

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 11, No. 8

December 17, 2019

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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THE STORMS OF LIFE

A STORM is a disturbance of the atmosphere marked by heavy rain, wind and lightning. Sometimes, Hurricanes, Typhoons and Tornadoes are also called storms. Therefore, the knowledge of the weather condition is extremely important. It can save ships in the ocean, and trees and other properties on land. It is even more important to know the cause of these storms. Theosophically, electrical and atmospheric disturbances form part of the upheaval that takes place during cyclic changes. Some of these changes may be owing to the sun's journey through space as it moves around an unknown centre carrying with it our earth and other planets, and bringing them into entirely new cosmic conditions. Science admits the possibility of the connection between sun-spot activity and electrical storms on earth. But occult science says that nothing in nature happens by chance. Every disturbance on earth may be linked to man and his thoughts, feelings and actions. Violent storms and other disturbances on earth may be regarded as sickness of the earth. Physical illness in a human being is often the result of the inner sickness of the inner man being discharged on the physical plane. Earth is a living entity made up of tiny units of energy called “lives.” Violent disturbances may well result when the lives of the earth, that have been impressed by the harmful thoughts—the selfish thoughts—of millions of human beings, have reached a point of explosion. The Law of Karma, which seeks to restore the disturbed harmony, brings the effects back to the point of disturbance.

A storm is a metaphor. There are storms of life: crises and unexpected tragedies. Life can be tempestuous, tossing us with winds of misfortune, grief, shame, losses, or stress. These are testing times, when our faith is tested the most. After a long day of teaching, Jesus and his apostles boarded a boat, and Jesus asked his disciples, “Let us cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.” The Apostles were afraid of the approaching storm as they were tossed by the winds, and water filled their boat. When they woke up sleeping Jesus, he arose and calmed the winds and the waves. He chastised his disciples saying, “Where is your faith?” Did they not remember that he could calm the seas during a storm? Jesus Christ, the true esoteric saviour, is the divine nature in each one of us, who can help us overcome storms within, provided we turn to It for help. “Crossing the Sea of Galilee” may represent crossing the sea of life, and like Jesus, the god within us also does not promise us that it will be a smooth sailing, but if we are ready to weather the storms, we can reach the other shore, of freedom from suffering and rebirth.

Here were the disciples following Jesus, and yet they found themselves facing a storm! Many are the devoted people, many are the righteous who obey the Will of God, expecting in return a smooth, storm-free life, or, expecting to be saved. We all profess to have full faith in God, in justice and mercy of the Law of Karma, and yet we often witness a pious person declaring that he no longer believes in God, whom he worshipped every single day, because He failed to save him from a certain calamity! Likewise, our supposed unshakable faith in the justice of Karma is set at naught when we resort to all kinds of ceremonies and rituals to avert the calamity.

“Faith,” says *Light on the Path*, “is a great engine, an enormous power, which in fact can accomplish all things. For it is a covenant or engagement between man’s divine part and his lesser self.” A covenant is a pact or agreement. The covenant between man’s lower and higher nature is analogous to the agreement between a child and his parents. It is based on trust. A child knows that even though

he is scolded, reprimanded by his parents, or denied certain pleasures, it is all for his good. Likewise, the person of *true* faith who knows that the universe is governed by a just and impartial Law is able to maintain his faith in the Law, even as he passes through painful experiences.

Storms upset our comfortable life. Sometimes they are unexpected. We are tested the most in dealing with the unexpected. They bring out the “real” person, bringing to the surface our strengths and weaknesses. When we think of trials and the crucifixion of Jesus and likewise of sufferings in the lives of spiritually advanced beings we might want to say, “Big ships, big storms. Thank God we are only rowboats and walnut shells,” as Nikos Kazantzakis puts it. For an ordinary person, Karma precipitates in terms of pebbles, *i.e.*, little knocks, small adversities, spread over many years. But for someone who is determined and aspires to live the spiritual life; takes a vow to change oneself and become a better human being, for them Karma precipitates in terms of boulders. “It is well to have recognized that for a long time the hidden activity of the spiritual aspiration manifests most in the increased activity of the lower nature, and this may also mean in the circumstances of life,” writes Mr. Crosbie. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 142)

Thus, storms in our lives come from within and also from outside. The inner disturbances are mostly caused by the outer disturbances, such as by the adverse change in the surroundings, or by the attitude of people, or by painful events such as loss of a loved one or reputation or money, etc. But these can be avoided, by taking the firm position, by equanimity, by detachment, so that like Epictetus one can be in chains but the mind is still free to think and remain calm. The storms within are produced when we are fighting with our lower nature. When we are trying to overcome anger, anxiety, loneliness, pride, etc., we face opposition from within, setting up an inner conflict. What affects us the most is this inner disturbance, and its effect can be on the mind, emotions, astral and physical bodies. We suffer pain, pleasure, anxieties, etc. because we identify

ourselves with the body, mind, and passing conditions, not realizing that through all these conditions and forms, which are changing continually, there is that in us, the “I,” which has remained unchanged and unchanging.

All the circumstances and objects are brief and changeable. The same object or situation or person that gave pleasure, may, after a while, give pain. By recognizing them as the passing shows of life, we can remain detached, knowing full well that “This too shall pass away.” Wisdom consists in passing through them by taking the position of a witness. Every adversity has come to us under Karma. If we pass through them without murmuring, or trying to dodge them by prayers and ceremonies, we can acquire some discipline and experience. We may find ourselves coming out of the storm, a little more patient, kind, courageous and wise, if we learn to *respond* instead of *reacting* to the situation.

Every spiritual aspirant, in one sense, is Arjuna, fighting his own inner battles, and constantly finding himself in the middle of some or the other trying situation. We are overwhelmed by the power of disturbing elements, from within and without, and feel that we do not possess the necessary spiritual courage to face them. There is despondency because we feel that what has happened is wrong and at times we expect something else to have happened. But things do not always happen according to our expectations, and then instead of accepting, we begin to blame outside circumstances and people. Research confirms that our emotional nature tends to overestimate the happiness caused by pleasure, and the duration of sadness caused by life-changing disappointment. We are all like sailors in small boats trying to cross a vast ocean. If we think that we can control the wind and the weather then we are likely to be constantly frustrated and disappointed. We can enjoy the journey of life if we can learn to pay attention to the changes in the weather and learn to follow the direction of the wind, which means becoming vigilant and learning to adapt ourselves to changes.

A storm or disturbance is produced by our *attitude*. “You have

been in storms enough. A few moments’ reflection will show you that we make our own storms. The power of any and all circumstances is a fixed, unvarying quality, but as we vary in our reception of these, it appears to us that our difficulties vary in intensity. They do not at all. We are the variants,” writes Mr. Judge (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 35). In other words, the capacity of a thing, person or situation to bring pleasure or pain is fixed. For instance, individuals derive greater or lesser pleasure from ice-cream based on their own likes and dislikes. The same is true of circumstances. Some of us are overwhelmed by slight adversities, while others are only moderately affected. But we see that those who have faced bigger storms are able to take them all in their stride. Then there are those rare few, like Helen Keller, who face their storms with such courage and determination that they go on to become inspiration for others. Helen Keller, who was afflicted at the age of 19 months with an unknown illness that left her blind and deaf, went on to achieve many remarkable feats. She was an author, lecturer and crusader for the handicapped. She altered the world’s perception as regards the capacities of the handicapped, and became a symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. Adversities of life, if met with properly, can build the character. “Struggle is needed for gaining strength; buffeting adverse eras is for the gaining of depth; meagre opportunities may be used for acquiring fortitude; poverty should breed generosity,” writes Mr. Judge.

“Look for the flower to bloom in the silence that follows the storm: not till then...The silence may last a moment of time or it may last a thousand years. But it will end. Yet you will carry its strength with you. Again and again the battle must be fought and won,” says *Light on the Path*. There is a silence after the storm in which the flower opens. Silence refers to the satisfaction felt by the aspirant. The silences coming among those fights and storms are the chances for preparation. The opening of the flower is the awakening of perception, gaining of knowledge and confidence. But it is no easy matter. The same book goes on to say, “not till the

whole personality of the man is dissolved and melted, not until the whole nature has yielded and become subject unto its higher self, can the bloom open.” In other words, until one has fought and won the first great battle, that of bringing the personality under control, purifying and cleansing it, so that the eternal truth becomes the guide, admonisher and the teacher, who is listened to and obeyed, not until this has happened can there be silence and peace. Interestingly, in the *Puranas*, Maruts are the storm-deities, which represent *mystically*, the *passions* that storm and rage within every spiritual aspirant’s breast, when preparing for an ascetic life, and which he must destroy by his steady will. Over and over again the battle must be fought and won. Can there be a better picture depicting peace than the picture of the mother bird sitting in her nest in perfect peace, in the midst of the rush of angry waters? “It just goes to show that peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all these things and still be calm in your heart.”

Thus, in the section “Abridgement of Discussions Upon Theosophical Subjects,” we read that it is inevitable that constant struggle, ups and downs, must go on. It is easy to aspire, to do good and to be good, in happier times and favourable circumstances, but not so easy when we are in the depth of despondency. If we only aspire when circumstances are favourable then the progress is slow. But if we do not cease to aspire even amidst the storms of life, we make rapid and greater progress. Thus: “But if we force ourselves to contemplation of the Supreme Soul when we are in despondency, then in the succeeding period of joy which will come, the bound upward is to a point beyond where we were before, and so the next downward rush will not be so low as the last, whereas if we leave it to itself we may for a long period never rise above, or rather never pass certain limits of this oscillation. So, it is more valuable for us to aspire and to reach toward the Supreme Soul, when we are in despondency, than when we find ourselves in a highly elevated condition.” (*Echoes of the Orient*, Vol. II, p. 443)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE HEAVENLY CHRISTMAS TREE

“THE HEAVENLY Christmas Tree” is a Christmas-time short story written by Fyodor Dostoevsky in 1876. This story is also known as “The Beggar Boy at Christmas Tree.” The author begins by saying that he has made this story up, but that even so, he thinks it must have actually happened, on Christmas Eve, in a great town, at a time of terrible frost. The boy, described as “six years old or younger,” awakens in a frigid cellar. He is dressed in a sort of little dressing-gown and has been shivering with cold. He is very hungry. Several times that morning he goes up to the plank bed where his sick mother has been lying. When he touches his mother, he finds her “as cold as the wall.” He is surprised that she does not move at all. He unconsciously lets his hands rest on the dead woman’s shoulders for a while, and then comes out of the cellar. He moves around in the bustling streets of this vibrant city. He has just arrived from a remote village, and this is his first experience in a big city, especially during the festive season.

He stops to view a lovely party, with children dancing. Through a huge glass window, he sees a fir tree decorated with lights, gold papers, apples, little dolls and horses. He is thoroughly fascinated. But his fingers and toes that had become stiff with cold were hurting him, so he runs on. He witnesses another grand party, with even more children, and with many people going in. Through a glass-pane he sees another Christmas tree, and on a table cakes of all sorts. He decides to boldly walk in, but the people inside “shouted at him and waved him back.” A woman puts a kopek in his hand and hustles him out of the door. But his fingers are too cold to hold on to the coin, and he immediately drops it.

Next, he stops to watch some astonishing puppets behind yet another window. At first the boy thinks that they are alive, and when he realizes that they are dolls he laughs. He has never seen such dolls before. The show delights him; but after a few moments an older child comes up from behind, hits him on the head, trips him,

and steals his hat. The little boy gets up and runs into someone's courtyard and sits down behind a stack of wood. But suddenly he begins to feel warm and comfortable. His hands and feet stop aching. He hears his mother singing. A "small voice" invites him to come and see a Christmas tree. He is not able to see who is calling him. "He thought that this was still his mother, but no, it was not she...and all at once—oh, what a bright light! Oh, what a Christmas tree! And yet it was not a fir tree, he had never seen a tree like that! Everything was bright and shinning." He finds himself at a grand party indeed, surrounded by his mother, other children who suffered similar fates, along with their mothers. "Some had been frozen in the baskets in which they had as babies been laid on the doorstep of well-to-do Petersburg people...others had died at their starved mothers' breasts (in the Samara famine), others had died in the third-class railway carriages from the foul air." He learns that this is "Christ's Christmas tree." The other children tell him that "Christ always has a Christmas tree on this day, for the little children who have no tree of their own."

The next morning the frozen bodies of both the child and his mother are found, and they are said to have met before the Lord God in Heaven. The author says that he felt that it was important to tell this story because he is convinced it must have really happened. But then he clarifies himself, and explains that he is only sure about the first part—and that he has no idea whether the incident about Christ's tree might be true or not.

We find the parallel of this poignant story in Hans Christian Anderson's "The Little Match Girl," published in 1845, which highlights the plight of the poor, and in some ways can be compared to Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol." These stories bring out the glaring contrast between the rich and the poor; the world of hunger and want is sharply contrasted with the festivities, pomp and show of the rich.

In her article, "The Tidal Wave," H.P.B. wrote that what the European world now needs is a dozen writers such as Dostoevsky,

the Russian author, who spoke boldly and fearlessly the most unwelcome truths to the higher and *even to the official classes*. As one of his critics remarked, "In the eyes of all, friends or foes, he became the mouthpiece of the irrepressible, no longer to be delayed need felt by Society, to look with absolute sincerity into the innermost depth of its own soul, to become the impartial judge of its own actions and its own aspirations," describing him as "the soul-stirring bard, of everything poor, insulted, injured, humiliated; he who unveiled with such merciless cruelty, the plagues and sores of his age." (*Lucifer*, November 1889)

In its appeal this story transcends all ages and cultures. There has always been this contrast in our society, but during festive season, especially, we are made aware of the inequality as also of the indifference of the rich towards the poor. In our so-called civilized societies we are continually brought face to face with the fact that large numbers of people are suffering from misery, poverty and disease, while on the opposite end of the scale there are many who lead the lives of careless indifference, material luxury and selfish indulgence, writes H.P.B. The "haves" are neglecting their duty towards the "have-nots."

At a simple level, Christmas is supposed to be the festival that emphasizes the spirit of giving. But do we really see that? A great satire is directed at the superficial and ritualistic way of celebrating Christmas—applicable to almost all festivals—when H.P.B. describes the vision of a man who saw a palatial church, on a Christmas eve, full to its capacity with well-dressed men and women. The priest was delivering the sermon in impeccable diction, with a recording angel standing by his side, expressly sent to make a record of an act of prayer or charity that would be acceptable to God. When the mass was over and the parishioners went out of the church, everyone went their way, keeping a safe distance from the beggar girl in dirty clothes. Just then a drunken sailor passed by, and seeing the girl, he thrust a few pennies into her hand, saying, "Here, you poor forsaken cuss, take this!" Instantly, a celestial radiance lighted

up the face of the recording angel, who recorded the sailor's act of sympathy and charity. Of what use are religious observances if they fail to stir our heart to pity!

A Christian writer, Janina Gomes, contrasts the present pomp and show during the Christmas festival with the condition in which Jesus was born. She observes that just as then, today Jesus is unwelcome—we have crowded him out. With our parties and merry-making and artificial lights, we have forgotten the real Jesus. If only someone would look into the eyes of the poor, the lonely, the helpless, the orphan, or sit down and meditate, then he might hear the Voice of Jesus and know what real Jesus was like. H.P.B. makes similar observation in the article, "Christmas Then and Christmas Now." There is glamour everywhere, including the churches, and before the dazzled eyes of the devotee the humble Bethlehem stable vanishes altogether, says H.P.B. It is not as if there should be no enjoyment and festivity, but why celebrate a festival in a manner that only emphasizes the gulf between the rich and the poor? The one class squanders money, while the other has to be satisfied only with the smell of the savouries and meat being cooked in the rich man's kitchen!

The Roman Christians were not sure of Christ's birth date, and so they fixed it on the 25th of December which is the day the Pagans celebrated as the birthday of their Sun-gods. The ancients believed that it was on 21st December that the Sun-god went down under the earth, to help the imprisoned souls or seeds, and remained there for three days to come up triumphant on 25th December. What does it mean? It represents something that happens actually during the mysteries of initiation. The "Sun" represents the candidate who aspires for spiritual rebirth. The candidate for initiation personifies the sun, who has to kill all his fiery passions before he can rise to new life and be reborn. He was made to sit, all alone, in a dark room. After facing and purifying the lowest levels of his consciousness, he rises fully purified.

Behind the physical sun is the True Sun or Central Spiritual Sun.

The Sun symbolizes the very Atman in man, the Christos or the Divine Principle. So, Christ, the true esoteric Saviour, is not a man but the divine presence latent within the hearts of men. In the article, "A Commentary on the Gayatri," Mr. Judge translates the Gayatri mantra thus: "Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, that face of the True Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light, that we may see the truth and do our whole duty on our journey to thy sacred seat."

Mr. Judge comments that the whole verse is an aspiration in the highest sense and "unveil" is the cry of the man who is determined to know the truth; the cry is made to the Higher Self. Just as the True Sun is hidden behind the physical sun, so also, the Higher Self is hidden by the passions and desires, the personal self and the thirst for life. "So long as desire and the personality remain strong, just so long will the light be blurred, so long will we mistake words for knowledge and knowledge for the thing we wish to know and realize." Inner preparation needs to be made before we can partake of the guidance and communication with that Sun or Christos within. Thus, knowing the *real* Jesus involves undertaking rigorous discipline. Janina Gomes says that Jesus came to us wearing a face of God and to know him we must be able to repeat the adventures of the life of Jesus—going through what he went through. The ultimate gift that God gave us was to show us His face in Jesus, and yet it is the *true face* of Jesus that people would rather flee from, and that is because the gift comes wrapped up in foils of hardship, pain, affliction, poverty, and even betrayal. We would recognize that Jesus went through all of these experiences. The wrappers so intimidate us that we hesitate to open the gift. Thus, if we live the life that Jesus lived in order to become "Jesus the Christ," or "Jesus the Anointed-One," we will have in us the "risen Christ," as Jesus is not the only Son of God; we are all Sons of God in our divine nature.

Let us remember that spirit of true Christianity which vibrates and reverberates in the ethical instructions of the Sermon on the Mount, and resolve to be the peacemakers, learn to return good for evil, examine our motives and make sure that our hearts are clean and pure.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

II

THE KEY-note of the object of true education is struck by H.P. Blavatsky in her work *The Key to Theosophy*. It is outlined in the closing part of the first part of the article printed in the previous issue. How much of those can be practically applied with effect in the prevailing well-entrenched, state-sponsored popular pedagogical system, which is almost wholly designed to prepare pupils to compete in the race for winning prizes in the competitive job market, is a moot question. The issue is very complex, and it is addressed principally in the context of conditions prevalent in India. While the system in vogue is tailored to suit the aspirations of the well-to-do sections of urban society endowed with means, comforts and conveniences of urban life, and family precedence and support, it scarcely meets the needs of right education appropriate to the vast millions living in sprawling rural hinterland who do not enjoy any such advantages. Many of the latter category who may be subjected to the present system, as well as those of the former category who lag behind in the race, are virtually no better than the “reading and writing candidates for starvation.” H.P.B. said, “If we had money, we would found schools which would turn out something else than reading and writing candidates for starvation”—starvation of both body and soul, verily! (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 268, Indian ed.)

A few Theosophical students have indeed ventured into running schools for children and youth. Their chief difficulties have been paucity of educators well grounded in the philosophy of Theosophy as well as those who have a flair for teaching, and having to work within the limitation imposed by the established system, social norms, choices and demands, which are diametrically opposed to the true objects of education. Given a band of serious and dedicated students of Theosophy, if the organizers have the wherewithal to run a school independent of state recognition and support, they can freely design the contents and methods in accordance, as much as possible, with the objects of Theosophical education as outlined by the Teacher,

and at the same time prepare the wards for practical life in the competitive world from theosophical perspective. Some thoughts on what could be the contents and methods of such an independent theosophical school are shared in the article.

In the other scenario, wherein individual teachers, who may be Theosophists but working as teachers in educational institutions which function within the parameters of the established system, may yet infuse some theosophical ideas into the minds of the pupils as seed thoughts in the course of informal interaction with them during free time. It is thus possible to arouse at least in some of them an interest in broader scientific, philosophical, anthropological and psychological truisms, which the universities do not teach, thus stimulate in them the spirit of inquiry, lay foundational ideas for independent thinking, and induce a love of truth, even when fulfilling the obligation of teaching the subjects prescribed in the syllabus of the main-stream program.

The Meaning of the term *science*; theory of knowledge (epistemology); assumptions and method of modern science to be empirical, use of *a priori* reasoning supported by mathematical logic, experimental verification of validity of hypotheses and predictions; validity and limitation of modern method. In contrast, epistemology of ancient science as related in Theosophy, its universal axioms illustrated in Plato’s philosophy of Ideas, in Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta systems; universal unity, universal causation, Karma, law of cycles, reincarnation; contrasting evolutionary theory of modern science with that of the ancient science in which can be found the missing links of the former, and the light it throws on all problems of life; essential unity of science and religion, and so on. These themes can be just touched upon and basic ideas scattered in the minds.

Even a few seed thoughts sown thus in the young minds on these lines may bear good fruit in some of them, at least, early or later in their life. Such of them so inspired, developing along the lines of their respective inclinations and interest, may become centres of free and independent thought, able to think and reason for themselves

from a universal perspective, on life in general and on specific issues. Plato truly said that an unexamined life is not worth living. Spirit of independent thought, an outlook of critical thinking and reasoning, based on a comprehension of universal principles, on received opinions, entrenched dogmas, popular prejudices, makes for freedom of soul and herald many a social reform. This is one of the objects of true education.

The importance of childhood education is generally well recognized as the foundation of a strong nation and a healthy society. The main purpose of the present system seems to be to fit the child to excel in academic pursuit in the school and in the later stages in the competitive learning system. It is teacher-centred and subject-centred education in which the pupil is handed on information on many subjects which he or she has to learn by rote, and score high in the grading system of evaluation of the performance of the pupil in examinations. It is obvious that in this approach the unique individuality of each pupil, its innate talents, interests and capacities are smothered and the object of education, which is to facilitate flowering out of these, is defeated.

It was the great philosopher, Rousseau, who advocated an alternative approach, which he called “child-centred education.” According to him every child has an innate ability to learn and develop its faculties and that the role of the teacher is to facilitate it by providing suitable environment for experiential learning and thereby develop capacity for independent thinking and creativity. This approach is closer to the true system Theosophy advocates, which is the development and training of the inner senses, faculties and latent capacities of each child considered as a unit. Theosophical education aims at “the most harmonious unfoldment of its powers, in order that its special aptitudes should find their full natural development” (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 268). For such a system of education to come to prevail it is necessary to admit the truth that each human being is a pilgrim Soul, sojourning through material life in innumerable cycles of reincarnation governed by the Law of

Karma. Every child, therefore, is a Mind-Soul, divine in its higher or inner being, come into a new earthly body by Karma in the course of its evolutionary journey in the great school of life, whose final end is divine perfection.

Assimilated experiences of an immense number of past incarnations is latent in the inner being of every child, and each one comes into life to fulfil its specific Karmic destiny, to redeem its Karmic debt to fellow-beings, getting rid of defects, acquire virtues, learn to live in accord with the dictates of divine conscience and of the law of absolute Justice of Karma. Our modern age is entirely ignorant of this fundamental truth, and, as such, completely misses out the soul’s need for fulfilling its Karmic destiny and equal and harmonious development of its sensory, mental, intellectual, moral and spiritual development. Each child has to be nurtured to develop along the line of its special aptitudes and its soul’s need. This does not take place. Children are made to go through one common curriculum in a subject oriented system which defeats the very purpose of the objects of true education, resulting in starvation of the soul, if not of the body. As the civilizational ideal, so is the educational system. Our civilization is based solely on money, power and acquisition, in a competitive spirit. The educational system is devised to meet the need of man as just a physical being who is to be fitted to survive and get on in the competitive world, in the struggle for existence. It only breeds intense selfishness, moral deficiency, intellectual development with no moral sense and spiritual wisdom to guide it. Such a civilization must end in nullity if it is not reconstructed on the basis of a higher and nobler ideal. It is the object of the Theosophical Movement to awaken the consciousness of the race mind to the reality of the divine nature of man and of the universe, their origin, evolution and destiny.

If we have to establish schools on Theosophical principles as aforesaid we evidently have to design courses of study which will meet the specific needs of different social groups situated in different circumstances to fulfill specific social functions for which they are

best fitted to serve, and develop along the many lines of experience and by emulation that build character. For instance, curriculum designed for the urbanized classes have to be different from that for rural children, the primary objectives of true education remaining as the basic foundation in both. The best illustration of it is found in the rural school founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1927, called *Sriniketan*, which is still alive, in West Bengal. The system is attempted to be replicated by a philanthropist in Karnataka. Rural schools have to be open to learning from Nature and from hands-on experiential learning of practical skills in various vocations, such as, agriculture, traditional industry, animal husbandry, water conservation and harvesting, health and sanitation, panchayat system of self-governance, women empowerment, co-operatives, marketing of products of rural industry in urban retails, and so on. These can be the practical part of education besides learning languages, basic science and mathematics. Universal values and ethical principles found in all religions should be taught through illustrations from the lives of great exemplars of these, story-telling, and organizing pupils to enact on stage inspiring episodes from mythology, epics and traditional art forms. In the case of indigenous forest dwellers who have been displaced through destruction of their natural habitat are to be absorbed in society through a curricula suited to their needs.

A few thoughts have been shared on practical ways by which the ideals of true education may be realized as much as is possible in the prevalent system. True education must lead to higher civilizational ideal, inspiration for which comes from the universal Wisdom-Religion which underlies and is the source of world religions, sciences and philosophies. “We would that all who have a voice in the education of the masses should first know and then *teach* that the safest guides to human happiness and enlightenment are those writings which have descended to us from the remotest antiquity; and that nobler spiritual aspirations and a higher average morality prevail in the countries where people take their precepts as the rule of their lives.” (*Isis*, II, 635)

(Concluded)

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS STUDY, APPLICATION AND PROMULGATION—VIII

YOU ARE dead right—many aspire but know not after what. Such there are even among “students” of Theosophy. We do not call ourselves Theosophists but students, but how many who speak of themselves as such are students? Many do not know what or how to study.

Each one of us has to find himself, teach and educate himself, discipline himself and finally energize himself. Buddhas and Mahatmas can but point the way. Whatever one does, home duties or business or anything else, can be untheosophical, non-theosophical or theosophical; it is for each student-soul to make it truly spiritual. In this, study plays a highly important part.

It is a natural desire to know about the various religions, but do believe me, this is not necessary, save and except to see the ancient landmarks of the Wisdom-Religion, 18 million years old. It is a vast study and quickly acquired by the piecemeal method through the study of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. It is more pressing that you know more about the line of teaching which the textbook of the 20th century reveals.

Every man has some problem or other which he is always anxious to solve. If we can find out what that problem is and give him the light of Theosophy, so that he is able to appreciate the teachings of Theosophy, much good will be achieved. Your method is right. You should draw out people and find out what their thoughts and feelings are and in that way you may be able to bring round the conversation to their own intimate problem.

The problem of contacting the wider public is important, but, in my opinion, what is more pressing is a co-ordination and a better understanding between the few who at present are keeping the Fire burning.

Co-operation in action with a friendly spirit will do wonders for the Cause. Do set an example.

The art of helping others is the most difficult of arts. I see more

and more that even when very earnest students forgather in a social way, if they do not watch they all too suddenly slip into action which becomes regrettable.

Try to help the permanent and soul part of people rather than the passing body part and you will be on the right track.

There are many who take from Theosophy all that they can get and do nothing for it in return, but it is their Karma and we must not mind it. All that we can do is to follow the path of duty as we see it, and leave others to do their best.

Discipline in you will produce discipline in others. Detachment in you will create respect from others. Learning in you, from a universal point of view, and the ability to show analogies with Nature, will bring application and enthusiasm from others. Self-discipline, justice and generosity will be the natural result of the perception of Law.

About not telling that one is a Theosophist when applying for a job: This subject pertains to the psycho-philosophy of the Esoteric Wisdom-Religion. We have known of good friends who hold the same or similar view point about holding back their intimate relation to Theosophy and its Great Cause. Such consider their attitude as expressing the wisdom of the serpent. Personally we think that such a policy is weakening to the aspirant's consciousness and will prove injurious when the employer finds out his employee's intimacy with Theosophy. Then, not only is the person concerned blamed but also the philosophy. No, we do not want to parade and make an exhibition of our Theosophy, but, on the other hand, we should not be nervous or fearful to be frank and courageous, whenever occasion demands, to state: "I am a student of Theosophy." Of course, always, in our case, we have to add that we do not mean the Adyar brand of Theosophy and to explain what we stand for—the Three Objects, which may lead to the Three Fundamental Propositions. All this has happened in our experience. Now, it is possible to conjecture that in some special and extraordinary circumstance we may for good reason wish to hold our tongue; but never to deny our relation to the

philosophy and its movement.

You speak of your attitude towards your colleagues who are not interested in spiritual matters. In this as in other matters it is necessary to adopt an attitude of tolerance. No true Theosophist will ever endeavour to force his ideas upon his fellow brother or to dictate to him what he should believe or disbelieve in. Every man has to prove his own work, as H.P.B. said, and we will never gain our point as Theosophists by looking upon all those who do not agree with us as "silly," though it is our duty to point out to others holding different views any errors of statement or of fact.

(To be continued)

BE of good cheer. Do not think of today's failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed, if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost.

—HELEN KELLER

It is not necessarily those lands which are the most fertile or most favoured in climate that seem to me the happiest, but those in which a long struggle of adaptation between man and his environment has brought out the best qualities of both.

—T. S. ELIOT

If a man is called to be a street-sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street-sweeper who did his job well.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

ZODIAC—A LOST KEY

I

ZODIAC is the sun's path in the heavens. In astronomy and astrology, it is a belt around the heavens extending 9 degrees on either side of the ecliptic. Ecliptic is a great circle on the celestial sphere representing the apparent path of the Sun over the course of a year. The paths or orbits of the Moon and of the principal planets also lie entirely within the belt of the zodiac. The zodiac is the ring of constellations that the sun seems to pass through each year. A constellation is a group of stars that forms an imaginary outline or pattern on the celestial sphere, typically representing an animal, a creature, a god or an inanimate object. Since most of the constellations through which the ecliptic passes, represent animals, the ancient Greeks called its zone *Zodiakos kyklos*, or "circle of animals." As the Earth orbits the sun, the sun appears to pass in front of different constellations. The twelve astrological signs of the zodiac are each considered to occupy 30 degrees of this great circle. These twelve signs roughly correspond to the twelve astronomical constellations. The twelve constellations are named after the twelve signs: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpius, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius and Pisces.

The Zodiac is related to both astronomy and astrology. According to some of the Orientalists the Zodiac is not very ancient, being only the invention of the Greeks of the Macedonian period. They believe that the Hindus never knew of a Zodiac at all, till they borrowed one from the Greeks. Not only that many of them declare that no Eastern nation knew of the Zodiac till the Greeks acquainted them with the same. The antiquity of the Zodiac in Egypt is similarly doubted. Our attention is drawn by H.P.B. to the *Book of Job*, considered to be the oldest in the Hebrew canon, prior to Moses, which speaks of "the making 'of Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades (*Ash, Kesil, and Cimah*) and the chambers of the South' (ix. 9); of Scorpio and the *Mazzaroths*—the TWELVE SIGNS (xxxviii, 31, 32), which words...imply knowledge of the Zodiac even among the nomadic

Arabic tribes." In fact, one finds several astronomical references in the *Book of Job*. Taking these as the basis, J. S. Bailly proved that the earliest founders of the science of the Zodiac belonged to an antediluvian, primitive people, and which knowledge existed about 3700 B.C. It shows that the Greeks could not have invented the Zodiac as they did not exist as a nation in 3700 B.C. Further, if the Zodiac was known in the days of Job, how could the civilized and philosophical Hindus have remained ignorant of it? (*S.D.*, I, 647-48)

The Zodiac was in India and Egypt for incalculable ages, and the sages (magi) of these countries possessed far greater knowledge with regard to the occult influence of the stars and heavenly bodies on our earth, than our modern astronomers. In the vicinity of Mexico City, a bas-relief has been discovered on a very old pyramid, which represents a man looking at the stars through a long tube, very similar to our telescope. Also, the astronomical observations of the *Surya-Siddhanta* (an ancient treatise on astronomy) can be traced to some 50,000 years ago. (*Le Lotus*, September 1886)

It is from the Fourth Race that the early Aryans got their knowledge of wonderful things. One of them is the Mayasabha mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, which was built by Mayasura, an Atlantean, for the Pandavas. Mayasura, also known as Asuramaya, was an Atlantean astronomer and astrologer. The chronology and computations of Brahmin Initiates are based on the works of Asuramaya.

Garga, the oldest astronomer in India, is supposed to have obtained astronomical and astrological knowledge from Sesha—the thousand-headed serpent, who bears seven *Patalas* and the entire world upon his head—who is also *Ananta*, the infinite, and also "Cycle of Eternity," in esotericism. Serpent Sesha also represents divine Wisdom. Sage Narada is credited in the old Stanzas with having calculated and recorded all the astronomical and Cosmic cycles to come, imparting science and astronomy to early humanity. The Atlantean Asuramaya used these records by Narada to determine

the duration of all the past geological and cosmical periods as also the length of all the cycles to come, till the end of the Seventh Race. Asuramaya is considered the earliest astronomer in Aryavarta. (*S.D.*, II, 49)

“Do not think that our astronomers would have made anything but a mess of the zodiac if the old Chaldeans had not left us the one we use,” writes Mr. Judge. In other words, the present zodiac is the one constructed by the Babylonians or Chaldeans. He says that we have lost the key to the understanding of both, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the Zodiac, which are “two great storehouses of knowledge.” Except for the initiates, the origin, the real significance and occult meaning of the Zodiac, were, and still are, mystery to ordinary human beings.

In *Isis Unveiled* we read that the twelve signs of the zodiac are connected with the twelve Jewish Patriarchs as also with the evolution of the universe. The ancients taught that the universe is not a creation but an evolution from primordial substance or pre-existent matter. Our universe is only one in the endless series of universes. The evolution of every world, including our earth, involves a cycle of twelve transformations. These transformations begin with the metaphysical and supra-human, and end with the physical and purely human nature of Kosmos and man. Applied to our earth, after the first six transformations our earth and everything on it, including man, is grosser and more material, whereas after the remaining six transformations the earth and man grow more and more refined and spiritual. This concept of evolution of the worlds was synthesized into a single pictorial design, known as the Zodiac or celestial belt, for the understanding of the common people.

Originally, only ten signs were known to the public, namely, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo-Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius and Pisces. There were two mystical and secret signs known only to the Initiates. When it was found necessary to make them exoteric, they split the sign Virgo-Scorpio and inserted Libra. Thus, the signs Scorpio and Libra hide the true signs. They

are blinds to conceal the true names of the two secret signs, which held the key to the whole secret of creation, and divulged the origin of “good and evil.” Within these two signs was hidden the explanation of gradual transformation of the world, from its spiritual and subjective, into “two-sexed” sublunary state. These twelve signs are divided into two groups: The first six signs were called ascending or the line of Macrocosm, *i.e.*, the great spiritual world; while the last six signs were called descending line or Microcosm, *i.e.*, the secondary world, that was a mere reflection of the former. Libra the seventh sign represented the *Mediator* between spirit and matter or God and man. The sign Libra is represented by scales or balance. It represents equilibrating point as well as a turning point. It shows that in the course of evolution the worlds having reached the lowest and grossest point and human beings having become materialistic and selfish, the turning point has been reached, so that from that point onwards, spirit will begin to ascend and express itself through matter. The scales symbolise eternal equilibrium, which is necessary in a universe of harmony, with balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces, of darkness and light, spirit and matter.

Likewise, we are told that the patriarchs in the Bible, which are identical with the Hindu *Prajapatis* (progenitors) and the Sephiroth of the Kabalists, are simply the signs of the Zodiac. They symbolize spiritual and physical evolution of human races. Patriarchs along the ascending line represent spiritual races which were produced without the union of the sexes, till we come to Virgo-Scorpio which represents Jehovah or Hermaphrodite man. The Virgo-Scorpio split denotes separation into sexes—Cain and Abel. Sagittarius represents Seth, the last part of Third Race in which separation of sexes has taken place. Libra or Enoch is half-divine and half-terrestrial man. The descending line represents the physical races that are produced through the union of the sexes. In giving this explanation, H.P.B. mentions that she has given only one turn to the key and that to understand the mystery completely, seven turns must be given to the key. (*Isis*, II, 455-463)

T. Subba Row gives illuminating explanation in the article, “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac.” He points out that the names given to various zodiacal signs have nothing to do with the shape of the constellations included in them. In the article he seeks to find out the source of the names given to the zodiacal divisions through the philosophy underlying these signs. From one point of view these signs represent various stages in the evolution of the universe from the Unknown, to the physical, objective universe of *panchamahabhutas* or five elements. He makes use of the Sanskrit names given to these twelve signs and delineates four rules for getting at the deeper or hidden meaning in the Sanskrit words. Thus for instance, one must find out the synonyms of the word; find out the numerical value of the letters composing the word; find out if the word is related to any ancient myth or allegory and lastly, permute the different syllables composing the word and examine the new combinations and their meanings.

The first sign of the zodiac is Aries, named *Mesha* in Sanskrit, which literally means Ram. One of the synonyms of this word is *Aja*. *Aja* literally means unborn or that which has no birth, and represents One Reality, Causeless Cause, *Parabrahmam*, the self-existent, eternal, self-sufficient cause of all. The second sign *Rishabham*, literally means Bull. However, this word is used in several places in the Upanishads and the Vedas to mean “AUM” or *Pranava*. In the *Glossary* under the term Taurus we read that it is the most mysterious constellation of the Zodiac, represented by Aleph, or the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Bull is the symbol of force and procreative power—the Logos. Since its connection is shown with Logos and *Pranava*, it may well represent *Sabda Brahman* or the Unmanifested Logos or ethereal vibrations diffused throughout space.

(To be continued)

APHORISMS ON KARMA—SOME REFLECTIONS

VII

[Preface to the *Aphorisms on Karma* by Mr. Wm. Q. Judge (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 21*) reads: “The following, among others not yet used, were given to me by teachers, among them being H. P. Blavatsky. Some were written, others communicated in other ways. To me they were declared to be from manuscripts not now accessible to the general public. Each one was submitted for my judgement and reason; and just as they, aside from any authority, approved themselves to my reason after serious consideration of them, so I hope they will gain the approval of those my fellow workers to whom I now publish them.”]

APHORISM 12: “*Karmic causes already set in motion must be allowed to sweep on until exhausted, but this permits no man to refuse to help his fellows and every sentient being.*”

An understanding of the working of the absolute Justice of the Law of Karma, which is the law of our very being, is necessary in order that we may learn to base our thoughts and actions in accord with the harmonious and progressive order of Nature. In the ordinary worldly view, the birth of a child is a commonplace event, one among the many thousands that occur every day, and no significance is discerned in it except as a purely personal one for the family concerned. In the modern scientific view, it is just a biological phenomenon and no more. But to the discerning eye of the philosopher each such birth is neither a mere chance nor a new soul created by God, as some religionists believe, but the coming into the earth life in a new body once again of an immortal Soul, in a series of its innumerable such rebirths; and that each child carries in its inner self a vast store of the Ego’s past Karma generated by it in its many past lives on earth. In each of its rebirths the body it acquires, the parents who are instrumental in giving it birth, the race or the nation in which it appears as a unit, the individual character and tendencies—good or bad—and those of the family and of the nation which it shares in common, are all in exact relation to one or more

phases of its vast store of the accumulated Karma of its past. The body the Ego acquires in each rebirth, and the environment of its life, therefore, are the result of its past Karma and serves as the instrument or channel by and through which such portions of its unexpended Karmic store can come to fructification, which are felt by the embodied Ego as good and evil experiences.

Karma is of three kinds: *Sanchita*, *Agami* and *Prarabdha*. In Vedantic literature, there is a beautiful analogy. The Bowman has already shot an arrow and it has left his hands. He cannot recall it. He is about to shoot another arrow. The bundle of arrows in the quiver on his back is the *sanchita* (stored-up karma); the arrow he has shot is *prarabdha*; and the arrow which he is about to shoot from his bow is *agami* (karma which is being made now). Of these, he has control over the *sanchita* and the *agami*, but he must surely work out his *prarabdha*. He has to experience the past which has begun to take effect. Every Ego is born bringing with it a portion of the stored-up Karma. Thus, *Prarabdha* Karma is that portion or aspect of Karma with which one is born, and the field was ready for its precipitation. It operates in the present life and body, bringing about all the circumstances and changes. Destiny or Fate is that Karma which has ripened, whose precipitation cannot be averted or postponed. For instance, we cannot change the family, nation or race into which we are born.

Therefore, circumstances and events of our lives as well as the character, qualities and tendencies of our personal natures are the objective manifestations of the subjective environment of our souls formed from the moral effects of our former thoughts and deeds. It is evident, then, that it is folly to quarrel with the outer circumstances of our lives when we find them unpleasant, painful, or obstructive. We often hear people entertaining wishful thinking that the life of someone struggling in adverse circumstances would have fared better had that one been placed in a different environment. Such reflection is folly because it could never be different so long as the flow of the Karmic cause created by oneself which brought about the apparently

unfavourable conditions as effects are not exhausted unimpeded by regrets, complaints or by attempts at escaping them through expedient means. The very attempt to escape what is felt as adverse circumstances would in itself be the cause of creating still greater trouble for oneself.

An excellent example of this is seen in our attitude towards and treatment sought for cure of diseases. The right attitude and approach towards disease which afflicts us, is to allow it to work itself out of the system with the knowledge that it is working out of the past Karma and thereby purifying of our inner self of taint. A wise approach to manage diseases one may be afflicted with is to follow ordinary rules of hygiene and take recourse to medicines prescribed by the physician. Physical ailments should be treated by physical means and not by resorting to practices of so-called mental-healing or “mind-cure.” Such practices create disturbance in the life-currents in the subtle body, the link between the mind and the physical body, obstructing manifestation of the disease on the physical plane. The disease is pushed back into the deeper layers of the mind, making it appear that one is cured of the disease. In reality it is not so. The disease, which has been thrust back, remains in the mental plane and will flow out of the individual’s physical system with a virulent force manifold stronger than before at some other time—either in the same life or in a future one.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (5-11-1) teaches, that a man in illness suffers is the highest *tapas* and that one wins the highest worlds, who knows this truth. Sri Shankaracharya, commenting on this teaching, says in his commentary: “A man should think that the suffering, his fever and other forms of illness cause him, is the highest *tapas*, ascetic self-denial. For suffering is common to both, to *tapas*, and *tapa*, to ascetic austerity and illness. For his suffering in the form of illness will wipe out the effects of his deeds, of the wise man *who takes that suffering as tapas, looking on it without a blame or a complaint*. With his suffering transformed thus into *tapas*, with this *tapas* that his meditation is, he with his evils all burnt up, wins

the highest worlds, he, the man who knows this.”

When Karma has ripened and begun to precipitate, all we can do is to experience the effects with right attitude. *The Voice of the Silence* says: “Teach to eschew all causes; the ripple of effect, as the great tidal wave, thou shalt let run its course.” 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 cultivate by every true spiritual aspirant. With such an attitude, one will not resort to any prayers or propitiatory ceremonies, to cause to deviate the course of the Law and dodge the karmic consequences. There is total acceptance that “my own comes back to me.”

However, “acceptance” does not mean 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; learning the lessons of fortitude and sympathy, or detachment and patience, etc. One of the aphorisms on Karma points out that in a given life we can take measures to repress wrong tendencies and eliminate defects. When intense efforts are made, the influence of the Karmic tendency is shortened. Karma has placed us where we are, but it does not hold us there. We can do more than merely learn the lesson, we can respond to the situation in such a manner that it inspires others.

The wise man understands the meaning of the events of life as working of Karma, and, therefore, when meeting adversities will never complain or resort to expediences to escape them but accepts the adverse circumstances as that which he himself desired and earned as his just deserts. The very attitude of such assumption of responsibility will enable the individual affected to learn the lessons contained in the painful experience. Once the lessons are learnt the

necessity of suffering adversity ceases, and man grows in wisdom and progresses in higher life. Hence the wise teach, *Karmic causes already set in motion must be allowed to sweep on until exhausted*. Unwise are those who resort to prayers and religious ceremonies in a bid to escape from the Karmic decree, not knowing that the very attempt to escape from the just decrees of retributive Karma results in his having to pay a still heavier penalty in the same or in a future life for defying the unfailing law of absolute Justice. Teaches Mr. Judge: “A sojourn for everyone in a body born to all pains, deprivations and miseries of modern poverty, is good and just. Inasmuch as the present state of civilization with all its horrors of poverty, of crime, of disease, of wrong relations almost everywhere, has grown out of the past, in which we were workers, it is just that we should experience it all at some point in our career.” (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 11).

One of the important bearings of the Karmic law on us is our responsibility in the face of the suffering of our fellowmen. Taking a narrow view of the law due to partial knowledge and selfishness if one refrains from helping the sufferer, saying that it is his or her Karma to suffer and one ought not to interfere in it, he commits an act of omission for which he will have to pay. If it is the karma of a fellowman to be in dire straits and suffering, it is also at the same time our Karma too, who may be witnessing it, to do what we can to mitigate as much as in our power the pain of the sufferer. “Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in deadly sin,” teaches *The Voice of the Silence*. Retributive justice follows one who thus violates the principle of Universal Brotherhood, and will have to learn the lesson that one cannot separate oneself from any being, good or bad. *Light on the Path* teaches that the soiled garment we shrink from touching may have been ours yesterday, and may be ours tomorrow, and that if we shrink from it in horror, when it is flung on our shoulders, it will cling more closely, till we learn the lesson that in reality there is no separateness, and that each one of us is bound up indissolubly with all beings—high or low, good or bad. Thus:

“If some person who now pays no heed to the misery of men and women should in next life be plunged into one of slums of our cities for rebirth, it would imprint on the soul the misery of such a situation. This would lead later on to compassion and care for others. For, unless we experience the effects of a state of life we cannot understand or appreciate it from mere description.” (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 11)

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. To ignore the suffering of another by saying, “it is his karma!” is gross misunderstanding of the doctrine of Karma. If a person meets with an accident and we happen to be the only one present at the scene, then under karma, it is our duty to help him. If a person comes to us asking for money, or seeking solace, or to solve a legal or moral problem, then it is our duty to help. Many people in India felt that the miserable plight of the untouchables was due to their own karma, hence, for a long time no one came forward to take up their cause. This was a blot on so-called Hindu religion.

It is difficult to say what portion of another’s karma is *strictly of his own making*. As Mr. Judge suggests, “The indissoluble unity of the race demands that we should consider every man’s troubles as partly due to ourselves, because we have been always units in the race and helped to make the conditions which cause suffering” (*“Forum” Answers*, p. 55). Besides individual karma there is also collective and distributive Karma. We have contributed in making the humanity as we find it today. We must realise that it is not easy to disconnect ourselves from the family, community or nation, because we would not have been born into one if we had not contributed in making them as we find them today. Thus, doing our duty to fellowmen and fellow-beings, desiring nothing nor shrinking from whatever Karma has in store for us, however distasteful it might be to the personal part of us, is Wisdom in action.

(*To be continued*)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

It is a fallacy to think that only the rich can leave behind legacy. The truth is that all of us leave behind a legacy, of some kind, either consciously or unconsciously. For instance, customs, traditions, rituals and behavioural patterns that are passed on from one generation to another may be regarded as a form of legacy. Unlike an ordinary will, a spiritual will is a document that passes on wisdom and valuable experiences rather than money or property. More than a wealth or property Will, a spiritual Will can be of immense benefit to our progeny by instilling in them priceless values, says Jamuna Rangachari. We need to be equally concerned about passing on values, wisdom and valuable experiences as money and property. After her marriage, the author’s late mother-in-law told her that promoting education was a family tradition, a sort of legacy passed on by one generation to the other. It could take the form of donating a book, paying school fees or teaching someone on a voluntary basis.

There are several individuals who are working towards creating such legacies. Thus, for instance, someone who has imbibed spiritual values and worked towards bringing solace to the elderly and the cancer patients, wishes that youngsters in her family should spend some time with the aged and help them overcome loneliness and boredom. She wishes them to follow her example and contribute to cancer patients’ medical needs and help them find inner strength to battle the dreadful disease. Another person who has been writing about social causes wants to leave behind a legacy of the same so that the next generation can do something to restore the dignity of women who are victims of dowry or domestic abuse.

“Leaving a spiritual will by pledging to do selfless acts and creating a family tradition out of it is part of *karma yoga*,” wherein you work as if you are working for the divine, without expecting any return. If spiritually advanced beings like the Buddha are remembered even today, it is because they emphasised spiritual values, showing the impermanence of material life. “His legacy

continues to feed the evergrowing mass of human awareness and act as a loadstar to humans looking for guidance and direction.” It appears that creating a spiritual will is a great idea, as it sets us thinking as to what we would like to be remembered for, when we have died. That in turn can go a long way in awakening us to our life purpose. This act of creating a spiritual will can help create a much better world, writes Rangachari. (*Life Positive*, October 2019)

In a world which values material possessions above all, determination by every individual to create a spiritual will and leave behind a spiritual legacy could prove immensely valuable. The first one to benefit from it is the person creating the will. We are forced to examine our lives, differentiate between real and false, permanent and fleeting, which prompts us to redistribute our time and energy. We may be led to question ourselves whether we have been leading a “meaningful” life in the spiritual sense. Theosophy says, with sage Patanjali that the whole universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul. To make our lives meaningful, we must try to understand the evolutionary plan, see our place in it and then work towards realization of that plan. Our endeavour should be to leave behind a spiritual legacy for the whole of humanity. Samartha Ramdas Swami, a Maharashtrian saint, wrote: “Let us do something so that our good name remains even after perishing of our body. Let us do all good deeds honestly. Let us wear out like sandalwood. Let others get benefit out of our sufferings.”

On the other hand, those receiving the spiritual legacy must not fail to keep it alive and pass it on in their turn. Some of us, who are fortunate enough to have contacted genuine spiritual tradition and true knowledge, received as a legacy from our parents, should strain every nerve to keep it alive, and to do all in our power to kindle interest in the same of the next generation. We, students of Theosophy, must remember Mr. Crosbie’s words that the opportunity to learn and apply the philosophy of Theosophy comes under Karma to the very few, and “it is the height of unwisdom to neglect the opportunity again, most especially in cases where it is brought home to people without their effort.”

It appears that almost everyone believes in an after-life, including the atheists. Psychologists find out through studies and experiments that the belief in the life after death is not based on religion or fear or due to one’s inability to imagine non-existence. For instance, psychologist Jesse Bering, at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, and others, believe that confronted with death, the majority of us, including rationalists cling to the belief that death is not the end. Surveys conducted regularly since the 1940s show that about seventy per cent of US citizens believe in some form of life after death. We cannot say that these beliefs stem from religious teachings because if that were so then belief in after-life would have declined in our times when religiosity has declined. Again, religion describes after-life more in terms of heaven and hell, whereas the believers in after-life speak in vague terms of “something” surviving. Psychologists are inclined to think that the belief in the after-life is largely instinctive or intuitive rather than learned.

In an experiment conducted by psychologist Jamin Halberstadt, at the University of Otago, students were invited to take part in a meditation trial. Half of them were told that a janitor had died in that room, a few weeks ago, and that a student had seen his ghost. After a while, the experimenters made the light in the room flicker. They found that those who were not told about the ghost story showed a little surprise, but those who knew about it, which included extincivists—those who reject the idea of life after death—were afraid. Thus, “it is evident that belief in the afterlife is instinctive and universal. Extincivists are simply people who have learned to suppress it,” says Halberstadt.

Of the people who believe in life after death, those with Near-Death Experience, are found to believe in it most strongly. No matter what causes Near-Death Experience, the survivors describe it as involving passage through dark tunnel and seeing light at the end of it. After such an experience they lose the fear of death and believe that there is something, call it spirit, soul or some aspect of our consciousness, which survives the death of the body. After Near-

Death Experience, some of the staunch unbelievers have been found to begin believing in the after-life, writes Graham Lawton. (*New Scientist*, November 23, 2019)

Death is not the end, taught the ancients. There is something surviving the death of the body. How do we know that? H.P.B. presents a common sense approach, saying that nothing in nature comes to an abrupt end. Thus, “A flower blossoms; then withers and dies. It leaves a fragrance behind, which, long after its delicate petals are but a little dust, still lingers in the air...Let a note be struck on an instrument, and the faintest sound produces an eternal echo. A disturbance is created on the invisible waves of the shoreless ocean of space, and the vibration is never wholly lost... And man, we are asked to believe, man, the living, thinking, reasoning entity, the indwelling deity of our nature’s crowning masterpiece, will evacuate his casket and be no more!” (*Isis*, I, 114)

Dr. J. Paul Williams observes in his essay, “Belief in a Future Life,” that the arguments regarding rebirth (and we might say, also regarding after-life) revolve around the fundamental question: What is man? There are three possibilities. (1) Is man just a body? (2) Is he a body that has a soul? (3) Is he a soul that has [or uses] a body? Our everyday experience shows that man is not just a body. If we accept that man *is* a soul, then what is the relation between the soul and the body? William James pointed out that we can say that body *produces* life [soul], *or*, that the body *reflects* life. He gives an analogy. Light is produced by a candle; if the candle is put out, its light disappears. But light is reflected by a mirror; if the mirror is taken away the light still continues. So also, we may suppose that the body reflects the soul, therefore it is rational to believe that soul can exist apart from the body. We may argue that we do not have a *direct* experience of the soul existing independent of the body. But so also, we have never seen an atom.

Yet, there are innumerable instances of people who have had OBEs [Out-of-the-Body-Experiences]—in which they describe rushing out of the body, observing the body from a distance and

re-entering it—showing that a soul can exist independent of the body. We must distinguish between the possessor and the possessed, *i.e.*, Individuality and Personality. Just as a person throws away old, worn-out garments and puts on new ones, so also the soul takes up a new body at every birth, teaches the *Gita*. There is an immortal “I” which is the possessor of body, mind, feelings, etc., but cannot be equated with them.

You are what you eat. Whatever we eat directly reflects in our being. That is why the eighteenth-century French lawyer, Jean Savarin said: “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” Keeping in mind the effect of food on mind, body and soul, Pythagoras recommended a healthy vegetarian diet. He seems to suggest that by consuming meat, a person absorbs the animal inside, which then becomes an obstacle to reach the peak of consciousness. The religions in India have favoured a vegetarian diet, mainly based on respect for all forms of life. Moreover, vegetarian food is light whereas non-vegetarian food is heavy. However, that does not mean that the non-vegetarians cannot meditate, it is only that they will be required to put in extra effort as compared to a vegetarian. For them it is like climbing a mountain carrying a heavy weight.

Moreover, with the vegetarian diet our body also begins taking on a different vibe. One begins to become less aggressive and more receptive. *Chhandogya Upanishad* says, “Purity of thought is a consequence of the purity of food that we eat. When food is pure and subtle, it transforms the very basic nature of man.” But it would be wrong to say that every vegetarian is a meditator, while every non-vegetarian is a non-meditator. “The messages from spiritual masters and scriptures are about unburdening the heavy baggage that we are carrying in our journey towards the peak of consciousness, in the easier and faster way,” writes Pratiksha Apurv. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, November 24, 2019)

In the *Gita*, food is classified into three divisions: *Tamasic* or impure food is described as stale and tasteless. *Rajasic* food is bitter,

sour, saline, pungent and excessively hot. *Sattvic* food is pure and savoury, and tends to enhance age, vitality, strength, health and cheerfulness. We can see from the above classification of food that vegetarian diet is neither emphasized nor insisted upon.

It is true that animal food imparts to the eater the qualities of the animal, and tends to make the physical body grosser and denser. One of the great German scientists has shown that every kind of animal tissue, however you may cook it, still retains certain marked characteristics of the animal that it belonged to. H.P.B. observes that when the flesh of animals is assimilated by human beings as food, *it imparts to them*, physiologically, some of the characteristics of the animal it came from. The “coarsening” or “animalizing” effect on a person is greatest from the flesh of the larger animals, less for birds, still less for fish and other cold-blooded animals, and least of all when he eats only vegetables. Spiritual life calls for etherealizing of the physical body. Thus, meat eating is deleterious in two ways: It retains the characteristics of the animal even when it is cooked very well and it leads to coarsening of the body.

There is also the other fact to be borne in mind and that is, suitability or fitness of the food for each person. Each body extracts from any kind of food only that which conforms to the nature of the possessor of the body and that nature is subject to change from within. Moderation in eating is important as much as the quality of food. “We advise really earnest students to eat such food as will least clog and weight their brains and bodies, and will have the smallest effect in hampering and retarding the development of their intuition, their inner faculties and powers,” writes H.P.B. Ultimately, however, we must be more vigilant about our mental food—what kind of thoughts and desires we entertain, and allow to take roots in our minds. “Without doubt, therefore, it is through one’s food that objects of senses get control over one’s mind. It is easy to shut off action of other senses, but it is not possible to carry on without food, on which, sustenance of the physical body depends,” teaches Saint Jnaneshwar.