid because “bogies are all kinds and sorts of things—except bogies!

Rats and mice, and beetles, and creaky doors, and loose slates, and broken panes, and stiff drawer handles that stay out when you pull them and then fall down in the middle of the night.” She cleans the room, prepares supper, and leaves.

After supper, Malcolm begins to study and at eleven o’clock takes a break. Just then he starts to hear the rats, gnawing, scratching, and racing up and down behind the old wainscoting. He begins to inspect the room and sees rats peeking through cracks and holes. In the corner of the room to the right side of the fireplace is a rope hanging from the great alarm bell on the roof. He pulls up a high-backed carved oak chair and sits down in front of the fire to drink his tea. He returns to his work and soon becomes immersed in his mathematics. When it is nearly dawn, Malcolmson looks up. “There on the great high-backed carved oak chair by the right side of the fireplace sat an enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes. He made a motion to it as though to hunt it away, but it did not stir. Then he made the motion of throwing something. Still, it did not stir but showed its great white teeth angrily, and its cruel eyes shone in the lamplight with an added vindictiveness.” When Malcolmson grabs a poker and runs at it, the rat disappears. After which he goes to sleep and sleeps soundly until Mrs. Dempster wakes him for breakfast.

He goes out for a walk, taking along his book and some sandwiches. He spends most of the day studying in a quiet spot and then stops at the inn on the way back. He thanks Mrs. Witham and tells her about the rats and the “one wicked-looking old devil” that sat on his chair by the fire. Although Malcolmson laughs about it, Mrs. Witham tells him to take care, saying that it may indeed have been the old devil himself.

On the second evening, the rats come out earlier and make noises, making it difficult for Malcolmson to concentrate on his work, but eventually he gets engrossed. After a while, the room becomes quiet, and Malcolmson sees the giant rat sitting on the chair. He starts throwing books at it, which the rat dodges easily. However, when

he picks up another book, the rat seems afraid. When he throws the book, it strikes the rat, who looks at him malevolently, then runs up the rope and disappears through a hole in one of the pictures, the third from the fireplace. When Malcolmson begins to pick up the books, he is startled to see that the one that hit the rat was the Bible his mother gave him.

After a good night's rest, Malcolmson wakes up late in the morning feeling uneasy. He asks his maid to clean the pictures. He goes out to his quiet spot and sits down with his mathematics problems. On his way back, he stops at the inn to meet Mrs. Witham, who introduces him to a Dr. Thornhill, who advises him to give up strong tea and late hours. Malcolmson tells them about the enormous rat. The doctor listens with grave attention and informs Malcolmson that the rope along which the rat ran up is the very rope that was used to hang the Judge's victims. After Malcolmson leaves, Mrs. Witham scolds the doctor for upsetting the student even more by talking about the history of the rope. The doctor explains that he mentioned it on purpose to draw his attention to the rope so that in case he becomes frightened in the night, he can pull the rope and sound the alarm bell.

When Malcolmson returns home, Mrs. Dempster has already left. He sits down to dinner amidst the noises of the rats. After dinner, as he resumes his studies, there is a storm, and the house begins to shake. The rope begins to rise and fall as the alarm bell swings on the roof. He remembers what the doctor had told him about the rope. He holds the rope in his hand and thinks about the Judge and his victims. Suddenly, the rope begins to shake, and he notices the great rat coming down. When he drops the rope, the rat disappears.

Malcolmson takes his lamp to the third picture from the fireplace to look at the hole into which the rat had disappeared the previous night. He notices with fright that it is a portrait of the Judge in his scarlet robe. "His face was strong and merciless, evil, crafty, and vindictive, with a sensual mouth." He has the same baleful eyes as the giant rat, and he is sitting in the oak chair to the right of the

fireplace, with the rope hanging down from the ceiling. When Malcolmson looks at the same corner of the room, he sees the great rat sitting in the oak chair, leering at him with the Judge's baleful eyes. He is frightened and drops his lamp.

He prepares a drink for himself and sits down to work. There is silence around him. Just then he hears a faint noise and discovers that it is the giant rat gnawing the rope. It chews through the rope, and the severed end falls on the floor. Malcolmson realizes that he can no longer call for help. When he throws his book, the rat disappears into the shadows. He removes the shade off the lamp so that the room is flooded with light. When he looks at the third painting from the fireplace, he notices a patch of blank canvas in the centre of the painting, where Judge should have been. He is horrified. When he turns around, he sees the Judge in his scarlet robe, sitting in the oak chair. The Judge lifts a black cap and triumphantly places it on his head as the clock strikes midnight.

Then he begins to pick up the pieces of the rope of the alarm bell, which lay on the floor, and deliberately begins to knot one end of it to make a noose. Taking his position between Malcolmson and the door, he approaches the trapped victim. Every time he throws the noose, Malcolmson dodges it with a great effort. The Judge tries again and again, his eyes fixed on Malcolmson, who barely manages to evade the rope each time. Malcolmson looks around the room in despair and finds the rats peeking out of their holes. Then he notices that the rope of the alarm bell is covered with rats. As more and more rats get on the rope, the bell begins to sway. The Judge gets angry and approaches Malcolmson with the noose held open. Malcolmson is paralyzed as the noose is tightened around his neck. The Judge then carries his rigid body to the oak chair. He places the body standing on the chair, and he himself climbs next to it and grabs the rope hanging from the bell. The Judge then ties the end of the noose to the bell rope. Then he steps off and pulls the chair away.

As a result, the alarm bell rings and a crowd gathers outside. They knock at the door but receive no reply. The crowd, led by

Dr. Thornhill, breaks down the door and runs into the house. They find the body of the student hanging from the bell rope, his life taken by the vengeful spirit of the Judge. The Judge's portrait now displays a malignant smile, suggesting the ghost's satisfaction in claiming another victim.

Bram Stoker was an Irish author best known for his Gothic horror novel, *Dracula*. It is interesting to note that he graduated from Trinity College with honours in mathematics, which is also the subject pursued by the student in the story. However, Stoker also had a passion for folklore and storytelling. The story combines psychological horror and supernatural elements. The story depicts conflict between rationalism and superstition. The student, with his rational, scientific mindset, ignores warnings and advice as to there being something sinister about the house. He scoffs at superstitions about haunted houses and evil spirits, which he feels only the uneducated people believe in. This rational outlook leaves him vulnerable to the supernatural forces that eventually overwhelm him. For instance, he is afraid and finds himself ill-equipped to deal with the giant rat with human-like qualities and the Judge's ghost. The story emphasizes the importance of humility and open-mindedness when facing the unknown. Dr. Thornhill, like Malcolmson, is a man of science, but he is more cautious, and we can see that despite his rationalism, he senses that something is amiss with the Judge's House.

Credulity and unquestioned cynicism are but two sides of the same coin. Both of these are forms of mental laziness that avoid critical thinking. Questioning is the middle path between gullibility and cynicism, and that is the steep path of an honest sceptic. Narada, the ancient Hindu philosopher said, "Never utter these words: 'I do not know this—therefore it is false.' One must study to know, know to understand, and understand to judge."

It is not the right kind of rationalism, which rejects all that it cannot immediately and completely understand. As no surgeon in cutting up the body has found the soul, therefore, no soul exists,

thus, reasons the false rationalist. Yet the same mind believes in the existence of mental suffering, and of emotional depression and elation, which are as invisible as is the Soul. A true rationalist always remains an inquirer—humble, reverent, and confident, looking for an answer or explanation to the phenomena he has not solved. We sin against wisdom when we accept on blind faith without understanding or turn sceptics because reason, observation, or experiments fail to give answers.

As we reason from premises to conclusions, we can reason ourselves into a false position from a false basis of thinking. If we start with wrong premises, we are bound to come to false conclusions, however faultless the reasoning. “Reason is the clumsy weapon of the scientists—intuition the unerring guide of the seer. In other words, reason develops at the expense and loss of natural instinct, and it finally shuts out man’s spiritual perceptions....If we had to judge of the Deity, and the world of spirits, by its human interpreters...belief in God and the soul’s immortality could not withstand the attacks of *reason* for one century more. That which supports the faith of man in God and a spiritual life to come is *intuition*,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 435). When knowledge is obtained based solely on observation, experiment, and reasoning, then a person can make a fatal mistake of denying all that can be apprehended only by a still higher faculty of intuitive perception.

Some critics observe that when the Judge was alive, he was feared for his relentless sentencing of criminals, and after his death, he continues to inflict punishment. The student becomes the final victim of this retribution. His malevolent presence continues to be there in the house, punishing those who trespass into his domain. Malcolmson, though innocent of any crime, is punished by the Judge’s ghost, showing his brand of justice to be indiscriminate and driven by desire for control and domination.

(*To be concluded*)

## WILLIAM CROOKES—A SCIENTIST OF THE DAY

### II

THE ELEMENTS known to science are not the primordial elements, *i.e.*, something that cannot be further resolved into constituents, which fact was proved by Professor Crookes through certain type of fractionation of Yttrium and other chemical elements. In his lecture on “Elements and *Meta*-elements,” Professor Crookes goes beyond the ordinary understanding of Chemistry when he questions the very concept of an “element,” as understood by science. He mentions “bodies,” which are neither compounds nor mixtures and are such that they cannot be classified as elements, as has been defined by science. He calls such “bodies” “meta-elements.”

Professor Crookes tells us of those elements in the periodic table where the only difference between two or more elements existing as one body and considered to be a single element is that when they are in a solution, one of them precipitates faster than the other. Also, there are such elements where there is almost no difference in their chemical properties, but they are physically distinct. The question may arise: what is chemical and what is physical? Can we say the tendency of one “body”—of a couple or of a group of elements—to precipitate before the other, in a given solution, to be a “physical difference”? Likewise, taking into account the difference in colour produced in a solution, (coloured reaction), or difference in spectra, or difference in basicity, if we accord the status of “element” to one of them, we must assign the same status to the other “body” also. In fact, he says that none of the 60 or 70 elements that were discovered then are found to be simple; when subjected to fractionation, they gave rise to bodies that were having qualities that were imperceptibly different from one another. Thus, each of the elements can be divided and sub-divided almost infinitely, causing infinite multiplication of chemical elements with the insuperable challenge of fitting them in the periodic theory, or the periodic law.

In the periodic table the rows are called periods and the columns are called groups. The elements belonging to the same column or

group show similar chemical and physical properties. The elements are arranged row-wise depending upon their atomic number, which is the number of protons in the nucleus. Till 1913, it was based on the atomic weight [average mass of atoms] of an element.

The periodic law states that when elements are arranged in the order of their atomic numbers, they show periodic variation of atomic structure and periodic variation in most of their properties. As a result, certain types of atomic structures or properties occur again after a particular interval, say after every seven elements, etc. A certain trend is noticed in the properties of elements, which in turn can be used for predicting unknown elements, depending on their place in the periodic table.

Professor Crookes suggests that this Periodic Law, or Periodic theory, has been verified in various ways so that we cannot accept something that fails to conform to this theory. What should then be done with all those “bodies” that differ from each other only in having slightly different properties? Since each element can be resolved into many closely similar elements, they may be looked upon as an “elementary group” instead of a single element. Then, in the periodic table, we should replace all such single elements by elementary groups, without any conflict with the Periodic Theory or Law.

According to Professor Crookes, the resolution of an element into various sub-elements that differ from each other slightly can be explained on the basis of *internal type*. Giving an example, Professor Crookes says that if we take a very small sample of the element Yttrium consisting of Yttrium atoms, these atoms must be closely similar to each other. Also, the atomic weight of this element should be more or less an average or mean of the weights of the atoms that constitute it. If we take the atomic weight of every atom that forms this element, these atoms, not being identical but differing slightly from each other, their atomic weight must be slightly more or less than the atomic weight of Yttrium. Hence, when Yttrium is resolved into various elements, the slight difference in their properties, such as spectra, colour, basicity, etc., can be explained on the basis of difference in weights of atoms that constitute Yttrium.



Professor Crookes suggested that ultimately, we can reduce the elements to their first state and even to their first primordial element. H.P.B. writes that while Professor Crookes is hinting at the existence of a homogeneous primordial element, occultism already knows of the One eternal element, which differentiates at the time of the manifestation of the world. The manifested world is called the Tree of life. The first differentiation of the One eternal element, or *Mulaprakriti*, in its most homogeneous state forms the roots of that Tree. By admitting the possibility of the existence of the most homogeneous matter on our lowest plane as being the source of chemical elements, science is compelled to accept also the possibility of the existence of the most homogeneous matter on the highest plane—being the source from which there is evolution of gods and atoms. This has been illustrated by the Caduceus of Mercury, the god of Wisdom.

Thoth Hermes carries the serpent-rod, emblem of Wisdom, the rod that became the Caduceus. The rod of Caduceus is a rod with a knob, flanked by two wings of the Swan (*Hansa*). The rod is entwined by two serpents. *Metaphysically*, the rod represents the trunk of the *Ashwattha* tree, or the tree of life and being. The trunk grows and descends at every new *manvantara* from the two dark wings of the Swan of Life. The two serpents coiled around the rod represent Spirit and Matter. They descend along the trunk of the rod, and where their tails embrace is the manifested universe, or the world of illusion.

The rod of Caduceus is called the “Laya” rod. If we look at the figure, we find that the intertwined serpents form a sort of spiral, alternatively represented by a figure of 8, called a lemniscate. One part of it represents evolution downward, or rather involution of spirit into matter; another part of the spiral is the path of evolution from matter into spirit, and both of these are gradual processes, with final re-absorption into the *laya* state. In *The Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, H.P.B. explains that the central line represented by the rod of caduceus around which two serpents are intertwined

spirally, represents two forces, and when the forces going spirally touch the central line, the differentiated becomes undifferentiated again, and hence the central line is called the Zero point or *Laya* state. This happens during the *pralaya* state. Evolution takes place spirally. Professor Crookes calls it “the point neutral as to electricity”—a neutral central line as far as electricity is concerned and neutral in chemical properties.

Both the *Ashwattha* Tree and the Caduceus are symbols that make clear that the ancients knew that there exists One eternal element, or the homogenous source, from which not only all the terrestrial and chemical elements but also all that exists in manifestation have been derived by differentiation.

Something similar has been applied to chemical elements, when Professor Crookes proposes to arrange the chemical elements by a curved figure where the curve must be such as to pass twice through a point that is “neutral as to electricity” as well as neutral as to chemical energy, and such a figure could only be the figure of 8 or the lemniscate. He says that there are three factors at work in endowing atomicity to a newly born element, namely, space, electricity, and temperature.

He points out that such a figure can be produced through three simple motions; first is a simple back-and-forth motion, say, east to west. The second motion could be the one at right angles to it but twice as fast, or from north to south, and the third at right angles to these two (suppose downwards). He gives a list of the first 14 elements in the periodic table, where elements have been arranged into groups based on atomic weight, of which seven each will form two loops of the figure of 8, or lemniscate. The first loop contains seven elements from lithium to fluorine, and the next contains the next seven elements from sodium to chlorine. When we refer to the portion of the periodic table given on p. 627 (*S.D.*, II), where the elements have been arranged in seven groups, based on their atomic weight, we see that the elements belonging to each row of the table form half the loop of the lemniscate. Professor Crookes says that if

all factors remain constant, then over and over again this cycle of 14 elements will be repeated, forming the same elements again and again. However, if temperature is reduced, then when the second cycle of 14 elements begins, the first element of this cycle will be a lineal descendant of lithium, *i.e.*, potassium. This process can go on, wherein as time advances and temperature declines (and that is the third downward motion), then we will have many other cycles of 14 elements, each of them forming a lemniscate such that each of these crosses a vertical line at lower and lower points. In other words, 14 elements from two rows of the periodic table form a lemniscate and if all the elements of periodic table are taken, we will have many lemniscates, one below the other, and each of them crossing the central vertical line twice. The central, vertical line will be found to be made up of the elements that are neutral as to electricity and also neutral as to chemical properties. Near the vertical line, or neutral line, are the three groups of transitional elements that form group VIII of Professor Mendeleev's table on p. 627 (*S.D.*, II), while the rare gases, or noble gases, or inert gases (four of which were discovered in 1894 and others were discovered subsequently), stand on the neutral line. The noble gases are primarily a group of six gaseous elements: Helium (He), Neon (Ne), Argon (Ar), Krypton (Kr), Xenon (Xe), and Radon (Rn), and they constitute about one per cent of Earth's atmosphere. These rare gases form Group 18 (last column) of the modern periodic table of elements. They are monoatomic gases and are colourless, odourless, and tasteless. They are chemically inactive (hence neutral as to chemical properties) because the arrangement of electrons in their atoms is such that it makes them stable and inactive. The reactivity of any element is partly determined by how easily it gains or loses electrons, as that is necessary for an atom to react with other atoms.

As for the transitional elements, they are intermediate between highly electropositive elements and the more electronegative elements, and are crucial in the chemical transition from metallic elements to non-metallic elements.

We are told that every coil or lemniscate with seven elements in one loop, and another seven in the other loop, formed on two sides of the neutral line, will be found to be arranged in such a way that mono-atomic elements would be one remove from the neutral central line, diatomic elements would be two removes, and so on. In every successive coil the same law holds good. Significantly, the table on p. 627 (*S.D.*, II), reproduced from Hellenbach's *Magie der Zahlen*, not only exhibits the law of periodicity but also the fact that this law is governed by the number *seven*, as rightly concluded by Hellenbach.

On pp. 105-06 (*S.D.*, II) we read that hydrogen is a gas on our plane, but Professor Crookes says that even in Chemistry hydrogen is the only existing form of matter and is allied or similar to *protyle* and comparable to *laya*. It is *upadhi*, or basis, for fire, air, and water. "Hydrogen is not fire, though it manifests or creates it; nor is it Air, though air may be regarded as a product of the union of Water and Fire—since Hydrogen is found in the aqueous element of the atmosphere. It is three in one."

(*Concluded*)

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BOOKS! 'tis a dull and endless strife:  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music! on my life,  
There's more of wisdom in it.  
And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!  
He, too, is no mean preacher:  
Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

"THE TABLES TURNED"

## ON TENACITY

THE ONE-POINTED tenacity to hold grimly to the Line of Theosophical Action through all the ups and downs which Karma precipitates is the only saviour of the aspirant to Adeptship. Service of the Great Cause being his sole motive, and sacrifice the method to be continuously used. The Inner Path is not only long and broad, it has depth also. As the aspirant marches onward and makes progress he encounters greater difficulties—larger in number and even more complex in character. On this path human souls are served by the soul; the soul-servant acquires the power to sacrifice to a greater extent, copying the example of the Perfect Living Servant and Sacrificer. Therefore, the new difficulties which the progressing soul-servant ever encounters are out of the ordinary, are more complex than the human frailties we usually encounter in business or club or home. By his own earnestness the aspirant not only stirs up his own latent weaknesses but by his devoted service of other souls he also acts as a catalytic agent which stirs their personalities. “‘Great Sifter’ is the name of the Heart Doctrine, O Disciple,” says *The Voice of the Silence*.

The Theosophical beginner has to prepare himself to face this two-fold din and clatter which is bound to occur in the near future, if he be earnest and sincere. From the very first let this be his line of life-meditation: *Through good and evil report, through success and failure, in fame and in ignominy, respected or suspected, hold on and march on with the Eye of the Heart on the distant goal, and the Eye of the Mind on the work of the day.*

The aspirant is on a more perilous and adventurous voyage than Columbus. Joaquin Miller in his inspiring poem has a message for every aspirant to the New World. Columbus on the shoreless seas never lost hope or courage when all others on his ship were waiting to be engulfed by the waves of death. Again and again he resolutely exclaimed, ‘Sail on!’ Hope without courage is impotent as courage without hope is disrupting.

## THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

### FRAGMENT ONE—VIII

**“THIS earth, Disciple, is the Hall of Sorrow, wherein are set along the Path of dire probations, traps to ensnare thy Ego by the delusion called ‘Great Heresy.’”**

A disciple is someone who has determined to discipline himself by taking knowledge, reflecting upon it, and applying the same. In *Raja-Yoga* or *Occultism*, H.P.B. says that “a lay chela is but a man of the world who affirms his desire to become wise in spiritual things.” Lay chelaship means working for merit under the observation of a Master. A Lay chela on probation is one who, in all sincerity, takes a vow to bring about inner purification. It is a promise or a pact made with one’s Divine nature. When this pledge is taken, all that was lying latent in one’s nature, good and bad, begins to come to the surface. Now, one is required to fight harder. It is like waking up a sleeping dog. Those who thought themselves to be very upright may be shocked to find in themselves a strong negative tendency, such as to lie or to gossip. It is through these karmic precipitations, the coming to the surface of what was latent, that the aspirant is tested. These tests may come in the form of unexpected loss, unexpected temptations, and situations. One is tested in their relations with family members and co-workers. The disciple on probation is like a candidate applying for a job who, after selection, has to pass through a probationary period, during which his performance is observed, to see if he has the capacity for various kinds of jobs. Then, after nearly one or two years of probation, he is *confirmed*, if found satisfactory. “As to probationary chelas, there is an invariable rule that they go upon seven years’ trial. These ‘trials’ do not refer to fixed and stated tests, but to all the events of life and the bearing of the probationer in them,” writes Mr. Judge. Shri B. P. Wadia remarks that “people do not get through, and seven [years] becomes 70 and extends to more than one life.”

On the earth, the ego has to pass through difficult tests and traps.

These traps are not meant to trap the ego so as to prevent its progress. On the contrary, they are the small tests that the ego has to pass because only then will the ego be fit to pass far harder tests in the future. These tests are in accordance with the karma of the disciple and his present circumstances—they need not trap him. He can jump over them and gain the opposite virtue. For example, the trap could be to test if one loses one's temper in certain conditions. If one loses one's temper, then one fails the test and shall be given further opportunities to overcome their anger. However, if one learns to control oneself by developing patience, tolerance, letting go of desires, or overcoming temptations, etc., then it is a definite gain. The last enemy to be fought and overcome is the “ego,” or sense of pride and separateness.

We are caught in a trap because, as we move from the mundane life towards spirituality, we tend to perpetuate our limitations. Thus, for instance, the ego, which was ambitious for money, now becomes ambitious for *moksha*. The ego, which saw no value in the spiritual experience, now sees little value in the human experience. The ego, which took pride in “more” holidays abroad, now takes pride in helping “more” people—“more” being the trap here. The personality is the same; the domain is different. The spiritual ego is more subtle than the mundane ego, so that its defence mechanisms wear a holy garb. The pitfalls on the way are part of the maturation process. The key to coming out of a trap is to see the trap for what it is. (*Life Positive*, November 2018)

These traps are set along the Path of dire probations by the delusion called “Great Heresy,” or *Attavada*, which the footnote explains as the belief in “separateness of Soul or *Self* from the One Universal, infinite SELF.” The *Glossary* defines it as “the sin of personality.” H.P.B. writes that the heresies of “Attavada” (belief in soul or *self*) and that of *Sakkayaditthi* (the delusion of individuality or *personality*, i.e., belief in an “I am” apart from Universal Existence) are regarded by a Hindu as “primary delusions,” the direct result of ignorance or *Maya*. (*The Theosophist*, Vol. III, No. 11, pp. 278-79)

The personal and the spiritual “I” in man are described in the *Mundaka Upanishad* thus: “Two birds, inseparable companions, perch on the same tree. Of these two, one eats the fruit (suffers and enjoys); the other looks on without eating.” The first bird is our individual self, feeding on the pleasures and pains of this world; the other is the Universal Self, silently witnessing all. The desire to progress, to enjoy the bliss of *devachan*, and to enter Nirvana are not bad desires but still are of the lower kind, since they involve a sense of identity and separateness. The person gets caught in these traps because of their sense of separateness. The one who has risen above the sense of separateness will never be caught.

**“This earth, O ignorant Disciple, is but the dismal entrance leading to the twilight that precedes the valley of true light—that light which no wind can extinguish, that light which burns without a wick or fuel.”**

It speaks of the journey of the aspirant who decides to walk the spiritual path. The earth life, or physical existence, in which the aspirant is tested in various ways, is being described as the dismal entrance, where “dismal” means that which causes gloom or misery. From the physical existence, one enters the twilight or psychic region, a stage of psychic development. Twilight refers to the period of time after sunset and before sunrise in which the atmosphere is partially illuminated by the sun, being neither totally dark nor completely lit. It refers to the state of uncertainty and vagueness. Psychic development involves the development of the psychic senses, which enable one to see things in the astral region and have other psychic experiences and powers. Mr. Judge writes that the astral plane is as full of strange sights and sounds as an untrodden South American forest, and hence difficult to fathom. Likewise, when one acquires certain psychic powers and undergoes psychic experiences, one is likely to mistake them as signs of spiritual advancement. “A moment of deepest peace or wonderful revealings given to the student is not the awful moment when one is about to see his spiritual guide, much less his own soul. Nor are psychical splashes of blue flame, nor visions of things that



afterwards come to pass, nor sights of small sections of the astral light with its wonderful photographs of past or future, nor the sudden ringing of distant fairy-like bells any proof that you are cultivating spirituality,” writes Mr. Judge. True progress always depends upon the purity of one’s motive and in controlling and conquering the lower self through the Higher Self.

If the spiritual aspirant is not lured by the psychic powers but focuses on moral and spiritual development, then they enter the valley of true light. The symbol of light is a profound symbol. There is (1) the light of the eyes and the physical light, (2) the light of the mind, and (3) the light of the heart and soul. A bulb becomes incandescent because the filament offers a certain amount of resistance. It offers just enough resistance for the bulb to be lit up. Similarly, the personality must be so moulded that it becomes a useful instrument for the Soul within and not an obstruction or a “dead weight”—like the total resistance of the filament, which altogether stops the current from flowing. Soul and body must work in harmony. It is only in the *light of Spiritual Knowledge* that one realizes the follies of the past and the darkness that surrounds the inner man. The highest light is the light of *Atman*—that spark of divinity that is present in us and is described in the *Gita* (XIII) thus: “It is within and without all creatures animate and inanimate; it is inconceivable because of its subtlety...It is the light of all lights, and is declared to be beyond all darkness.” We may call this light *Swayambhu*, or self-existent. It has not been lit by anyone, and nor can it be extinguished. Thus, the journey of a spiritual aspirant is from the darkness and gloom of earth life to the semi-darkness of Psychic progress, ending with the True Light of Spiritual progress.

**“Saith the Great Law: ‘In order to become the KNOWER of ALL SELF, thou hast first of SELF to be the knower.’”**

In order to know “ALL SELF,” one has to know the “SELF,” because man is the microcosm of the macrocosm, and in him is all that is there in the universe. Man is connected to Nature, and in him are all the centres (active or latent) that connect him to the whole of

the universe. The footnote explains that “The *Tattvajnyani* is the ‘knower’ or discriminator of the principles in nature and in man; and *Atmajnyani* is the knower of ATMA or the Universal, ONE SELF.” In other words, before becoming *Atmajnyani*, one has to become *Tattvajnyani*. Both man and universe are made up of the seven *tattvas*, or principles. However, in Indian philosophy, the *tattvas* help to understand the nature of the Absolute, the souls, and the universe. Sankhya philosophy lists 25 *tattvas*, while later Shaivite philosophies mention 36 *tattvas*. *Tattvas* are used to explain the structure and origin of the Universe and are divided into three groups: The *pure tattvas* describe internal aspects of the Absolute; the *pure-impure tattvas* describe the soul and its limitations; while the *impure tattvas* include the universe and living beings that assist the existence of the soul.

In the article, “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac,” T. Subba Row observes that the Zodiac represents various stages in the evolution of the universe from the Unknown to the physical, objective universe of *panchamahabhutas*, or five elements. He observes that the Seventh Sign, Libra (*Tula*), marks the turning point, and it corresponds to the number 36, which represents 36 *Tattvas*. He explains that the difference between *Jivatma* (or *Baddha*) and *Paramatma* (or *Mukta*) is that *Jivatma* gets encased, as it were, within these 36 *Tattvas* and hence gets bound, while *Paramatma* is free. He observes that the number of *Tattvas* is different according to the views of different philosophers, but by *Saktas* generally and by several ancient Rishis such as Agastya, Parasurama, etc., the number of *Tattvas* has been stated to be 36.

In the article, “The Septenary Principle in Esotericism,” 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 first product of the evolution of *prakriti* is Mahat, and that in turn produces *ahankara*, or self-consciousness, and the latter in turn produces *Tanmatras*, or subtle elementary

principles or particles, out of which the *mahabhutas*, or the gross elementary principles or particles, are evolved. To the latter belong desire nature (*kamarupa*), astral body (*linga sarira*), life-energy (*prana*), and physical body (*sthula sarira*).

In Sankhya Philosophy, *Prakriti* is the first principle (*tattva*) of the universe, and it becomes manifest as twenty-three *tattvas*. Thus, in Sankhya philosophy, the evolved universe is a play of twenty-four principles, of which *prakriti* is the first, the five gross elements are the last, and Mahat, mind, five organs of action, perception, and *tanmatras* are the intermediate ones.

A *Tattva jnani*, one who has realized the nature of the fundamental principles or *tattvas* that constitute reality, including the physical world, the mind, and the senses, can become an *Atma jnani*, i.e., one who has gone beyond the knowledge of *tattvas* to the realization of the Self, the *Atma*, by cultivating deeper self-awareness and realizing the unity of the *Atma* with the *Paramatma*. This involves transcending the limitations of the mind and ego and recognizing the true nature of consciousness. According to Sankhya philosophy, the soul becomes free from the *tattvas* (principles or elements) through the realization of its distinct nature from *Prakriti* and its components or *tattvas*. This realization leads to cessation of the soul's identification with *Prakriti* and its effects, ultimately resulting in liberation, or *Kaivalya*.

This has been expressed, a little differently, in the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita*. Shri Krishna says that when *Purusha*, i.e., Soul, comes in contact with *Prakriti*, or matter, it gets attached to the qualities that are inherent in matter and thereby is born again and again. There is that which is above *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, which is called *Para-purusha*, translated by Mr. Judge as the Spirit in the Body, *Maheshwara*, and also the *Paramatma*, the highest soul. When one succeeds in uniting oneself with *Para-Purusha*, one becomes an immortal being, having attained the knowledge of that which is to be known.

(To be continued)

## GOD AND DEMON

RELIGIOUS traditions and myths of the ancient world are replete with legends of contests between two titanic forces of opposite character, represented in human consciousness as good and evil, for supremacy. Osiris and Typhon of the Egyptians, Loki and Odin of Scandinavia, the two opposite characters of Siva—the benevolent and the dark destroying god—Suras and Asuras of Hindu mythology, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman of the Zoroastrians, Michael and the Dragon of St. John's *Revelations*, the good and evil serpents of Ophite Gnostics, Zeus and Prometheus of the Greeks, God and Satan of Christian Theology, and so on, are some of the examples of the dualism of the ancient religions. A comparative study of these dualistic myths of world religions in the light of Theosophy reveals to us, at least partly, keys to many a cosmic, anthropological and psychological, mysteries and astronomical truths, as well as a philosophical rationale of the enigma of good and evil, and gives us a glimpse into prehistoric and cosmic events connected with human evolution.

Misunderstanding of the philosophical rationale of the exegesis of the dualistic principles of the ancient religions has given rise to wrong beliefs. Theological dogmas based on dead-letter reading of the scriptures defy reason and run counter to common sense. Wrong beliefs obscure right knowledge, pervert right mental action, and, consequently, subvert true human happiness and progress. Personification of the abstract dual principles as concrete extra-cosmic personages, as God and Satan or the Devil, outside of and separate from the universe and man, is an instance of distortion of truth and the ill effects that follow wrong beliefs. It can be readily seen how attributing to an outside devil the sins of man, who, according to theological dogma, can only be saved by affirmation by him, the belief that the carnal Saviour has vicariously atoned for the sins of mankind, weakens the will of man, defeats the all-important virtue of self-reliance, and encourages immorality among

believers. A Remedy for ill-effects produced from wrong beliefs is found only in dispelling them by a spread of right knowledge.

“If ‘God’ is Absolute, Infinite, and the Universal Root of all and everything in Nature and its universe, whence comes Evil or D’Evil if not from the same ‘Golden Womb’ of the absolute? Thus, we are forced either to accept the emanation of good and evil, of Agathodaemon and Kakodaemon, as offshoots from the same trunk of the Tree of Being, or to resign ourselves to the absurdity of believing in two eternal Absolutes!” (*S.D.*, I, 412). Spirit and Matter are the two facets which, acting in opposite ways in manifestation, merge into the higher Unity and become one during the period of non-manifestation. Pre-cosmic Ideation reflecting itself in pre-cosmic Substance at the first stage of cosmic manifestation from the Unknown is Akasa, which abstract divine principle contains in itself potentially all that is to be in the universe and contains, therefore, both good and evil, gods and demons, Suras and Asuras, and a whole range of contrasted qualities, which in the beginning emerging as a primal unity of Self and Nature differentiates into two distinct but ever conjoined opposite principles and becomes many. Hence mythologies of ancient religions depicted god and Satan to be twin brothers of the same parent Cause—GOD—and both serve the cause of the same great grand end, which is progression and perfection of the universe of beings.

Akasa on the divine plane is reflected on the lower plane of the Septenary cosmos as Astral Light, which mediates between the material world below and the spiritual plane above, partaking of the attributes of both—its inmost being touching the former and in its lower aspects polluted by the earthly emanations and the misdeeds of men on earth. The lower Manas of mankind is on the plane of the Astral Light, which is a register of all thoughts and deeds of man and reflects them back on the world. In better ages when spirituality is paramount in human life and affairs, the Astral Light reflects the higher quality of thoughts and virtues of mankind back on the world; mankind thus reaps the benefit of the quality of its own benevolence.

But as the general trend of thoughts and acts of mankind in periods of spiritual darkness, as at present, the principle of Kama, passions and desires, being uppermost, and Manas only partially evolved, the Astral Light is full of the deleterious emanations of vile thoughts and deeds of the world of men, and these are reflected back on earth, causing physical and moral epidemics and calamities. The Astral Light, being in intimate association with the lower mind and lower nature of man, is the great deluder and tempter of man. It is then the true Satan or D'Evil, which is man's own unregenerate personality, which wars against his higher spiritual nature. The Higher Self of man partakes of the divine attributes of Akasa, while his terrestrial mortal personality is effused with the Astral Light. In other words, Spirit reflecting itself in differentiating Matter-Prakriti on a septenary scale becomes progressively obscured by evolving matter at each step of descent till, on the lowest material plane, spirit is fully involved in, and generally conquered by, unintelligent instinctive material principles.

Spirit struggles to be free from the bondage in Matter but is frustrated by the power of illusion caused by refractory turbulent material principles, hence designated by exoteric religions as mythical Satan, Evil, or Devil. Evil, therefore, is no extra-cosmic entity but just the absence or diminishing of the light of Spirit. Given to unintelligent automatic, repetitive action, being as yet on the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder, and, therefore, yet devoid of discriminative faculty, Matter offers resistance to conscious impulse given to it by Man, the Thinker, in his effort towards self-regeneration and freedom. The absence of Light of Spirit on the lower planes of the septenary cosmos, on the one hand, and the opposing or resisting quality of lower nature, which frustrates the higher aspirations of the septenary man during his embodied [state] on earth, on the other, is the natural and inevitable consequence of the universe coming into being. It is only by this contrast of the two mutually opposing principles—one in their essence, polarised into opposites during periods of manifestation—that evolution of Beings under Law can

ever take place. Thus, Matter, or Prakriti, is no Devil or Evil *per se*, but both are natural dualistic principles in the order of cosmic evolution and progress. Evil, so-called, is the shadow and the necessarianism of Good. Good comes from the experience of Evil. Evil is therefore the parent of Good. Evil in human life is the painful experience of the retributive Karma which follows acts that violate the harmony of life because of man's ignorance as to what in reality man is and of the purpose of life. Yet it is by and through pain and suffering produced by man himself by his own actions impelled by passions of ambition, pride, vanity, and so on, that the mind-soul is purified, to be at last merged with the Higher Self, like the gold that results from smelting in the fire and cleansing by water of the auriferous ore.

Hence, there is no God and Devil outside of man and Nature, but they are personified dual principles, of which both are composed in their septenary constitution. Philosophers of old knew this well. They called Evil the lining of Good, Demon the inversion of God, an inseparable pair. The universe ceases to be one in the absence of either. It is the destiny of man, by exercise of reason, discrimination, and Will, with which his mind is naturally endowed, to free himself from the deadly coils of this Astral Serpent, subdue it, raise it to godhood, and himself merge into it and attain to conscious immortality in Spirit. Innate native purity of Spirit is only negative goodness and unmerited, unless it is acquired by the fire of mental suffering and experience in Matter through cycles of reincarnation.

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HOLD fast to dreams, for if dreams die  
 Life is a broken-winged bird, that cannot fly.  
 Hold fast to dreams, for when dreams go  
 Life is a barren field, frozen with snow.

—LANGSTON HUGHES  
 "DREAMS"

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Shamanism is on the rise, both in practice and popular culture. In England and Wales, the number of people describing their religion as “Shamanism” has increased more than tenfold, according to the most recent census in the United Kingdom. The surveys in the United States suggest that hundreds of thousands of people there regularly consult shamans. The current surge in popularity of shamanism has been explored by Manvir Singh, at the University of California, in his new book, *Shamanism: The Timeless Religion*. He has been studying shamanism for a decade, since he first visited the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia and witnessed their ceremonies and learned about the central role they play in medical and spiritual life.

He defines shamanism as “a practice in which a specialist enters altered states to engage with unseen realities or agents and provides services like healing and divination.” Though people have generally confined shamanism to the realm of superstition or magic, he says that shamanism is religious at its core, as it exhibits the features common to all religious practices, involving supernatural agents to procure blessings and avoid misfortune. Shamanism differs from place to place. One difference is seen in the method of inducing trance. The ceremonies are public in some places, while in others they are private.

How old is shamanism? Archaeologists claim shamanism to be prehistoric based on rock art, “especially of human-animal hybrids, which are sometimes said to portray shamans.” When they came across graves containing women with physical differences or notable headdresses made of teeth and bones, they interpreted them as potential Palaeolithic shamans. According to him, “the best evidence for shamanism’s antiquity is its ubiquity.” It is extremely difficult to destroy, and even if it does get destroyed, it re-emerges very easily because, according to psychological research, “it taps into universal features of the human mind.”

What aspects of the human mind does it tap into? Firstly, our



predisposition to feel that uncertain events are influenced by invisible agents, such as gods, spirits, witches, etc. The second is our reliance on rituals and willingness to perform them if they are not costly and yet can bring desired results. Dualism is another way that shamanism leads us to think about the supernatural. There is intuitive dualism, wherein we believe that minds or souls exist separately from the material realm. There is dualism underlying shamanic rituals, such as during a soul journey, when the soul leaves the body, and during possession, when a soul or spirit enters the body. According to Manvir Singh, if many people are embracing shamanism today, it is because shamanism can be seen as a means of dealing with uncontrollable events, and it is embraced by those who have become disenchanted with organised religion but have a strong desire for spirituality, writes Kate Douglas. (*New Scientist*, July 19, 2025)

Today, whatever little is known of Shamanism has been perverted. It is called “heathenism” of Mongolia, without any basis, for it is one of the oldest religions of India, writes H. P. Blavatsky. “It is spirit-worship, or belief in the immortality of the souls, and that the latter are still the same men they were on earth, though their bodies have lost their objective form, and man has exchanged his physical for a spiritual nature. In its present shape, it is an offshoot of primitive theurgy and a practical blending of the visible with the invisible world.” Whenever a person on earth desires to communicate with these invisible beings, he has to assimilate himself to their nature, wherein he is furnished by them with a supply of spiritual essence, while he supplies them with a portion of his physical nature to enable them to appear sometimes in a semi-objective form. “It is a temporary exchange of natures, called theurgy.” (*Isis*, II, 615)

H.P.B. cautions that “Real *divine* theurgy requires an almost superhuman purity and holiness of life; otherwise, it degenerates into mediumship or black magic....It was the transcendental aspect of what is now called Spiritualism; but having been abused and misconceived by the populace, it had come to be regarded by some as necromancy, and was generally forbidden” (*The Key to*

*Theosophy*, Indian Ed., p. 2 fn.). In this connection she writes that the true Shamanism that prevailed in India in the days of Megasthenes (300 B.C.) cannot be judged by what we see of their present-day degenerate descendants among the Shamans of Siberia. “It is in the chief lamaseries of Mongolia and Thibet that it has taken refuge; and there, Shamanism, if so we must call it, is practiced to the utmost limits of intercourse allowed between man and ‘spirit.’ The religion of the lamas has faithfully preserved the primitive science of *magic*, and produces as great feats now as it did in the days of Kublai-Khan and his barons.” (*Isis*, II, 615-16)

“Its followers have neither altars nor idols, and it is upon the authority of a Shaman priest that we state that their true rites, which they are bound to perform only once a year, on the shortest day of winter, cannot take place before any stranger to their faith. Therefore, we are confident that all descriptions hitherto given in the *Asiatic Journal* and other European works, are but guess-work,” writes H.P.B. According to her, the Russians, who are in constant touch with the Shamans in Siberia and Tartary, have learned from them nothing more than clever jugglery. Their ceremonies upon the occasions of births, deaths, and marriages are but small parts of their worship, which includes offerings, the sprinkling of the fire with spirits and milk, and magical incantations intoned by the officiating Shaman. They wore numerous small bells of brass and iron on their priestly robe of deerskin, or the skin and fur of some dead animal, known for its magnetism, to drive away the malevolent spirits of the air. (*ibid.*, 624)

When a Shaman is only an irresponsible medium, he pours out prophecies and describes future events. When consulted about thefts and murders, they could point out the guilty parties. “The Shamans of Siberia are all ignorant and illiterate. Those of Tartary and Thibet—few in number—are mostly learned men in their own way, and will not allow themselves to fall under the control of spirits of any kind. The former are *mediums* in the full sense of the word; the latter, ‘magicians.’” The latter, who are learned in the mysteries of the priestly

colleges of Tibet, have the power, just like a mesmeriser, to expel the elementary creature from the possessed person. (*ibid.*, 625-26)

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Stoicism is considered to be a philosophy of grim endurance, of tolerating rather than transcending life's agonies and adversities, and that is perhaps the reason why the Stoic sage, in Western culture, has never obtained the popularity of the Zen master, writes Larry Wallace. He says that stoicism is a philosophy of gratitude, which is rugged enough to endure anything. Stoicism is not grim resolve but a way to wrest, or snatch, happiness from adversity. The truth is, indifference is a power that facilitates a more expansive and adventurous mode of living, in which joy and grief are there along with other emotions, but they are tempered so that they are less tyrannical.

"Stoicism" is derived from the root *stoa*, a Greek term for a porch, where the ancient Stoics would hang out and talk about enlightenment, etc. The Greek scholar Zeno was the founder of stoicism, and Marcus Aurelius was its practitioner, but the real hero of Stoicism is the Greek philosopher Epictetus, who had been a slave and who taught Marcus Aurelius directly. "Among those Epictetus has taught *indirectly* is a whole cast of the distinguished, in all fields of endeavour. One of these is the late United States Navy Admiral James Stockdale. A prisoner of war in Vietnam for seven years during that conflict, he endured broken bones, starvation, solitary confinement, and all other manners of torture. His psychological companion through it all was the teachings of Epictetus, with which he had familiarised himself after graduating from college and joining the Navy...and he came to know their application much better than anyone should have to."

Epictetus once asked, "Who is the invincible human being?" and also answered himself: "One who can be disconcerted by nothing that lies outside the sphere of choice." In other words, any misfortune "that lies outside the sphere of choice" should be taken as an

opportunity to strengthen our resolve. There should be a willingness to convert adversity to opportunity. Seneca wrote that to the one who has never been tested by hardship, he would say, “You are unfortunate in my judgment, for you have never been unfortunate....No one will know what you were capable of, not even you yourself.”

William B. Irvine, in his book *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (2009), has given the name “negative visualisation” or keeping constantly in our heads the very worst that can happen because only by envisioning the bad can we truly appreciate the good; gratitude does not arrive when we take things for granted. Stoics must be seen as those who are “serene and confident in the face of anything you throw at them.”

Marcus Aurelius, who was sick with an ulcer, whose family was a source of distress, whose officers rebelled against him, and whose empire also experienced plague, famine, and natural disasters such as the earthquake, started each day telling himself, “I shall meet with meddling, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, and unsociable people.” This was his way of adapting to vicissitudes of life, writes Larry Wallace in an article that appeared in *Aeon* magazine.

Additionally, we read that a stoic is not entirely above pain and pleasure but strives to be indifferent to them. They recognise pain and pleasure to be natural human experiences, but they should not be the driving force behind one’s actions or emotional state. Stoicism fundamentally emphasizes virtue, reason, and self-control as the pathways to a fulfilling life, and one should not be controlled by external factors like pleasure and pain.

We may say that true Stoicism, or “indifference,” is that which has been taught in the *Gita* as equal-mindedness. It may be equated to the Buddhist term *upeksha*, meaning tranquillity or equanimity. However, *upeksha* must be distinguished from cold, hardened, and fixed indifference and also from neutrality, lukewarmness, or lack of interest. True equal-mindedness has to be rooted in spiritual insight

and *vairagya*, i.e., detached attachment, or still better, “non-attachment.”

Hence, equanimity is often described as a higher state of happiness arising from acceptance of what is happening in the present moment, based on spiritual insight. To acquire spiritual insight, one must begin to understand and realize that all conditioned existence is impermanent, full of suffering, and devoid of true selfhood. We try to derive pleasure out of sensations. *Light on the Path* says, “In sensation no permanent home can be found, because change is the law of this vibratory existence.”

*Through the Gates of Gold* asks us to blend the capacities of a stoic and a voluptuary: “He must be capable of testing and valuing to its most delicate fraction every joy existence has to give; and he must be capable of denying himself all pleasures, and that without suffering from the denial.” In other words, it is developing the capacities that enable us not to be *dependent* on the pleasures.

However, a spiritual person feels more keenly the pain and pleasure, and yet, does not allow them to shake him or influence his decisions. He is able to achieve this by allowing one part of the incarnated mind to experience the emotion while keeping another part detached and thus assuming the position of an observer. A certain amount of detachment is required to enable us to learn lessons from our experiences. We can learn to experience pain and pleasure with detached concern. There should be a dissociation of “I” from happiness and unhappiness.

In the article “A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy,” H.P.B. writes, “The true Raja-Yogi is a Stoic; and [Sage] Kapila describes their state in the following words: ‘To a Yogi, in whose mind all things are identified as spirit, what is infatuation? What is grief? He sees all things as one; he is destitute of affections; he neither rejoices in good, nor is offended with evil. A wise man sees so many false things in those which are called true, so much misery in what is called happiness, that he turns away with disgust . . .’”