

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### ARE WE REALLY FREE?

We should aim at creating *free* men and women, free intellectually, free morally, unprejudiced in all respects, and above all things, *unselfish*.

—*The Key to Theosophy*

IN his book, *Studies in Words*, Prof. C. S. Lewis observes that corresponding to the word “Free” in English, there is the Greek “*Eleutheros*,” and the Latin “*liber*” and “*liberalis*,” which means free and not a slave. The typical “slave” or servile man was the person who had an axe to grind and who lacked generosity, whereas a free man is one who is characterized by readiness to give. Interestingly, then, as Aristotle points out, *servile status* and *servile character* need not always coincide. Hence, Menander says, “Live in slavery with the spirit of a free man and you will be no slave.” Nobody can chain his thoughts. *Light on the Path* says, “A slave may be dragged through the streets in chains, and yet retain the quiet soul of a philosopher, as was well seen in the person of Epictetus.” In *Isis Unveiled* H.P.B. speaks of spiritual freedom where the effort is to be made to enfranchise, *i.e.*, free the people, from all tyranny, including that of Science and Theology.

At some point in time, the word “franchise” was synonymous with citizenship. Later, “franchise” implied “power of voting,” which we know is essential for a person to become a full citizen.

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But our job as true citizens of a democratic state is not finished, merely by casting vote for the right person or party. Democracy is the strength of the people to express their will into action. In a democracy, the most important role is played by character inherent in the people.

In western countries, for a long time, the church enjoyed supremacy, because the monarch was subservient to the church authorities. Later, however, even the authority of the church was challenged by the claim to liberty of conscience, and the *individual* was recognized as the true basis of an empire. A good citizen should not have passive obedience. In his essay on “Civil Disobedience,” Henry David Thoreau poses the question: Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? Otherwise, why are we endowed with conscience? We should be men first, and subjects afterward. Respect for law must be accompanied by respect for truth and justice. An undue respect for law makes an automaton of a man. Such men would act according to law, going against their will, common sense and even against their conscience. When we serve our country only with intellect, we are as likely to serve devil, without intending it, as God, because there is no moral basis for judgment, says Thoreau.

John Stuart Mill points out in his essay “On Liberty” that originality is a valuable element in human affairs. When traditions and customs become the rule of conduct, individuality should assert itself. “He who does anything because it is a custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best.” We all have strong herd-instinct and are only too ready to conform.

Emerson, too, emphasizes *self-reliance* and says, “It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” Jesus’ advice to spiritual aspirants is: “Come ye out from among

them and be ye separate.”

We talk about freedom of speech, failing to realize that we have not learnt to think for ourselves. More than any external authority, our own fears, compulsions and public opinion are potent enemies of freedom. It is this slavery which is difficult to detect. We are slaves to our desires, being bound by a hundred chords of desire. Peace Pilgrim describes the state of freedom thus:

No one is truly free who is still attached to material things, or to places, or to people. We must be able to use things when we need them and then relinquish them without regret when they have outlived their usefulness. We must be able to appreciate and enjoy the places where we tarry, and yet pass on without anguish when we are called elsewhere. We must be able to live in loving association with people without feeling that we possess them and must run their lives. Anything that you strive to hold captive will hold you captive, and if you desire freedom you must give freedom.

Many people doubt that we have free will. Is not everything pre-destined? H.P.B. observes that Man is a free agent during his stay on earth, and if we deny free will, we must also deny *psychic Individuality* that is the self-determining power that enables a person to override circumstances. Thus:

Place half a dozen animals of the same species under the same circumstances, and their actions while not identical, will be closely similar; place half a dozen men under the same circumstances and their actions will be as different as their character, *i.e.*, their *psychic individuality*. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

We are continually influenced by the ideas of the people around us. Theosophy teaches that our thoughts and feelings are impressed in the astral light, which acts as a hypnotizing agent. In his book, *The Fear of Freedom*, Dr. Erich Fromm points out the difference between *pseudo-thinking* and *genuine-thinking* by means of an

example. When a fisherman is asked what kind of weather to expect in the next six hours, he will weigh in his mind the direction of the wind, the temperature, the humidity, etc., and then come to a definite judgment. He may have heard of a radio-forecast, but he will use it only to support his conclusion. A person who is not well versed in this field may *claim* to have reached the conclusion by seeing the direction of the wind, humidity, etc., but actually he had first accepted the radio-forecast, and was rationalizing only to make it look like his own opinion. Similarly, when we are asked about a certain political situation, or burning moral issues like conversion, or conducting of nuclear tests, etc., we would repeat what we have read in the newspapers and magazines. Dr. Fromm points out that we accept ready-made goals and pursue a career that has approval of the society. Modern man thinks he knows what he wants, while he actually wants what he is *supposed to want*. Mr. Crosbie puts it thus:

From our birth we are surrounded by those who suggest certain ideas to us as true, and we follow these suggested ideas. There is very little *original* thought anywhere, and particularly is this true in those lines to which the public pays the most attention—that is, politics, religion, science. Whatever system of thought is presented to us, that we adopt. We follow the suggestion given, with no attempt to reach the basis of that which is suggested. The foundation upon which the suggestion rests is taken for granted, even in the most important things in life. (*Universal Theosophy*, p. 108)

In the light of this we see that we are free, but we have used that freedom to choose those things which have consent or approval of the majority around us. Why does this happen? We are afraid to choose and be different because we are afraid of being isolated. It is easier to swim in the direction of the stream.

However, there are a few, who dare to be different, to be independent, to assert their freedom. Some of us go to the extreme in asserting our independence and often fail to discriminate right

from wrong. In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Mr. Judge says, “I am tired of these people who gape and gape and are excuse me so Americanly ‘independent’—as if men were ever independent of each other.” This is the crux. There is that state of positive freedom, in which the individual exists as an independent self, yet united with other men, with the world and nature.

Paradoxically, it is this *truly free man*, who is more conditioned and under control than even a slave. In his book, *Studies in Words*, Prof. Lewis refers to Aristotle’s work “*Metaphysics*,” in which he has compared a household with the organization of the Universe. He asks us to consider a household where there is a master and his slaves. He shows that it is the master, the free man, who has the least chance of acting at random, whereas the slaves and the domestic animals act randomly, always. The master sees that the slaves, when they are not put to some task are quarrelling, playing dice, flirting or sleeping. However, the master can use all of them for some common end, but they themselves do not have any such end or aim in mind. They live randomly, depending upon the mood of the moment. The master himself has a systematic life with religious, social activities and definite hours of recreation. So the master is self-bound with the discipline of a free man, while the slaves are *negatively* free between two jobs. If we compare this with the structure of the universe, we would find that it is things of the higher world that are regular, consistent and immutable; those down here are subject to chance and change. A truly free man does not do what he likes, but he imitates the flawless and patterned regularity of heavenly beings, by being fully human, as they are divine. Thus, instead of doing what he likes, the free man tries to be what *he is*, *i.e.*, fully human and finally divine.

*Light on the Path* states that only he who is untameable, who cannot be dominated, who knows that he has to play the lord over men, over facts, over all things save his own divinity, can arouse the faculty of intuition. We are influenced by a thousand and one voices, but we have to follow our own sense of right and wrong.

We need to consult wise people, good books and above all our own inner nature. We may go wrong in our judgment, but the important thing is to learn self-reliance and self-rule. When the church authorities asked Joan of Arc: “Do you dare to set your judgment against that of the church?” her reply was, “By what other judgment could I judge?”

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. 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 is learning how to cooperate—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. For instance, the inclination to marry and settle down would be less strong, when lessons of family life are learnt, and there would be genuine desire to practise celibacy. Then, having learnt the lessons from the family-State, the individual 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 really free man has unfolded his divinity to such an extent that he is able to live with other men and women, enriching their lives without interference.

## CONSOLING THE INCONSOLABLE

If you have obtained true knowledge it forces you to meet all men not only halfway, but more than that, to seek them. It urges you not to retire, but, seeking contact, to plunge into the misery and sorrow of the world, and with your cheering word, if you have no more, strive to lighten the burden of some struggling soul.

—W. Q. JUDGE

HOW does one console a friend or a relative who may be in the grip of sorrow, and who finds it difficult to come out of the intense grief caused by some unforeseen event in life, such as the heart-breaking loss of a beloved, frustration in love, divorce, desertion, serious illness, or a traumatizing event like rape? The important question is: Is it my duty? Am I directly called upon to help out the sufferer? We may, at first, hesitate, especially when we feel incompetent to handle the situation. We may think we might do more damage than help! However, if one is sincere and feels acutely about someone’s suffering, then by being there and offering loving care one can help a lot. For, that is the stuff of which a Theosophist is made. He responds to every cry of pain. “The Theosophical ideas of charity mean *personal* exertion for others; *personal* mercy and kindness; *personal* interest in the welfare of those who suffer; *personal* sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles or needs.” These words of H. P. Blavatsky form a common theme in most of her writings. Sometimes, the simple, non-verbal message: “I am there for you,” or, “You may bank on me,” is enough as a way of soothing the bleeding wounds and an aching heart. At times, even an animal pet gives comfort by its tender presence!

We have first to understand the anatomy of grief, which comes in many forms—ranging from a dejected and downcast feeling to melancholy, which may be frankly pathological, although arising from a traumatic experience like rape. However, in case of clinical

depression, competent help should also be available. Unfortunately, here too, so-called professional help is generally restricted to psychotropic drugs, rather than “psychotherapy” and “befriending.”

About eighteen million adult Americans suffer from depression, and the “U.S. market for antidepressant drugs is dollar 12 billions”! writes Shankar Vedantam (*Hindustan Times*, April 4, 2007). Many such cases are simply a normal state of sadness, as a reaction from common events like divorce, loss of job or of a dependant.

Dark moods, dejection, grief, helplessness, are only the usual reactions to stressful events or a crisis in life in normal individuals who are temperamentally susceptible to react in a particular way. “Every man has his secret sorrow,” said Longfellow. But if one permits it to affect one’s normal functions in life, it may become entrenched enough to need competent help.

It is also proper that we must allow the process of human grief to run its course. For mourning is a way of coming to terms with the loss or the trauma. And this needs time. The mourning process is complex, as there are various forms of grief reaction. Some need to be alone with their grief but not completely left out. Some cannot cry and learn to conceal the secret wound (such as disappointment in love), yet are unable to let go. These need time to open up and talk about it or deal with it more consciously. Here comes the importance of the support system by volunteers who can reassure and help the person to gain control gradually.

What then is the role of a sympathetic attendant (called befriender)? There are dos and don’ts. One must be willing just to be by the side of the sufferer without pronouncing opinions and without magnifying or understating the condition. One should be careful not to appear over-solicitous or formal. One has to spare enough time for the grief-stricken, and instinctively know when to leave the person alone. One has not to preach, or to be judgmental. The grief is a real thing to the person, so *one must never make light of anything*. Only the wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches, just as a broken toy to a child is a real tragedy!

A friend may gently encourage the person to open up, if possible, or just be a willing “any time” listener. One is not there to repress grief but *to help the person to cope with it* and to overcome the imbalance of emotions. In short, we have to be sensitive and cater to the individual’s needs. Some need physical proximity, a hug, or holding of hand. Others shrink being touched, and keep a distance.

A sympathizer, and especially a theosophist, should have in him some qualities of the heart and head to be ready to manage persons in a state of sadness and shock. The most important qualification of a “befriender” (not a “counsellor”) is his credential as a person of sincerity and warm heart which always responds to suffering. To console an inconsolable grief is not a matter of formality or professionalism.

To be able to penetrate into the deeper causes of intense grief requires an intuitive understanding and sensitivity arising from genuine compassion. One must be trustworthy enough to assure confidentiality without invading the privacy of another. One has to accept the whole person, whatever the signs of weakness and limitation, irrationality or delusions that accompany the state of dejection.

Here, we are reminded of the faint, loving smile of Lord Krishna looking with compassion at the despondency of his pupil Arjuna in the midst of the battlefield! Although Lord Krishna begins his sermon thereafter, it was because Arjuna, the pupil himself, requested for help from the one he fully trusted as his guide. A befriender is not there to preach in the first place. His immediate and appropriate job is to soothe and to support. Only when the individual is ready to gain insight into his own predicament one may hint at the virtue of philosophical resignation and the power of turning to the Divine with faith. Meanwhile, if we can offer our friendship and willingness to share (and not be overwhelmed) in the suffering, it is more than enough anyone can do.

After all, a hearty good-will is a potent healing force which can extend beyond the limits of time and space. That means one can

help another even from a distance—by one’s intensely benevolent and healing thought. When H. P. Blavatsky wrote about “the power to bless and help humanity,” the precondition was that this benevolent power primarily results from the long pursuit of self-forgetfulness and sincere concern for the suffering of all creatures. Hence, the *Gita*, too, refers to *Dana*, *Yajna* and *Tapas* (charity, self-sacrifice and strenuous self-discipline) as the irreplaceable duties of a seeker. For love is a power that purifies and opens up the hidden streams of knowledge and endows one with the power to help “without lifting a finger.” But it also needs great courage to plunge into the misery and sorrow of the world. Writes Mr. Judge:

Act with a high motive; have kindly feeling towards all; do some little acts of kindness every day and try to realize that the end of all this will be happiness and peace to all humanity. Then, a foretaste of that peace will enter your heart. There is the bright side of life, and what makes the brightness is the love which each of us may have for humanity.

It is surprising but true that there is a healing power in grieving. When one comes to terms with grief, and at first, vaguely senses the hidden purpose behind the loss and the trauma, one enters into a new phase of life. One may learn to feel others’ woes and to sympathize truly. With a few exceptions, one emerges out of sorrow a more thoughtful and stronger individual.

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No matter what it is, if a man is afraid of losing it, he will lose it, but if he is willing to give it up, he will get it. So be ready to give up your life for the good of the people around you.

—TOYO TENSHITSU

## HEALTHY MIND IN HEALTHY BODY

### II

WE know how our mental state, moods and emotions affect our body. During stress, such as occurs in fighting, mating and fear, the autonomic nervous system stimulates release of adrenaline into the bloodstream. That in turn may lead to hair erection, sweating, and acceleration of heartbeat and breathing; adrenaline also causes the blood to be diverted from the digestive tract to the muscles. Similarly, some cases of mental depression are apparently caused by reduced quantities or reduced activity of serotonin (a neurotransmitter) in the brain. Researchers have carefully identified the effect of our mental states on the secretion of various hormones. This is useful. The only trouble is that for the purpose of treating the disorder, medical science ends up offering drugs that control the level of chemicals in the blood that are released by those hormones under emotional disturbance. For example, several antidepressant drugs achieve their effect by inhibiting the body’s physiological inactivation of serotonin, resulting in the accumulation of serotonin in the brain and a consequent elevation of mood. Such treatments deal with effects and not the causes themselves. It is better to opt for methods that try to find out the root cause and help man to deal with them rather than merely suppress or manipulate effects.

As against this there are numerous examples of people who have managed to live with serious illness and even overcome it by changing their mental and emotional attitude. Norman Cousins’ own experience with a life-threatening illness and exploring the healing ability of the human mind is well known. He has demonstrated that through a positive attitude, optimism and innocent laughter, one can cure serious diseases such as tuberculosis. He claims that about ten minutes’ hearty laughter could give a person about one hour of painless sleep. Modern science has also shown how laughter helps, by releasing endorphins,

which are the body's natural pain-relievers. There are laughter-clubs encouraging people to laugh. There are meditation classes, which encourage us to withdraw ourselves from stressful mental environment, at least for some time, and focus on uplifting thoughts. There is music therapy, which elevates the mind and brings relief. These are pro-active and health-inducing activities that attempt to attack the cause. Man can himself provide for these ingredients by living a balanced and wholesome life, a life that has place for elevating influences of arts or science or true religion.

Healthy mind in healthy body is an ideal to strive for. However, it does not mean that if you have a deformed, sickly or unhealthy body, you cannot have a healthy mind. Stephen Hawking—the great scientist, and Helen Keller, author and educator who was blind and deaf, have shown what a great power our mind can have over matter, if there is a will. Our thoughts shape us. *The Dhammapada* says:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought happiness pursues him like his own shadow that never leaves him.

The term “mind” is very broad; it includes our thoughts, feelings and emotions as also our likes and dislikes. Mental health needs to be understood from the perspective of the purpose of life itself. A healthy state of mind brings inner peace and a feeling of harmony with oneself and those around. There is a sense of goodwill towards all. A healthy mind is a cheerfully occupied mind. Mental disposition, which harbours anger, hatred, ill-feeling, criticism, envy, pride, jealousy or fear, is an unhealthy state and must bring ruin if the tendencies are not corrected, because such thoughts seriously affect the inner, invisible body on which the physical body depends. Theosophy tells us that our physical body is built on a model or design body known as *sukshmasarira* or astral body. Astral body has its own senses and organs that correspond to the

physical ones. In astral body circulate vital airs or astral currents, just as blood circulates through our physical body. Our thoughts affect the astral body and the astral currents. For instance, anger produces violent shaking which forms cracks in the astral; envy makes it cloudy; fear shrivels it up, and sustained vanity has an explosive effect on the astral body—breaking it up into pieces. The physical body, following the master plan of its astral counterpart, exhibits the effects in terms of health or ill-health, disease and various kinds of disorders. Mr. Judge explains the relationship between astral body and the physical one thus:

The inner currents emanate from their own centres and are constantly in motion. They are affected by thoughts and the reflection of the body in its physiological changes. They each act upon the other incessantly. (Every centre of the inner body has its appropriate correspondent in the physical one, which it affects and through which it is in turn acted upon). It is by means of these subtle currents—called vital airs when translated from the Sanscrit—that impressions are conveyed to the mind above.

And just as one may injure his body by ignorantly using drugs or physical practices, so can the finer currents and nerves of the inner man be thrown out of adjustment if one in pride or ignorance attempts, uninstructed, to deal with them.

The seeds of disease being located primarily in the mind, they begin to exhaust themselves through the agency of the inner currents that carry the appropriate vibrations down upon the physical plane. If left to themselves—aside from palliations and aids in throwing off—they pass out into the great crucible of nature and one is free from them forever. Therefore pain is said to be a kind friend who relieves the real man of a load of sin. (*W.Q.J. Series No. 22*, p. 18)

The best prescription for health comes from Krishna when he describes the nature of his devotee. If only we can imitate his devotee we can be assured of a wholesome state. Thus:

My devotee who is free from enmity, well-disposed towards all creatures, merciful, wholly exempt from pride and selfishness, the same in pain and pleasure, patient of wrongs, contented, constantly devout, self-governed, firm in resolves, and whose mind and heart are fixed on me alone, is dear unto me. He also is my beloved of whom mankind is not afraid and who has no fear of man; who is free from joy, from despondency and the dread of harm. My devotee who is unexpecting, pure, just, impartial, devoid of fear, and who hath forsaken interest in the results of action, is dear unto me. He also is worthy of my love who neither rejoiceth nor findeth fault, who neither lamenteth nor coveteth, and being my servant hath forsaken interest in both good and evil results. He also is my beloved servant who is equal-minded to friend or foe, the same in honour and dishonour, in cold and heat, in pain and pleasure, and is unsolicitous about the event of things; to whom praise and blame are as one; who is of little speech, content with whatever cometh to pass, who hath no fixed habitation, and whose heart, full of devotion, is firmly fixed. (*Gita*, XII)

(Concluded)

WHAT time the mind is fixed on God and there abides, the senses are obedient to the mind. As one should hang a needle to a magnet and then another needle on to that, until there are four needles, say, depending from the magnet. As long as the first needle stays clinging to the magnet all the other needles will keep clinging on to that but when the leader drops the rest will go as well. So, while the mind keeps fixed on God the senses are subservient to it but if the mind should wander off from God the passions will escape and be unruly.

—ECKHART

## LAO TZU'S "TAO TE KING"

### III

ANOTHER important concept in Lao Tzu's philosophy is that of *wu-wei* which means "without doing," or "absence of action." Yet, "*wu-wei* is not an ideal of absolute inaction; on the contrary, it is a particular efficacious attitude since it makes all doing possible," writes Max Kaltenmark. In the *Gita*, when Shri Krishna speaks of *Karma sanyasa yoga* he does not mean abandoning action but abandoning attachment to the fruits of our actions.

There seem to be at least four different implications of *wu-wei* or the "Doctrine of Inaction." Firstly, it implies the Law of Least Effort. We are asked to flow along with the Tao, *i.e.*, to accept the consequences of our Karma. As Mr. Crosbie says, "The 'easy' and happy times are the periods of rest; the 'hard' times are the periods of training—opportunities for gaining strength and knowledge." We are asked not to kick against the pricks, as the pricks seem to enjoy it and they keep coming back. Surrender the personal will to the divine will and you can achieve things with minimum effort. Secondly, the doctrine of inaction seems to imply non-interference. In practising the principle of *wu-wei*, the Taoist merely imitates the Tao. For it is said, "Tao is eternally inactive, and yet it leaves nothing undone. If kings and princes could but hold fast to this principle, all things would work out their own reformation." (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 107). Spontaneity is another name for Tao, and hence everything in the universe happens without any particular kind of intervention. When the ruler follows the principle of inaction, it makes for ideal government. Thus:

In the highest antiquity, the people did not know they had rulers. In the next age they loved and praised them. In the next, they feared them. In the next, they despised them. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, pp. 116-117)

That government is the best, which governs the least. Lao Tzu, like Plato, seems to think that "until kings are philosophers, or philosophers are kings, cities will never cease from ill." A ruler must impose minimum laws and rule by setting an example which people could imitate. Thus:

When people are subjected to overmuch government, the land is thrown into confusion....The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be. Therefore the Sage says: "So long as I do nothing, the people will work out their own reformation. So long as I love calm, the people will right themselves. If only I keep from meddling, the people will grow rich. If only I am free from desire, the people will come naturally back to simplicity." (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 118)

"Govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish," says Lao Tzu. It means that the less stirring you do the better it is. Great skill and patience are needed in governing a great nation, just as in cooking a small fish. "As a small fish stewing in the pan will be broken up if it be moved about too much, so will the Empire be fatally injured if its natural development be interfered with. The only safe course is to follow the Tao," writes C. Spurgeon Medhurst.

In its third aspect, the doctrine of inaction advocates "resist without resisting." How should we deal with our opponents? Resist without resisting is the plan of quiet passive resistance. Retreat within your own heart and there keep firmly still. Says Lao Tzu:

The best soldiers are not warlike; the best fighters do not lose their temper. The greatest conquerors are those who overcome their enemies without strife....This is called the Virtue of not striving. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 115)

There is a Chinese story told by Dr. Lin Yutang. There was a man who used to raise fighting cocks for the king. After ten days had passed, the king asked if his cock was ready for a fight.

"Not yet," replied the man, "the cock is still very impulsive and haughty."

After another ten days the king asked again and the reply was, "Not yet. He still reacts to noises and shadows."

After another ten days had passed, the king asked again and this time the reply was, "Not yet. His eyes still have an angry look, and he is full of fight."

After another ten days, the man said, "He is about ready. When he hears other cocks crow, he does not even react. You look at him and he appears to be a wooden cock. His character is whole now. No other cock will dare to fight him but will run away at first sight."

Even at the physical level this is true. A person who has developed his muscles has only to roll his sleeves and no one will dare approach him. Similarly, when a person develops inner strength, inner integrity, total harmlessness, and therefore, total absence of provocation, he is able to subdue his opponent without effort. Henry David Thoreau and Gandhiji followed "non-violent non-co-operation" and were largely successful. Says Lao Tzu: "The softest things in the world override the hardest. That which has no substance enters where there is no crevice. Hence I know the advantage of inaction."

Chinese history supplies a severe, if somewhat crude, example of the doctrine of inaction. It is stated that when Ju-shih-ki (Tang dynasty) was on the eve of accepting an official position, his uncle called him and said that he felt ill at ease respecting him. "What will you do, Nephew," he asked, "if someone strikes you?" "Receive the blow in meekness," was the reply. "If you are reviled, what then?" "I shall be silent." "What if you are spat upon?" "I shall wipe away the spittle." "*In doing that,*" answered his uncle, "*you may be showing resentment to the spitter, and that would be a wrong.*" (*Tao Te King*, by C. Spurgeon Medhurst, p. 75)

Although it might sound utopian, ultimately, every spiritual aspirant has to learn to practise complete nonviolence. In the

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." *Light on the Path* says that the disciple must abandon the very thought of individual rights and give up all weapons of offence and defence. "A man must become as a little child before he can enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Do you know what it is to resist without resistance? That means, among other things, that too much expenditure of strength, of "fortitude," is not wise. If one fights, then one is drawn into the swirl of events and thoughts, instead of leaning back on the great ocean of the Self that is never moved, says Mr. Judge.

Lastly, the doctrine of inaction seems to suggest that although inactive physically, all things are possible to one who is active on the inner planes.

Without going out of doors one may know the world; without looking out of the window, one may see the Way of Heaven. The further one travels, the less one may know. Thus it is that without moving you shall know; without looking you shall see; without doing you shall achieve. (*Selections from the Upanishads and the Tao Te King*, p. 108)

There is the *Dakshinamurti sloka* to the effect that the guru is a young man while the disciples are old; the teaching is silence and yet the doubts of the disciples are dispelled.

(*To be concluded*)

THE outward world is but a glass or representation of the inward; and every thing and variety of things in temporal nature must have its root, or hidden cause, in something that is more inward.

—WILLIAM LAW

## KARMA YOGA

DEDICATING all that one has to do in life by way of duty to the Supreme Spirit, which is in the heart of all, as sacrifice with a view to achieving union with that Supreme, is called Karma Yoga. Such renunciation of personal self through devotion in action is an inner, moral and mental discipline. Such renunciation of personal self is motivated by a deep conviction of the nature of the true self as eternal self of all beings, and of the fact of universal brotherhood. In the Eighteenth Chapter of the *Gita*, Sri Krishna shows that threefold results accrue at death in respect of those who do not perfectly renounce, *viz.*, wished-for, unwished-for and mixed, by which they are bound by a concatenation of cause and effect thus set in motion for endless series of reincarnations. Miserable and unhappy are those, says the *Gita*, whose impulse to action is found in the reward.

It is only those who realize the illusions of lower personal self and long for enlightenment who take up the study and discipline of Yoga. But the path to emancipation is not easily found and many aspirants are led into error by misconceptions and wrong practices which are in currency from ancient times. One such error is the notion held by many that renunciation of action is mere outward relinquishment of the world, and they therefore, retire into the seclusion of monastic life in the forest and mountains. As justification for outer abstention they point to an apparently equal endorsement of both devotion in action (*Yoga*) and renunciation of action (*Sanyasa*) as efficacious, as declared by Sri Krishna in Chapter Five of the *Gita*:

Children only and not the wise speak of renunciation of action and right performance of action as being different. He who perfectly practises the one receives the fruits of both, and the place which is gained by the renouncer of action is also attained by him who is devoted in action. That man seeth with clear sight who seeth that the Sankhya and the Yoga are identical.

Renunciation of the world is taken to be the easier option than the other one of performing Yoga while remaining in the world, as temptations, distractions, cares and anxieties of the worldly life are thought to be obstacles in the performance of Yoga. Mr. Judge, in his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, shows that such devotees err, as they have either overlooked or underestimated the warning given by Sri Krishna. Thus:

But to attain to true renunciation of action without devotion through action is difficult, O thou of mighty arms; while the devotee who is engaged in the right practice of his duties approacheth the Supreme Spirit in no long time. (*Gita*, V)

Mr. Judge shows that such devotees, following the impulse of the tendency set up in their natures by outer asceticism, will repeat the folly for many successive lives till, at last, they, due to a purification of their natures by ascetic lives, begin to see that the true renunciation does not consist in abandoning the duties of life, but in learning and mastering the science and the art of inner relinquishment even while performing every duty of life. Without effecting development of spiritual discrimination by inner detachment, right amidst the trials, difficulties and distractions of worldly life by self-induced and self-devised efforts, checked by Karma, true renunciation (*Sanyasa*) cannot be obtained.

Three sorts of Karma bind us to the cycle of rebirths: (a) The vast store of held-over Karma accumulated from the beginning of time; (b) the Karma which we are experiencing at the present moment in the body and environment which are ours; and, (c) the Karma which we are making now, which will come to fructification in future lives on earth, thus adding to the store of accumulated Karma. As we experience only a portion of the accumulated stock of Karma in each incarnation, and at the same time, in each life, we go on creating new causes by actions. Thus constantly adding to the store of Karmic energy, we are compelled to go through endless weary cycles of recurring rebirths.

Such is thy Karma, the Karma of the cycle of thy births, the destiny of those who, in their pain and sorrow, are born along with thee, rejoice and weep from life to life, chained to thy previous actions. (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 38)

The one desirous of emancipation has to acquire Spiritual Knowledge and cultivate that mental devotion in action (*Buddhi Yoga*) so as to create no new causes which have the power of binding the Soul to rebirth, and thus gradually exhaust the vast store of accumulated Karma over a series of lives till, at last, the Ego, having exhausted the law of Karmic retribution, is freed from the cycles of rebirths, and attains emancipation (*Mukti*).

Many a devotee takes to Occult practices based on misunderstanding of the scriptures. Altruism or acting for and as the Self of all is the law of life, in which alone lie the seeds of true human happiness and perfection. This spiritual perception of divinity in all living beings, progressively transforms a person from acting from the motive of self-interest into identifying himself with, and acting for the highest good of all. Such devotion to mankind in performance of duties is Karma Yoga. This implies resignation and surrender of personal will to the Will and pleasure of God within.

When a man is able to regard his own life as part of a whole like this he will no longer struggle to obtain anything for himself. This is the surrender of personal rights. (*Light on the Path*, p. 76)

In the practice of this divine discipline we encounter old habits, lower tendencies and wrong attitudes established in past lives which are inimical to our endeavours, forming formidable obstacles in our path. One such defect that is common is fault-finding. The act of finding faults is disregard of the Divine Justice called Karma. One who condemns others even in thought or blames the circumstances of his life violates the Law and distances himself from the beneficial influence of the Divine Self in him—his only true guide.

It is only through devotion to one's own natural duty with the right attitude and motive as implied in Karma Yoga that one can ever make spiritual progress. The habit of fault-finding throws us out of the path of *Swadharmā*. Hence, Sri Krishna warns in the *Gita* of the danger of meddling with the duties of others. Teachers show that dwelling on the faults and weaknesses of others with a critical attitude swells the same defects in our own nature, making our task more difficult for ourselves, besides accumulating for ourselves the Karmic demerit of disregard of the Law and Universal Brotherhood.

It is better to do one's own duty, even though it be devoid of excellence, than to perform another's duty well. It is better to perish in the performance of one's own duty; the duty of another is full of danger. (*Gita*, III)

The true practice inculcated by the Teachers is that we should learn to recognize in ourselves the defects we see in others and diligently strive to eliminate them from our nature. If it becomes necessary, however, to speak to another of a fault or weakness, in his interest, or for the general well being, it will be our duty to do so, but we should speak directly to the person concerned in the gentlest manner, and in the spirit of Brotherhood.

To free oneself from the binding power of actions one has to understand the nature of Karma and its relation to individual action in all its aspects. "Every act proceeds from the mind. Beyond the mind there is no action and therefore no Karma. The basis of every act is desire....For a man to be free from the effects of Karma of any act he must have passed to a state no longer yielding a basis in which the act can inhere." (*W.Q.J. Series No. 6*, pp. 2-3)

Personal self is the maker of Karma and is the product of Karma whose passions and desires raise clouds of illusions, obscuring and preventing the light of the Spirit shining in our hearts from illuminating and guiding us. Meditating right amidst performance of every act and duty we must strive to rise interiorly to the source

and the root of our consciousness. Neither rejoicing at meeting what is pleasant, nor being cast down by meeting what is unpleasant, equal-minded in all situations, endeavouring always to conform to the Divine Will, we will gradually destroy the personal idea and personal motive in all actions, and become emancipated. This constant practice of Devotion to the Supreme with a view to realize It while engaged in actions is Karma Yoga.

It is certain that we will not succeed at once in Yoga but have to unremittingly strive towards the Ideal for many lives to come. "The great and difficult victory, the conquering of the desires of the individual soul, is a work of ages; therefore, do not expect to obtain its reward until ages of experience have been accumulated" (*Light on the Path*, p. 13). It is our duty to *try* and keep on trying. There is great encouragement in the *Gita* where it is said that no effort is wasted in this system of Yoga, nor are there any evil consequences, and that even a little of this practice delivers a man from great risk (*Gita*, II). Even death of the body will not cut us away from the great ideal we had been striving towards, but the just law of Karma will bring us back to the knowledge and attainment we had reached in earlier lives, and by the impulse arising from previous practice we would strive more diligently towards the goal.

Try to realize that progress is made step by step, and each step gained by *heroic* effort. Withdrawal means despair or timidity....Conquered passions, like slain tigers, can no longer turn and rend you. Be hopeful then, not despairing. With *each* morning's awakening try to live through the day in harmony with the Higher Self. "Try" is the battle-cry taught by the teacher to each pupil. Naught else is *expected* of you. *One who does his best does all that can be asked*. There is a moment when even a Buddha ceases to be a sinning mortal and takes his first step towards Buddhahood. (*She Being Dead Yet Speaketh*, p. 12)

## ON MEDITATION

TODAY, meditation is the word of the hour. With no understanding of its implication, and little knowledge of the powers employed, thousands of enthusiasts embrace this practice with anticipation and fervour. They are promised health, wealth and the achievement of their desires. It never occurs to them to question the rightness of such an approach, for they are the children of our culture. However much they proclaim a “counter-culture,” there is deep embedded in them the virus of our civilization, the notion that selfish desire is “right” because it is “natural.”

And yet it is ignorance which betrays them. They do not realize that much more is involved in these practices than appears as obvious to them. It is knowledge which is needed; a standard by which to measure the deluding opinions glibly suggested to them by those only less ignorant than themselves.

Such a standard is to be found in the *Gita*; in its teaching on Meditation. “The man of meditation...is superior to the man of penance and to the man of learning and also to the man of action; wherefore, O Arjuna, resolve thou to become a man of meditation.” This epitomizes the nature of Arjuna’s struggle, and the primary goal to be attained.

The whole of the *Gita* is founded upon the premise of Reincarnation. The dweller in the body who changes bodies as he “throweth away old garments and putteth on new,” immediately sets the stage for the action that must follow, and the values by which it must be judged. For, since it is the Spirit in the body or the Individuality which endures, while its personalities disappear at the end of each life, it is the position of the former which must be sustained and strengthened, and attention withdrawn from the latter.

The Goal is “to be absorbed in Brahman, the Supreme.” And this must be done while in the body. The method to be followed is separation of the sense of Self from identification with the life of

the body. This is accomplished in the mental attitude of detachment.

There are two stages described in the *Gita*. The first is centred on bodily functions. “I am doing nothing in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing; even when speaking, letting go or taking, opening or closing the eyes...the senses and organs move by natural impulse to their appropriate objects.” The second stage is more subtle and difficult. It involves a mental separation from the qualities which are “born from nature, and bind the imperishable soul to the body.” Students are aware that the qualities represent the personality, ordinary human nature. To become free from the slothfulness of *tamas*, and the propensity and aggressiveness characterized by *rajas* is easily understandable. But why from the “lucidity and peacefulness” of *sattva*? What is wrong with that?

One of the strongest and most deeply entrenched feelings of the personal man is the sense of pride, particularly “justifiable” pride. “Surely,” he says, “it is better to enjoy the refined pleasures of a cultural pursuit, rather than wallow in crude sensualism.” Or, “how many are there who can duplicate my high attainments?” From the viewpoint of the personality he is undoubtedly right. Why then does Krishna say, “When the embodied self surpasseth these three qualities...which are coexistent with the body it is released from rebirth and death, old age and pain, and drinketh of the water of immortality”? Because pride, however “justifiable,” still embodies the separative viewpoint; and while thus remaining, cannot be assimilated with the unitary view, which represents the Higher Life. That is why the student is urged, in *The Voice of the Silence*, to “make of pride and self-regard bond-maidens to devotion.” The man of pride should not make his great attainments a reason for considering himself superior, but rather devote his talents and abilities to the service of his fellow-man, and thus of the One Life.

Reverting to the stages that lead to meditation, we can recognize that Arjuna has engaged in action, while being detached from its

results; he has gained learning in the process; and has also become a “man of penance,” or of sacrifice. For, becoming detached from the desire of the personal man involves a great sacrifice—the giving up of the dearer for the better. Meditation, as thus seen, emerges in a new light. It is not merely a way of thinking. It is the embodiment of the higher perspective. One must *become* a man of meditation.

Now, a clear distinction may be drawn between the aims of the modern pursuers of “meditation,” and those of the followers of the path outlined in the *Gita*. The former have for their goal the satisfaction of the personality. The *Gita* teaches that it is only through detachment from this personality that Truth may be attained.

Let us meditate on Plato’s definition of meditation—“the ardent turning of the soul toward the divine; not to ask any particular good (as in the common meaning of prayer), but for good itself—for the Universal Supreme Good.”

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CONSIDER the difference between iron and iron: between cold and hot iron, such is the difference between souls, between the tepid soul and that kindled by divine fire. When the iron is first cast into the fire it certainly appears to be as dark as it is cold. But after having been a time in the flame of the fire it grows warm and gradually changes its dark colour. Visibly it begins to glow, and little by little draws the likeness of fire into itself until at last it liquefies entirely and ceases altogether to be itself, changing into another kind of thing. So also, the soul absorbed in the consuming fire in the furnace of the divine love, surrounded by the glowing body of eternal desires, first kindles then grows red hot, at last liquefies completely and is altogether changed from its first state.

—RICHARD OF SAINT-VICTOR

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

**Question:** What are the do’s and don’ts for one who chooses to walk the spiritual path consciously?

**Answer:** For someone who chooses to walk the path *consciously* and earnestly, the first step is observing constant vigilance, at the level of thoughts and feelings. Right actions follow right thoughts and desires. It is very important for the spiritual aspirant to be in a wholesome state of mind. Our mind should be full of positive, optimistic and loving thoughts. We have to make all our desires lean to and centre upon the acquirement of spiritual knowledge so that the natural tendency of our thoughts is in that direction. As soon as the mind becomes free from pressing affairs, instead of allowing it to become a playground of our senses, we must consciously take up reading or ideating upon ennobling ideas. “There is no help like association with those who think as we do, or like the reading of good books,” says Mr. Judge. His advice is to read holy books or whatever books tend to elevate our consciousness. We need to gradually build an island of good thoughts where we can take refuge when threatened by adverse circumstances, without losing balance. All that we are is the result of, founded on and formed of our thoughts. Happiness and pain both arise out of the kind of thoughts we entertain. Hence, H.P.B. points out that it is far less important whether one is a vegetarian or not, than what he “*thinks and feels*, what desires he encourages in his mind, and allows to take root and grow there.”

When H.P.B. was asked, what she considered to be the chief of

the negative Theosophical duties, her answer was:

To be ever prepared to recognize and confess one's faults. To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbour's efforts. Never to backbite or slander another person. Always to say openly and direct to his face anything you have against him. Never make yourself an echo of anything you may hear against another, nor harbour revenge against those who happen to injure you. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 250)

A spiritual aspirant is never a faultfinder. Firstly, we are not to find fault with the working of the Law of Karma. "Our duty is to drink without a murmur to the last drop, whatever contents the cup of life may have in store for us," which means acceptance without complaining or grumbling. Abstaining from gossip, slander, backbiting, is very essential to purification of speech. Through idle or slanderous talk we waste the creative power of speech. It is essential for a spiritual seeker to turn within and observe silence for a few minutes every day. One who is used to turning within periodically, is not likely to feel lonely or depressed. Our divine nature is continually wishing to communicate, but it can do so only when our inner and outer chatter is stopped. We may use some of this time for silent reflection on what we have read, and for self-examination.

Every seeker should be prepared to do as much altruistic work as may be possible for him. Shri Krishna's advice is that over and above one's duty—which should be performed sincerely, carefully and cheerfully—one must never abandon acts of charity, mortification and sacrifice.

As we observe ourselves, we must check vanity and pride. We must take care not to set too great a value on our progress. "Grow as the flower grows, unconsciously, but eagerly anxious to open its soul to the air." Self-reliance is another important aspect of spiritual life. "Never ask another to do for you what you can do for yourself.... You are valuable only when you are helpful, not when

you require help," says Mr. Crosbie. There must be readiness to bear suffering and injustice without feeling the need to share it with others. Self-reliance also means reliance on one's own inner judgement. Having consulted the spiritual teachers and scriptures, the final answer must come from within. In other words, it is essential to develop intuition. As *Light on the Path* says, without faith and intuitive faculty, the disciple would be more helpless than driftwood or wreckage on the great tides of the ocean.

Lastly, it is essential for the aspirant to cultivate detachment, and in this, life is found to be the best teacher. "The ocean of life washes to our feet and away again, things that are both hard to lose and unpleasant to welcome, yet they all belong to life." If we are centred in the Great Self, we are not likely to get ruffled.

**Question:** Is the fulfilling of worldly duties worth the compromise of spiritual practices?

**Answer:** Mr. Judge divides meditation into two types. There is meditation practised at a set time and there is the meditation of an entire lifetime—the single thread of intention and desire running through the entire life. Similarly, we may divide spiritual practices or exercises into two types. The exercises which are practised at fixed time include *japa* or repetition of the divine name or some phrase, yoga practices, daily rituals of some kind, etc. Most of these practices are preparatory and only stepping stones to a higher form of spiritual life. We may mechanically perform them and get into a rut.

However, some kinds of work and recreation are such that they allow us to repeat the sacred name or phrase. Between the two jobs, we can always find an interval of time to take up the spiritual exercise. If our daily grind does not give us time for spiritual practice then probably we may get up early or stay up late in the night. If there is sincerity and devotion, it is found that circumstances arrange themselves in such a way as to facilitate the performance of the spiritual practice. Often, distractions to such practices come as tests and challenges, and if met without irritation or grumbling, lead to

greater progress than the practices themselves.

Often, a pious person performs an elaborate worship as an end in itself, instead of as means to his goal. It often becomes sacrosanct and is performed at the neglect of one's duty. A doctor refuses to attend to a serious patient as he would not leave his *puja* (worship) halfway. What good is such worship if a person refuses to help another? Hence, it is suggested that though spiritual exercises have their own values, this affection for the set forms and hours of mental prayer must never be allowed to become excessive. Thus:

To neglect any urgent call to charity or obedience for the sake of practising one's spiritual exercises would be to neglect the end and the proximate means for the sake of means which are not proximate, but at several removes from the ultimate goal. (*The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 348)

Spiritual exercises are only reminders of the true nature of things, and of our relation with one another and with God. "He who seeks God under settled form lays hold of the form, while missing the God concealed in it," says Eckhart. We may temporarily seek God under a "settled" form, all the time being aware that it is merely a symbol of Reality, which must sooner or later be discarded. (*The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 358)

Performance of one's worldly duties with attention, concentration and sincerity can itself be a spiritual practice. Duty is that which *is due* to Humanity, to our fellowmen, neighbours, family, etc., and if we fail to pay this debt, then we shall be left spiritually insolvent and morally bankrupt. Duty or *Dharma* of fire is to give warmth, but it is also to burn and destroy. So, too, our duties or actions must be such that they give warmth and comfort to others, but at the same time consume and destroy the personal ties and possessions of our own lower nature. As we develop discrimination, we are able to determine which duty is to be given preference.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

"There is nothing to hope for at Alexandria," the English excavator D. G. Hogarth cautioned, after a fruitless dig in the 1890s. He was proved to be wrong, as French archaeologist Jean-Yves Empereur and other scientists are now uncovering astonishing artifacts, along with one of the wonders of the world, the Pharos, 440-foot-high lighthouse, from the city of Alexandria, which was built more than 2000 years ago by Alexander the Great. It was a city linking Greece with Egypt. After the death of Alexander the Great, it was his General Ptolemy who founded the Mouseion, a research institute with lecture halls, laboratories and guest rooms for visiting scholars. It was here that Archimedes and Euclid worked on Mathematics and physics problems and it was here that the astronomer Aristarchus of Samos determined that the sun was the centre of the solar system. Ptolemy's son added the famous library to the Mouseion complex. The first chief of the library, Eratosthenes, measured the earth's circumference to an accuracy within a few hundred miles. In 1326, the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta, described the glory of Alexandria thus: "Alexandria is a jewel of manifest brilliance, and a virgin decked out with glittering ornaments," where "every wonder is displayed for all eyes to see, and there all rare things arrive." Early Christians threatened Alexandria's scholarly culture and viewed pagan philosophers and their learning with suspicion, and around 312 A.D. theological schools sprang up to counter the pagan influence. Christian mobs played some part in the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, and Christian monks kidnapped and tortured to death the female philosopher and mathematician Hypatia. Even after her death intellectual life continued in Alexandria for Christian and pagan scholars alike, writes Andrew Lawler. (*Smithsonian*, April 2007)

The city of Alexandria is interesting to Theosophical students, for it was in this city that in 193 A.D. Ammonius Saccas founded his School—the last great Theosophical School in history—which

ended with the death of Hypatia. Though it was Alexander the Great who started the work of building the city of Alexandria, the task which was left unfinished because of his death was completed by his half-brother Ptolemy Soter and his son Ptolemy Philadelphus. The first museum commenced by them, was built with the intention of collecting the great literature of every country in the world for the Museum Library, which was called the Bruckion. He also intended to diffuse the knowledge as widely as possible. Early in the Second century a School called Catechitical School was established in Alexandria and for a while its director was Clement of Alexandria who had studied Greek and Egyptian philosophy and was convinced that truth could be found even in heathen systems. He was deposed and replaced by his pupil Origen, who studied Hebrew scriptures. Dissatisfied with the existing translations, he brought out what is known as *Hexapala*, or six-fold edition of the Old Testament, in which he presented various versions of the Scriptures, including his own. He was convinced that the orthodox Church was making a fatal mistake by denying the authenticity of certain documents and openly rebuked the church for rejecting the Book of Enoch, which contained the history of the early races of mankind and completely destroyed the Jewish chronology. He openly professed interest in Neoplatonism and hence was banished from the city. Ammonius Saccas, who later became the teacher of both Clement and Origen, started the Neoplatonic School in Alexandria in the year 193 A.D. He and his disciples called themselves *philalethians* or lovers of truth.

However, in the fourth century A.D. Christianity sought to throttle the old religions, sciences and philosophies. During this period there was the destruction of the Mystery Schools and the Serapion Library. Later, when Cyril was the Bishop of Alexandria, the mob murdered Hypatia, the last of the Neoplatonists, and with her death the great Neoplatonic School came to an end. (*Theosophy*, November, December 1936 and March 1937)

How should we define “maturity”? There are as many definitions as there are people. For some, maturity means doing something with knowledge and not at someone’s suggestion. Maturity is when one’s actions arise out of a balanced frame of mind. A mature person achieves his goals—personal or professional, without hurting anyone else. To Lavina Gulati, a trained child counsellor, maturity implies awareness of one’s own thoughts and feelings so that one’s actions are proactive. Maturity is subtracting the negative and multiplying the positive so as to make the right decisions at the right time. Swami Brahmananda, a Vedanta teacher for 20 years, says that a mature person accepts what he cannot change and changes what he can.

One reaches *physical maturity* at a certain age, as a natural process of growth. *Emotional maturity*, on the other hand, is based on taking responsibility for one’s choices and circumstances. Emotional maturity strengthens one’s relationship with the self, helping to assess and face one’s strengths and weaknesses. As children we cried when the balloon burst and as grown-ups we cry when the share market balloon bursts. We cannot claim to be mature so long as our reaction to loss and other such negative experiences remains the same, even as we grow up, says Swami Brahmananda.

A truly mature relationship is characterized by *acceptance*, in which there is no attempt to change the other person, and it is based on unconditional love and trust. An immature person will get into a relationship to complete himself, whereas a mature person will get into a relationship as a complete being who wants to experience the bliss of two “whole” people getting together.

*Spiritual maturity* is the ability to say “yes” to life, unconditionally. “A spiritually mature person goes through his share of loss and disturbance—but he is able to undergo everything with absolute poise and remain untouched by it,” says Swami Brahmananda. When our concern for others outweighs our concern for ourselves, we grow in maturity. There are no steps or

skills to grow in maturity, life itself is the best teacher, writes Megha Bajaj. (*Life Positive*, April 2007)

Physical age is no indicator of maturity. While defining an “elder,” Buddha points out that “A man is not an elder simply because his hair is gray....He is called an elder in whom dwell truth, non-violence, restraint, and control, and who is free from impurity.” It is wisdom and not mere head-learning which is the true measure of maturity. It is rightly said that men are wise not in proportion to their experiences but in proportion to their *capacity* for experience. Two people undergoing similar experiences in life are not equally mature. The one who is able to extract the lesson from the experience grows in maturity. A mature person has the ability to “accept the woes of birth,” so that instead of complaining and grumbling at adversity, he uses it as “raw material.” Maturity grows proportionately with impersonality, because impersonality helps us see things objectively. Spiritual maturity results when we determine to live in close proximity to our divine nature and are determined to “suffer or enjoy whatever the Higher Self has in store for us by way of discipline and experience.” A spiritually mature person is not easily shaken, whereas a spiritually immature person gets completely identified with the emotion and is easily thrown off-balance. *Light on the Path* describes it thus:

If grief, dismay, disappointment or pleasure, can shake the soul so that it loses its fixed hold on the calm spirit which inspires it, and the moisture of the life breaks forth, drowning knowledge in sensation, then all is blurred, the windows are darkened, the light is useless. (*Light on the Path*, p. 38)

Is everything preordained, or can we chart our own course without letting the deeds of our past and present lives dictate the terms? It is generally believed that destiny is the predetermined and the inevitable course of events, while Karma is the action of

both past and present lives—only some of which can be changed. For instance, when we prepare a dessert, if there is too little sugar or too little butter, too much or too little milk, it can all be adjusted. But once it is cooked, it cannot be reversed. Similarly, *Prarabdh Karma*, i.e., Karma that has begun to precipitate, cannot be changed, while *Sanchit Karma*, i.e., stored up Karma, can be changed by spiritual practices.

Being good and being religious are not synonymous. Regular worship is fruitless if we are mean, conniving and negative all the time. It is our actions or Karma, which build our destiny and not the other way around. Dr. Kondaveti Newton, founder, Pyramid Past Life Therapy Clinic, says:

Consciously or unconsciously, through our thoughts, beliefs and actions, we create our own realities. Sometimes we are not conscious of our own creation, hence, when we cannot make a connection between our thoughts and manifested reality, we attribute it to destiny.

The Law of Karma is scientific. It is Newton’s third law of physics—every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Good and bad Karma do not off-set each other, and there are different levels of Karma, says Vivek Doshi, pranic healer and trainer of Yogavidya Pranic Healing Foundation, South Mumbai. “Even if I am destined to be a successful person, but choose to wallow in self-pity, chances are slim that I will make it to that doctor’s degree,” says Meera Kotak, pastlife therapist and cofounder, Energy Centre. “You are the one who has the power and the capacity to change your fate. Your good Karma, both thoughts and actions, will decide your future course of life,” writes Ritu Sur. (*Sunday Times of India*, May 27, 2007)

Exertion is greater than destiny. Man is a free agent during his stay on earth. The Law of Karma is the law of cause and effect and follows the parallelogram of forces. We are never completely determined. We make our own destiny, like a spider weaving the

web. Our present reaction to the karmic consequences determines the future state. When the lesson is learnt, the necessity ceases. Measures can be taken by the individual to eliminate defects and to counteract by setting up fresh causes. “The effects may be counteracted or mitigated by the thoughts and acts of oneself or of another, and then the resulting effects represent the combination and interaction of the whole number of causes involved in producing the effects.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 21*)

Mr. Judge says that “Destiny is the English word applied to a Karma so strong and overpowering that its action cannot be counteracted by other Karma. . . . As we are experiencing the effects of Karma from this life as well as from many previous ones, it follows that the events in a man’s life are the result of the *balancing* of Karmic causes.” For instance, our birth in a male or a female body or in a particular family is irreversible Karma and can well be called *destiny*.

“Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

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WHAT is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is.

—PLATO

## STAGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

ALTHOUGH it is not apparent at first sight, the subject of instinct, reason and intuition is connected very closely with that of who, where and what God is. Study of these three faculties may indeed help us to answer the question being asked: “Is God dead? “Certainly the idea of God as a personal being, the creator of all, the arbiter of man’s destiny, “loving” yet “despotic,” has to a great extent died out. But, for many, no other idea has filled the gap thus left in their thinking and in their knowledge of the purpose of life.

The idea of God that Theosophy advances is that of an impersonal, all-pervading Deity lying at the root of all manifestation and extending also beyond it. If we try to seek Deity in the known things of life we shall get some grasp of it, but we have to bear in mind that our idea of Deity will grow as our understanding of life grows, until we arrive at the stage when we realize what is expressed in the following extracts:

The ever-unknowable and incognizable *Karana* alone, the *Causeless* Cause of all causes, should have its shrine and altar on the holy and ever untrodden ground of our heart—invisible, intangible, unmentioned, save through “the still small voice” of our spiritual consciousness. Those who worship before it, ought to do so in the silence and the sanctified solitude of their Souls; making their spirit the sole mediator between them and the *Universal Spirit*, their good actions the only priests, and their sinful intentions the only visible and objective sacrificial victims to the *Presence*. (*The Secret Doctrine*, I, 280)

The “Parent Space” is the eternal, ever present cause of all—the incomprehensible DEITY, whose “invisible robes” are the mystic root of all matter, and of the Universe. (*Ibid.*, I, 35)

What is DEITY but Consciousness, Life, Universal Mind, and all else in manifestation? We are told that Universal Mind is omniscient; Matter is universal; Spirit is all-pervasive.

It seems to complicate matters when we read that

there is no plane in the whole universe with a wider margin, or a wider field of action in its almost endless gradations of perceptive and apperceptive qualities, than this plane [of mentality] which has in its turn an appropriate smaller plane for every “form,” from the “mineral” monad up to the time when that monad blossoms forth by evolution into the DIVINE MONAD. But all the time it is still one and the same Monad, differing only in its incarnations, throughout its ever succeeding cycles of partial or total obscuration of spirit, or the partial or total obscuration of matter—two polar antitheses—as it ascends into the realms of mental spirituality, or descends into the depths of materiality. (*S.D.*, I, 175)

There are stages of instinctual, mental, and purely abstract, or spiritual consciousness. (“Psychic and Noetic Action”: *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

We have therefore to note that there are at least two lines of evolution proceeding simultaneously—one the evolution of physical form with organs, and the other the evolution of consciousness or mentality, or the power to react to life. From the cohesive power of the mineral comes the flexible plant with the power of sensation. From the plant life comes the animal which develops the further power of instinct. And, when we come to man, we find in him the additional power of reason, and later of intuition.

To help us to see the relationship between evolving life and the organism through which it expresses itself, careful reflection on what is said in *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. I, p. 425, is required. The whole passage is important, but here we shall quote certain sentences which deal with instinct.

Instinct is the universal endowment of nature by the Spirit of Deity itself....Instinct, as a divine spark, lurks in the unconscious nerve-centre of the ascidian mollusk, and manifests itself at the first stage of action of its nervous system as what the physiologists term the reflex action. It exists in the lowest classes of the acephalous animals as well as in those that have distinct heads; it grows and develops according to the law of

the double evolution, physically and spiritually; and entering upon its conscious stage of development and progress in the cephalous species already endowed with a sensorium and symmetrically-arranged ganglia, this reflex action, whether men of science term it *automatic*, as in the lowest species, or *instinctive*, as in the more complex organisms which act under the guidance of the sensorium and the stimulus originating in distinct sensation, is still one and the same thing. It is the *divine instinct* in its ceaseless progress of development.

We have therefore to see animal instinct as a development from cohesion and sensation to the condition where a suitable physical organ has been evolved to respond to the profounder aspects of the Universal Mind, however unconscious it may as yet be. But we must remember that behind all this there must be an intelligence of some sort working.

This instinct of the animals, which act from the moment of their birth each in the confines prescribed to them by nature, and which know how, save in accident proceeding from a higher instinct than their own, to take care of themselves unerringly—this instinct may, for the sake of exact definition, be termed automatic; but it must have either within the animal, which possesses it or *without*, something's or someone's *intelligence* to guide it. (*Ibid.*)

The transition from the animal to the animal-man and then to man himself, and finally to the super-man is gradual. In the transition from unself-conscious choice and automatic action to self-conscious decisions and will-inspired action we lose something of the power of instinct and depend on reason. "Reason," says H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 433), "the outgrowth of the physical brain, develops at the expense of instinct...reason avails only for the consideration of material things; it is incapable of helping its possessor to a knowledge of spirit." Again, reason is "the product of the reflective faculties—denoting judiciousness and human intellectuality" (*Ibid.*, I, 432). It is the faculty of understanding gained by analysing and

building on premises to reach conclusions. Hence it can never be infallible, for the premises may not be accurate. Reason is "the slow development of our physical constitution, an evolution of our adult material brain" (p. 425). In the tentative progress of the finite reason, "the god-like nature of man is often utterly engulfed, whenever he shuts out from himself the divine light of intuition." (p. 434)

Reason alone, even if care is taken to see that our premises are accurate, brings us to a point where we can go no further. We find our conclusions at a dead-end; they differ from the conclusions of others and do not make a united whole. Reason starts with isolated facts. But there are in reality no isolated facts. All is one UNITY.

As one writer put it: "It is the higher synthetic mind only which can have the understanding of the universals. Even that higher mind does not succeed in its task if it is unaided by the apperception of the intuition, which is the energy of the Heart." And apperception, according to the dictionary, is the mind's perception of itself as a conscious agent; an act of voluntary consciousness, accompanied with self-consciousness; the assimilation of a new sense-experience to a mass already in the mind.

Great Nature once more steps in and the brain becomes an instrument of a higher power than reason. This is spiritual intuition, "intimately connected with the 'third eye,' which mythological tradition ascribes to certain races of men" (*S.D.*, I, 46 fn.). Man is now able to sense the Universal Mind which is omniscient; he understands things as they are; he sees clearly. Now he can reason from these premises and his conclusions will fit in with other conclusions until he sees the Universe as one Whole, every part mathematically arranged and geometrically perfect. When this condition becomes permanent, he reaches the stage of super-man. He is no longer a creature through whom the Universal Mind unconsciously functions, but he is an instrument, not of reason, or instinct, or sensation, but of the DEITY in Nature, the Omniscient Mind. Various verses from *The Voice of the Silence* will arise in

the mind and help to give us a glimpse of what this means.

We shall end with a quotation from Plotinus. He taught that

human knowledge had three ascending steps: opinion, science, and *illumination*. He explained it by saying that “the means or instrument of opinion is sense, or perception; of science, dialectics; of illumination, *intuition* (or divine instinct). To the last, *reason is subordinate*; it is absolute knowledge founded on the identification of the mind with the object known. (*Isis*, I, 434)

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