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THE WAY TO CONTENTMENT

IN this competitive world with its consumerist culture, how are we to practice contentment? Whether it is acquiring of wealth, fame, position or even academic knowledge, how does one know where to draw the line? Could we afford to be content without running the risk of being out of step with the present world? It appears that we are searching for the way to contentment. Or are we?

There is the story of a barber who was presented with seven jars of gold coins, by a demon. The six jars were full, the seventh was only half-full. The barber thought of filling up the seventh jar, after which he could live happily. He cut down on all his expenses in order to fill up the jar but did not succeed. All the time he was anxious to fill up the seventh jar, completely ignoring the six full jars of gold coins. Then one day someone who had passed through similar experience asked the barber to throw away the jars. The barber complied and is said to have lived happily ever after. Some of us are like that barber. Instead of enjoying what we possess we run after things we do not possess. Is it the thrill of getting and achieving which lures us? The *Gita* says that the person with a *demoniacal disposition* is the one who is fast-bound by the hundred chords of desire. He says, "This today hath been acquired by me, and that object of my heart I shall obtain; this wealth I have, and that also shall be mine....I am the lord, I am powerful, and I am happy ...I am rich...where is there another like unto me?" Those

who speak or feel like this are deluded. They are confounded by desires. They are deluded because in the ultimate analysis, they are neither powerful nor happy.

Advertisements play a major role in psychologizing and tempting us to buy things. We are made to feel that we *need* certain things to make life comfortable. We seldom think for ourselves or exercise the power of choice. For instance, when we see an advertisement, where a beautiful girl in silk gown recommends buying soap or toothpaste of a particular brand, we are induced to buy it. Do we ever reason that there is no earthly connection between the merits of the toothpaste and the beautiful girl in the silk gown advertising it? We need to differentiate between our *needs* and *wants*. Do I really need a mobile when my school or college or office is very close to my house, and when I already have a telephone at home? If I possess one, I only use it for idle talk. When there is temptation to buy iPod we may ask ourselves, why do we want to possess one? What probable use could we make of it? Are we tempted to buy because other friends or neighbours have it or will it really help us save time and energy? At times we are only seeking to fill the void and emptiness by continually buying new things.

We need to be *less self-centred* and learn to think away from ourselves. The more egocentric we are, the more vulnerable we become. The smallest thing that does not happen according our wish can shatter our happiness. It may be something as petty as not being invited to lunch party, while our other friends were invited. Or, it may be our inability to buy an expensive suit like our neighbour's. Not only in material matters, but even at the intellectual and spiritual level there is every chance of our being disappointed so long as we are egocentric. For instance, if our office colleague gets a promotion and we do not, we become unhappy; or, if our friend is considered more able and intelligent, we feel jealous. If another person is judged kinder and nobler than us, even then we feel a tinge of jealousy. In Statistics, they have a normal curve, which is bell-shaped, tapering off on both sides, showing thereby that extreme cases are rare, that

extremely good or extremely bad people are very few. Most of us are mediocres, falling in the middle region of the curve. Then what does it matter if another person is a step or two below us or a step or two above us, materially, intellectually or spiritually? Instead of feeling dissatisfied with what we possess or what we are, if we were to cultivate *Mudita* or sympathetic joy, we might rejoice at another's success, prosperity or good fortune, instead of competing with him.

Contentment cannot come by looking at those who have more than we have. It comes when we try to look at those who are worse off, who are less fortunate than we are. As a Christian saint has said, "I cried for boots until I saw a man who had no legs." The more the things we require for being happy, the greater our chances of despair and disappointment. Often there are those who do not have even the basic necessities of life and are yet happy. Happiness is an attitude of mind.

We need to go back to the basics. "Contentment is the greatest wealth." There is the beautiful story by Leo Tolstoy, *How much land does a man need?* It is about a man who had insatiable desire for possessing larger and larger areas of land. His greed leads him to a village where the elder tells him that as much land as he can cover by walking, from morning till sunset, will be his, with the condition that he should return to the original spot by sunset. The greedy man tries to cover a very large area, with the result that he is breathless by sunset and dies of exhaustion as he reaches the original spot. Ironically, the villagers bury him by digging a patch of land, just long enough to hold his body, i.e., seven feet! Some of the ambitious "achievers" of our day fall in the same category. Some psychiatrists have discovered that many of these young achievers experience depression or die of heart attack while they are in their thirties. They achieve too much too soon and wonder what they should do with life. Some discover only too late that they have very high IQ but very poor EQ (Emotional Quotient). They are very poor at handling personal problems and human relationships.

"Kill out ambition. Ambition is the first curse: the great tempter of the man who is rising above his fellows ...Men of intelligence and power are led from their higher possibilities by it continually." It is very difficult to practice this rule. People generally push us to advance, and they mean well. Our own friends, parents and relatives encourage us to rise in our job, or to go abroad, or to push ahead of others in our career. So we grow up thinking that we must always strive to be more learned or popular or successful than others. But it is working for *self* and "to work for self is to work for disappointment," says *Light on the Path*. Nobody dares to say, "Do this for a *Cause*." So all appeals are made for self- advancement. As we are absorbed in working for ourselves, we are led away from higher possibilities. But, contentment is not complacency. To be content is to work hard for promotion but not be disappointed if we do not get it under Karma. We are asked to kill out ambition but at the same time we are also told to "work as those work who are ambitious."

If we stick to our needs and not wants, if we are not afraid to be isolated, if we are convinced that "we" are not our possessions or name, fame, or even our knowledge then we would know where to draw the line. We tend to derive our identity from what surrounds our true Self, i.e., our body, ideas, feelings, education, etc. This derived sense of self could be extremely fragile, requiring continual maintenance, nurturing and defending. For instance, when we derive our sense of identity from our interaction with others, we may work towards getting approval from others and avoiding criticism. To bolster the sense of identity we gather possessions. Our identity is often measured in terms of houses, cars, television sets, furniture and paintings.

Great technological advancement and material abundance endowing great wealth and comfort ought to have brought about great happiness. But sadly, this has not happened. In his book, "To Have or To Be?" Erich Fromm points out that the rich throughout history have practiced *radical hedonism*, which says that the aim of

life is happiness or experiencing maximum pleasure, which arises as a result of satisfaction of any desire or subjective need of a person. The great teachers have never endorsed such a view, and growing number of people are becoming aware that unrestricted satisfaction of all desires is not conducive to *well-being*, nor is it the way to happiness. He points out that there are two modes of human existence: the *mode of having* and the *mode of being*. Many of us feel that "to have" is the normal function of life and hence if one *has* nothing, then one *is* nothing. Our everyday life shows that most of us are in the *having mode* of existence. We are more interested in "possessing" instead of reading a book. Often we find that we possess clothes and jewelry, which we have seldom or never worn. Likewise, while learning, some students listen to a lecture, attempt to understand, but all the while they are busy making notes so that they could later memorize the notes and pass the examination. On the other hand, the students in the "being mode" will not passively receive words and ideas, but they will listen attentively, think, reason, ask questions and arrive at their own conclusions. They *respond* to the lecture and are different persons at the end of the lecture. The "being mode" is when we learn not to find security and identity by clinging to what we have. "To be" requires giving up egocentricity and selfishness, by making oneself "empty" and "poor." A piece of glass appears blue when light shines on it because it absorbs all the colours and gives out or reflects blue. It is named "blue" not for what it *possesses* but for what it *gives out*.

In order to become rich or famous we work hard and may even achieve the goal and feel thrilled, or be intensely satisfied. But that is temporary, because soon we are driven to experience that pleasure again. We want to hold on to our pleasures through repetition and intensification. We may have experienced unutterable joy at the first drinking of the cup of pleasure, but when we seek to repeat the pleasure, it loses some of its charm and intensity. With every repetition we add a drop of poison in the cup, so that at last the entire cup is filled with poison.

A realized ambition becomes a bore, and love that promises fulfilment, loses some of its charm. Often material things acquired turn to dust and ashes in the mouth. In some cases, such experiences bring home the truth that happiness lies in some other direction. For those of us who are satisfied with their present state, spiritual life is irrelevant. Buddha said of such complacent, worldly persons: "Most people go their rounds on this shore only." Spiritual aspirants long to cross over to the other shore. More often than not, what jolts us out of this complacency is some painful experience. For some, however, such a turning point can be brought about through extreme indulgence in pleasures. Generally, we feel that we can be happy if only we had a car, position, money, etc. When we have all these, we may try to get a better model of car, try for a higher post in the office, join a club, smoke most expensive cigarettes and so on. Sooner or later, a point of satiation is reached and we are woken up to higher possibilities. Gradually, one is led to "divine discontent," which is a realization that we were trying to satisfy *soul's hunger for sensation* by contact with external objects. How can that which is external satisfy or even please the inner man?

Lord Buddha, the great psychologist, teaches a doctrine of conditioned co-production, or the chain of causes, that show how birth, old age, disease, death and suffering arise depending upon conditions or causes. Depending upon *sparsha* (contact of the senses with sense-objects) arises *vedana* (feeling or sensation). The sensation produced could be painful or pleasant. Depending upon sensation there arises *trishna* or craving, hunger or thirst for excitement. It is the flame of desire, which burns unsatisfied, birth after birth. The transition from sensation to craving, from passive feeling to active desire is the battlefield of the spiritual life. To win a victory over one's self is to experience the feeling and yet not be swayed by the desires. There must be *impersonal appreciation* of things and people without wanting to possess them.

THE FUNCTION OF A TEACHER

WE all recognize that learning is the basis of any achievement. One's essential physical needs may be classified as food, clothing and shelter. Our emotional needs are more complex and cover a whole gamut, but broadly they may be classified under the headings of pleasure-sensations and pain-sensations. If man were limited to these alone, the physical requisites and emotion-sensitivities, our problem would be relatively simple and social definitions would be easy. In fact, taking man in the mass, the common man, broad conclusions can be made. But, when we consider the individual, greater perplexities arise. We find that there is a third dimension, or plane, on which man functions, which sets him apart from the instinctual or conditioned physical response.

Man is a "thinker" or a mind-being. He considers and reviews situations, physical, and even emotional. He also thinks about thinking. He is consciously able to bifurcate himself in a dialogue, into subjective *versus* objective position.

It takes time to assume this interlocutory pose, to review past experience, to anticipate the future consequences that might result from immediate decisions. Man finds in himself, in his memory, a storehouse of past observations and experiences. In his capacity as a decision-maker he controls, or does not control, his present. Generally, as this ability is refined, decisions are made consciously with a view to a "better" future for his being, which we now see is at least threefold: physical (body), sensitive (emotion-instinct) and mental (memory-decision-anticipation).

Man, as a mental being, is a chooser. He sees that he is a creature of his past, living in his body, and this limits him. But, as an ongoing individual, he knows intuitively that his decisions made now will shape his future to ease (pleasure) or dis-ease (pain and trouble).

The function of a Teacher, or one wiser and more experienced than the generality of mankind, is to draw man's awareness to this innate position; to demonstrate to him that he must be in essence

even *more* than "mind"; that mind itself is an instrument or tool that the "real man" can direct at will. The Great Teachers are said to induce in their pupils the capacity to learn for themselves, by showing that all the powers are potential in man but need usage, control and refinement. They draw on the natural universe for illustrations to show how each can prove for himself that he is a Perceiver, an innately divine, immortal being, an ongoing force, an atom of inextinguishable life, a purposive element of the general progressiveness.

The Great Teachers speak of human relationships that ought to work in co-operation and harmony. They show that Nature is bountiful and generous; that each one will always secure that which he desires—if he works for it; that it is already there waiting to be attained and used.

They speak of Law operating as harmony everywhere through the balancing of cause and effect. They speak of charity, tolerance and love, because they do not limit themselves to temporary, territorial restrictions that are bounded by greed, anger or hate of a personal and emotional sort.

They speak of the evolution of the Universe as a whole, a vast Entity made of "intelligences" of various types and grades—and man is one of these. Man, they say, is immortal in his essence, his body being of the stuff of the universe, energized, sensitized and refined into ever higher degrees of matter and consciousness.

The Great Teachers—Sages, Prophets, Magi, Hierophants, Adepts, Heroes, Mahatmas—by whatever name designated, stand as evidence to man that there are deeper refinements and higher attainments open to him. That which he feels to be potential in himself may lead him to talent and genius, which in the Great Ones has been made fully manifest. What man has done, man can do, they say—and offer themselves and their findings as evidence to those who enquire and aspire.

A Teacher's function is not to push or pull or mould his pupil, or to pour vast masses of knowledge into him, but rather to adjust and

to encourage by example. The pupil is the enquirer; the Teacher answers to the extent that the pupil's capacity to understand has been self-developed. He leads the pupil to a wider vista of the future, to a deeper penetration of the cause of circumstance, and to a more acute awareness of the pupil's own capacities and potentialities to make meaningful and wise decisions.

A spiritual Teacher would abstain from guiding the pupil through clear-cut instructions as to what and how to do. He would never deprive the pupil of the opportunity to strengthen the muscle of Will. He would never steal from the pupil his sovereign power of choice, which could make of him a God.

The faith and love that exist between a spiritual Teacher and disciple act as a stimulus and purifier for the mind of the disciple. When the true link is established between them, there is an inner osmosis, and knowledge flows from Teacher's consciousness to the pure consciousness of the disciple. We are told that the disciple becomes the outpost of Master's consciousness, i.e., his consciousness is not encapsulated—the two consciousnesses work in a well-synthesized way.

The Teacher helps the disciple to prove to himself that "man-spirit" is one with the Over-Self—the One Source of all life, all consciousness, all being. He encourages the pupil to use this knowledge to transmute his actions, to refine his emotions and his thinking, and to build them into a life of practical virtue, of altruism, of intuitive perception in everyday affairs.

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

-WILLIAM BLAKE

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA THE THOUSANDS—HI

11. *Better than an unrestrained life of a hundred years of wickedness is the short life of a single day of the virtuous man who meditates. (110)*

12. *Better than an unrestrained life of a hundred years of ignorance is the short life of a single day of the wise man who meditates. (111)*

13. *Better than an idle and a weak life of a hundred years is the short life of a single day of the man who strenuously endeavours. (112)*

FOR ages, men have sought immortality or deathless existence through "elixir of life." "The same term, more fully *elixir vitae*, was given to the substance that would indefinitely prolong life—a liquid that was believed to be allied to the Philosopher's Stone. Chinese Taoists not only sought the 'pill of immortality' but developed techniques (meditation, breathing exercises, diet, etc.) that were thought to confer immortality by internal alchemy" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Dr. Brown-Sequard, the French physiologist and neurologist, a pioneer endocrinologist and neurophysiologist also claimed to have discovered the elixir for prolonging life. H.P.B. called his famous "rejuvenating system," involving a loathsome animal injection into human blood, "unconscious black magic." Little do we realize what horrible results can ensue such perpetual existence without proper moral basis of life. Mythologies have shown what happens when powerful but evil men acquire a boon that makes them *almost* immune to death. They spread such tenor in the three worlds that finally a divine being has to fight and destroy them. Hence, the emphasis is on the *quality* of life and not its length.

Unrestrained life of wickedness is a prolific parent of many evils as well as suffering in the society. These men stop at nothing. Their passion for enjoyments combined with wickedness make them very dangerous for others. Often, those who live such a life are ignorant

about the higher purpose of life. They are also ignorant about grave consequences that the law of Karma is sure to bring them. *Rishi Valmiki* was a robber, to begin with, who looted and killed wayfarers to feed his family. But when he became aware of the working of the law of Karma, he abandoned his evil ways. Thus, ignorance may be dispelled by wisdom. But there are people who live without a purpose; preferring idleness and indifference to active existence. *St. John's Revelation* (3:15-16) points out: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." There are many people in the world who choose neither good nor evil—preferring to remain idle and undecided— "useless drones." But the virtuous man, wise man and the man who strenuously endeavours are better. Having made a positive choice, they strive to live according to the law so that they may become like Buddha. Having intellectually understood the truths about the nature of the Self and the purpose of life, they meditate upon the great truths for their realization. When study and reflection are thus combined with actual practice, they have far reaching effect. Being part of the one human family, we affect one another for good or evil. H.P.B. writes:

It is an occult law, moreover, that no man can rise superior to his individual failings, without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part. In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of sin, alone. In reality, there is no such thing as "Separateness." (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 201)

14. *Better than the life of a hundred years of the man who perceiveth not the origin and end of things is the short life of a single day of the man who perceiveth the origin and end of things. (113)*

15. *Better than the life of a hundred years of the man who perceiveth not the deathless state is the short life of a single day of the man who senses that deathless state.(114)*

16. *Better than the life of a hundred years of the man who perceiveth not the highest law is the short life of a single day of the man who perceiveth the most excellent doctrine.*
(115)

There are various stages in the spiritual evolution of man. The journey often starts with a realization that life is transient. The best and even the most beautiful things in life come to an end. NOthing lasts forever. As long as one has not realized this grave fact of life, —one goes on living as though life was never going to come to an end. Then, time and energy is spent in worldly pursuits. But, a little reflection shows us that all our worldly achievements drop at the threshold of death. Name, fame, wealth, power are all left behind at death while the real man moves on to the heaven world and then to another life of worldly existence, until some experience of life awakens us. It is then that the quest begins. Then comes a realization that it is possible for man to reach the deathless state. It is possible for man to become immortal. It is possible for him to become like Buddha, Jesus, Shankara—by following in their footsteps. The great ones have attained *Moksha* from the rounds of life and death by their own efforts. Yet, in their divine compassion for the suffering humanity, remain in the world to teach *Dhamma* or *Dharma*. *Light on the Path* beautifully describes this transition, thus:

The oscillation in which he lives, is for an instant stilled; and he has to survive the shock of facing what seems to him at first sight as the abyss of nothingness. Not till he has learned to dwell in this abyss, and has found its peace, is it possible for his eyes to have become incapable of tears.
(*Light on the Path*, p. 44)

(Concluded)

SWEET flowers are slow, and weeds make haste.

-WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ON RUDRAKSHA AND SALAGRAM

RUDRAKSHA is a large evergreen broad-leaved tree, and the seed or kernel of the fruit of this tree is traditionally used for making a necklace or rosary. The "Sadhus," "Munis" and "Yogis" in India have been using the rudraksha from ancient time. They wear it on their head, around their arms or neck in the form of rosary or pendant. Its botanical name is *Elaeocarpus ganitrus Roxb.* Rudraksha seeds are covered by an outer shell of blue colour when fully ripe, and for this reason are also known as blueberry beads. Rudraksha fruit is blue in colour but turns black when dried. Rudraksha is considered sacred because of its wonderful magical qualities. Rudraksha tree grows mainly in the foothills of the Himalayas, Indonesia, Nepal, and Nilgiris in India.

The word *rudraksha* is derived from *Rudra*, one of the names of Siva, and *aksha* meaning eyes. According to a Hindu legend, once when Siva opened his eyes after meditating for many years, tears of happiness fell from his eyes and turned into rudraksha. In the book, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, H.P.B. points out that rudraksha symbolizes the faculty of clairvoyance and the gift of prophecy. Only those who by long years of ascetic practises have acquired the "third eye" of Siva, i.e., the faculties of clairvoyance and prophetic discernment, are acquainted with magical qualities of rudraksha. Traditionally, rudraksha is believed to work as a talisman, protecting the person who wears it, from evil spirits, diseases and evil eye. Whole volumes are devoted in Sanskrit and Tamil to the description of rudraksha which also instruct how to distinguish the good seed from the bad one. The magical qualities of rudraksha depend on the age of the tree, the soil, the surrounding forest and even the personal *qualities* of those who gather them. "To a wicked man the rudraksha will bring evil instead of good," writes H.P.B. Only a few rudraksha trees bear fruits and of which 90 per cent of the fruits fall to the ground before ripening or they become overripe and thus do not possess magical qualities. The

unripe seeds are red, brown, grey and yellow in colour and have no value at all. Only the black rudraksha seeds are precious. H.P.B. points out that the most useful seeds are those which leave a gold dust when ground on the trial-stone. Writing in 1880s, she points out that princes and kings of India paid for each such seed, Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 5,000! The seeds or beads of rudraksha could have one face (*mukha* or facet), or they could be multifaceted. Faces of rudraksha are deep lines (*indentation* or clefts and furrows) found on the surface of the bead from bottom to the top hole. A rudraksha seed with one face is called *Ek mukhi* (one-faced) rudraksha, and such are found "only on a few trees in Nepal, and then only one or two on a tree, in several years," and one such seed would cost more than rupees ten thousand, writes H.P.B. The Maharaja of Nepal had paid around one million rupees for half a dozen of genuine black rudraksha (pp. 574-75 fn.). It is said that a genuine rudraksha bead will never float on water and even if it is boiled in water for more than six hours it will remain unaffected, whereas the fake one would disintegrate.

Traditionally, it is believed that each rudraksha bead has different effect depending on the number of facets on its surface. Rudraksha with different faces have different electromagnetic powers and healing properties. It is suggested that one should not wear rudraksha during intercourse, menstruation, or at cremation ground. Says astrologer and gem therapist Ajai Bhambi, "The many faces symbolize different deities and have different healing effects. One-faced rudraksha represents Siva; it is said it helps in concentration and brings peace and prosperity. The two-faced rudraksha brings the blessings of *Ardhnarishwara*, Siva and Parvati [Siva's consort]. The three-faced bead symbolizes fire and is said to be effective in controlling blood pressure and stress; it brings health, wealth and prosperity." (*Sunday Times of India*, [The Speaking Tree], June 27, 2010)

Salagram, also called Saligram, is a sacred stone of unique character. A salagram is as famed in India as a rudraksha. It is usually

a round and sometimes an oval stone, black in colour and its size varies from that of the stone of peach to that of a goose egg. However, when it is as big as a melon, it is *priceless*. Salagram is not a stone but an ossified shell. The genuine and the most expensive salagrams are found at the bottom of Gandaki river, in Nepal, which is one of the tributaries of river Ganges. The salagrams with smooth surface have no value. Some of these stones have figures of *Chakra*, the wheel of Vishnu, as if carved on the surface. H.P.B. mentions having seen on one of them the figure of Krishna under the guise of *gopala* (shepherd) with his herd of cows, and on few others, pictures of several *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu, as if it was carved by some artist's chisel. The formation of such stones is attributed by the students of natural science to certain species of fish, but H.P.B. declines to comment on correctness of this explanation (*From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, pp. 577-78). Traditionally, It is believed that the symbols of *chakra*, found both inside and outside of the stone, are formed by the river worms called *Vajra Keeta*, which drill the stones, and use them as dwelling place.

There are various legends behind the origin of salagram. According to the Puranas, once a battle broke between Lord Siva and demon Jallundhara. It was the battle between the two equally matched warriors. In fact, it was the battle between chastity of two chaste women—Parvati, the wife of Siva, and Vrinda, the wife of demon Jallundhara, because each warrior was protected by the chastity of his wife. Victory was possible only by spoiling the chastity of either of the women by the opposing warrior. Thinking that by spoiling the chastity of Parvati he could defeat Lord Siva, Jallundhara approached Parvati in the guise of Siva. But Parvati recognized him and she signalled Lord Vishnu that it was now possible to spoil the chastity of Jallundhara's wife. So, Vishnu approached Vrinda in the guise of demon Jallundhara, who could not recognize him and thus lost her chastity. However, when she realized what had happened, she cursed Lord Vishnu to turn into stone, grass, tree and plant. Since then, *Salagram stone*, *Kusa-grass*, *Pipala tree* and *Tulsi*

(basil) plant are worshipped as incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

Col. Olcott, the President of the Theosophical Society, was gifted with a salagram carrying the figure of Krishna under the guise of *gopala* (shepherd) with his herd of cows. In the same book, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, Ananda Swami, an ascetic from South India explains to him that the stone represented *Gopala-Krishna*, or "Krishna the Shepherd." The person wearing it must avoid meeting the cows, because otherwise, whole herd of cows would rush after the possessor of such salagram, drawn by its irresistible magnetic force. If the cows do not run after the person wearing *Gopala-Krishna*, the stone is said to be counterfeit. Likewise, there are salagrams which represent *Sampat-Krishna*, "the squanderer of riches," and *Santan-Krishna* or "bestower of children," etc.

The ascetic explains that the tulsi leaves, salagram, rudraksha and *danda* (stick or wand carried by the ascetics and yogis), have magnetic properties of their own, but they could also be imparted "magical properties" and powers by the *owner*. There is a difference between a *Hath-yogi* and a *Raja-yogi*, and the way they use rudraksha, *salagram* or *danda*. He describes *Hath-yoga* as a modern compromise of mysticism. It is born out of centuries of slipshod practice of philosophy and as a result of emphasis on the rituals and external form instead of the spirit of *Brahma-Vidya*, leading to its degeneration. Those who believe and follow *hatha-yoga* are convinced that Siva himself resides in each seed of rudraksha. Hence every phenomenon such as clairvoyance or healing of sickness performed with the aid of rudraksha is attributed by them to the direct action and participation of Siva and not to their own power and will. The believers and followers of *raja-yoga* deny such divine intervention, but instead recognize that all the powers of the godhead are within them. They concentrate that power in the object—that object could be a *rudraksha*, a *salagram* or a *danda*. For the time being he turns each of these objects into his *vahan* (vehicle) and imparts to it his own properties. It is similar to what is done by a

magnetizer who impregnates a piece of paper or some object with his life currents for healing the sick, though it is to much lesser degree. Thus, for instance, for a *raja-yogi*, whose mind and will function with complete consciousness, the *danda* (equally applicable to rudraksha and salagram) becomes the conductor of that will. It is just like a telegraph wire which acts as a conductor of the thoughts of the person who sends the telegram, but in the absence of such an agent, it remains an ordinary piece of metal.

A *hatha-yogi* tends to attribute the wonderful actions performed using rudraksha, salagram or *danda* to some god, instead of realizing that it is his own will at work. As a result, he tends to spread superstition, which often brings about harm than good. Colonel Olcott was told that the salagram presented to him possessed its own particular intrinsic qualities. "It is a magnet of its own kind, with which you can perform various experiments, diversifying them without end, but its specific properties will always remain with it."

A *Raja-yogi* is one who has renounced his personality *unconditionally*, and he lives to be of help to humanity. Naturally the question arises, what need has the *raja-yogi* to carry a *rudraksha*, a *salagram* or a *danda*? The answer given is that the two-fold power of creation and destruction possessed by the *raja-yogi* could be easily dissipated under the pressure of the external eventualities of daily living, but a *rudraksha*, a *salagram* or a *danda*, for instance, could act as a reservoir of that power, which make that power available to him for using in case of emergencies. An excellent example is given by the ascetic, who asks us to imagine the case of a *raja-yogi* walking down the street with another person, discussing some commonplace subject. Just then a mad dog rushes at them and is about to pounce on that person. What is needed is instantaneous action to save that person. No doubt, thought moves with the speed of, or even faster than electric fluid. But at that moment it may not be possible to *instantly* invoke from the mind that was occupied with commonplace subject, the power of thought and will, which could repel the dog. In such a case if the *raja-yogi* was carrying a *danda* (or rudraksha

or salagram) which is imbued with the essence of his power, then it can act with the speed of lightening and when directed against the animal it can instantly paralyze its impulse to jump on that person. In fact, if the *danda* is repeatedly directed against the animal, it can even kill the animal without touching the beast, if that was necessary.

Thus, we might conclude that a salagram or a rudraksha may possess its own magnetic properties but its efficacy is increased manifold when it is made a carrier or vehicle of the "power" of the person who uses it, if he knows how to. There is the power in nature which creates and destroys, and which attracts and repels. It is that power which has created man, who is a vehicle of *Parabrahman*, and he carries this two-fold power within. A human being who is aware in himself of this two-fold power can transmit the *surplus* of this power to other *vahanas* (vehicles) such as rudraksha, salagram, etc. But one who desires to develop the *surplus* of this power, must first of all, renounce his personality and devote himself completely to the service of humanity, forget his personal "I" and make himself worthy of being a collaborator with Nature.

MANY a person has discovered that by bravely meeting difficult situations he has been pushed into accomplishing things, which he never supposed, he could do. Had Milton not been blind he probably would never have written much of his great poetry. John Bunyan's twelve tormenting years in Bedford jail afforded him the passion and the leisure to write *Pilgrim's Progress*. It was St. Augustine's sufferings that made possible his *Confessions*. Sickness and handicaps may mean that our careers will be thwarted in one way or another. Adversity may mean that we will witness our life's work reduced to ashes. Hardships may cause us to make detours, and detours are setbacks; but detours need not be defeats. They may prove to be opportunities!

—PAUL S. MCELROY

THE GREAT BATTLE OF LIFE

CHARLES Darwin revolutionized the western thought in the middle of the 19th century when he propounded his ingenious theory of the evolution of species, in support of which he marshalled an impressive array of hard evidence from the natural world. Scientists and free-thinkers of the time found in his theory an addition of a formidable weapon to their armoury for use in their struggle against the constricting theological dogma of "special creation" based on the dead-letter interpretation of the Old Testament with which the western mind had been burdened for over a millennium. The idea that it is by the imperious reign of natural law, which can be observed, its workings discovered and applied to unravel the mysteries of nature—not by the arbitrary rule of a despotic God—that the universe comes into existence and progresses, gained credibility and wide acceptance.

Darwin's main idea was that by a process or a mode, which he called Natural Selection, groups of organisms tend to multiply beyond their means of subsistence, resulting in a perpetual struggle with other groups and within the group for survival and existence. In this struggle for existence the unfit are weeded out, the fit survive and transmit their traits to their progeny, thus preserving useful variations and effecting progressive improvement in the organisms. The idea came to strongly influence the race mind. Despite the many short-comings and easily demonstrable defects in this theory of evolution through struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest, it has nevertheless come to be tacitly assumed to be the law of life, including the human life. We can see the silent but potent influence of the idea in the social, economic and political life of nations at the present time.

Selfishness and the spirit of competition are natural to man at the present stage of his intellectual and spiritual evolution, wherein *Kama*, the principle of passions and desires, predominates in his constitution. But these are exacerbated to an *abnormal degree* by

the idea of *struggle for existence* and the *survival of the fittest*. It is indeed inculcated as part of the educational curriculum in the young impressionable minds. To strive for superiority over one's fellowmen in a spirit of competition and rivalry is encouraged right from the childhood, and this has come to be considered a desirable quality to be developed and perfected. It is plainly evident to independent thinkers and lovers of humanity that the unrestrained greed and aggrandizement which drives the modern industrial civilization with all its devastating effects on the societies and environment is clearly traceable to this one deeply entrenched idea, which is considered on all hands to be a scientific fact and law of life.

H. P. Blavatsky said that this idea is not untrue, as physical existence in whatever form is indeed a struggle, but that the said law has only a relative existence in the harmonious order of the universe. She pointed out that its true meaning and nature has been misunderstood and misapplied by the western thinkers, with its inevitable undesirable consequences. Thus:

The *pseudo* law is a "pretended" law indeed, as far as human family is concerned, and a fiction of the most dangerous kind. "Self-preservation," on these lines, is indeed and in truth a sure, if a slow, suicide, for it is a policy of mutual homicide, because men by descending to its practical application among themselves, merge more and more by a retrograde reinvolution into the animal kingdom. This is what the "struggle for life" is in reality, even on the purely materialistic lines of political economy. (H.P.B. *Series No. 34*, pp. 11-12)

The idea of evolution and struggle of life is certainly not a new discovery. It is an ancient doctrine, far more comprehensive and inclusive, encompassing as it does the intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions of being, not merely the physical and animal existence to which the modern theorists limit themselves. The ancient doctrine is summed in these words:

There was a spiritual, a psychic, an intellectual, and an

animal evolution, from the highest to the lowest, as well as a physical development—from the simple and homogeneous, up to the more complex and heterogeneous; though not quite on the lines traced for us by the modern evolutionists. This double evolution in two contrary directions, required various ages, of diverse natures and degrees of spirituality and intellectuality, to fabricate the being now known as man. (S.D., II, 87)

With the ancients it was the one Absolute immutable Law, Karma, which caused the One Life to differentiate into the two great opposite primal forces--Spirit and Matter—one in essence but dual in manifestation. Though ever conjoined, they act in contrary ways, which causes the Cosmos to evolve from the homogeneity of the one universal essence into multiplicity of worlds and beings; and again causes the many to merge with the ONE. The essence of the experiences gained by all the beings at the end and culmination of this stupendous drama of Cosmic evolution and involution, "the out-breathing and in-breathing of Brahma," forms the basis for the next great evolutionary unfoldment to take place, but on a plane higher and of a quality superior to the earlier one. This process of cyclic progression, they said, has neither conceivable beginning nor an imaginable end.

The Cosmic drama is the unfoldment of the titanic "struggle for life" between these two opposite forces ever conjoined in close embrace. The One Law plunges Spirit deeper and deeper into matter, which results in evolution of worlds and beings in seven distinct stages, from the most spiritual down to the most material. The Spirit is imprisoned in sheaths after sheaths of differentiating matter; thus arrived at the acme of physical development, and the corresponding eclipse of the Spirit, balance is struck between the two contrary forces, Spirit and Matter. Thus is Man produced, "a correlation of spiritual powers as well as a correlation of chemical and physical forces, brought into function by what we call 'principles.'" (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 101)

From this point onwards the embodied Spirit, the human Soul, struggles to free itself from the illusions of Matter to reassume its original primeval unity, purity and wholeness, but illusions of Matter ever deludes and prevents the desired consummation. The embodied Spirit thus acting in ways contrary to its own true nature by a mistaken notion of its true self-identity, creates causes which imprison soul to the miseries of "struggle of life" as far as the human existence goes. This struggle will last till Man learns from the painful experiences resulting from his own actions, and begins to think and act from a correct appreciation of the nature of his true being, which is eternal, and from an appreciation of the essential unity of all life. This progress of humanity is aided by emancipated and perfected beings, who are ahead of it in the scale of Cosmic evolution, in accordance with the exigencies of Karmic and Cyclic Law, towards final redemption and liberation.

With regard to the cosmic and the planetary evolution the allegorical "struggles" and "wars" were the adjustment and harmonizing of forces of opposite polarity, and their emplacement in harmonious revolutions. With regard to man it was the mental and moral struggle—the war between his lower, terrestrial nature and his higher, spiritual nature for supremacy. When the former gains the upper hand there reigns injustice, the "rule of Satan"; when the latter prevails, it is the reign of peace and benevolence. Thus,

The "Struggle for Existence" and the "Survival of the Fittest" reigned supreme from the moment that Kosmos manifested into being, and could hardly escape the observant eye of the ancient sage...The great "War in Heaven," in the Puranas; the wars of the Titans, in the Hesiod and other classical writers; the "struggles," also in the Egyptian legend between Osiris and Typhon, and even those in the Scandinavian legends, all refer to the same subject....All these relate to Heaven and Earth, and have a double and often even a triple meaning, and esoteric application to things above as to things below. They relate

severally to astronomical, theogonical and human struggles; to the adjustment of orbs, and the supremacy among nations and tribes. (S.D., I, 202)

Modern evolutionists see in the great struggle of life among creatures in the natural world a law devoid of any intelligent design or purpose—simply random action of blind forces acting automatically and mechanically. Therefore, from such a premise follows the logical conclusion that exhibition of spirit of combativeness, competition and rivalry in human society is nothing but the extension of the same blind law of life. The Teacher points out that the tendency of modern civilization, arising from this one misconception, is "a reaction towards animalism, towards a development of those qualities, which conduce to the success in life of man as an animal in the struggle for animal existence." (*Five Messages*, p. 6)

H.P.B. points out that the "struggle for existence" applies only to the physical, never to the moral plane of being. Man is not a physical creature but the Eternal Thinker, Mind-Being, the roots of whose consciousness is in Eternity. To show the correct place of the "struggle for existence and survival" in the scheme of universal evolution, she quotes approvingly from the eminent Sanskritist, Mr. Emile Burnouf :

The oft-repeated formula of the struggle for life is true, but not universal; it is true for the plants; it is less true for the animals in proportion as we climb the steps of the ladder, for the law of sacrifice is seen to appear and to grow in importance; in man these two laws counter-balance one another, and the law of sacrifice, which is that of charity, tends to assume the upper hand, through the empire of reason. It is reason, which in our societies, is the source of right, of justice, and of charity; through it we escape the inevitableness of the struggle for life, moral slavery, egoism and barbarism, in one word, that we escape from what Sakyamuni poetically called the power and the army of Mara. (H.P.B. *Series No. 34*, p. 13)

Man, as already said, is potential God, his godly nature is eclipsed by the turbulent animal nature in which he is incarnated, and which is the chief motor force in his life at this stage of his evolution. He reasons on the plane of brain-mind which does not take into account the laws of the higher life of his divine nature. The enormous pain and suffering, degradation and destruction, that follows such selfish behaviour as just Karmic retribution are not however unmixed evil. Pain of wars, revolutions and calamities awaken the Soul from its stupor to search for reasons, to question the assumptions, ideas and beliefs it held, and enter on the path of a quest of truth. History shows that social reforms do come from an arousal of human conscience following extreme forms of social injustice and collective suffering.

Theosophy shows that there is another safer, surer and peaceful road to lasting reform and true progress of all by demonstrating the true nature of the Self of man to be the divine consciousness, and Universal Brotherhood to be the fundamental truth of life. When we awaken to this profound truth of our real Self, we bring into play in our purified and elevated minds, higher reason, spiritual intuition and moral sense. When spiritual perception grows and Wisdom-Compassion unfolds in the human heart, the illusion of the sense of separateness, from which arise the egotism—the rife source of evil in human life—is dissolved like the mist before the rising sun. Then the whole nature of man yields and subserves the Divine Ruler within, who then becomes an extraneous potency; and the great curse of "struggle of life" ceases and it is replaced by the Law of Sacrifice.

It is only by the close brotherly union of men's inner SELVES, of soul-solidarity, of the growth and development of that feeling which makes one suffer when one thinks of the suffering of others, that the reign of Justice and equality for all can ever be inaugurated. (H.P.B. *Series No. 34*, p. 12)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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: We have a tendency to imprison ourselves in narrow grooves and regard other people to be mistaken and misguided. How do we prevent imprisoning ourselves in narrow grooves?

Answer: Each one of us has mental grooves by *nature* and by *training*. We are born with certain fixed likes and dislikes, ways of looking at people and circumstances, which is the result of our past training and conditioning. We think and feel in grooves. We might call it the conditioned mind or one-track mind. The grooves in the mind are formed by set ways of looking at life-situations and problems, by having fixed views on morality, by set ways of thinking and also by our fixed reactions to people and circumstances. Mr. Judge describes such a mind to be like a flanged wheel of an engine, which can run only on a track of a particular size. We have to take off the flange and make the face of the wheel broader so that it can run on any track. In other words, we must fill up the grooves or break the moulds of thought. To achieve that we must know what creates these grooves.

Since our childhood we have imbibed certain ideas from our parents, our teachers, our society, our religion, our culture, without questioning their basis or foundation. For instance, a person who was brought up from his childhood in strict discipline with the advice to always *five* within his means tends to look down upon indulgent parents or those who tend to pamper children. He may think those who lend or borrow money are mistaken. A person born in a high-caste family or community, who has witnessed people all around him ill-treating servants or treating certain low-caste people as

"untouchables," is likely to follow in their footsteps. Sometimes rigid following of customs, conventions, traditions and even mechanical practice of virtues could produce mental grooves.

We could be very rigid about practice of virtues, so as to become slaves to them. It would be disastrous to insist too literally upon punctuality in time or purity of motive. We must avoid close and morbid scrutiny of our motives before every action. A person who fights for his country and the one who refuses to kill his fellow-beings, even for the sake of his country, can both be pure in motive. *Categorical morality*, which views right and wrong, or good and evil in watertight compartments, tends to make a person think in grooves.

We can break the moulds of thought or fill our mental grooves by acquiring universal ideas and getting larger view of life. Then, for instance, instead of judging the action as good or bad, based on the effects produced, we might learn to inquire into the *motive* behind the action. A little reflection reveals that an action done with perfectly good motive could still produce unintentioned harm in the *absence of knowledge* and wisdom. Then, in the absence of such data we might learn to refrain, altogether, from judging a person or an action.

We have forged deep mental grooves of one kind by *blindly* accepting certain religious ideas, such as personal god idea, that we live but one life, that we are born in sin, and so on. With all its rationalizations, science has helped in forging quite another kind of mental grooves, with extreme skepticism, atheism and materialistic outlook of life.

A one-track mind is a "re-active" mind, which not only views people and situations from a set point of view, but also tends to give fixed responses to them without much deliberation. Our ordinary, everyday mind is reactive. It does not act *spontaneously*, but requires some stimulus to set it in motion. When someone speaks angrily we hit back without a moment's thought. It is as if we are programmed.

When criticized for being proud or stingy, we can always do some soul-searching. If the criticism applies, we must take steps to

improve; if not, we may ignore it. Similarly, when we are up against a difficult situation or difficult persons, instead of our usual reaction of frustration and despair we could always ask, "Why is it that no one else but I am put into this situation? Do I perhaps have to learn something from this?" This is the mark of a creative mind. As H.P.B. suggests, we must learn to respond, i.e., learn to *act* from within and not just *react* to stimuli from without.

To break the moulds of thought, we must get rid of the misconception that "my ideas" regarding life and living, or parenting, or human behaviour are perfect and only true ideas. We must be ready to take a fresh look at the situation, be ready to consider another's point of view, be open-minded enough to read other religious scriptures and accept the truth from whichever quarter it comes from. Mr. Judge points out that we are hourly presented with the opportunity of accommodating our mind to other minds and natures, and of filling up the mental grooves. Regular meditation on noble ideas and daily practice of impartial examination of our thoughts, feelings, actions and motives in the light of our divine nature, could go a long way in training the mind.

All the same, we are cautioned that we must not be in a hurry to throw away old ideas *at one stroke*, in order to acquire new ones. We would be like a person *jumping* from the tenth floor of the building to reach the ground floor instead of alighting step by step. We must occupy our "ideas" while we are renovating them and go step by step. It is the old story of the Dublin City Hall. They passed a resolution: RESOLVED, that we will construct a new city hall; RESOLVED that we will construct a new city hall out of the materials contained in the old city hall; RESOLVED that we occupy the old city hall until the new city hall is completed. (*The Theosophical Movement*, December 1952)

Question: It is said that the knowledge of the doctrines of *Karma* and *Re-birth* would result in the decline of evil and crime in the world. Today, many people believe in these two doctrines. Then,

how is it that the evil and crime in the society continue to increase?

Answer: A Master of Wisdom advises to preach, *practice* and promulgate the doctrines of *Karma* and *Rebirth* because they provide sure and logical basis for practice of ethics. H.P.B. further endorses this view when she says that teach people the laws of *Karma* and *Reincarnation*, and then "besides feeling in themselves true dignity of human nature, they will turn from evil and eschew it as they would a physical danger." The belief that it is possible to escape the consequences of one's own actions, is the fertile source of all crimes and immorality. Hence, it is hoped that true understanding of these two doctrines will make people aware that law of Karma is the all-seeing law of ethical causation, which none can bribe, fool or dodge. First of all, we should not relate increase in crime and evil only to the knowledge or ignorance of *Karma* and *Reincarnation*, as there might be other factors contributing to them. Then again, perhaps, there is greater number of non-believers than there are believers of these doctrines. But the most important point is that mere *knowing* and *understanding* these doctrines is not going to bring about change in people. We need to *practice* these doctrines, instead of paying mere lip-service.

There is a difference between intellectual understanding and superficial acceptance of a principle, and having conviction of and realization of the truth of the principle. There is the story from the life of a certain saintly person (probably Guru Nanak, the Teacher of the Sikhs). It is said that as a child when he went to study with other boys, the teacher taught them that God is everywhere, that there is not even a hair's breadth of space where God is absent. After the lesson for the day was completed, the teacher called the boys and gave each one a mango, asking them to hide it in such a place where no one would be able to see it or find it. Each one accepted the mango and carefully hid it in a secure place where no one could see. Only this one child (the would-be saint) came back with the mango saying, "Where could I hide it? Did you not teach

us Few minutes back that God is everywhere?" Well, if that is true, *even* if no one else could see the mango, God would definitely be able to see! He was *convinced* about the omnipresence of God. By virtue of our birth in a Buddhist or Hindu religion we might learn about the doctrines of *Karma* and *Rebirth*, but we do not necessarily keep them at the back of our mind. If we were *convinced* about the working of these laws, we would be ever vigilant about our thoughts, words and actions. But, the calamities in life tend to shake our faith in the law of karma, and we are tempted to go and visit temples, carry out propitiatory ceremonies, perform rituals, engage in prayers asking for intervention of gods, etc. At times, it is priests, *pundits* and *purohits*, who present the warped idea of the doctrine. For instance, the priests often say that if you have killed a cat, your sin of killing the cat could be washed off, if you offer a cat of gold to the deity! In other words, there is always an antidote for the sin. Likewise, it is said that deep repentance or making a confession to a priest can absolve us of our crime. Much crime and evil is perpetrated in the name of *religion*. A person who kills others in the name of religion is made to believe that it is an act of sacrifice and that he is performing a meritorious deed!

Another reason could be that we carry certain tendencies from our past lives. A person might be trying very hard to hold evil tendencies in check, but is unable to overthrow it all at once. As Mr. Judge points out, for some of us the pattern of progress is, first sinking low through wrong actions, and then rising to proportionately greater heights by right living. There are only a few people who can manage to follow the straight path with very little variations, always being watchful of their thoughts, feelings and actions. This is because such a course calls for *never-ceasing strain* and the strength needed comes from ages of service rendered for the benefit of humanity.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Who was Ravana, the opponent of Rama in the epic *Ramayana*? The film *Raavan* by Mani Ratnam, recently released in India, has forced us to take a fresh look at his character. Was the "demon king" good or evil? Ravana, a scholar, scientist, musician and worshipper of Lord Siva and Brahma, was the son of a Brahmin father and demon mother. Ranjan Singh, who directed the teleserial *Raavan*, points out that Ravan's grandfather, Sumali, wanted a child who would have the intellect of a Brahmin and the strength of an *asura* (demon) to take over Lanka. Ravan is said to have been taught the *Vedas* by his father, Sage Vishrava. Ranjan Singh found out during his research that although Ravana is portrayed with ten heads and twenty hands, he actually did not possess so many heads or hands, but it was the reflection caused by the crystal necklace gifted by his mother. He was granted the boon of invincibility by Lord Brahma. He is also said to have made a musical instrument out of the veins of one hand, using one of his heads as the "resonator." This instrument is popularly known as *ravan-hattha* in Rajasthan, which is the precursor of the modern violin, writes Delhi University lecturer Suneera Kasliwal, who has written a book on this subject. He is credited to have written books on medicine and science and possessed an army of aeroplanes such as the "Pushpak Vimana." Sri Lankan author Neil Kiriella who has written a book, *Historical Rawana* considers *Ramayana* to be history, at least 7500 years old, and not just mythology. Devdutt Pattnaik, a mythologist, points out that Rama approaches Ravana when the latter was on his deathbed, who then teaches Rama that we are seduced by things which are bad for us, and we run after them, while we tend to shun things which are good for us. "That is why I was impatient to abduct Sita but avoided meeting you." We might say that the good in Ravana ultimately triumphed over evil within him, writes Anuradha Varma. (*Sunday Times of India [Times Life!]*, July 4, 2010)

Ramayana is the mystic narrative in epic form, which allegorizes the history of the struggle between the adepts of the Fifth or Aryan

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Race with the sorcerers of the Fourth or Atlantean Race. Rama is the symbolical personification of the Atlantean or Lanka race, writes H.P.B. It was a battle of divine forces over lower terrestrial forces. She points out that every line of this epic must be read esoterically and one must have seven keys to understand seven aspects of *Ramayana*. The Aryans were the Solar Gods; while the Atlanteans were the lunar Devas. It is very suggestive that *Manas* (Mind) in man is *dual*—*lunar* in the lower and *solar* in its higher aspect. In other words, in its higher aspect it is attracted to *Buddhi*, but in its lower or lunar aspect it is attracted to and listens to the voice of *Kama*, or *animal* soul, full of sensual and selfish desires. (S.D., II, 495-96)

Mr. Judge points out that the bad Karma of the world goes on increasing with the lapse of ages and at last produces a creature who is, so to say, the very flower of all the wickedness of the past, counting from the last Avatar. He is not only wicked but is also wise, with magic powers of awful scope, for magic is not just the heritage of the good. This flower of wickedness, such as Kansa or Ravana, towers above all the black magicians of that time. The *Avatar* and the Black magician are equally matched in power and knowledge, but the *Avatar* has on his side the *general will of nature* and the preservative and conservative forces, which the other has not, and hence there is victory for the good and destruction for the wicked. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 107-08)

Hence, it is not surprising that Ravana was a combination of wickedness, power and knowledge. H.P.B. points out that no one can fail to recognize the Atlanteans of *The Secret Doctrine* in Ravana and the *Rakshasas* of Lanka. It is from the Fourth Race that the early Aryans got their knowledge of wonderful things. One of them is the Mayasabha mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, which was built by Mayasur, an Atlantean, for the Pandavas. The chronology and computations of Brahmin Initiates are based on the works of the great astronomer and magician, Asurmaya, who was also an

Atlantean. The Aryans learnt from the Atlanteans the aeronautics or *Viman Vidya*, and so also their great arts of meteorography and meteorology. "It is from them again that the Aryans inherited their most valuable science of the hidden virtues of precious and other stones, of chemistry, or rather alchemy, of minerology, geology, physics and astronomy" (S.D., II, 426). They were adept in *Ashtra Vidya* (highest magical knowledge). The terrible Sidereal Force, known to and named by the Atlanteans MASH-MAK, which when aimed at an army, could reduce to ashes 100,000 men and elephants, as easily as it would a dead rat. (S.D., I, 563)

The essay "Faux Friendship," by William Deresiewicz, excerpted from *The Chronicle Review* (December 6, 2009) a section of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, appeared in *Utne Reader* for May-June 2010, explores how the concept of friendship has undergone radical change in our modern world. Facebook, MySpace and Twitter allow you to boast of having six hundred or more friends, but it is not clear if we know what friendship really means. It seems inevitable that once we decided to become friends to everyone, we would forget how to be friends with anyone. We are connected to everyone, and yet we do not really *know* anyone, writes Deresiewicz. Friendship in earlier times was a high calling, demanding extraordinary qualities of character, rooted in virtue and dedicated to the pursuit of goodness and truth. The classical friendship persisted through the 18th and 19th centuries giving us great friendships of Goethe and Schiller, Byron and Shelley, Emerson and Thoreau. The classical ideal of friendship was revived by the Renaissance, which Montaigne described by saying, "Those who venture to criticize us perform a remarkable act of friendship, for to undertake to wound and offend a man for his own good is to have a healthy love for him." The modern concept of friendship has its roots in the growth of commercial society and democratic ideal of universal equality. What has contributed to modern mode of

friendship is industrialization. A person is torn away from extended families and traditional communities, moving to and settling in urban centres, so that friendship acts as a salve for anonymity and rootlessness of modern life. Today, we do not recognize that the higher purpose of friendship is to summon us to the good by offering moral advice and correction. We practice non judgmental friendship of unconditional support and acceptance, which is termed "therapeutic" friendship by sociologist Robert N. Bellah. Friends are there to support our feelings and decisions and to raise our self-worth. Instead of creating a private space and building a unique inviolate world between two people, in the new age friendship we tend to expose our private lives to public. "The image of the one true friend, a soul mate rare to find but dearly beloved, has disappeared from our culture," writes Deresiewicz.

Friendship is the bond or relationship through which we fulfil our need to *share*—our pleasures, pains, achievements, views, likes and dislikes. The process of sharing and communicating is very essential for our mental and emotional well being. Only, in the new age friendship, we seem to share everything or rather announce everything, indiscriminately, which include trivialities like one's changing the brand of one's toothpaste or soap! Generally, friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more people discover that they have in common some insight, interest or even some tastes, which they thought was not shared by others. Though it is the common interest which brings two or more people together, it opens up the possibility of kindling appreciative love where each learns to appreciate the other for what he is, and at times, even emulate the other. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, points out that the Buddhist *Sangha* or spiritual community is sustained by spiritual friendship (or *Kalyan Mitrata*) among its members. The primary meaning of *kalyana* is "beautiful," so in spiritual friendship we take delight in spiritual beauty of our friend. Friendship is what develops when two people start treating each other as persons, which calls for the development of sympathy, sensitivity and awareness. There

is sharing of enthusiasm, inspiration as also the understanding and experiences of the *Dhamma*. There is also sharing of mistakes, which could take the form of confession.

Perfect friendship or companionship of two or more individuals, which rests on sharing of ennobling ideas, has the possibility of creating a powerful centre of the like-minded. A group of people sharing common views and goals could have the power to bring about religious, political and social reforms and could even prove to be a stepping stone to universal brotherhood. In *Five Messages*, H.P.B. writes:

Theosophists are of necessity the friends of all movements in the world, whether intellectual or simply practical, for the amelioration of the condition of mankind. We are the friends of all those who fight against drunkenness, against cruelty to animals, against injustice to women, against corruption in society or in government, although we do not meddle in politics.

But there is also the danger. As Professor C. S. Lewis remarks, such companions with common interest create a barrier between themselves and others and thus form a *partial brotherhood*. Alone among unsympathetic companions, we may hold certain views and standards timidly, not too sure if we are right. But when a *group of people* holds certain views, right or wrong, they tend to be assertive. Lord Buddha asks us to choose our friends carefully, saying that if a person does not meet his better or his equal he must proceed alone, as "there is no companionship with a fool."

Are we able to think of doing something before actually doing it? It is but obvious that we think of moving our finger and move it the next instant. Thus, cause precedes the effect. When we think of doing something, the thought is converted into electrical impulses in the brain, which then causes required muscle movement.

However, Benjamin Libet, a researcher in the physiology department of the University of California and a pioneering scientist in the field of human consciousness, discovered to the contrary. Way back in 1970 he connected a few subjects to brain scanning and muscle monitoring equipment and asked them to move a finger whenever they wanted to, and to report when they made that decision. He found that when we act there is first the brain impulse to act and we become conscious of it half a second later. In other words, apparently conscious decisions to act were preceded by an unconscious build up of charge within the brain.

These experiments have been successfully repeated several times and they seem to suggest that free will, the power of making decisions unconstrained by external circumstances, does not exist. We *seem* to move our finger of our own free will but it is not so. Libet said that we may not have "free will" but we have "free won't." In other words, though the action (or decision) to do something was initiated half a second before we thought we were initiating it, there was still enough time to stop the action. However, "Free won't" could be tricky because it is all right if we had the urge to kill someone but we do not act on it. But what happens if we have the urge to help someone falling off the cliff but do not execute the thought? Many philosophers have suggested that perhaps consciousness is the epiphenomenon generated *after* the brain has done its job. Is our conscious self, an illusion? Or, does there exist some fuller collective consciousness, of which we are an ingredient, and which is perhaps responsible for initiating all actions in the universe? Then, being part of the whole we would be placed in driver's seat as volitional partners in every activity, writes Mukul Sharma (*The Times of India, The Speaking Tree*], July 4, 2010)

It is beyond any doubt that man possesses free will. H.P.B. argues that when we place animals of same species under the same circumstances their actions will be closely similar. But if we place a few people under the same circumstances their actions will be as different as their characters. Thus, in a dangerous situation, one

person may respond by charging forward, while the other may withdraw or sink back. It is the self-determining power to override circumstances, but it is limited or coloured by the character of the person. The higher Self-conscious Will belongs to higher plane.

The energy or will is coloured and limited by one's likes and dislikes, one's biases, prejudices, desires, etc. However, when the psychic or lower mind, is freed from *Kama*, it becomes the guide of highest mental faculties and an organ of free will in physical man. It becomes a channel through which the higher Mind guides the direction of that force, just like the sailor of the vessel does not *create* the steam but uses it to *direct* the vessel. *Kathopanishad* compares the body with the chariot, and horses with the senses. *Kama-manas* or lower mind is compared to the reins through which the horses may be controlled, and it is placed between the horses and the charioteer, which stands for the higher Mind. When the reins are with the charioteer (i.e. when *manas* is freed from *kama*), the charioteer is able to guide the horses through the reins.

H.P.B. points out that no physiologist will ever be able to solve the mystery of the human mind unless he accepts the *dual* nature of *manas* or mind—lower (animal) and a higher (or divine) mind in man. She writes that *there is no special organ of will* and no *physical basis* for the activities of self-consciousness. In the article, "Psychic and Noetic Action," H.P.B. quotes the views of Prof. George T. Ladd. Psycho-physiology classifies the mental phenomena into three major heads of thought, emotions and acts of will. Prof. Ladd points out that these faculties or phenomena must not be attributed to one or the other part of the brain or to the molecular motions in the nerve fibres and nerve cells of the brain, either as their cause or concomitant to it. They have no independent existence of their own in the brain, but they are the result of the modes of behaviour in consciousness of the Real Being called the Mind. Occult philosophy rejects the materialistic view that mental changes are caused by molecular changes.