

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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DUTY—THE ROYAL TALISMAN

IN HINDU Philosophy *Dharma* (duty), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (desire) and *Moksha* (liberation) are considered to be the four *purusharthas*, i.e., the aim or goal of human existence. Each of the four *purusharthas* was subjected to a process of examination and elaboration which produced several key works in the history of Indian philosophy, including the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana (treating *kama*, particularly as “sexual gratification”), the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (treating *artha* as “material pursuits”), the *Dharmashastras* of various authors, most notably Manu (treating *dharma* as “religious, social and personal ethics”), all of which are principally concerned with the attainment of *moksha*. The purpose of human life is to follow *dharma* or law, or to fulfil one’s *dharma* or duty as a human being, and achieve liberation by leading a balanced life in which both human passions and wealth have their legitimate place.

Often *moksha* or liberation is referred to as the *parama-purusartha* or “chief end of human life.” The erroneous understanding has been that the chief aim of human life could be attained by giving up attachment to worldly life, i.e., by retiring to a jungle or going to a monastery, forsaking one’s duties towards household, society and nation. The fact is that we cannot get liberation by running away from the world and mankind or by mortification of the body, but by living in the world and discharging our duties towards family, nation and the whole of humanity. In

India, especially, we find that a good religious man is afraid to take or give personal help to anyone. It is construed as getting involved and creating a tie with that person, and that in turn means having to be born again, whereas the goal of life is freedom from the chain of births and deaths. To reach *Moksha* or liberation is also to attain self-realization, and self-realization (or self-knowledge) is the child of loving deeds.

“To live to benefit mankind is the first step. To practice the six glorious virtues is the second,” says the *Voice of the Silence*. The person, who does not perform his “duty” or appointed work in life, lives in vain. We might say that the performance of one’s duty is an integral part of spiritual development. But what is duty? H.P.B. defines it as, “Duty is that which is *due* to Humanity, to our fellow-men, neighbours, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves.” The area of our duty is not restricted to our family or society but embraces the whole of humanity. When we fulfil our duties towards the family, society or nation we are, in a sense, only repaying our debt towards them, which we might have engendered in this life or in some past life. Mr. Judge says that performance of one’s duty is higher yoga than chanting of mantras or yoga practices. If you are unable to do anything else, but only perform your duty, then even that will take you to the final goal.

The *Gita* says that action is better than inaction, and in fact, it is not possible to remain inactive even for a moment. We are continually acting, if not on the physical, then on the mental plane. To think, “now onwards I will not act,” is in itself an action on the mental plane. We live the life full of activity. For instance, we eat, drink, breath, sleep, think, and during all these activities we are not without action. Hence, when Arjuna refused to fight, Shri Krishna told him that “If indulging in self-confidence, thou sayest, ‘I will not fight,’ such a determination will prove itself in vain, for the principles of thy nature will impel thee to engage.” Shri Krishna shows that the body with its tendencies is the manifestation of what

the inner man is. The inner man is the result of thoughts and actions of past incarnations. Thus, each person is naturally, by his bodily tendencies, compelled to do the acts of this or that particular calling. We are born in the environment and the family where we could have the needed experience. Arjuna, being a warrior, is compelled to fight, whether he will or not. So also, each one of us is compelled to act, by the force of our past tendencies.

Next we must consider what kind of actions one must perform and *how* these must be performed. Mr. Judge’s advice is that we must not madly rush out “to do” something. Do what you find to do. Sometimes we may be unable to carry out anything, but if we ardently desire do something, our desire will strike the chord in some other hearts and we will find that the work we longed to do has got done. Shri B. P. Wadia writes that the work that is necessary to be done must be regarded as our duty. What is not necessary to be done is not our duty. “The law of necessity” helps us determine what our duty is.

In the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita* we are told about *Karma*, *Vi-karma* and *A-karma*. *A-karma* is inaction or abandonment of action. *Vi-karma* are the bad actions or destructive activities that are condemned and forbidden in the scriptures and by the *Shashtras*. The constructive activities or karma are of three kinds. *viz.*, *Nitya*, *Naimittika* and *Kamyā* karma. *Kamyā* karma are the actions performed with the expectation of reward. They are desire-prompted activities. *Naimittika* karma include special duties performed on special occasions, such as, our duty to help the accident victim, if we happen to be on the scene of accident. *Nitya* karma implies daily duties. Mr. Judge says, “It is our duty to help all, and we must begin with those nearest to us, for to run abroad to souls we might possibly help, we again forsake our present duty.” The *Gita* says that over and above the performance of one’s duties one should never abandon deeds of *dana* (charity), *tapas* (mortification) and *yajna* (sacrifice). Just like we would not stop searching till we have found the lost object; we would never abandon the boat in the middle of the river

before reaching the other shore, so also, acts of charity, mortification and sacrifice must not be abandoned till the final aim of self-realization has been attained.

The word “duty” is the English rendering of the Sanskrit word *dharma*. *Svadharmā* (one’s own duty) is fulfilling *svabhava* (one’s inner nature). By being in the place which matches our inner longings and skills we can give our best contribution to the world. Shri Krishna says in the *Gita* that humanity was divided into four classes or divisions depending upon the inner disposition or temperament. Thus, a man of “Kshtriya” or warrior temperament can serve the society or nation best by joining the police force or army, and a person with good business acumen can give his best contribution by being a businessman. For the healthy functioning of the society the work of a doctor, lawyer, professor or trader is equally important, as they are complementary and hence must be co-operative and not competitive units in the whole. Mr. Judge advises, “It is one’s duty to try to find one’s own duty and not to get into the duty of another.... We should detach our *minds* (as well as our tongues) from the duties and acts of others whenever those are outside of our own.”

It is said that we meet our karma in our daily duties. Life is a school. We are here to learn the lessons of life. We are meant to learn some lessons while we perform our duties. Often, work at office or home feels like drudgery. Who wants to do the same thing, day in and day out? Who wants to do work, where one is unable to see immediate results? The small plain duties of life hourly call upon us to acquire skill in action as well as concentration of mind. By doing what we have to do under karma we may acquire good discipline. No matter what work is entrusted to us, interesting or boring, we must give our best. Some of us like to read books, work in the office, interact with people. Some others may like to cook, take care of family and perform household chores. We find that a career woman may dislike being confined to the house and perform household duties. The work we dislike doing is the work which

affords us the opportunity to remove the “personal element,” of aversion and attachment. By doing the work we dislike, cheerfully and carefully, we would be able to overcome the personal element. The irksome duties come to us under karma. When we perform them without complaining or grumbling, we get an opportunity to overcome some of the weaknesses in our nature.

Instead of trying to escape from our duties and responsibilities we must try to take pleasure in doing what is our duty, and especially in the *little* duties of life, writes Mr. Judge. By learning to perform our little duties joyfully, we can acquire cheerful disposition. Some duties are pleasant. Generally, looking after her child is a pleasant duty for a mother, though tiring at times. It is only by careful performance of small plain duties that we are fitted for greater duties. No duty is insignificant, and at times we are unable to see instantly the effect of our efforts. Hence a Master of Wisdom writes, “Ah! if your eyes were opened, you might see such a vista of potential blessings to *yourselves* and mankind lying in the germ of the present hour’s effort, as would fire with joy and zeal your souls!”

There is a very telling tale, which George Eliot has versified, of Stradivarius, the maker of violins. She says:

My work is mine,
And, heresy or not, if my hand slacked
I should rob God—since He is fullest good—
Leaving a blank instead of violins.
I say, not God Himself can make man’s best
Without best men to help Him. I am one best
Here in Cremona, using sunlight well
To fashion finest maple till it serves
More cunningly than throats for harmony.
‘Tis rare delight: I would not change my skill
To be the Emperor with bungling hands
And lose my work, which comes as natural
As self at waking.

“God could not make Antonio Stradivarius’ violins without

Antonio.”

Leo Tolstoy, in his short piece of writing called “Three Questions,” expresses deep philosophy of karma. What is the most important moment? The present moment is the most important moment. What is the most important work? He says that the work in your hand at a given moment is the most important work. Who is the most important person? The one in front of us is the most important person. He seems to suggest that we must learn to live in the *present*. Let us learn to make good use of every moment. In the office or in the society we should serve all human beings equally well, knowing that no person is insignificant. A Master of Wisdom writes:

Does it seem to you a small thing that the past year has been spent only in your “family duties”? Nay, but what better cause for reward, what better discipline, than the daily and hourly performance of duty? Believe me my “pupil,” the man or woman who is placed by Karma in the midst of small plain duties and sacrifices and loving-kindnesses, will through these faithfully fulfilled rise to the larger measure of Duty, Sacrifice and Charity to all Humanity.

When we are able to fulfil our duties and responsibilities with detached concern, we are not bound by these actions. It is the duty of parents to provide basic necessities of life and bring up their children with right views and high purpose. When this is done with perfect detachment without any future expectations from the children, such duties produce no karmic bondage. Actions that are *nishkamya*, without attachment to the results, self-sacrificing, *i.e.*, performed for the good of others, are compared in the *Gita* with cow *Kamdhenu*, the wish-fulfilling cow. Such pure actions may well be compared to a talisman, which keeps at bay evil influences and attracts good influences. Talisman repels evil, so also the antidote to loneliness, depression or negativity is in the cheerful performance of duty.

THOUGHTS ON THE NEW YEAR

AS THE TIME of year fast approaches when we consider the coming year, reflecting how we will act within it, and pondering over the past year, we turn to H. P. Blavatsky for some thoughts on this time in the cycle. She writes:

To mankind there comes a new and fresh vigour to all his channels of life from within outwards, gradually strengthening as the Sun moves nearer. The ancients, being aware of this fact, and realizing that Life is One through all its manifestations, took advantage of the birth of the year to reaffirm their highest aspirations, thus consciously seizing the opportune time.

Let no one imagine that it is a mere fancy, the attaching of importance to the birth of the year. The earth passes through its definite phases and man with it; and as a day can be coloured, so can a year. The astral life of the earth is young and strong between Christmas and Easter. Those who form their wishes now will have added strength to fulfill them consistently.

From the ancient times and among all peoples and all belief systems, the beginning of the year was marked as an occasion with deep meaning. The beginning of the year always had relation to the return of the Sun from its farthest course; a return which brings with it the re-vivifying influences to all the kingdoms of Nature.

The influences touch the inner life of all forms and give a renewed impetus to expansion and growth, so we see the reasons for this natural inclination lying hidden in the depths of our own being. We have a *natural perception* of occult law in our observance of this particular period of the year.

When the Sun’s rays become warmer and stronger, all the other forces behind the Sun itself, and behind ourselves, become stronger within us. In the rising wave of spiritual and psychic renewal, all that we desire to do has a greater impulsion than at some other time

of the year.

The proper resolve to make is a positive one, always phrasing it as “I will do this,” as in this manner we make a direct affirmation of Will. We have to call upon the will of man, for that will is not restrained by any form of obstacle whatever. For instance, it is not the body which holds us here but the desire to live, for always behind Will stands Desire.

There is also a mental phase of the will which can be cultivated by practice: fixed attention or concentration in certain directions capable of effecting desired results. *But the real and true Will is known as the Spiritual Will, which “flies like light and cuts all obstacles like a sharp sword.”* It is that Will, proceeding from the highest spiritual part of our natures, which is the basis for evolution from within outwards.

All the powers that exist or can exist are latent, however ill-expressed, in the spiritual nature. We were once conscious of our spiritual nature, but as we came down through the planes of expression to this plane of matter, we acquired a growth in intellectuality at the expense of spiritual perception.

To realize our own true natures, we must begin at the highest point of our nature, by assuming that It is, and by holding to the power of that assumption. We begin to see light, to feel warmth, by the very power of that affirmation of the spiritual nature. This time of year helps us to reconnect with those hidden ideas, hidden only until we decide to lift the veil and remember.

We must learn to recognize an evolution under law—a law both true and merciful—which operates everywhere. Under the law of cycles there is a periodical return of impressions, and hence the tendency each year to make New Year’s resolutions. We could by an understanding and using of this law of recurrence bring into effect those resolutions. Let us, then, be mindful of the cycles and seasons; let us remember who and what we truly are within; and let us act in a way, always, which honours those truths.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT LITTLE THINGS

“I DO wish you would try to be more careful, dear, even in doing little things. Sometimes, especially in these times we live in, very little causes lead to very big effects!” Mrs. Bowen was speaking to her 10-year-old son, but his small sister Edna, catching her repetition of the word “little,” entered the conversation importantly with one of her nursery rhymes:

“Little drops of water, little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land.”

“Very true, Edna! And now dear, you take your dolly into the sitting-room and play there. Your brother and I are talking now.” “I am thinking Alan,” she continued, “about that big sum you brought for your homework in arithmetic yesterday. Your father and I both added the columns after you had got the total and found no mistakes. How could your answer have been wrong?”

Alan shrugged his shoulders. “Just because I’d put *one* down wrong when I copied it. Was it fair to mark it zero?”

“Why not dear? A total can’t be partly right; it is either right or wrong.”

“But I had added up right, what I’d put down! I think I should have got some marks for that!”

“Suppose you start off in the wrong direction to go to school. You may walk and walk in the direction that you choose but does it bring you any nearer the school?”

“N—o, it might even take me farther away,” he admitted.

“Right! Well, now be glad that this time you got ‘quick Karma’ for your carelessness. It will lower your mark for the month and we’ll all be sorry, but most of the unhappy result came right home to you. If it has taught you to put your mind on whatever you are doing, son, it will have been well worth the disappointment that you felt. Go out and play now, Alan! Just come in time to do your homework, but don’t waste any more energy in feeling sorry. Just

say to yourself often, ‘I must be careful! I must put my mind on what I have to do! If you don’t, Son, you may expect another lesson sooner or later, and perhaps a harder one, that would hurt you and other people more and make you even sorrier. It is only when lesson has been learned that the need for it stops. And we can be absolutely sure that Karma will bring us the reaction for everything we do.’

Alan did try harder for a while to pay attention, but one morning, three or four weeks later, just as he was leaving for school, his elder sister entrusted him with a letter to post on his way. “Be careful with it, Al!” she cautioned, and he said he would.

Before he reached the mailbox, however, he met his good friend Dick Stone and the two boys went along chattering gaily, and never thought did Alan give to the letter that he was to post. It stayed in the back of his geography book where he had put it for safe keeping. It fell out of the book, a week or ten days later, as he reached home, and entered the room where his sister was sitting and reading. She looked up when he came in and saw the letter fall. Her writing on it and the uncanceled stamp told their own story. “O Alan!” she exclaimed, “how can I ever trust you?” She looked very unhappy and then began to cry. Alan was shocked, too, to see the letter fall from his book, but more by seeing his almost grown-up sister’s tears.

“Alice, please don’t cry!” he pleaded. I am awfully sorry I forgot. I will run right out and mail it now! And he put out his hand to take it. “It is too late!” she wailed. “The contest is closed, and I thought that I had a good chance to win it. If they had given me the prize I was going to get Mother a new dress for her birthday. Oh dear! Oh dear!” she wailed, and wrung her hands. Alan was crying too when the door opened and Edna ran in ahead of her mother, to stare open-mouthed at them and then to begin crying in sympathy.

Mrs. Bowen had gone directly to the kitchen to lay down her purchases and, coming back now, exclaimed, “Whatever is the matter? What has happened, Alice?”

Alice stopped sobbing with an effort, but, loyal sister that she was, she hesitated.

Alan bravely but with swimming eyes told his mother the mischief he had made again by heedlessness.

“How did it happen, Mother?” Alan asked, looking woebegone. “I forgot all about the letter to mail. And Alice cried so, Mother! She was awfully disappointed; she wanted to get a prize to get a present for you and now it is too late.”

“Do you see, Alan, why this lesson is a harder one than the wrong sum was?”

“Yes, I do, Mother, because it hurts Alice and you too.” A sob choked him for a moment.

“I am not going to punish you, Alan. I know that you feel very sorry. But that doesn’t make it all right.”

“I think that I would feel a little better if you did punish me!”

“No, Karma is punishing you, son. But, do, do learn the lesson and try to put your mind on every duty! Did you ever hear the story of the horseshoe nail?”

Alan shook his head, and his mother said, “I will tell it just as I remember it, and you listen carefully so you can tell it back to me. But the last part I want you to memorize and repeat to me every day for a week. That ought to help you to remember it always.” And she began:

“Once upon a time, there was a war between two little countries. And the King of one country was trying take away the kingdom of the other King. This other King wanted to send an important message to his General, who had left for the border of the country with the army, some such order as that he should fall back until the other soldiers that the King was sending could have time to reach him. He gave the message to a faithful subject and told him to take a swift horse and give the message to the General just as soon as he possibly could.

“The rider first took his horse to a blacksmith’s shop to be sure that it was properly shod for a long gallop. The blacksmith had left his apprentice to see to the shop while he went to lunch. The apprentice took off one worn horseshoe and put a new one. There

was another horseshoe that needed another nail to be quite tight, but there wasn't another nail there, and the apprentice was too lazy to go up to the loft to get one. He said to himself, "Those other nails might hold it. Who is going to take the trouble to go get another nail!"

"The rider also was in such a hurry that he didn't take time to see that the shoes were properly nailed on, so there were two careless people. He started off and got far away from the city when he found that the horse was limping and the shoe that wasn't properly nailed had fallen off. There was no blacksmith for many miles. The rider tried to go on foot, and after travelling a long distance, fell down thirsty and exhausted. So the General never received the message and he started the battle without the soldiers who were coming. The other side won the battle and the army of the other country came to the capital and captured the King. You must memorize the following, so listen carefully:

"A little neglect may breed great mischief: for want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe, the horse was lost; for want of a horse, the rider was lost; for want of a rider, the message was lost; for want of a message, the battle was lost; for want of a battle, the kingdom was lost; and all for a want of a horseshoe nail!"

We must never forget the importance of small things, whether we are trying to build a good character or overcome irritability. The accomplishment of great things consists in doing little things well. Mr. Judge writes, "You can solidify your character by attending to small things, by attacking small faults, and on every small occasion, one by one. This will arouse the inner attitude of attention and caution. The small faults and small occasions being conquered, the character grows strong." To another student he advised to learn to control small irritations, and then the bigger ones will not have the occasion to arise.

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA THE PATH—II

2. *This is the Path. No other leads to the pure vision. Enter ye this Path. So shall ye confound Mara. (274)*

3. *Treading this Path you will end your suffering. It was shown by me as soon as I learnt how the thorns in the flesh are to be removed. (275)*

4. *You yourself must strive; Buddhas are but sign-posts. Those who enter the Path and discipline themselves are released from the bondage of Mara. (276)*

AS CHILDREN, we relied upon wisdom of our parents, teachers and our elders. We had innate faith that they would never mislead or misguide us. To the Buddha, the whole mankind is like a child, in need of guidance, as to the path they should follow in order to become free from suffering. He taught the Noble Eightfold Path, and assured the suffering humanity that by following that Path, they will be able to free themselves from suffering. By following that path, one can confound *Mara*, the great tempter who takes the man away from the right path.

However, a common mistake made by many seekers is to go out in search of truth, and go on seeking it, without getting committed to any particular system. They would go on studying various philosophies and religious teachings, ever on move, from one system to another, without giving themselves to any of them. They forget that one does not become spiritual simply by study of books or by intellectual analysis of teachings. Experiential truths cannot be conveyed by another person merely through description. One cannot truly know the taste of mango by its description. One needs to taste the mango oneself. So also, one can know the truth by walking the path shown by the Enlightened One. The Buddha, who was himself a seeker at one time and who had tried to walk different paths shown by others, speaks from his personal experience. He tells the seeker that the Path suggested by him will lead him to Enlightenment and

help him to overcome *Mara*—the distracting temptations that confound our judgement. He assures him that by treading this Path, he will be able to end all his suffering.

But lest we make the mistake of thinking that the Buddha, by his spiritual knowledge and power will take away all our suffering and make us wise, he tells us that he can only point out the path; the walking has to be done by the individual himself. He makes no false promises to lure people as is done by the pseudo prophets and false teachers. Many people in their foolish piety feel that a spiritually advanced person can do anything. They feel that if they surrender themselves to their god-man, he will somehow take away their suffering and make them wise. This is false faith or blind faith. Therefore, the Buddha had to say: “Evil is done by self alone, by self alone is one defiled. By self alone is evil left undone, by self alone is one purified. Purity and impurity belongs to oneself. No one can purify another.” The Third Fundamental teaching of Theosophy tells us that in the lower kingdoms, such as, mineral kingdom, vegetable kingdom and animal kingdom, evolution is by natural impulse, an unfolding from within without, guided by divine intelligences. But once the soul reaches the human stage of development, further evolution is by “self-induced and self-devised efforts, checked by its Karma...The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.” Thus, the guru can help the disciple to remove his darkness of ignorance and show the Path of spiritual progress, but it is up to the disciple to bring about gradual change in his life and make effort to live his life in accordance with the Path shown by the teacher.

Those who enter the Path and discipline themselves are released from the bondage of *Mara*. In Buddhism, *Mara* is considered to be personified temptation. We are tempted by things and beings; by glamour, fame, name, wealth, and so on. We get attached to these things and get entangled. The disciple has to learn to practise

detachment or *vairagya*. In the *Gita*, equal mindedness is called Yoga.

5. “*Impermanent are all conditioned beings.*” *He who knows this ceases to be in the thrall of grief. This is the Path of Purity.* (277)

6. “*Full of pain are all conditioned beings.*” *He who knows this ceases to be in the thrall of grief. This is the Path of Purity.* (278)

7. “*Unsubstantial are all conditioned beings.*” *He who knows this ceases to be in the thrall of grief. This is the Path of Purity.* (279)

The above verses contain one of the most important teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha said: “*Sabbe sankhara anicca,*” “*Sabbe sankhara dukkha,*” and “*Sabbe dhamma anatta.*” “*Sabbe sankhara anicca,*” is translated as: Impermanent are all conditioned beings. Here, *Sankhara* means “conditioned things.” *Sankhara* means that which has been set up, put together, formed or compounded or created and therefore, it is that which has a beginning or birth. Shri Krishna says: “Death is certain to all things that are born and rebirth to all mortals.” Therefore, that which is born must one day die. That which has a beginning must also have an end. Similarly, anything that has been put together must one day fall apart into its constituents. Hence, all composite things are impermanent. *Sankhara* refers to any compound form in the universe whether a tree, a cloud, a human being, a thought or a molecule. All these things are *sankharas*. The Buddha taught that all such things are impermanent, arising and passing away, and are subject to change.

Here, *Sankhara* does not refer to second “link” in the chain of Causes (twelve Nidanas) that lead to rebirth. Here it simply means “Compounds” or “formations” which are impermanent because whatever has been put together must one day be taken apart; the principle of creation is identical with the principle of destruction; we begin to die the moment we are born. That alone is eternal which is un compounded; only unborn can never die. Nirvana alone is said

to be Deathless because it is the Unconditional. Every state and form of phenomenal existence, from the short-lived insects to the longest-lived of the gods—whose lifetimes are reckoned not by thousands but by millions of years, and who behold unmoved the wreck of universes and the crash of worlds—is perishable, and must one day end. Nirvana alone endures. When the penetrating and concentrated mind of the disciple truly understands the transitory nature of all the phenomena, he becomes free from attachment and desire for any created thing. Turning his back upon the world, he enters the stream that leads to Nirvana, writes Sangharakshita

Next, the Buddha says: “*Sabbe sankhara dukkha*,” which means full of pain are all conditioned beings. It does not mean that there are no pleasant experiences in the world. But it means that at the bottom of even pleasant experiences, there is pain. There is concealed suffering. Something may be a source of pleasure but it may be tied up with anxiety, as we are afraid of losing it. It could be a person, a thing, or position or power. It is because being composite, all things and beings, however dear or precious, must sooner or later disintegrate and perish, causing pain and suffering due to their loss. But the root cause of our pain is our desire and attachment. Happiness comes only when we are not attached to *anything*. And that happiness is eternal.

Finally, the Buddha proclaims: “*Sabbe dhamma anatta* (in Sanskrit : *anatman*),” which means unsubstantial are all conditioned beings. This is because things have no permanent identity or unchanging selfhood. Firstly, because each one of them is merely the sum of its components, apart from which it is merely a name, and secondly because it is not self-originated but produced by coming together of exterior causal factors. When the doctrine of *anatta* is considered under its first aspect, compounds are impermanent because they are unsubstantial; under its second, unsubstantial because they are impermanent.

In Indian thought, the idea of selfhood is closely connected with the idea of mastery or ownership. That over which we cannot exercise

complete control does not pertain to our self. The body is not the self because it is not fully subject to the will and whether we like it or not, eventually it falls sick, grows old and dies. Buddhism takes this idea further to its logical conclusion. It asserts that not only the material processes of the body, but also the mental processes which make up the so-called “mind” do not belong to us, are not our own, because they arise in dependence on conditions over which we have, with few exceptions, no control whatever. None of the phenomena of personality can be regarded as the “Self” because none of them “belong” to us, and apart from these phenomena personality does not exist.

Only a foolish person will think that anything belongs to him. Because things are impermanent they can be taken away from us; what can be taken away from us is not our own; and what is not our own cannot be regarded as our self. Thus is the unsubstantiality of phenomena deduced from their impermanence. Man is only a conventional name for a collection of different constituents, the material body, the immaterial mind and the formless consciousness; just as a chariot is a collection of wheels, axles, shafts etc. The existence of man depends on this collection and it dissolves when the collection breaks up. Man is analyzable into a collection of five groups, namely, (1) form, body or material qualities (*rupa*), (2) sensation (*vedana*), (3) abstract ideas (*sanna*) (4) tendencies of mind (*samkhara*), and (5) consciousness itself (*viñjana*), which is simply the collective term for all our evanescent mental states.

The first step in the Noble Eightfold path is “Perfect Vision,” which represents the phase of initial spiritual insight and experience. Spiritual insight involves the understanding of the true nature of conditioned existence as discussed above. However, to achieve any concrete results, this must be followed by “Perfect Emotion,” *i.e.*, one needs to transform one’s emotional nature in accordance with the initial insight and understanding.

(To be concluded)

HOW AWARE ARE WE?

II

OUR SEARCH-LIGHT of awareness must be directed towards two main targets—the outward objects and the inner stages. On the outward planes we may study people and notice things we encounter. An interesting awareness technique in a Buddhist school is to sit down and watch one's in-breathing and out-breathing, including the pause in-between. Here, a certain concentration is required to maintain breath-awareness for some specific time. As to the awareness of people, there is such a thing as noticing the "body language." A person's posture and facial mien sometimes reveal his inner state and character. In the Japanese culture people cultivate a faculty of noticing some form of beauty, a "signature," or a meaning in natural objects like stones and flints, in a piece of wood, the shape and structure of a leaf, etc. But awareness of our inner states is much more useful. For instance, we could discover our own inner cause of partial failures and weakened resolves.

A true seeker of wisdom may resolve to pursue the higher life of the soul, but the lower personal nature comes to the surface to claim attention and make demands. His safety lies in keeping his consciousness in touch with the reality of the Inner life, and to remember his resolve. For any slackness in the remembrance of the higher purposes of existence can weaken his will and confuse his judgement during the tests and trials that come to every seeker.

Lord Buddha's teachings on "vigilance" say that wakefulness is not merely being on one's guard against the lower ebullitions, but having resolved to undertake *yog-sadhana*, this discipline demands sincerity and persistence in the same. A constantly vigilant person experiences the inner joy of freedom from the non-essentials, and from the attachment to the personal nature. The Buddha says that the one who has recognized the danger of heedlessness "advances like a fire consuming fetters, small or large."

In his book, *Survey of Buddhism*, Bhikshu Sangharakshita states:

"The higher evolution of man takes place in and through awareness. It follows therefore that the progress or higher evolution is at the same time a progress of Awareness." It also means that there is the development of an awakened consciousness in depth and also in all-embracing breadth. If we survey the process of evolution, we find that the present state of "self" awareness in man has been graduated from that of lower forms of life in nature. Along with the physical evolution, the consciousness in creatures also progressed, from the most rudimentary in the mineral to that of vegetable, animal and higher up in human kingdom. Man alone is endowed with the faculty of apperception, *i.e.*, the ability of observing the state and phenomena of his own consciousness. And now Man, the self-conscious Thinker, is further evolving towards the higher form of awareness in order to reach what is called "perfect awareness" (*samyak smriti*), the highest goal for the present race.

In the Oriental Psychology a distinction is made between the personal self-awareness, which changes with the self image and conditions, and the unchanging sense of "I-am-I" which remains from birth through all the changes of the personal identity till the death and beyond! Self-consciousness is the privilege of only the human beings. Since we are involved all the time in the personal affairs, we lose touch with the root of our being, the silent permanent Individuality or Ego. Thus, the important lesson to be learnt from the practice of awareness is to note that the familiar "self" is habitually engaged in its personal doings and in the surface mind, while the real Ego remains behind as the "Witnessing Consciousness," better recognized as the PRESENCE.

One of the chief devotional exercises (through meditation) consists of discriminating between the two selves—the real and the unreal, the permanent and the transitory—and acting on the basis of the Real Man in us, our secret friend, philosopher and guide. Ancients call it *Avidya* or spiritual ignorance, if we do not see the wisdom of distinguishing between these two tendencies in us. It is the awareness practice which helps us to see the *roles* of the dual consciousness in

our life's purpose. This becomes the beginning of true knowledge or wisdom spoken of in all sacred scriptures.

In the Buddhist tradition this technique is called to "become aware of awareness," and at its perfection it is called *samyak smriti*, perfect remembrance (of one's spiritual base). According to the Oriental Psychology there are the planes of consciousness that can be scaled to reach the highest. Patanjali explains that mind or "the thinking principle" is subject to constant modifications by reason of its being diffused over a multiplicity of subjects. Mind is modified by every subject or object that comes before it; it is as if it were transformed into that subject or object. When one does not practice concentration, the soul which uses the mind as an instrument, and views the objects through the mind, is as if it were altered into that form. However at the time of *perfect concentration*, the soul abides in the state of a spectator without a spectacle. The soul is brought to a state of being wholly devoid of taint or impression by any object or subject. To discover this unknown phase of consciousness, the mind must be silenced and made placid. The true seeker seeks to silence his mind by means of awareness technique and through intense devotion.

To be alive is to be aware, and *vice versa*. So, what does it mean to take awareness as a discipline? When cultivated by constant practice, it can put us in the silent stance of being a deliberate and detached observer of "self" from time to time, while carrying on outer activities. For instance, one has to become aware of the mental and emotional tendencies and his familiar mental grooves, so as to be able to control and direct them into the right channel. This can also be an aid in the exercise of "self-examination," during which one recalls the impressions recorded of the day's noteworthy events, and evaluates them. Ultimately, this discipline helps to make the needed internal adjustments and corrections, like a navigator's compass in the travel through life's journey. Mind is considered to be a mirror, which gathers dust while it reflects—the dust of false ideas, biases, desires, and predilections. One has to be aware of their existence to get rid of them. Watching the mental processes

would also help one to curb the tendency to go off at a tangent. For instance, mention of H.P.B. might remind us of Russia and then of the aeroplane journey to another country and we might start thinking of totally irrelevant matter in no time. If we are watchful, we see that we are going off the track. It is very essential to know if we have an inquiring and reflecting mind. It is important to ask questions, but it is equally important that we find the answers ourselves.

At an advanced stage a chela is expected to be fully aware of his inner and outer states of consciousness. Also, he should be able to register every noteworthy event in his hourly condition. He must be capable of recalling correctly every impression recorded upon his astral being, for the purpose of daily self-examination. Mr. Judge points out that the mere passing sight of a picture or a spoken word may become a basis for one's dream. The dreamer must be able to trace back his dream to the cause by carefully going backwards, day by day, through all the events and through all the thoughts he permitted to pass through his brain. For a discerning seeker, his self-awareness can reveal the tone or character, and the tenor (general drift or the course followed) of his life and consciousness, which may need to be regulated according to his spiritual needs.

When this discipline engages the power of Will, it will help to develop the power of concentration necessary for the *penetrating* thought as an explorer of truth and wisdom. This has to be supported by the *deep interest* in the study in hand, and preferably great devotion. For instance, a true scientist may get deeply involved in his thesis, or an artist with his creative imagination and expression, or a seeker lost in the study of *adhyatma*. Such committed people soon sharpen their power of awareness and their perceptive faculty, so that the higher nature within may do the rest by supplying the flash of insight or an inspiration in their own field of research and creativity—if the motive is particularly selfless.

(Concluded)

ON CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

PAKISTANI terrorist Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving gunman, was convicted in May 2010 by a special judge in Mumbai city (India) for murdering seven people directly and 65 others in common intent with a fellow terrorist. On November 22, 2012 the nation woke up to the news of Kasab being hanged after the President of India rejected Kasab's clemency petition. The general reaction of people was that hanging had brought closure to the trauma of terrorist attack on November 26, 2008. There were many and varied reactions to the execution. Some felt that at last, justice had been done, or that the homage was paid to the dead heroes. There were stray instances of people expressing pity and sympathy for the executed terrorist.

A Mumbai-based lawyer, Yug Chaudhry remarks that under Article 72 of the Constitution of India, the President of India has the power to grant mercy even after the judicial system has confirmed the death sentence. It is only in the rarest of rare crimes that are truly unpardonable that the offender becomes eligible for pardon and mercy. Paradoxically, the very fact that Kasab had indeed committed an unpardonable crime is what rendered him eligible for mercy. "Mercy and pardon are acts of grace.... Giving someone what he deserves or is entitled to is not mercy, it is recompense involving no measure of grace.... We do not *deserve* mercy, we *need* it. I think all of us—the best and the worse—are in need of mercy, and it is only by showing mercy that, morally, we ourselves become entitled to receiving it. Bereft of mercy, our society would be impoverished and inhuman, for mercy is quintessentially a human quality, not found elsewhere in the natural world.... Mercy tempers justice, makes it less exacting, more humane," writes Chaudhry. (*Mumbai Mirror*, November 22, 2012)

It is significant to note that the above noble sentiments are voiced by a lawyer, and they are not mere pious platitude. We might recall that during the terrorist attack of November 26, 2008, many were killed and many were maimed for life. Among them was the

American national, a professional meditation teacher and a successful marathon runner, who lost her 13-year old daughter and was herself badly injured. Even as she walked with the help of a walker, she hoped that Ajmal Kasab would not be sentenced to death, *because victims of the attacks would find some solace when a terrorist like Kasab transforms*. Perhaps he was misguided. Jesus on the cross forgave the misguided souls and so also, she forgave him and prayed for him every day!

Truly, to err is human, but to forgive is divine, especially when an ordinary person brings himself to forgive a grievous harm. Forgiveness helps both the victim and the wrongdoer to heal faster. Forgive, forgive and largely forget, says H.P.B. In the article, "Is Denunciation a Duty?" H.P.B. points out that denunciation is *duty to truth*, and it is our duty to denounce systems and organizations, social and religious evils, but *not the individuals*, who are but children of their own century, the victims of their environment. "To condemn and dishonour a man instead of pitying and trying to help him, because, being born in a community of lepers, he is a leper himself, is like cursing a room because it is dark, instead of quietly lighting a candle to disperse the gloom," writes H.P.B.

We are asked to "condemn the sin, and not the sinner." But dissociating the sin from the sinner is most difficult. We tend to brand people for their smallest mistakes and transgressions. We should be willing to take a fresh look at the person. We tend to think, "once a sinner, always a sinner." To change this mindset we have to begin small, by forgiving and forgetting, *i.e.*, by not holding it against another the wrong done to us. Often, we are willing to give another chance to a friend for his gravest misdeed. Certainly, we are ready to give a second chance to our sons, daughters, sisters, brothers. Let us remember that all crimes are not premeditated. At times, they are committed on the spur of the moment and the person is truly repentant. "We have to learn to look intelligently into the hearts of men." There is no such thing as separateness because we are all united on the inner planes of our being. We cannot isolate

ourselves from the wicked and foolish people, because the world that we live in today is of our own making.

We are all united on inner and invisible planes, and are continually affecting each other through our thoughts, feelings and actions. It is difficult to say what portion of another's karma is *strictly of his own making*. We have contributed in making the humanity as we find it today. There is the story of an Eastern king who had a son, and this son committed a deed, the penalty of which was that he should be killed by great stone thrown upon him. But it was seen that such a punishment would not repair the wrong nor give to the offender the chance to become a better man, hence the councillors of the king advised that the stone should be broken into small pieces, and the same should be thrown upon him in the quantity that he was able to bear, so that he would *suffer* but not be *killed*. H.P.B.'s advice has been that human laws must be restrictive and not punitive, because we do not have the wisdom to mete out adequate punishment, such that it would give the person chance to repent and turn the corner.

The occult reason why theosophy is against Capital Punishment is that an executed criminal though physically dead, is astrally alive. He is filled with the feeling of hatred towards society and all those who were responsible for his trial and execution; as also with the strong feelings of revenge. He can inject thoughts of crime into the minds of sensitive and mentally weak people and incite them to commit crime. That is why we hear of cases in which a crime is suddenly committed by weak persons who appear to be carried away by some outside force. While in the body, a criminal is able to influence only a few, but after death, living in the astral body, his area of influence is unlimited.

Mercy is not opposed to Justice, and the fullest justice is the same as the fullest mercy. However, this is only applicable to the law of Karma, and not to man-made law. Our concept of merciful law is the law that *excuses* our wrongdoings and allows us to escape the ensuing consequences. The "mercy" aspect of the law of Karma is that unlike man-made law, it gives us innumerable opportunities

to improve. Often there are circumstances beyond our control. The law of Karma takes into account all the "extenuating circumstances." Karma is action and reaction. However, this reaction is not mechanical but takes into account the motive, the inner state of the person and the weight of his past Karma. Another meaning of mercy is compassion. Compassion is an all-embracing universal love that aims at "Universal" good. Compassion is that aspect of the law, which desires growth of every being—even if it entails suffering. We must learn to imitate the Law. Whenever we are tempted to condemn, we must remember that the inner state of the person is known only to the Law of Karma. When we see a wicked person, we should regard him as one whose boots have become heavy with mud and give him a helping hand to come out of the situation.

H.P.B. seems to suggest that a criminal is like a leper born in a leper colony. No one is born a criminal, and society or circumstances are also responsible for making a person what he is. So much of terrorism is in the name of religion and arises from false and literal interpretation of lofty spiritual concepts. Perception of oneself and one's community as victims leads to anger. We must try to understand the background of the criminal. Ajmal Kasab has been regarded as a religious fanatic. However, a retired Lt. General in the Indian army, V. G. Patankar, who was formerly a Corps Commander in Kashmir writes that rather than religious fanaticism, poverty drives young men to terrorist activities. Ajmal Kasab, as he lay injured in a hospital bed, had admitted that he did not know much about *jihad* (righteous war), but had joined the terrorists only to earn some good money that could help his poor family. Patankar remarks that he has heard similar refrain from captured terrorists in the Kashmir valley. "They were usually young men in their late teens or early twenties, mostly unemployed, some with rudimentary education and some illiterate, but almost always from underprivileged families. The typical young terrorist usually belonged to a large family with meager means; one among several siblings, with no more than one or at best two bread earners," writes Patankar (*The Times of India*, November 23, 2012).

Who is to be blamed for the economic iniquity? Today, a large number of people suffer from misery and poverty, and often their spiritual faculties are almost dormant. On the opposite end of the scale we see mindless affluence and selfish indulgence. H.P.B. attributes such disparity to the neglect of the social duty by those who “have” wealth and knowledge towards those who “have not.”

What is the best method of reforming the criminals? Rehabilitation, imprisonment and religious rehabilitation programmes have been considered to be better alternatives to hanging. Unfortunately, prisons, which seek to improve the character of prisoners, tend to degrade it instead, as they lack empathy. It is true that an individual must reform himself, but he can be helped in the task. No lasting reform can be achieved unless human nature is changed. The individual criminal needs proper training and he needs to have ideals put before him that can prompt a change in his mental and moral outlook. The book, *It's Always Possible—One Woman's Transformation of Tihar Prison*, is an account of Dr. Kiran Bedi's efforts to fundamentally change an entire prison system of criminality to that of humanity in India's Tihar jail. Dr. Bedi began by taking rounds in the prison and talking to inmates, to know their problems. She revived and enlarged the library, started yoga classes, and began to work on formal education. In 1994 around one thousand inmates were introduced to *Vipassana* meditation popularized by Mr. S. N. Goenka, which opened the minds of the prisoners to the beauties and possibilities of life. To enable the prisoners to become self-reliant after the end of the prison term, they are taught trades like shoe-making, manure production, screen printing, tailoring, book binding and envelope making. The important thing is to cultivate right attitude towards the crime and the criminal. As Mr. Winston Churchill puts it, there must be “tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerative processes; *unfailing faith that there is a treasure if you can duly find it in the heart of every man.*”

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: Man is said to be the architect of his own destiny. How?

Answer: We use the word “fate” or “destiny” when we are unable to see the rationality. What is destiny? There are three classes of Karma: *Sanchita*, *Agami* and *Prarabdha*. *Sanchita* Karma is that which is stored up and not in operation now, because there is not the appropriate environment or condition for bringing it into action. *Agami* is the Karma we are making in the present life and will be felt by us in future births. Every re-incarnating Ego at birth, brings with it a portion of the stored Karma. Thus, *Prarabdha* Karma is the portion or aspect of Karma with which one is born, and for whose precipitation the field is ready. It is operating in the present life and body, bringing about all the circumstances and changes. Destiny or Fate is the Karma that has ripened, so that its expression cannot be averted or postponed. For instance, we cannot change the family, nation or race into which we are born. The Karma that is irreversible may be called fate or destiny.

In the absence of the knowledge of the law of karma we describe certain inevitable events by saying, “These things were destined.” But destiny is only the working of certain powerful causes, so that no action of ours or any other karma can avert or modify the result.

Who weaves the web of destiny? We are creating our destiny from moment to moment. How do we build fate or destiny? “Sow a thought, reap and act; sow an act reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” The manner in which a man turns into a chain smoker illustrates this process. An occasional smoker with confidence in his will power may finally become a

habitual smoker. When we form these habits deliberately and consciously, it becomes *avoidable* fate, because by avoiding certain thoughts, feelings and actions we can avert the fate. Just as a spider weaves the web, thread by thread, so every man from birth to death weaves his destiny. When the last strand is woven, we are *seemingly* enwrapped in the network of our own doing, and are under the empire of *self-made* destiny.

Destiny and free-will co-exist. A person may think ten times before he makes the choice, but having made it, that choice becomes his destiny, by which he is bound. Today's destiny is made by our choice in the past. Today's choice weaves our future destiny. If a man makes the choice to go in the right direction, he goes forward, else he goes backward. Destiny is woven in the minds of men with good and evil thoughts. Each one is born with the Divine Destiny. Each one can weave his freedom. One needs to transform one's thinking and feeling and thus weave a better destiny.

When Karma has ripened and begun to precipitate, all we can do is to experience the effects with right attitude. Since the Law of Karma is just and merciful, there cannot be a misshapen day. So, instead of complaining or grumbling there must be acceptance or resignation. We might even go a step further and say, "This is not only what I deserved, but what in fact I desired." This is an attitude of supreme surrender, of unswerving faith in the Law of Karma—an inward stance necessary to be cultivated by every true spiritual aspirant. With such attitude, we will not resort to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, to cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge the karmic consequences. It is total acceptance that "my own comes back to me." However, "acceptance" should not be equated with passivity and helplessness. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power. We are not expected to remain poor, handicapped, ignorant, weak, oppressed, or whatever be our plight. We can use the situation as raw material and extract the necessary lessons. When intense effort is made, the influence of the Karmic tendency is shortened. Karma has placed us where we

are, but it does not hold us there.

The fact is that we are conditioned, to an extent, by our previous right or wrong actions so that our present choices are, as it were, determined or influenced by the past. In other words, the exercise of free will is conditioned or limited by the *external* circumstance, as well as, the *inner* capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma. Ramakrishna Paramahansa illustrates it by the example of a cow tethered to a pole with a long rope. The cow feels she is free to roam anywhere but the perimeter of the area in which she can move is fixed. Similarly, he explains, every human being has a free will but the length of the rope is governed by God (or Law, based upon our previous actions). Ultimately, each one of us can rewrite his destiny, by acting with complete awareness. In fact, we can become Karmaless by not doing our actions with the feeling that "I am acting," and renouncing interest in the fruits of action. We, then, cease to offer individual focus where the Karmic consequences could return.

Question: It is said that "man proposes, but God disposes." Should we stop planning anything and leave everything to God?

Answer: This proverb is a translation from "The Imitation of Christ" by the German-born author, Thomas à Kempis: "For the resolutions of the just depend rather on the grace of God than on their own wisdom; and in Him they always put their trust, whatever they take in hand. For man proposes, but God disposes; neither is the way of man in his own hands." This may be a reflection of a verse in the Bible (Proverbs 16:9): "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." Shakespeare, too, had a similar message in Hamlet when Hamlet is made to say: "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." It is very clear that man is free to make plans but he has no control over the outcome of the plan. In fact, there are times when he may not even be able to execute his plan. We may plan, but we must not set our heart on its execution or its outcome, because then we are likely to be

disappointed. A wise man is never fixed on any particular *mortal* plan. When we plan we are not aware of many unseen factors and obstacles.

A seed contains within it the potentiality of a tree. But we know very well that planting a mango seed does not guarantee that it will grow into a tree and bear fruit. The growth of the seed depends upon many external factors. If it falls on the stony ground it will not bear fruit at all. If it falls in a thorny bush its growth might be stifled. If it falls on good ground but does not get the required water and sunlight, then again, it may not grow and bear fruit. It may get eaten by some animal or be destroyed in a storm. The one who plants the tree may expect to get fruits, sell them and make some money. But he cannot be absolutely sure that the desired result will be obtained, because of many unforeseen factors. We may plan a trip but we are forced to cancel the trip if we fall ill, or if we miss the train on account of sudden heavy rain. We may have long-term plans, such as, to become a doctor, to marry at an early age, but they do not necessarily come to pass. It might be a noble plan to gather people and clean the city, but it may or may not work. When it is said, “God disposes,” or the success of the plan depends upon God’s will, it only implies that whether we will be able to execute the plan or if executed, whether it will bring the desired results or not, will depend upon the wise and all-seeing Law.

The Buddha says about those who make fixed plans, “‘Here shall I pass the monsoon; there shall I dwell in winter and summer.’ This is foolish reflection. He does not consider obstacles of existence.” Mr. Judge advises a student to take an easy and fluidic position, and not fix his mind on a set plan. In a sense, it means that having made our plans, having envisaged the result, we must be able to say, “Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” Depending upon the force of the past karma our plan may or may not be successful. Though we may dream and perfectly plan, there must be an inward feeling of surrender.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Expectations breed conflicts, frustration and anger, and they embroil us in suffering. We often find ourselves getting angry with our friend, because our expectation is not fulfilled. We are disappointed. But it really means that inwardly, psychologically, we are depending on that person. Where there is dependence there may be frustration; and frustration inevitably breeds anger, bitterness, jealousy, and various other forms of conflict, says J. Krishnamurty. Byron Katie, the well-known teacher of “The Work,” says that the only time we suffer is when we are unable to accept what is. “If you want reality to be different than it is, you might as well try to teach a cat to bark. You can try and try, and in the end the cat will look up at you and say, ‘Meow.’” She points out that when we stop opposing reality, not expecting it to be something else, then action becomes simple, fluid, kind and fearless. Others’ expectations of us could be stifling. We tend to drift from even the loved ones who tend to expect too much of us. Chitra Jha, a Bangalore-based spiritual trainer, writes that we have expectations because we think that everyone thinks, feels, acts and reacts just as we do. So, if something excites us, we expect others to feel equally excited. To let go of our expectations we need to realize that each one of us is unique, thinking, feeling and acting in different manner. However, our expectation of others can become avenues for us to learn a lesson and evolve.

Learning to serve without expectations is the crux of unconditional love. Though some expectations may feel to us to be reasonable and healthy, we should aim to get rid of all expectations, because sometimes even reasonable expectations have the potential to give us grief by pitting us against reality. For instance, what if the refrigerator fails and the ice-cream does not set? What if the cook mistakes salt for sugar?

Expectations that others have of us pose a greater challenge because we are unable to change their needs or attitudes or values. When we are free of the need to please others, we are able to deal

with others' expectations in the most appropriate and compassionate way, never allowing anyone to use or abuse us. When we expect nothing from the world or even ourselves, we are able to work most effectively with what is—often exerting a transformative influence. It is because Buddha did not expect the murderer Angulimala to be other than what he was, that the Buddha could transform him, through compassion. When we drop expectations, and accept what is, we claim our birthright to peace, joy, love and harmony, writes Suma Varughese. (*Life Positive*, November 2012)

To have expectations is to set our heart on certain mode of action, certain reaction or response from another or on certain outcome. Life becomes a business and barter, if we are always expecting others to reciprocate our good turn. If we have to learn to practice true Altruism, then we must begin by learning to help without expectations. Though it might be natural to expect certain things in a relationship, there is more joy and peace when the other person acts spontaneously and not under the pressure of fulfilling the expectation. In human relationships, we often have unreasonable expectations of other people. Life becomes a burden if each one of us continually tries to live up to each other's expectations. When we do not have expectations, life often surprises us with the unexpected joy.

The *Gita* advises us to act but have no expectation of the result or reward. "Let then the motive for the action be in the action itself." "All actions performed other than as sacrifice unto God make the actor bound by action." When we are asked not to expect result it is not implied that we should not think about the result. If a surgeon performs an operation, it is reasonable for him to hope or expect that the operation should be successful and the patient must recover. However, he must not set his heart on the result, and be prepared to take whatever may be the outcome. The opposite of expectation is acceptance, and total acceptance results when we learn to have full faith in the law of Karma. However, there is positive side to expectation. To expect something to happen is to have positive

attitude, or have hope. H.P.B. says, "With expectancy supplemented by faith, one can cure himself of almost any morbid condition."

It is tough when the person you idolized as role model suddenly falls from grace. A certain individual of Indian origin, holding a prestigious position in a prestigious global consulting firm, after making good name for himself committed a serious mistake, for which he received two-year jail term and a fine of five million dollars. His own reaction was, "I have lost my reputation that I had built over a lifetime." Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, a spiritual teacher, reminds us of the saying, "If wealth is lost, nothing is lost. If health is lost, something is lost. But, if character is lost, everything is lost." He says that the word "character" might be replaced with the word "history," Our history is our identity that includes honesty, integrity and reputation. If by committing a mistake, we lose this identity, we will risk losing respect. The employed are careful about what is called "break in service," then we should be even more careful about "break in history."

Yogi Ashwini, a spiritual teacher, mentions Shri Krishna's teaching in the *Gita*, "Whatever is practised by the most excellent men, that is also practiced by others." It is by people following ideal role models that we have an ideal society. If the leaders of the society are corrupt, the entire fabric of the society is likely to get corrupted. When any leader of the society succumbs to unethical business practices, he sends out wrong signals. It becomes necessary to mete out fair punishment in the light of the ripple effect his actions could have throughout global society. A leader is meant to uphold ethics and values that constitute the very basis of an egalitarian society.

Jug Suraiya reminds us of Sartre's remark that saints are vigilant against sin, but what they should be guarding against is not sin but their saintliness. One should not fall into the trap of admiring the image of goodness that has been created around one's self, which

tends to enhance one's ego and the sense of self-worth. When one considers himself great he may begin to feel that all that is done by him is also great, because a great man can only do great things. "This is the dangerous logic of self-justification, born out of an ego-gratifying public persona that others have created for you and which you have come to believe in yourself. . . . When we lay claim to possess goodness or wisdom, or high reputation, we become enmeshed in the ego, in the 'i' which must be surrendered before the true state of spiritual grace can be achieved, a state in which there is 'no-I,' 'no-one.'" We should not attach too much importance to our sense of moral accomplishment. We must do the good works unself-consciously, writes Suraiya. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, November 4, 2012)

At the base of a good character is a virtuous mind. "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." However, good moral behaviour calls for integration of head and heart, otherwise, moral principles are set at naught by clever minds. *Sheela* is a transcendental virtue and may be described as "a good moral character that is a permanent disposition." Moral qualities like truthfulness, equanimity, honesty, etc., appeal to us all. But, *Sheela* implies leading a pure and virtuous life from moment to moment, and not once in a while. It does not take a spectacular mistake or slip on our part to let in bad influences. Living a pure life, continuously, creates a shield. Then, evil thoughts, words and deeds of others do not affect us; they would be like dust thrown against high wind.

Virya or spiritual energy is often essential in living a morally pure life, because energy is not only required to start something new, but also for maintaining what has already been begun. Spiritual energy is created by the surrendering of the personal will to the divine will.

There is a danger in taking any *living person* as ideal. Mr. Crosbie says that it is not the best thing to rely upon any *living person*, to the extent of *idealizing* him; for if such a person is even seemingly swept

away in darkness—such as lapse in discipline, or is accused and slandered even falsely—then it would dishearten us. Many spiritual leaders have lost some of their followers because of accusation of their involvement—justly or unjustly—in a sex-scandal; or accusation of moneymaking or corruption, etc.

In London's Mayfair at the Legatum Institute, Dalai Lama was invited to a conference of high-level financiers from the likes of JPMorgan Chase and Blackstone Group, and Corporate lawyers, entrepreneurs, etc. to find innovative approaches to the free market in the 21st century. Since the last financial crisis attempts are being made to incorporate some ethical values in business. Now there are Companies classed as "benefit corporations," that are required to generate benefits to society as well as to their shareholders. Jitesh Gadhia, a director at Blackstone and a participant of the Legatum meeting, helped introduce the global business oath, part of which reads: "I will manage my enterprise with loyalty and care, and will not advance my personal interests at the expense of my enterprise or society." Such initiatives gel well with Dalai Lama's message which emphasizes changing the individual behaviour instead of imposing laws. In his latest book, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, he writes: "Ultimately the financial crisis was generated by greed itself—by the failure to exercise appropriate moderation and restraint in the blind quest for ever greater profits." He proposes secular ethics training to counteract this. It has been found that the Ethics training already introduced in certain financial institutions have been performed perfunctorily. It is felt that there is a need to create an atmosphere where the employees could regularly ask themselves if their actions are ethical, and likewise feel free to tell their bosses if they think their behaviour is wrong. Dalai Lama was of the opinion that ethics training should take place in schools. He also stressed family values and personal responsibility, saying,

“If you have affection from your mother, then you are content. But if there is no affection from mother, then people become greedy, angry, insecure.” Dalai Lama, who calls himself the “Buddhist-Marxist,” is of the opinion that ethics are integral to business in the 21st century, writes Peter Pomerantsev, a television producer and non-fiction writer. (*Newsweek*, November 5, 2012)

Lust for pecuniary gains, though more or less present in human nature, is self-defeating because it arises from an inadequate knowledge of the ultimate cost one has to bear both morally and in economic terms. Franklin Roosevelt once said that we have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we know now it is bad economics! H.P.B. writes: “No lasting political [or social] reform can be ever achieved with the same selfish men at the head of affairs as of old. . . . To seek to achieve political reforms before we have effected a reform in *human nature, is like putting new wine into old bottles.*” It means self-reformation precedes social regeneration, and in Theosophy this is the crux of and an answer to most human problems arising from lax character and weakness of human nature.

In all our dealings and pursuits (including leisure), such as business, the moral issue is whether a man prefers to exercise his higher nature—which is *sattvic* and compassionate—even at the cost of serious personal loss, or to succumb to the familiar lower tendencies which he has fostered by frequently neglecting the “call of honour.” Indeed, it needs moral stamina to stand upright in the face of hardships, frustrations and even business failure. Such men of stature exist even today, who can make the difference in our national character.

SOME men see things as they are and ask, why. Others dream things that never were and ask, why not.

— GEORGE BERNARD SHAW