

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THE DWELLER OF THE THRESHOLD

MAN IS a mixture of good and bad, of the godlike and demoniacal natures. In an ordinary person, the good and bad tendencies exist as complex collective forces, but when one decides to achieve some spiritual goal, and resolves to allow his higher nature to govern him in his life, these tendencies separate out into two opposing forces of good and bad—represented in the *Gita* as *Kaurava* and *Pandava* armies. Arjuna represents an individual who has resolved to develop his better nature. Like Arjuna in the *Gita*, every individual who resolves to develop his better nature faces opposition from the lower tendencies and faculties, “which have their camp and base of action upon the Astral and other hidden planes.” The threshold has to be crossed before entering a room or a house. It is as if someone sitting at the threshold of the house or a room prevents you from going inside the house or a room. Likewise, in moving from the familiar, personal and often base nature, to the unfamiliar and spiritual nature we have to face and conquer, at the threshold, the evil in our own nature, in the family, race, etc.

Mr. Judge tells us that the “Dweller is the combined evil influence that is the result of the wicked thoughts and acts of the age in which anyone may live.” H.P.B. mentions that the chela is not only called upon to face all latent evil propensities of his own nature, but also the evil tendencies accumulated by the community and nation to which he belongs. The mass of evil that the disciple has to face and

conquer before he can step across the threshold of the Higher Life, comprises: (1) The evil propensities common to himself and to his family; (2) those common to himself and his nation; (3) those common to himself and mankind in general, known as weaknesses of human nature.

The idea of the “dweller” is like what the idea of a “devil” is to the child—it is the horror of the unknown and unseen. A child is more afraid of “devil” than of his father or a teacher with a cane; because the pain caused by the beating is tangible, something that he has experienced, but the fear of devil never passes. We are given some idea of the dwelling of the “dweller” on the unseen plane. Mr. Crosbie explains that each human being may be thought of as being in a centre of a circle, and that circle contains every experience through which he has passed, and all knowledge hitherto gained. Since each life adds to the store of knowledge and experience, we can see that within the circle there are zones, at least seven in number, containing a particular kind of consciousness and composed of particular kind of substance. We are surrounded by these zones and each of these zones keeps us from the highest and the most spiritual zone of our nature. If we are to pass forward, even one step beyond the mere physical, we must go through that zone which is just beyond the physical, and in which the more evil, selfish elements of our nature and experience exist. It is only by passing through that zone that we can go to the higher zones of our being, and in doing that the aspirant would arouse the evil tendencies, which he has to face and transform. At first, the minor dwellers of the threshold are aroused, and although they do not, to begin with, assume any definite shape, their opposition is felt.

Each one of us is forming our individual Dweller. At first our selfish, personal and unkind thoughts, feelings and actions do not seem to produce any effect on us. We produce thoughts, feelings or actions and then forget them. Although we forget them, these are not wiped out, but remain in the invisible astral sphere or zone which surrounds us. Coalescing with other thoughts, feelings and actions,

in time, a form is built, which is magnetically linked to us. At first, it will not reveal itself as a shape, but may infuse in the aspirant a sense of horror, or a feeling of fear. But later, it will take a definite shape.

Our Dweller is about us all the time. Everything which conflicts with good is an operation of that Dweller. We are in *Kali-yuga*, the dark age, which is characterized by selfishness, competitiveness, and declining moral values. We are influenced by the thoughts and feelings of our fellow-men. Their thoughts and acts tend to reinforce our Dweller. “The greatest Dweller we have is doubt, suspicion, fear, lack of faith. These are outward exhibitions of the Dweller....These Dwellers have to be conquered. We must have absolute faith; absolute faith in our power to learn, and an unbounded confidence in that which is being taught us,” writes Mr. Crosbie. In fact, every duty left undone, every moment of sloth, every feeling of fear, anger, envy, goes to form the Dweller.

For most of the student-aspirants, the “dweller” may not have yet assumed any definite form, but let us remember that we are daily adding to its stature and strength by entertaining unwholesome thoughts and feelings. It is therefore necessary to take stock of ourselves and to become aware of and destroy those things which are slowly building this dreaded thing.

Regular self-examination is necessary to become aware of the weak and strong points in our character. One day we may become aware of our tendency to think uncharitable thoughts. We know that it is not good, but we also know how terribly hard the fight will be before we can overcome this tendency. We know that we have to fight hard to be able to stick to our aspirations, or even to our resolutions, and not let them fade away through lack of will-power. Sometimes we may discover that we have begun to consider ourselves so important or good that we are all the time criticizing others. We might be so occupied with criticism of others that we have no time left to look at our own weaknesses. Often this creates the delusion that we are always right and others all wrong. Thus,

we build the most harmful of all Dwellers—pride, or the perverted sense of “I,” or the exaggerated self-importance, which is the most difficult foe to fight.

Professor C. J. Jung in his *Essays on Contemporary Events* points out that there is a biological relationship between the unconscious processes and conscious mental activity, wherein any deficiency of consciousness, such as, exaggeration or one-sidedness, is suitably supplemented by an unconscious process. If such a compensatory move of the unconscious is not integrated into consciousness in an individual, then it leads to neurosis or even psychosis. We may apply this to the case of a student-aspirant. We *speak* of philosophical and ethical tenets but fail to apply. For instance, we may speak of the great truths of Karma, Rebirth, Universal Brotherhood, Order and Harmony. But if these are not worked out through our conscious mind in our daily life, they may stay in our unconscious, causing an imbalance, and the accumulation of these ideas will in time cause a breakdown of the moral life. On the other hand, if the ideas we hold are those of disorder, while our conscious mind strives for order, there will again be conflict and chaos.

How shall we find what is in our unconscious mind? Professor Jung says, “We always discover our own psychic contents, which has become unconscious, in other people.” We see ourselves reflected in other people; we see our “shadow,” which is the unknown character that is slowly building for us our “Dweller.” Not only do we see ourselves in other people but we view wrongly the relationship between ourselves and our environment. Professor Jung points out that “one is always inclined to lay the blame on external circumstances” and that we do not remember that “nothing could explode in us if it had not been there.” It is necessary for us to discover our “shadow” and destroy it. The first step is to become aware of our weaknesses and mistakes. Mr. Crosbie says, “No one who sees his mistakes can be a hopeless case.” A student of the Higher Life should be anxious to see his errors. “It is certainly better to know that your worst adversary is right in your own heart,”

says Professor Jung.

Shri B. P. Wadia describes the “dweller” in another context. When another or others are angry, moody or irritable, we must try to see in their tarnished consciousness our own lower self. But we should not come down to their level. Let us understand what happens. Let us look at it from the point of view of elementals. If you get angry or irritable by coming down to their level, then the elementals impressed with their anger or irritation pounce upon you and then go back to them with your strength. These elementals enjoy the vibrations of irritability; it is food for them. If continuity of such exchange persists then a common “dweller” will spring into existence. The demolishing of that dweller is ten times harder than controlling the anger or irritation in ourselves. When the “dweller” is strengthened it can become a home for an “elementary” or evil spirit. Next, either you or that other person will become “obsessed” by that “elementary.” Hence, it is very important that we learn to take a higher point of view and not allow ourselves to slip down to a lower level.

In order not to reach a state wherein a common “dweller” is created, our first task is not to allow ourselves to be disturbed within, whatever others say or do. “Do not answer, and then you will not retaliate. Listen—it entails only a loss of time—and then go on the Right Way which is self-chosen.” We are advised to consult the Inner Ruler more and more, in every situation, else we are likely to be caught up in the maze of irritation, depression and defeatism. When we are inwardly strong and pure, we begin to stream forth Light and Peace, more and more, and then those who criticize us are bound to weaken by observation of our example.

But there are also weapons to fight the Dweller. Every time we foster good aspirations, every time we use our will to overcome sloth, every time we are able to overcome fear, superstition, blind belief, every time we respond to insult, anger or ill-will with kindness, charity and forgiveness, we are building the weapons to fight the foes in the final battle. Every time we listen to our conscience we

are using one of our most potent weapons for the fight, but unfortunately, most of the time we tend to ignore the message which comes from the Inner Ruler.

We would do well to nip in the bud our weaknesses. We must watch for the occasions when, in however small a degree, we let sloth overcome the will. We must find out what desires predominate in us, for personal, selfish desires, more than any other thing, come in the way of exercising spiritual Will. Each one of us has the germ of the vices and weaknesses which are in our family, community, nation or race. When an individual becomes aware of these weaknesses, even traces of them which he might possess, and takes steps to purify them, he is able to lessen their cumulative strength. We are responsible for the family, national or racial traits, because either in this life or in some other life, we helped to make both good and bad traits. Therefore, we cannot escape the good and bad effects of both. *Light on the Path* reminds us, “Remember, the sin and shame of the world are your sin and shame.” None of us acts in isolation. We are all united on inner and invisible planes, and are continually affecting each other through our thoughts, feelings and actions.

As we progress on the spiritual path with greater and greater aspiration and strong determination, more marked is the separation of good from evil in our nature. Our faults and weaknesses begin to assemble and take shape, and when the process is completed it becomes *Papa-Purusha*, the evil Dweller. But our aspirations and our effort to lead the higher life also begin to take shape creating *Punya-Purusha*. “Then by the help and strength of the latter we eject the former from within ourselves. Next, it torments us from without; this is the real Dweller. There are some grim mysteries connected with the subject. A clear conscience, purity of magnetism and cleanliness of body are the very best protection. You are bound to get over difficulties as you persist in attention-devotion,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT “A TIME TO EVERY PURPOSE”

MASTER, why is punctuality important?

Friend, I will ask you another question: What do you mean by practical Theosophy?

Master, practical Theosophy means putting the truths of Theosophy into practice in daily life.

How does this show in our life, O Friend?

Master, it shows in kindness and in a brotherly attitude to all.

Is that all it means, Friend? That should be our fundamental attitude, of course, but it must be based on knowledge, or it is merely sentimental and does more harm than good. Does not practical Theosophy mean the putting into practice of the *knowledge* we learn?

Yes, Master, but where does punctuality come in? What is its basis in knowledge?

Friend, have you forgotten the Second Fundamental Proposition which tells us of the law of cycles? Does it not tell us that this is a fundamental law which operates at every point in space and at every moment of time? If this is true, then this law must act without fail in our own lives. It is Karma, in fact—action-reaction-action. There is, therefore, a right time and a right place for every act. The *Gita* tells us that even the giving of gifts should be at the *right* time, to the *right* person, and with the *right* attitude. Shakespeare has told us that “there is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” We colloquially speak of “missing the bus.” *Ecclesiastes* says: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

Is it not also said, “A stitch in time saves nine”? The awful words, “too late,” can prove catastrophic. Does it not strike you, therefore, that there is more to “time” than at first appears?

Yes, Master, I see this in the big things of life, of course, for we know that if we are too late we miss a train that we have planned to

catch, but why must we practise punctuality all the time? Are the little things in life so important as to have a right time and place?

O Friend, what do you mean by a “little” thing? Even one little drop of poison can bring death. Is the observance of punctuality in commencing and ending a meeting, a small thing or a big thing? We are called upon not only to disseminate the Fundamental Principles of Theosophy but also to exemplify them in practice. As the ceaseless operation of the law of cycles is a fundamental principle of the Ancient Wisdom. We, too, must follow that law in our own lives.

Ask yourself, what causes unpunctuality? A man goes regularly late to his office; he gets up late, he is late with his letters, for his meals, in going to bed. He is late for appointments, etc. Unpunctuality has become a habit with him. What is a habit? “Sow a habit, reap a character,” we are told. So habit builds character. Why and how? It is because when we think, feel, or act, we are using elementals, those impressionable entities that we make our own and impress with our own stamp. They fly to us at our wish and, if impressed with the stamp of unpunctuality, they make it almost impossible for us to be punctual!

Think along this line and ask yourself another question: What does the habit of unpunctuality ultimately lead to?

Master, I suppose it must lead to the habit of procrastination.

You are right my Friend. And procrastination leads, in time, to apathy, which ends ultimately in destruction. So we had better, here and now, begin to follow Nature’s eternal Law.

There is also another aspect to this question. Since eternal harmony is the basis of all things, that is, everything fits in properly with every other thing—the right time to the right person—since this is the law of the universe, if we do not fit in we disturb the harmony, and this affects not only ourselves but others as well. Suppose we are unpunctual for our meal. It will affect not only the over-cooked meal, not only the others sharing that meal and the one who prepares it, but add to this the factor of digestion. Are we not taught that even

the stomach works under the law of “cyclic impression and return”? There is natural rhythm in all things. If we disturb this, the lives of our stomach get upset, apathetic, cease to function, etc. Our emotions also get upset, and upset emotions further adversely affect the digestion. Digestion is not something that has to do only with the body. Nothing is simple in the wonderful complex machine of the body or of the Universe. By virtue of the complexity it is essential that things be allowed to work under their own law of being.

There is still another thing to be remembered. What do you think of an unpunctual person—that is, if it is someone other than yourself?

Master, I cannot trust him; he upsets my plans; I never know where I stand with him.

Then, O my Friend, do not others feel the same way about you when you are unpunctual? So now, how shall the habit of punctuality be created? First, we are taught to get the right *mental* attitude. Actions follow the mind and feelings, so it is no use merely saying, verbally, “I will be punctual.” You have to sit down and again work this thing through with your mind and your feelings. We must dismiss the attitude: “Oh, it does not matter if I am a few minutes late!” It *does* matter, for the reason given above. If we do not get rid of this attitude, we shall find ourselves on more and more occasions making excuses for being late. Once we make up our *mind* to be punctual, we can begin to create the habit. We shall not succeed at once, for the elementals we have trained for unpunctuality hinder us. But we have to go on and on and on until we have trained other elementals which are punctual. It is arduous at first, but we must not give in.

Are we not taught to “help Nature and work on with her,” and if we do so, are we not told that Nature in turn will help us? Look also at the Ten Items from *Isis Unveiled*. Nature becomes our “material ally, pupil and servant.”

This means that punctuality will become a habit and, strange as it may seem, when this happens it becomes *impossible for us to be unpunctual!* We have to become, in this respect at least, an ally and

master of the Law of Cycles!

Nature shows forth punctuality in all its departments, following the Law set in motion at the dawn of manifestation. Tides rise and fall cyclically. Seasons follow each other in rhythmic succession. Blood circulates and the heart beats in an orderly way. Man alone hinders this great Law in Nature through his unpunctual behaviour.

In *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 24*, Mr. Judge mentions that if we maintained a diary we would observe that depression occurs at regular intervals of time. When the depressive cycle returns, we must compel ourselves to feel joyous, even against our will—or at least try to feel the joy of others. We may do this next day or even two days later. We would then have implanted joyous impressions, so that when the depression returns, it brings along with it the impressions of joy and they would counteract each other's momentum. Soon we would succeed in establishing a joyous cycle. Likewise, if we study at a fixed time every day, then the mind comes ready for work so that more work gets done.

The Divine Discipline mentioned in the Sixth Chapter of the *Gita* includes both moderation and punctuality. Thus, “the meditation which destroyeth pain is produced in him who is moderate in eating and in recreation, of moderate exertion in his actions, and regulated in sleeping and waking.” Lord Buddha has given similar advice in the *Dhammapada*: “He who does not rouse himself when it is time to rise and though young and strong is full of sloth, whose will and thought are weak, that lazy man will not find the Path of Wisdom.” This is a good picture of us human beings at the present time, for many of us turn night into day, and day into night.

Punctuality in time also implies the power of judgement, or reasoning or forethought. It involves constant vigilance or watchfulness, because watchfulness enables us to do the right thing at the right time. Even Spiritual Teachers of humanity watch for the right time for Their efforts. We learn from *Isis* (I, 219): “Everything

in this world has its time, and truth, however based upon unimpeachable evidence, will not root or grow, unless, like a plant, it is thrown into soil in its proper season.” In this both forethought and judgement are essential, and they grow out of patience, and that in turn grows out of reliance on the *Law*. Both scientific and philosophical ideas could be in advance of time. “If either a religion or a philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception...Every science, every creed has had its martyrs,” wrote H. T. Buckle in his work, *History of Civilization (S.D., I, 298)*. Likewise, an idea or a reform cannot be enforced by brute force, for it may be “out of time,” no matter how noble in nature.

However, there is an important bit of advice given in the article, “Breaking the Moulds of Thought,” (*The Theosophical Movement*, January 1948) that punctuality does not necessarily mean rigid adherence to an immutable time-table, however valuable the discipline of a fixed schedule, particularly in organizing routine work. *Through the Gates of Gold* cautions us that by practice of virtue we might fetter ourselves into one groove, one changeless way of living the life. For instance, there could be over-anxious insistence on the virtues of accuracy or punctuality. Some people feel lost unless they get up at the same time, eat at exactly the same time, and follow the same daily routine. These are *slaves* rather than *masters* of punctuality—slaves to automatic action of the bodily atoms. A doctor cannot be rigidly punctual like an office employee, because he may be called upon to attend an emergency case, while on his way to his clinic. In other words, punctuality has higher and wider aspect. Just as a machine demands a little margin for free action among its parts—if the parts interlock then no movement would ensue—so punctuality has its fluidity. It is the inner need that determines the moment of punctuality. To close a U.L.T. meeting abruptly, cutting into the middle of eager inquiries in order to be “dead” punctual to the stroke of time, is not a virtue.

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

ALTRUISM—TRUE AND FALSE—II

THE THREE types of action, *viz.*, *kamic*-action, *dharma*-action and *Yagna*-action, can be expressed in a third way, and that is, making the distinction between the selfish man, the unselfish man, and the selfless man. The selfish man is following his personal wish and desire—his action is *kamic* action. The unselfish man is trying to do his duty, but he makes distinctions. He is separating and grouping things, obligations or people in one department, and acting towards them in a particular way, to bring benefit to them, and on the other hand, he has the whole of the world. The selfless man has abandoned the idea of separateness. To him there is no division; people, the whole Universal Self is his concern; he can only act in terms of the Universal Self. Therefore, he offers all his actions, however trivial and ordinary they may appear to the other man, as sacrifice to the Higher Self.

The one fundamental idea is to get a conception of what to us duty indicates, when we arrive at the human kingdom. What do we mean by *Dharma* of Mankind? What is our own duty? *Dharma* is the natural quality or attribute, or the very essence of any particular object or being. For instance, the *Dharma* of fire is to burn, and of the rain is to fall down. It is the natural quality of an object or being, and so again, we come to the question, what can be the natural quality of our human self? We find that what causes confusion is the eternal question, “What should I do in this particular case? What are the things I ought to do, and the things that I should not and must not do? Krishna does not directly say what our *Dharma* is, but he does convey the idea very clearly in an indirect way.

He explains what his *Dharma* is. He says: “I,” and by “I” he means the “Immortal I,” “I in all beings,” the “Universal Principle,” am constantly in action. “If I were not indefatigable in action, all men would presently follow my example, O son of Pritha. If I did not perform actions these creatures would perish; I should be the

cause of confusion of castes, and should have slain all these creatures.” It is in this mysterious verse which explains, what would be the result of the withdrawal of the One Life unto Itself, abandoning the phenomenal world, that we find a clue for the understanding of our *dharma* as spiritual beings. If the One Self were to separate itself from all the objects in which it exists, and which it is sustaining and energizing, then the whole world would come to an end. That would be exactly the condition of the world were Krishna to retire and abandon his own duty.

If this is true of the Universal Self, and if the Universal Self must be continuously acting, that we all may live and perform our duties, and thereby evolve, unfold and grow, then the same must be true in our little universe. We find as Spiritual Beings that we perform exactly the same duty to the atoms or “lives” composing the whole of our personality, the whole of our lower beings, and that we are exactly in the same position as Krishna is to us, and to all objects and creatures. The idea of reincarnation is too often looked upon by students as the means whereby their own soul can find a spiritual road and essence, and unfold the spiritual powers. But here we get the idea that reincarnation is also the means whereby we can perform our duty to the lives of our lower self, and unless we perform that duty, we cannot raise these lives. In other words, they are dependent on us for their further growth and evolution, exactly as we are dependent on the Universal Self for our further growth and evolution. Those Human Beings, who having recognized the evil tendencies that have been generated in the past in the lower nature, try to separate themselves from the lower nature, by retiring to a forest or a mountain, instead of performing actions through that personality, are running away from the human *dharma*. They are, as Krishna says, “false pietists of bewildered soul.” It is an error to think that by separating ourselves from the lower, we can find the knowledge of the Self. It is by trying to *elevate* and *purify* the lower personality with the help of the Higher, that we find knowledge of the Self. That is what is meant by these verses which have puzzled many, and which relate

to the idea of sacrifice. Krishna says:

When in ancient times the lord of creatures had formed mankind, and at the same time appointed his worship, he spoke and said: “With this worship, pray for increase, and let it be for you Kamaduk, the cow of plenty, on which ye shall depend for the accomplishment of all your wishes. With this nourish the Gods, that the Gods may nourish you; thus mutually nourishing ye shall obtain the highest felicity. The Gods being nourished by worship with sacrifice, will grant you the enjoyment of your wishes. He who enjoyeth what hath been given unto him by them, and offereth not a portion unto them, is even as a thief.” But those who eat not but what is left of the offerings shall be purified of all their transgressions. Those who dress their meat but for themselves eat the bread of sin, being themselves sin incarnate.

We can see that the idea of outside offerings and outward sacrifice has a spiritual meaning. In our own civilization that meaning is lost, however, there is one kind of sacrifice which we are asked to perform in the spiritual life, and that type of sacrifice we can all understand. It is the offering of the daily duties of life on the altar of our Self. This very idea of sacrifice will be further illustrated for us by Krishna in the Fifth Discourse. But here, it is made clear that by sacrifice is meant something that we can all begin to do, for the application of those verses is found in Verse 30, where it is said:

Throwing every deed on me, and with thy meditation fixed upon the Higher Self, resolve to fight, without expectation, devoid of egotism, and free from anguish.

We begin by throwing of every deed on Krishna, the Universal Self. Arjuna, in the Second Discourse, got the idea that a spiritual person must be one who acts differently from other men, and who does not go about in the world in entirely the same manner as we human beings go about. But Krishna very clearly tells us that it is not in the outward things that we are going to recognize the Spiritual

Man, for it is the inner attitude that must change. But if there are these three actions which we can follow, it must necessarily imply that we find three aspects in our own being, exactly corresponding to these three types of action, and if we remember the great ancient maxim, “as above so below,” and try to discern the three aspects of Deity in ourselves, we will be able to get further light. These three types of action have been symbolized by the three great aspects of Deity—Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva—Brahma being the Creator, he brings the whole world into manifestation. He is responsible for the differentiation in the Universe. Vishnu is the preserver. His duty is to preserve the beings that have been differentiated by Brahma. The third aspect is Shiva, who must regenerate these beings that have been preserved by Vishnu.

Two things have to be noted in Indian tradition. Never has the first aspect of the Hindu Trinity been worshipped. We find that not one single temple has been erected for the worship of Brahma. This is simply in a metaphysical way the very same truth we have found in this chapter. Just as we do not worship Brahma, the Creator, in a temple, so we do not worship or glorify our own *kamic* nature, for it is *Kama* in us, the power to create, which represents Brahma. When we act, following the desire nature, following the aspect of Brahma in ourselves, we, as it were, create different entities and thus, emphasize the idea of separateness which is not spiritual. Therefore, we should not worship Brahma, *i.e.*, not allow our *Kamic* nature to act. Vishnu preserves. That aspect in ourselves enables us not only to perform our duty, but to persevere in the performance of that duty. We do need patience in the spiritual life, and therefore, we need this aspect of duty, of Vishnu. The third aspect is that of Shiva, he who through constant change brings about regeneration; changes the good preserved by Vishnu into spiritual, and enables us to destroy the creations of the *kamic* nature, creations we had indulged in, in the past. These two things, symbolized by Vishnu, and by Shiva, which enable us to regenerate our duty constantly, are necessary.

We know that our duties may change as we develop new perception. If we keep on performing the duties, without further enlightenment and aspiration towards something higher and greater, we may become crystallized, and may, in time, practice false altruism. That is why it is necessary to regenerate ourselves and maintain a spiritual universe, which enables other beings to regenerate themselves in their turn. Here, between these two aspects, one Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Regenerator, we find the distinction between false altruism and true. Merely preserving forms of life, physical bodies, or institutions, is waste of time, of energy, and of money from the spiritual point of view. It is not only preserving forms that is necessary, but by preserving them in a particular fashion which allows them to evolve into spiritual good, and thereby true altruism, through performance of our actions as sacrifice, that we may change the mind and heart of the race. In the great altruists, in the Teachers of Theosophy, we find the exemplification of this principle, for those Great Masters do not go about giving physical wealth or possessions as the expression of their own altruism or compassion or duty. They even do not go about bestowing knowledge and wisdom on human beings, for the very rules which they keep, make it necessary for every single human being to “deserve” spiritual knowledge before the Master can extend his helping hand, and offer that spiritual wisdom. Thus, it is not giving outwardly which is a sign of true altruism but regenerating our own selves, and thereby offering the means and way for every human being to do the same. A Master of Wisdom says that what constitutes the true Theosophist is the “self-sacrificing pursuit of the best means to lead on the right path our neighbour, and to cause to benefit by it as many of our fellow creatures as we possibly can.”

By this method Krishna promises us that we can find true spiritual knowledge, and so in the fourth discourse, it is spiritual knowledge which is taken up, whereby we can measure our own soul.

(Concluded)

AGNI—THE GOD OF FIRE

II

“FIRE IS THE most mystic of all the five elements, as also the most divine. Therefore to give an explanation of its various meanings on our plane alone, leaving all the other planes entirely out of the question, would be much too arduous, in addition to its being entirely incomprehensible for the vast majority,” writes H.P.B. (*Transactions*, p. 114)

Speaking about mystery of fire H.P.B. points out that science knows air to be a mixture of Oxygen and Nitrogen gases. The universe and the earth are considered to be composed of definite chemical molecules. We say that water is, chemically, a compound of Oxygen and Hydrogen. But what is FIRE? Science replies that it is the effect of combustion. It is heat, light, motion, and a correlation of physical and chemical forces in general. The esoteric teaching says that Fire is the most perfect and unadulterated reflection, in Heaven as on Earth, of the ONE FLAME. It is Life and Death, the origin and the end of every material thing. It is divine “SUBSTANCE.” “Thus, not only the FIRE-WORSHIPPER, the Parsee, but even the wandering savage tribes of America, which proclaim themselves ‘born of fire,’ show more science in their creeds and truth in their superstitions, than all the speculations of modern physics and learning,” writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, I, 121)

The chief, the central symbol of the Zoroastrian Religion is Fire. There is a tradition, according to which, in every *Atash-Behram* or Fire-temple the fire is kept burning continually. The Great Fire of the Temple is watched and fed by specially qualified priests, five times a day. The Fire of the Great Temple is the symbol of Universal Wisdom, and the priests represent the teachers who by their labours keep the Flame of Wisdom burning bright in the world of men. The custom of keeping the fire constantly burning in Parsee Temples is also to symbolize the immortality of the soul and the impermanent nature of man’s mortal body.

The Theosophist of July 1884 mentions that the divine fire which the Parsees are called upon to worship is known under the divine name of *Atharvana-agni*, and the same is known as *Samvartak-agni* to the Hindus. This fire in the Cosmos is always blazing and can never be extinguished. In order to indicate to the fire worshippers of the Parsee faith that the fire which they worship is not the ordinary fire, this custom has been introduced. “In the ancient times, whenever it was thought necessary to worship this fire, an adept or a magi used to invoke it and attract it from *Akasa*. But an adept, who could perform this difficult and dangerous operation with success, was not always ready to attract this divine fire for its worshippers. Hence, when once the heavenly flame was kindled by a real adept by his occult power, it was kept for a considerable length of time without being extinguished.”

Atharvan was a legendary Vedic rishi, who is said to have first instituted the fire-sacrifice or *yagna*. According to *Mundaka Upanishad* and other texts, he was the eldest son and a *Manasputra* born from the mind of Brahma.

In the lecture on “The Spirit of Zoroastrianism,” delivered at Bombay in February 1882, Col. H. S. Olcott mentions that the fire in the Parsee fire-temple which is kept burning is lighted by collecting fires from thousands of hearths. They are collected like so many fragments of universal life, into one sacrificial blaze, which shall be as perfectly as possible the complete and collective type of the Light of Ormazda. The priest takes the precaution to collect only the quintessence or spirit, as it were, of the separate flames. Thus, the priest takes not the crude coals from the various hearths and furnaces, but at each flame he lights a bit of sulphur, a ball of cotton or some inflammable substance. From this blaze he ignites a second quantity of fuel; from this a third, from the third a fourth, and so on; taking in some cases a ninth, in others a twentieth flame, until the first grossness of the defilement of the fire in the base use to which it was put has been purged away, and only the purest essence remains. Then only is it fit to be placed on the altar of Ormazda. Yet the flame of the fire

so produced is only the body of the earthly flame, which lacks the noblest soul. The soul is added by drawing fire from heaven or *Akasa*. He mentions that when the forefathers of the Parsees had gathered at Sanjan, near Surat, the holy Dastur Nairyosang, who had come with them from Persia gathered his people about him in the jungle. Upon a stone block the dried sandalwood was laid. Four priests stood at four cardinal points. The *Gathas* were sung, and the priests bowed their heads in reverential awe. The Dastur raised his eyes to the heavens, reciting mystical words, and then there descended from the higher realms of ether or *Akasa*, silvery flame, onto the piece of sandalwood which burst into flames. “This is the missing spirit evoked by the Adept Prometheus. When this is added to the thousand other dancing flames the symbol is perfected, and the face of Ormazda shines before his worshippers.”

The fire thus lighted at Sanjan has been kept alive for more than 700 years. Only when another true Priest like Nairyosang appears, will he be able to draw the flames from ether. The ancient art of drawing fire from heaven is taught during Samothracian mysteries. To be able to draw the fire from heaven, the priest must be absolutely pure in thought, word and deed.

Fire-worship or reverence for Fire was universal in the ancient times. Every religion has revered Sun and Fire as emblems of *Life*. In fact, Fire-worship is as old as Sun-worship, and fire when worshipped was originally regarded as an emblem of the Solar Deity. In *Fire and Water*, says Occult Science, the productive powers of the universe are centred. Fire and Water represent Spirit and Matter. Deity is called Living Fire. The Jewish Deity appeared before Moses as flame of Fire. In the temple of Ceres and Apollo the sacred fire was always kept burning. In the temple of Vesta or goddess Minerva, there are vestal virgins who are in charge of preserving the sacred fire, and there is penalty of death, if they allow it to extinguish.

Fire is the symbol of human soul in all religions. A *Rig Vedic* hymn says that *Agni*, the Fire-Lord, has the power to bestow life, prosperity, speech and wisdom. The Zoroastrian concept is

identically the same—the name of *Agni*, the Fire Lord, is *Atar* or *Adar*. Zoroastrianism recognizes various classes of spiritual beings, at various levels, designated as the *Amesha Spentas*, *Yazatas*, and *Fravashis*. The term *Amesha Spentas* literally means, “Immortal Benefactors,” and they are the first six emanations from *Spenta Mainyu*, also taken to signify six attributes, aspects and helpers on the side of *Spenta Mainyu*. The opponent of *Spenta Mainyu* is *Angro* (dark) *Mainyu*. Both these primal divinities (*Mainyus*), namely, *Spento* (luminous) and *Angro* (dark) have emanated from Ahura Mazda (or Ormazda), the Creative Logos. The two primeval spirits, *Spento* and *Angro*, are impersonal, universal forces—centripetal and centrifugal. Out of them emanate the seven hierarchies of spiritual intelligences. *Spento* and *Angro* are like the *Purusha* and *Prakriti* of Indian philosophy. These two forces are the basis of the universe, and they cause manifestation and dissolution.

Ahura-Mazda may be taken to represent the immanent aspect of the Deity, equivalent to Brahma of the Hindus and Osiris of the Egyptians. *Amesha Spentas* are creative powers, through whom all subsequent creation was accomplished. The *Amesha Spentas* are identical with the Archangels of the Christians, the *Prajapatis* of the Hindus, and the Sephiroth of the Kabalists. Their names are: *Vohu Mano* or “Good Mind,” which presides over cattle [“cattle” are human souls]; *Asha Vahishta* or Righteousness, which represents fire, and is the Guardian of Humanity; *Kshathra Vairya* or “Desirable Dominion,” presiding over mineral kingdom, *Spenta Armaiti* or “Holy Devotion,” presiding over the earth, *Haurvatat* or “Spiritual growth and Perfection” and presides over water, *Ameretat* or “Immortality,” presiding over the vegetable kingdom. *Ameretat* is almost always described as a Twin of *Haurvatat*. In the *Gathas* these two are sometimes called the “gifts of Vohu-Mano,” writes Irach J. S. Taraporewala. The *Gathas* are the holy songs of Zarathushtra.

In the hierarchy of beings the *Yazatas* rank next to *Amesha Spentas*. The term *Yazata* literally means “worthy of worship or

reverence.” Some of these *Yazatas* are: *Haoma*, *Atar* or *Adar*, *Mithra*, *Sraosha*, and *Rashnu*. In the Zoroastrian pantheon *Atar* or *Adar* is the ninth *Yazata*, corresponding to *Bahman* or *Vohu Mano*, the second *Amesha-Spenta*. Further, it is the presiding deity over the ninth month. Thus, the sacred Number of *Atar* is 9.

Asha, as the Law of harmony within nature and man (as the law of his own being), along with the Higher Mind or *Vohu Mano*, are together invoked to burn away the dross of ignorance, in order to purify our being. Both the soul-fire and the purifying fire of *Asha Vahishta*, are great aids in fulfilling the divine plan of Ahura Mazda.

“Ahura Mazda” in its literal translation means the “Wise Lord” (*Ahura* “lord,” and *Mazda* “wise”). Moreover, this name of *Ahura*, in Sanskrit *Asura*, connects him with the *Manasaputras*, the Sons of Wisdom who informed the mindless man, and endowed him with his mind (*manas*) (*S.D.*, II, 608). Fire is called the “son of Ahura Mazda” whose Sanskrit equivalent is *Manasa-putra* or Mind-born son of Brahma. To this purifying power, son of Ahura Mazda, this prayer is offered in *Atas-Nyayis* (*The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 23, pp. 357-61):

Fire! Son of Ahura Mazda, thou great Purifier! Burn in “this house,” blaze in this house; Increase in this house; and that perpetually. Burn, Blaze, Increase in this House till the Day of Restoration and of judgment, which thought brings us courage, good moral courage. (Verse 9)

Give me, O Atar, son of Ahura Mazda! Lively welfare, lively maintenance, lively living; fullness of welfare, fullness of maintenance, fullness of life; knowledge of sagacity; quickness of tongue; (holiness of) soul; a good memory; and then the understanding that goes on growing and the one that is not acquired through learning. (Verse 10)

“House” referred to is the Temple of the Body. “Fire” is the soul in the body—the Son of Ahura Mazda; the *manasaputra*, the mind-born son of Brahma who is named *Agnishvatta-pitri*—the fire-lord; the Christ in the Heart. John the Baptist baptized men with “water;”

and said that Christ would baptize them with “fire.” When the above prayer is read in this light, it becomes full of meaning; for it is the Soul who gives the gift of speech and fullness of life, which are prayed for. Our Soul comes from Deity (Universal-Oversoul), and is thus the Son of Ahura Mazda. It is the Pure Fire and has no smoke. But when it comes down into the body then the smoke of passion and sense-life arises, as is described in the *Gita*.

Fire is the Reincarnating Soul and has two aspects, one stationary, immovable, the other changing and growing. The non-moving is the Divine Ego whose ray is the other. The former sits as the watching spectator—“Upadrashta” of the *Gita*. The Divine Ego, the Motionless and Smokeless Fire is described as “the Purifier,” “the maker of prosperity,” “strong and immortal,” the “Warrior.” He is also called “the cook who cooks the day and night meals of mortals,” *i.e.*, he is the supplier of experiences in waking and sleeping conditions, as also in life and death.

Our body is the Temple and our Soul is the Fire. Keep out from the Temple of your body evil thoughts, ignoble feelings, crass ignorance and gross superstition. Our kitchen fire should never go out—what does that mean? The fire of attention to lower and mundane things must be unwavering, so that our food or experience may be pure and wholesome. There is the second fire of the *Agaries* (fire-temples), it is the fire of Duty whereby right deeds are done. There is the conquering fire of Behram, the Great Fire of Mahadeva that burns to ashes all selfishness, all egotism (*ahankara*). *Atar* is an aspect of *Maheshvara* or Shiva, “the Lord of the Burning ground,” the destroyer of passions, the Creator of Wisdom and Universal Brotherhood. Wonderful blessings are given by the fire-soul to anyone who brings him “dry wood,” *i.e.*, deeds free from the moisture of passion. “Sandalwood” represents fragrant acts of unselfishness, of wisdom, of kindly understanding, and without them no amount of sandalwood will avail, writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

(*To be continued*)

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

I

RAPID PROGRESS in computer technology in recent decades has enabled scientists to create machines which can perform complex tasks with accuracy and speed, and respond to surrounding environment with a human-like intelligence. It is popularly termed Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is defined as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines.” They exhibit not only computational intelligence but also capacity for reasoning, planning, learning, natural language processing (communication), perception, and the ability to move and manipulate objects.

The basic premises of AI, also termed as Artificial Psychology, is that the central characteristic of human intelligence can be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate the human mind. Scientists prefer to use the term *Intelligence* rather than Mind, Consciousness, Understanding, because they believe that intelligence is something that can be measured, and, as such, seek to fabricate machines which exhibit intelligence in a demonstrable, measurable way. One of the scientists explained the *reductionist* logic of AI, which runs as follows:

Mind can be reduced to the brain, the brain can be reduced to biology, biology to chemistry, chemistry to physics, and physics is mechanical. Therefore, anything that a mind can do can be done by a machine, and that intelligent machines can be fabricated if the laws of physics are discovered and practically applied. Basic assumption here is that since the human mind is nothing but the brain itself, the brain being nothing but a biological computer, one has only to study how the neurons are connected and are fired in different ways in different acts of cognitive and motor functions, and replicate the process in fabricating computer programs, which will simulate human intelligence. Thus, it is believed, human mind itself can be created, since mind *is* the brain. Some scientists confidently believe that by perfecting the technology some day they

will be able to build better minds than the human mind made by Nature. Some others however are not so confident, as they admit that the gulf between the AI and the human mind-self is so vast as to be unbridgeable. This is illustrated in several ways.

It is found that a computer programmed to play chess plays the game in a way different from the way a human being plays. Computer evaluates for every move thousands of positions ahead, and out of the alternatives chooses the best move in a matter of seconds, which the human player cannot do on that scale and speed. Human player can think of, at best, a couple of moves in advance. The human player, on the other hand, exhibits a quality of consciousness, ideation, will, feeling, intuitive perception, which the computer lacks, and its moves are determined according to the program built into the system, which can hardly be called thinking. The significant fact is that the best computer program has not been able to beat top level chess players, though it has the upper hand while playing against the less proficient.

Computer may be programmed to tell a story but it can scarcely understand and make sense out of a story as a child does, which is a distinct quality of consciousness. A robot may be built in the shape of a human body and programmed to perform various functions and respond to various external stimuli. But they do not have sensorium as we have and cannot sense the world as we do. Scientists say that to make a Robot as intelligent as just a five year old child in all respects would be a stupendous achievement, and that it is as yet a far off dream.

Experience in building AI has thus brought into clearer focus the fact that there is indeed a wide gulf between the human mental consciousness and intelligence, and the AI. Progress in the science of artificial psychology, consequently, has brought up a number of philosophical and ethical questions before the investigators, and compelled them to revise their basic assumption that mind is no more than the brain subject to physical laws alone. What then is mind and whence its origin? Is there consciousness apart from mind

and brain? How to account for spontaneity of human mental self, free will and memory? With these pressing questions in mind a group of seven eminent scientists from different disciplines held a series of dialogues with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in late eighties and early nineties, and sought Buddhist insights into these questions. The conversation with His Holiness on the science of the mind has been published in a book entitled, *Gentle Bridges*. H.P.B. writes:

No doubt Occult philosophy could learn a good deal from exact modern science; but the latter, on the other hand, might profit by ancient learning in more than one way, and chiefly in cosmogony. (*S.D.*, I, 586)

This is clearly brought out in this marvellous dialogue between the representatives of modern science and ancient Buddhist wisdom tradition, which is highly edifying and enriching, especially to students of Theosophy. H.P.B. writes:

We know the day is approaching when an *absolute reform* will be demanded in the present modes of Science by the scientists themselves—as was done by Sir W. Grove, F.R.S. Till that day there is nothing to be done. (*S.D.*, I, 495)

New discoveries are opening up vistas into the metaphysical and psychological truths before the scientists, which cannot be accounted for in terms of their empirical methods, and materialistic theories. Investigators are compelled, by the force of circumstances, to seek insights from ancient learning, and study the rudiments of ancient science. It is in this spirit of quest for truth that these few scientists are seeking insights from Buddhism, mainly from the Mahayana tradition. His Holiness gives some remarkable teachings which almost wholly agree with the Theosophical philosophy.

Scientists hold the view that consciousness arises from a material cause. Buddhism does not accept this and says that there cannot be a new moment of consciousness, because there would be, in that case, a beginning to a continuum of consciousness, which refutes the fundamental cosmological truth that the universe *as a being*, is

without beginning, and consequently, consciousness is beginningless continuity. His Holiness explained that causation is two-fold: main or substantial cause, on the one hand, and co-operative cause, on the other; that matter can only be a co-operative cause of consciousness, never the main cause. In Buddhist view of evolution, the universe is infinite; that it is born, undergoes many changes, dies, is reborn, in a series which has neither a beginning nor an end, and that there is always an underlying subtle consciousness through all these perpetual cycles of change. Sentient life is designated on the basis of body and mind—extremely subtle mind.

In answer to the question whether computers have consciousness His Holiness made a remarkable statement: It is difficult to categorically deny that it does not have cognition, and that, though “the consciousness doesn’t actually arise from matter, but a continuum of consciousness might conceivably come into it.” (*Gentle Bridges*, p. 152)

There is no possibility for a new cognition, which has no relationship to a previous continuum, to arise at all. I cannot rule out the possibility that, if all the external conditions and karmic action were there, a stream of consciousness might actually enter into a computer. (*ibid.*)

Explaining further he said that though a Robot or computer cannot be said to generate, or cause consciousness to arise, it seems that there is a possibility of their being animated by a conscious entity external to it, *if proper conditions are furnished*.

Theosophy teaches that there exists from the remotest antiquity what is called Theopoea—the science of animating inert matter with life and intelligence by the potential will of the Hierophant. Here the suggestion seems to be that, unless animated by the action of a practitioner of the ancient art, computer programs cannot generate life and consciousness in machines.

(*To be concluded*)

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: Is it possible to remain ethically sound and morally good without belief in God?

Answer: Before answering this question from the theosophical standpoint it would be useful to consider the rational approach to this question adopted by Julian Baggini, in his book, *Without God, is Everything Permitted?: The Big Questions in Ethics*, which explores relation of ethics with God. Some religionists tend to believe that morality is God-given, and hence, no God, no morals, or that we are good for the sake of God, who might punish us if we are not good. The atheists and Humanists believe that it is possible to be “good without God,” by being good for goodness’ sake. The author draws our attention to “Euthypro dilemma” posed by Socrates in Plato’s dialogue, which a little differently stated implies: Does God command what is good because it is good, or are things only good because God commands them? The conclusion reached is that goodness is a property that things have independently of God’s will, and that in fact, morality is independent of *anyone*, including human beings. Actions are not good because good people choose them, but rather good people choose actions because they are right. Morality is objective and emerges out of the confluence of certain facts, desires, feelings and needs. Thus, normally, pain is unpleasant to all human beings; there is desire to be free from illusions and to be appreciated, and there is a feeling of empathy for the distressed. All these become the basis for our wanting to be just, fair and honest, to show compassion. However, there is no external power or principle that forces us to *choose* the values, so that people can

perform acts that are not morally permissible, and then we might say that without God everything is permitted. The author concludes that without God morality is not lost, for we may indeed be good without God, for goodness' sake.

There are many types of atheists. Many are atheists in the sense of rejecting a personal, anthropomorphic God, who is a law-giver, who can punish or reward people, and can be propitiated by prayers. As one awakens progressively, one has to be able to drop such a concept of God. Then there are those who do not believe in God, personal or otherwise, but they do believe in the intrinsic order and therefore in the Law that governs the affairs of life. In a sense, this is indirect belief in God, as God is Law.

In a sense, it is not possible to live a noble, sensible and useful life disbelieving in both God and Law, because to live such a life, one must have *some* basis, and that basis is provided by law of Karma, or the principle of Brotherhood. These might not be our explicit beliefs. But we may find that we abstain from evil conduct because our better nature rebels against immorality, thus admitting the existence of morality and moral law. Or, it may be because we do not want to accumulate bad Karma for the future. It may even be out of consideration, "how would I feel if I were ill-treated?" and thus unknowingly we follow the principle of brotherhood; and so on. What is the origin of moral law? It is the law of our own being, and ingrained in the very fabric of the universe.

Even science seems to agree that human beings have an innate moral faculty. Harvard evolutionary biologist and cognitive neuroscientist Marc Hauser believes that there are a set of innate, universal, moral principles that every human being is born with, because millions of years of natural selection have moulded a "universal *moral* grammar" within our brains, and we seem to unconsciously draw upon these principles while making moral choices, instead of sitting down to rationalize when faced with moral problems. Theosophy views it a little differently. We are told that the Divine Instructors who endowed infant humanity with the light

of mind, impressed on the imperishable centre of man's consciousness, first notions of arts and sciences, spiritual knowledge and moral ideas, called "innate ideas," which reside in *Buddhi-Manasic* or Divine consciousness. Hence, each one of us receives moral guidance from this divine consciousness in terms of "voice of conscience," irrespective of whether we believe in God or not. But it is up to us to pay heed to it or not. On the other hand, those who believe in God do not necessarily live a morally good life. The general attitude of even those who believe in God is very aptly expressed by Prof. C. S. Lewis, who says, "We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it is there for emergencies, but he hopes that he will never have to use it." We turn to God only when all other doors to happiness are closed.

Question: What is meant by "learning the lessons of life"? Do we learn only from the painful experiences?

Answer: When we say that the purpose of life is to learn and become wiser and better, this learning is not like theoretically learning physics, biology or geography. It is like learning to dance or sing. It is becoming. We do not learn to love by reading books on love, but *by loving*. We learn patience only by *being* patient, in any and every situation of life. Every person or event has something to teach. We may change for the better or for worse, depending upon our response to the situation, and our inner development. An unruly and adamant child can bring about a great transformation in the parents, because in handling such a child parents may learn the lesson in patience. A child born to drunken and poor parents may learn fortitude and sympathy, or may grow up to be a drunkard and a criminal.

The first thing that we are expected to learn, when faced with any adverse situation, is to *accept* it and *face* it instead of complaining and trying to *dodge* it. Through patient acceptance not only do we pay off the Karmic debt, but also have an opportunity to learn to deal with such a situation. For instance, one person interested in classical music might rebel against being transferred to a place where he cannot go to the concerts. Another with similar interest may accept

it as good discipline and look upon it as an opportunity to cultivate some other interests. There are two kinds of learning—conscious and unconscious. A certain amount of introspection shows, at times, that we are in a particular situation because we have to learn sympathy, or calmness or detachment or patience. But often, people change for the better, without being aware of having learnt any “specific” lesson, from the situation.

Pain is nature’s way of showing that we have missed out something vital. We may regard it as our “vulnerable point,” our “Achilles’ heel,” through which nature gives us the opportunity to grow, if we could only learn to handle it. That “vulnerable point,” could be money for some, for others it could be sensuality, or anger, or anxiety, and so on. When the calamities come pertaining to that weakness, we find them troublesome and difficult. But if we handle them well, we are able to burst through the shell, *i.e.*, overcome that one inhibiting factor in our character.

Once we have learnt to deal with a difficulty, the next time it ceases to be a difficulty. *When the lesson is learnt the necessity ceases.* The force of the situation weakens. There is an aspect in us, which drives us to achieve *hundred per cent perfection*. If we are trying to conquer anger or greed or attachment, this inner taskmaster places us again and again in such situations till we have mastered them *completely*. As a person advances on the spiritual path, he encounters more and more complex and trying life situations.

Are there lessons to be learned from pleasurable situations? More often than not, when surrounded by pleasures and comforts of life, we tend to sink into them, becoming slaves to them. For instance, money alone is enough to corrupt the character by leading one to pamper the body and giving over to alcohol, drugs, smoking, gambling, and many other sensual pleasures. However, in the middle of pleasures, a rare few can learn detached-attachment, valuing people, wealth, things, and using the advantages of life to benefit others, and learning to move from the gross to more refined pleasures.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

What is it about alcohol which makes people reach out to it and over-indulge so as to lose any kind of logic or sanity? Liquor played a primary role in two tragedies that occurred recently—one being the case of drunken driving, and the other involved death of 102 people belonging to poor families in a slum area after consuming illicit liquor. Alcohol plays insidious tricks on human brain chemistry. Alcohol has paradoxical effects on the brain, as it works as both depressant and stimulant of the central nervous system. Drinking alcohol is considered a “pick-me-up” experience, as when alcohol is consumed in even small quantities it affects the areas involved in inhibiting behaviours, which can cause an increase in animation, in talkativeness, and greater sociability. Alcohol directly affects brain chemistry by altering levels of neurotransmitters emitted by brain. Neurotransmitters are the chemical messengers that transmit the signals throughout the body, which control thought processes, behaviour and emotion. For instance, alcohol *suppresses* the release of glutamate, an “excitatory” neurotransmitter, slowing down brain activity and energy levels. On the other hand, alcohol *increases* the “inhibitory” neurotransmitter GABA (Gamma-aminobutyric acid), which reduces energy and slows down your thought, speech and movement. Factors like how much and how fast a person drinks, and whether drugs such as marijuana have been taken will determine exactly how much brain activity slows down.

Alcohol also increases the release of dopamine in your brain’s “reward centre,” the areas in the brain which are affected by pleasurable activities. By increasing dopamine levels, alcohol tricks you into thinking that it is actually making you feel better or great. But at the same time it alters other brain chemicals that enhance the feeling of depression. Hence, it is said that “alcohol provokes the desire but steals the show,” even sexually. Alcohol easily crosses the Blood-Brain-Barrier (BBB), formed of tight network of tiny blood vessels which protect the brain from harmful substances, and

directly affects the neurotransmitters and receptors of neurons. Since the arguments against consumption of alcohol seem to outweigh any positive health benefit it might have, drinking in moderation should certainly be encouraged, if abstinence is not desired, writes Dr. Keki Turel, a neurosurgeon at Bombay Hospital. (*Sunday Mumbai Mirror*, June 28, 2015)

Alcohol in all its forms has a direct, marked and very deleterious influence on psychic condition of a person. When taken in excess, it makes one lose self-control and also affects his judgment. For instance, in an experiment, a truck driver was asked to pass the truck between the two poles that were kept wide apart. Then the driver was made to drink alcohol and the poles were progressively brought closer. It was found that the more he was drunk, the more confident he was about his ability to drive the truck between the poles that were ultimately brought adjacent to each other.

It has been shown that alcohol has strong impact on “reaction time.” For instance, if a person is driving along a road with his foot on the brake, and if he suddenly sees a child dashing in front of his car, it will be one-fifth second before he puts on his brakes after he has seen the child. Whereas if he has taken even a small dose of alcohol, it will take him appreciable time before he begins to stop his car.

Alcohol is prejudicial to the development of “Third eye,” or intuitive faculty. Pineal gland is connected with spiritual clairvoyance, while pituitary body is connected with pure psychic visions. Drunkenness produces disorderly molecular motion in pituitary body and sometimes can paralyze it, preventing the development of intuitive faculty, giving rise to hallucinations.

Etherealizing of physical body is conducive to spiritual progress. In the list of physical desires to be eschewed, the first place is given to “alcohol in all forms.” It is stated that while alcohol supplies no nourishment, it induces rush of life, producing stress. This stress can be sustained only by very dull, gross and dense elements. By the law of supply and demand, the body of the drunken person

seems to attract these gross particles from the surrounding universe, thus making the physical body coarse and dense instead of ethereal. A drunkard is in proximity of the lowest and kamic astral plane that throws up before him various tempting images leading him to more drunkenness and baseness. They are images of lust and vice tempting the person to commit crimes.

The phenomenon of *déjà vu* is a sudden and intensely convincing feeling that you have been somewhere before, or that it has happened before. Many people feel that it is because they dreamt the scene which is now coming true. However, that may not be the case as there are no documented cases of people, in this state, predicting what is going to happen next. And many attempts to prove precognitive dreams have failed. According to one theory *déjà vu* happens when one part of the brain senses something fractionally before another part, and thus wrongly sets off the feeling of familiarity. Another theory attributes *déjà vu* experience to the excessive or unusual temporal lobe activity, as temporal lobes handle many memory functions and are responsible for the sense of familiarity. Temporal lobe epileptics often report *déjà vu*. “People with highly variable temporal lobe activity tend to be creative, believe in the paranormal and have lucid dreams, spiritual and out-of-body experiences as well as *déjà vu*,” writes Susan Blackmore, a visiting professor at the University of Plymouth, and an expert in psychology and evolution. (*BBC Knowledge*, August 2015)

Déjà vu (French for “already seen”) is an uncanny feeling of having experienced something before. Alan Brown, psychologist and author of the book, *The Déjà Vu Experience*, writes, “It’s a real puzzle. We don’t know what causes it, what triggers it, who has it and who doesn’t, and why. We don’t even understand why it dissipates with age. But the more we can understand about how this illusion occurs, the more we’ll understand our normal memory processes.”

H.P.B. describes memory as “the most unreliable thing in us.” Memory “is a recording machine, a register which very easily gets out of order.” Further:

Memory—the despair of the materialist, the enigma of the psychologist, the sphinx of science—is to the student of old philosophies merely a name to express that power which man unconsciously exerts...to look with inner sight into the astral light, and there behold the images of past sensations and incidents. (*Isis*, I, 178-79)

“Each plane has its own tablet of memory and produces the appropriate effects on any other plane—being accessible, in fact, but not perceived on account of other predominating perceptions,” writes Mr. Crosbie (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 180). During sleep, the astral body (soul) becomes free and travels round visible and invisible worlds. Pictures and images seen during astral travel are impressed on the brain, but we remember nothing upon waking up. However, “the impressions of scenes and landscapes which the astral body saw in its peregrinations are still there, though lying latent under the pressure of matter. They may be awakened at any moment, and then during such flashes of man’s inner memory, there is an instantaneous interchange of energies between the visible and the invisible universes. Between the “micrographs” of the cerebral ganglia and the photo-scenographic galleries of the astral light, a current is established. And a man who knows that he has never visited in body, nor seen the landscape and person that he recognizes, may well assert that still he has seen and knows them, for the acquaintance was formed while travelling in ‘spirit.’” (*Isis*, I, 180)

Mr. Judge suggests that we carry pictures and images in our aura—which include pre-natal impressions—which are not always developed into memory, but await appropriate conditions. Thus, when a child is born it carries with it pictures and impressions derived from the mother. It would be very difficult to know at what point in time the image was projected before one’s mind, as thousands of impressions are made every year. That they are not *developed into*

memory does not prove their non-existence. (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 171)

They may have the latest phones, trendiest clothes, new relationships, brand new cars, and yet the young generation of today cannot stop thinking about the next new thing. A research has found that in 60 per cent of the cases the average mind is thinking about the newly-announced ipad, even when the person may be possessing the latest model. Vishal Gondal, CEO, GOQii, a fitness technology venture, says that this impatience to possess the “new” is common to people of every age. “To possess the next new thing, to know about the next new idea, to be a part of the Next New Craze is the new ‘cool.’... We are obsessed, driven by our impatience, and have a constant fear of missing out on the Next New Thing,” says Gondal. In the present-day world things change quickly, as compared to earlier times, when change happened slowly, giving us time to think and ponder about the One Big Change. For instance, when computers replaced typewriters and notebooks, we had enough time to adapt ourselves to these things. In fact, these days, change takes place on an everyday basis. From the huge handsets, mobile phones have become more sophisticated with newer facilities. The central philosophy has shifted from “enough” to “insatiable.” This shift is explained by Vineet Bajpai, Group CEO, TBWA India, who remarks that most young men and women today belonged to middle-class families, who witnessed financial struggle of their parents, and for them acquiring the next new thing is not based on the utility of the product or its associated status value, but it is more an expression of freedom from the shackles of middle-class legacy.

Technology expert Rajiv Makhani is of the opinion that this craze for the new is fuelled by technology. Christopher Booker, English journalist and author, has coined the term *Neophilia* to describe this phenomenon and he wrote a book about people who are perpetual novelty-seekers, and calls them neophiliacs. “There is an aggressive lust for newer things even in relationships. Someone better can

always come along, the next date is a click away. Our reactions to gadgets is being mimicked when it comes to our relationship with human beings,” writes Akhila Shivdas, a social researcher.

The high of possessing the latest thing fades away soon, as people start seeking the next novelty in no time. For a manufacturer or an advertiser it may be a dream to live in a neophiliac’s world, but for a consumer it can be a source of misery, writes Nona Walia. (*Times Life, Sunday Times of India*, July 5, 2015)

Our world and civilization are characterized by an insatiable desire for the “new.” Very quickly things get out-dated and out-moded. We are wearied of and lose interest in gadgets, products, amusements, and even people! Never have we witnessed so many varieties in eatables, perfumes, clothes, etc., as in the recent past. Have we become more innovative or are we manufacturing “new” brands only to cater to the senses—which crave for different sensations? “Are these things really better than the things I already have? Or am I just trained to be dissatisfied with what I have now?” questions Chuck Palahnuik, an American author, in his novel *Lullaby*. But it is also true that with fast changing technologies the old becomes out-dated far too soon and there is no choice but to discard the old.

To see a new sight, to hear a new speaker, to meet a new person or visit a new place are described as “new” experiences. The markets are flooded with new books every week and people read them to kill time or enjoy the sensation. The art of reading leisurely so that the reader feels the joy and uplift of that experience is little known. Just as we “skim through” books, we also go through the different incidents of life, daily and hourly, without assimilating the experience and learning its lessons. We are in the transition period when *Kama* or desire principle is predominant. We witness too much preoccupation with the development of personality and acquiring of name, fame, position and power. In all the modes of living, gratification of senses is esteemed the highest good.