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The Living of the Higher Life

THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE	3
ON COVETOUSNESS	9
STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA-THE WISE-II	12
ON FIRE-WALKING AND ELEMENTALS	16
MENTAL HYGIENE-A PERSPECTIVE	22
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	28
IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY	33

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

Men suffer because the body decays, the mind continues to be ignorant and the heart remains selfish. Death is feared; ignorance is found difficult to overcome; ignorance is considered a natural inheritance of every man, woman and child. And so from death to death mortals pass, knowing only sorrow...But the innate divinity at the very core of our being whispers —“There must be a way out of the death of the body, the darkness of ignorance, the corruption of selfishness.”

—*Thus Have I Heard*

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA is a practical guide to the art of living. It is a *Yoga-shastra*, as it teaches different ways to unite with God. This union can be achieved through action, devotion and meditation, as also through acquirement of spiritual knowledge. Interestingly the First Chapter of the *Gita* has been called “Arjuna Vishad Yoga,” or “Yoga of despondency of Arjuna.” *Vishad* is not an ordinary grief. It is the kind of despair essential for a person who aspires to walk the Spiritual Path. There comes a stage in a person's life when he begins to find the world to be like a cage or a prison and all is and fleeting. He is dissatisfied with himself and with the world around. This is the point where treading of spiritual path begins, i.e., he decides to seek, in this eternally changing, and evanescent world, a real and permanent thing. In seeking this reality the

chooses or rather begins with the Path of Knowledge, Action or Devotion depending upon his temperament. But none alone can take the seeker more than one step onward. In fact, it is not possible to practice any one of them perfectly, withOUt involving the other two.

Philosophy seems dry to most people. Many give value only to emotional goodness. But strength, sympathy and goodness are not enough without knowledge. Prof. C. S. Lewis points out that *prudence* is one of the four cardinal virtues and it means practical common sense, which implies taking the trouble to think and find out what exactly you are doing and what will be its consequences. People say that Christ asked us to be like children, so we have to be good and in the process, it does not matter if we remain fools. But Christ never asked us to remain children in intelligence. He said, "Be as harmless as doves," but he also said, "Be as wise as serpents." Is it not lack of reasoning, questioning and common sense which gives rise to dogmatism, rituals and superstitions? If something was done from our forefather's time it tends to be regarded as sacrosanct. There is the story of disciples in an ashram who used to sit down near a tree for meditation. Every time the meditation was going on a cat would come and disturb them. So, the first thing they would do before sitting down for meditation was to tie the cat. This practice was continued for long. The old disciples died, one by one, and new ones joined, but the practice of tying the cat before meditation was kept up. After some time the cat also died. But then the disciples in the ashram brought a new cat and began tying her before meditation!

The Path of knowledge in Sanskrit is called *Thana-marga*. It is always in the sense of supreme self-knowledge that the word is used. This knowledge is essential to help us remove ignorance, because it is ignorance which makes us think that God is finite and sits outside of us. Also, it is ignorance, which makes us feel that we are our personalities, that we are weak, ignorant sinners. As Swami Vivekananda points out we are like the lion-cub that got mixed up

with a flock of sheep and grew up with them, with the idea that he was a sheep. One day a lion spotted him in the flock and took him to the lake. On comparing both their reflections in the water, the "sheep-lion" realized that he was indeed a lion! So also, we need spiritual knowledge to make us realize that we are *potentially divine* and *inherently perfect*.

To acquire this knowledge, first, there must be recognition that true knowledge exists. Then there must be ardent desire to obtain it. In the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita* we are told, "Seek this wisdom by strong search, by questions and by humility." In that search lies the danger for the seeker. He finds many teachers, each with separate claim to knowledge. But then instead of choosing the teachings, which suit our preconceived notions or desires, we must accept only those teachings that have Universal application. Mr. Judge seems to suggest in *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* that so long as the *person is sincere*, even if for a while he is way-laid by one or other philosophy, in the course of time, he will come in contact with the right knowledge and right teacher.

The Ninth Chapter of the *Gita* suggests that to acquire this knowledge the attitude of mind must be of not finding fault with what is taught, or with the working of the Law of Karma. One must be a perfect and resolute listener. Mere intellectual appreciation of knowledge could be an effective starting point, provided we are sincere. In the Sixth Chapter of the *Gita* shri Krishna says, "Even if only a mere enquirer, he reaches beyond the word of the *Vedas*," *i.e.*, it gives impulse in that direction so that it fits the individual to take an upward step in the next life. But mere intellectual knowledge is called Head learning. It is blinkered thinking. It does not make an individual more kind or loving but oftentimes produces misplaced pride. Unfortunately, by knowledge we mean an all-round acquaintance with religions, philosophies, arts and sciences, along with the data which senses bring to us. Science feels that nothing can be known about the constituents and properties of a plant or stone without the mechanical and chemical processes. Nor can we

understand the thoughts and feelings of another until they are expressed in words. But there is higher form of knowledge, called intuitive knowledge, which is not dependent on reasoning faculty, though it will never contradict reason. Intuition is the faculty of the soul. Wisdom *or para-vidya* is the knowledge, which leads to right discrimination of good from evil. To do good we require wisdom otherwise, we may end up doing an incalculable harm. It leads also to acquirement of the power through which one can do the good he desires, often without even lifting of a finger.

All that we learn in our schools and colleges including that given in the scriptures is *apara vidya* or inferior knowledge. But this *apara vidya* is not useless. The seeds of wisdom are present within us as potentialities. For these seeds to flower forth, life experiences are necessary. Many events take place in our lives, but an event becomes an experience only when we have drawn some lesson out of it. To do this, the mind needs breadth and depth. Breadth of mind means acquiring non-parochial views. We must welcome truth from whichever quarter it comes. We must allow our minds to contact Universal ideas, through good books and scriptures. The depth of mind comes from the commitment to go deeper. The third ingredient, to acquire wisdom, is the heart quality. Besides everyday experiences, we need to develop qualities like love, goodness and altruism.

The development of Heart quality is important. As the Bible says, "What shall profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?" Again, conceptual knowledge is of little use. Why should we think that a piece of prose or poem, or a piece of art is like a stone on the beach, lying to be picked up by any careless passer-by? It is something wonderful and in order to be able to appreciate or understand it completely we have to raise our level of consciousness, and call in certain amount of imagination and sensitivity to understand the work. In spiritual life we achieve very little by somebody else telling us about faith or love or devotion. We are required to have undergone various experiences of faith and love to know what it is. H.P.B. writes that acquirement of wisdom

requires sacrifice and devotion of man's whole life.

Finally, one has to shift from learning to wisdom. Bullhe Shah, a Sufi of Punjab, was sent to school as a boy, and while other boys mastered the entire alphabet, Bullhe was stuck with the first letter of the alphabet, Alif. On seeing his father's unhappiness, Bullhe ran away from home to the forest. It is said that in the forest he *saw* Alif (One Reality) manifested in everything—trees, hills, rocks, birds and beasts. He then came back to his teacher and asked his permission to write it on the wall. Bullhe wrote the letter "Alif" on the wall and it, of itself, divided into two. Alif represents the ONE (God or *Parabrahm*), and as the Pythagoreans say, the One becomes the Two, then Three and then Four and Seven, and so on, giving rise to manifestation. When the teacher humbly accepted Bullhe as teacher, Bullhe sang:

Leave your learning aside.
Fill not your room with tomes.
You burden the mind with learning.
Cease; for it has no use.
In pursuing the false, lose not the true.
One Alif is all you need to know.

This is very important to know. Scriptures are only pointers. Buddha says that once that you have crossed the river you need not carry the boat on your head, but leave it on the shore, as it has served its purpose. The Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita* defines true Wisdom of Spiritual kind as freedom from self-esteem, hypocrisy, injury to others, meditation upon birth, death, decay, sickness and error. A truly wise man is free from the sin of separateness. I regard with equal mind a Brahmin, a cow, a dog and also the one who eats the flesh of the dog.

Devotion and action combined with knowledge leads to final wisdom. Knowledge and action are two whips that are necessary for soul's ascent. As the actions grow more and more free from attachment and sacrificial in spirit, one becomes fitted to higher and abstruse knowledge. But On the Other hand, with the

acquisition of knowledge the soul becomes firm in such desireless and sacrificial acts. We need to put into practice the spiritual teachings, because only then the quality of mind can change, making it porous to the influx from above.

As for devotion, in the absence of knowledge it just remains some kind of emotional effervescence. Devotion is defined as intense love of God. When this singleness of attachment is towards a personal god or a particular idol, then it degenerates into fanaticism. In every religion, we find that people love their own god, idols, and ideals and hate every other gods and ideals. **In** the absence of knowledge, the devotion that is developed is inferior. As against this there is *Para-bhakti* or supreme devotion. The *Gita* says that spiritual knowledge includes every action without exception and that it is to be obtained by means of devotion. Mr. Judge gives example of Jacob Boehme and many ignorant men who had no access to books and yet they had perceived by their inward sense the real truth of things. Thus:

The reason is that these men have attained to devotion, and thereby cleared away from before the eye of the soul the clouds of sense whose shadows obscure our view of truth. I do not despise learning; it is a great possession; but if the learned man were also a devoted one in the sense of the Bhagavad-Gita, how much wider would be the sweep of his intellection no one can calculate. Learning of the human sort is not despised among the highest occultists, even among the Adepts. They use it and acquire it. They accumulate the *record* of the experiences of seers and devoted men of small learning for long periods of time, until a great master of both learning and devotion arises who, by reason of his profound knowledge joined to devotion, can make the wonderful deductions in the possession of The Lodge respecting matters so far beyond us that they can with difficulty be imagined. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 75-76)

ON COVETOUSNESS

No suffering befalls him who clings not to name and form and who calls nothing his own.

—*The Dhammapada*

TO COVET, to possess, to hold, to own, to limit, to control—for how long? Decay and death come to all—to the owner and to the thing owned. Of what avail, then, is covetousness, or the desire to own, to control, that is so much an obsession with us during life? The desire to stop the ravages of time, the movement of the wind, the swelling of the tide—this is folly, for nothing endures for ever.

Whence, then, desire? Is it love overmagnified? Is it stability overstabilized? Is it a kind of living in the past—a refusal to accept advancement in time, to be flexible, to adapt oneself to change? To live in the past is to stagnate, for Time sweeps ever on, Memory grows dim as events sweep by and all things change, grow, decay, and reappear under cyclic law.

Fear, grief, delusion, anger, **retaliation, revenge, are all** offshoots of covetousness. The detached mind alone can evaluate the justice of circumstances. If resentment and hate are fixed and fastened on a person through whom our Karma came, all that we carry is an emotion-memory of that past and little, if any, recognition of ensuing changes in both ourself and the other. The other person may have changed for the better; we, for the worse. Can we ever be sure that our evaluation of another is correct or invariable? Literature is full of tragic stories of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of prejudice, pride, and over-exaggeration of one's own importance.

In the *Gita*, covetousness or greed is deemed a "gate of hell," for the reason that no one ever owns anything—not even his body.

What about property, wealth, security and ease? Our statute books burst with laws ensuring us these and providing for punishment to those who violate the laws. What is it in us that makes us covet what we have not earned, or what is not our due? What ^{fear prevent} our asking for help, for food, clothing and shelter, when needed'?

What selfishness twists its tendrils of lethargy and suspicion around our innate generosity, so that we refrain from helping the needy, feeding them from our satiety, clothing them from our surplus, housing them, bringing them back to health, teaching a philosophy of life that they may use to better direct themselves while temporarily we give them a respite from their physical-plane needs?

Fear may step in here, fear that advantage may be taken of our generosity. To be truly large-hearted we need discrimination. Assistance is no longer valuable or justified when the recipient abuses it. Restraints are needed and the matter of character-education has to be considered.

In ancient India, the wealthy built almshouses for the poor and rest-houses for the traveller. Assistance to the needy was considered a duty and meritorious in the flow of one's life.

The abuse, the exaggeration of any virtue, vitiates it. Principles of fairness, justice and equity alone restore balance, and the principal organ of harmony is the understanding, the unemotional mind which, while feeling deeply for others' wants and needs, also takes into consideration how they will react to the aid they receive and to what use it will be put.

Speaking out clearly in matters of principle is neither hurtful nor does it cloud issues. Face-to-face discussion clears a situation before it deteriorates into the chaotic chasm of emotionalism and warped imputation to others of our own emotional condition. The clear light of fact, truth and justice is respected by all. The liar pretends he is true; the cheat pretends he is honest; the thief pretends he is a bystander. Virtue is the universal touchstone of personal interaction, the only basis for community living. And its main supports are right action, direct speech, and concern for others' rights and dues as though they were our own.

Covetousness is destroyed by generosity; hypocrisy is destroyed by the light of truth and honesty. Generosity is the life attitude of him who believes in reincarnation, in the action of the law which brings to his door in this life a "stranger" who may perhaps, in lives

gone by, have been a friend or relative and who is now returning to re-establish the old bonds of life shared in the distant past.

Our physical eyes may not see this, but our soul does. Our first impression may often reflect this recognition of the soul—a reaction from the karmic connection of our mutual past. Our friends or enemies return. Our duty lies in working on our own nature to deal fairly with all, in the spirit of brotherly charity, to enhance the good and the noble and to resist the selfish, the separative and the secretive.

Humanity is a brotherhood. The fear of the stranger is indeed the most dangerous of conditions. Unfounded suspicions create false "defences" which instigate misunderstanding, division, strife, war and destruction.

For the practical person plunged in the turmoil of life and the constant pull of passions, what can be offered? First, cultivate detachment as an attitude that permits the mind free from passion or desire to evaluate facts. Second, make sure that you have all the facts, including those of the other person's attitudes and wants. Third, unfold fairness, justice and discrimination, which universal principles alone can bring about. Fourth, have a fearless attitude that permits you to speak the truth freely without imposing it, which enables you to act with determination and directness. And finally, consult with others so that your decisions may be more impersonally based and right action may arise from mutual brotherly understanding.

This also leads to assimilation of one another. While retaining our individuality, we grow together as we come to trust the impersonality of universal equity and realize that each being carries this in his inner spiritual nature. We are indeed the same in kind, but we do differ in degree. All have the same potentialities; how we develop and use them creates our own karma, and adds to or subtracts from the karmic burdens of the composite Whole.

INTELLIGENCE is shown by good judgment.

—*Gems from the East*

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE WISE MAN—II

3. *Do not be friends of evil doers or of mean men. Do be friends with the good; keep company with the best of men. (78)*

4. *He who drinks in the Dhamma with a serene mind lives happily. The wise man delights in the Dhamma taught by the Noble Ones. (79)*

WE ARE constantly influenced by thoughts, feelings and actions of other people, whether we are conscious of it or not. The process begins right from childhood. It is a means by which we can attain progress and salvation, if we take right steps. Mr. Judge describes these steps as follows:

The first step is giving up bad associations and getting a longing for knowledge of God; the second is joining good company, listening to their teachings and practicing them; the third is strengthening the first two attainments, having faith and continuing in it. Whoever dies thus, lays the sure foundation for ascent to adeptship, or salvation. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 100)

In the canto of "Happiness" we are told, "The company of fools is like company of enemies—productive of pain. Company of the wise is like meeting of real kinsfolk—it brings happiness." Till we are firmly established in the Law, it is better to be watchful about the company we keep. Otherwise there is a danger that we may fall pray to temptations, pressure or persuasion that comes from our so-called "friends." While it is good to avoid bad company and make friends with the good, the wise delight in the *Dhamma* taught by the Noble Ones.

5. *Irrigators lead the waters. Fletchers shape the arrows. Carpenters carve the wood. Wise people discipline themselves. (80)*

6. *Solid rock is not shaken by the gale. The wise man is not moved by praise or blame. (81)*

7. *After hearing the Dhamma the wise become tranquil, like a deep lake which is clear and calm. (82)*

8. *Good people move onwards whatever befall. They do not prattle, nor yearn for pleasures. The wise are not elated in their happiness, nor are they depressed when touched by sorrow. (83)*

9. *Neither for himself nor for others will the wise man crave sons or wealth or position. (84)*

Irrigators lead the water wherever they like. Fletchers shape the arrows, making them straight and pointed. Carpenters carve the wood. All of them have obtained mastery in their respective skill by practice. Likewise, the wise people discipline themselves. How? They listen to the *Dhamma* and allow it to sink into their minds and hearts. It gives them tranquillity which is symbolized by the lake which is deep, clear and calm. This does not come about automatically. It comes from disciplined mind. Good people take things in their stride, no matter what befalls them. It signifies highest faith in the working of Law of Karma. Our general tendency is to blame someone else for our problems. We tend to grumble endlessly and waste a lot of energy in unproductive talking and complaining rather than doing something to remedy the situation. The right position that we need to take is beautifully summed up by Mr. Judge thus:

We must be ready to say at any moment under whatever circumstances, whether expected or unexpected: "It is just what I in fact desired." ...We must cultivate complete resignation to the Law, the expression and operation of which is seen in the circumstances of life and the ebb and flow of our inner being. All that can be gotten out of wealth, or beauty, or art, or pleasure, are merely pools of water found along our path as it wanders through the desert of life. If we are not seeking them their appearance gives us intense pleasure, and we are thus able to use them for our

good and that of others just so long as the Law leaves them to us; but when that superior power removes them, we must say: "It is just what I in fact desired." Any other course is blindness. All the passing shows of life, whether fraught with disaster or full of fame and glory, are teachers; he who neglects them, neglects opportunities which seldom the gods repeat. And the only way to learn from them is through the heart's resignation; for when we become in heart completely poor, we at once are the treasurers and disbursers of enormous riches. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 45-46)

The wise crave not for sons, wealth or position for themselves or for others. Because they are truly wise. The true wisdom of a spiritual kind has been described by Shri Krishna in the *Gita* as:

True wisdom of a spiritual kind is freedom from self-esteem, hypocrisy, and injury to others...it is an exemption from self-identifying attachment for children, wife, and household, and a constant unwavering steadiness of heart upon the arrival of every event whether favourable or unfavourable...it is a resolute continuance in the study of Adhyatma, the Superior spirit, and a meditation upon the end of the acquirement of a knowledge of truth—this is called wisdom or spiritual knowledge; its opposite is ignorance.

10-11. *A few only reach the farther shore. Most people go their rounds on this one. Those, however, who listen to the Law and live up to its precepts cross over to the farther shore. This crossing over the dominion of Mara is difficult.* (85-86)

Life is called an ocean of *samsara*—worldly existence, difficult to cross over. Few alone have the courage to plunge and swim across to the other shore or eternal life—Nirvana. Mara, the great tempter and deluder, rules this world. Comment on these verses from May 1956 issue of *Theosophy* magazine states that "this shore" is clearly a realm of partial incarnation of man's energy of merely half-hearted

dedication, and those who live on this familiar terrain are, therefore, both the producers and the victims of ceaseless confusion. For, while even "on this shore" there are moments of intuitive vision and times of comparatively high resolve, these suffer constant interruption until one crosses "over to the farther shore."

What in analytical terms, are the chief characteristics of "this shore"? Another translation of the *Dhammapada* remarks, "the multitude, who remain, run up and down the bank on this side." This is a good simile, for the chief difference between behaviours on the two "shores" is that of the confusion on the one and the clarity on the other. The greatest difficulty is what Patanjali calls "misconceptions of duties and responsibilities"—also, we may add, misconceptions of *opportunities*. And those who "run up and down the bank" fail to give thorough attention to anything they do. Leaving tasks partially completed, obligations cursorily discharged, affections less than fulfilled in purposive striving, they are constantly distracted.

Though it is possible for a person to live many lives during a single existence, in terms of discharging Karma, each one of these "lives," like each day of the year, must have full attention for its own fruition. The person who puts off until tomorrow what needs to be done today is the person who fails *to incarnate* sufficiently in the situations he encounters. So, from one point of view, it is "better"—because less confusing—to have no "love" unless that love be complete, to have no "patriotism" unless it is of a full and noble sort, to have no virtues if they are but partially attended. Actually, of course, evolution cannot work in terms of such clear beginnings and endings. Yet while we live "on this shore" we have half a love, half a patriotism, and, perhaps, a small portion of each virtue. But on the "other shore" we know completeness—the full focusing of will and intelligence, which means the responsibility for incarnating with all of our faculties at one and the same time.

(To be concluded)

ON FIRE-WALKING AND ELEMENTALS

WE often hear accounts of people walking through beds of blazing fire unscathed or being invulnerable to bullets. In the *Old Testament* there is an account of King Nebuchadnezzar who had built a gold statue in Babylon. He had issued an order that as soon as the music started everyone should bow down and worship the statue, and that the person who would not bow down and worship would be thrown into a blazing furnace. However, the three Jews—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who were put in charge of the province of Babylon disobeyed the King's order saying that they will not worship the gold statue but only the God, who may save them from the blazing furnace. The story goes on that these three men were tied and thrown into an extremely hot furnace. However, when the King looked at the furnace, most miraculously, he saw four people walking in the fire and they were *not tied* and showed no signs of being burnt. Also, the fourth one looked like God (*Daniel*, iii). What is the theosophical explanation?

There have been innumerable cases of fire-walking witnessed by hundreds of European visitors to India and other countries. During religious festivals it is common to find at least a few of the devotees perform the feat of fire-walking. Though it is accepted that fire-walking is an actual fact, in 1930s the University of London Council for Psychic Investigation sought to investigate the matter with proper tests. Mr. Kuda Bux, a Mohammedan born in Kashmir was willing to demonstrate the power of fire-walking. He claimed to have practised fire-walking first at the age of fourteen. The investigators felt that they had solved the mystery of fire-walking when they came to the conclusion that the secret of fire-walking was *short contact-time* of each foot with burning embers, as also the *confidence* in walking. The investigators were convinced that Kuda Bux was indeed immune from burning and that fire-walking was not a fraud. But they could not understand *how* it was done. Kuda Bux himself attributed his invulnerability to "faith."

In *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. mentions the case of a general of the Jesuits, who was *unlearned* but full of *magical* knowledge. At his command, one of his Jesuits not only brought burning coals from the kitchen fire but held them in his hands till the group of people had all warmed themselves. In the west, a "sensitive" is entranced before being made invulnerable to fire by the presiding "guides." Such entranced mediums are known to bury the arms to the elbows in glowing coals. However, no such preparation or abnormal state is needed for the performers in the East, generally termed "jugglers." They are able to handle fire, red-hot pieces of iron or melted lead. "We have seen in Southern India these 'jugglers' keep their hands in a furnace of burning coals until the latter were reduced to cinders," writes H.P.B. She explains that some of them are seen to perform this feat during the festival of *Shivaratri* or the Vigil Night of Shiva, with the help of an elemental spirit, called *Kutti-Sattan* or little *demon*. A juggler has this elemental spirit at his command, who serves him faithfully in performing various fire-phenomena. (I, 445-46)

H.P.B. also mentions (*Isis*, I, 504) a certain oil, having several extraordinary properties, that can be extracted from Asbestos. The secret of its virtues is known only to certain Lamas and Hindu adepts. When this oil is rubbed into the body, it leaves no stain or mark. Even when the body is scrubbed with soap and hot or cold water, the virtue of the oil is not diminished. The person so rubbed may boldly step into the hottest fire; unless suffocated he will remain uninjured.

There are chemicals and plants with occult properties that work as *anaesthetics*. H.P.B. mentions the stone of Memphis (*lapis Memphiticus*), which is a small pebble—round, polished and sparkling. When it is ground into powder and applied to that part of the body on which the surgeon was about to operate, either with his scalpel or fire, then only that part of the body would be protected from any pain of the operation. When it was taken after mixing with wine or water, all feeling of suffering was completely deadened.

Likewise, the Brahmins in India know the secrets, which help a woman to burn herself in the funeral pile of her husband without experiencing a single pang of agony, in the rite of widow-burning or *Sati*. The holy plants with occult properties and a sacred root that is culled at midnight hour on the spot where the waters of Ganges and Yamuna rivers mingle are used in the ceremony. There is also certain process of anointing the body of the widow with *ghee* and sacred oils. All these work as so many magical *anaesthetics*, so that the widow is consumed in the fire without suffering the least pain. (*Isis*, I, 540)

There is yet another explanation given in terms of the constitution of the person. There are four major elements—earth, water, air and fire, which are made up of tiny "lives" or elementals. These elementals are called "nature spirits." The elementals are the soul of the elements. Thus, we have *Gnomes* or earth-elementals, *Undines* or water-elementals, *Sylphs* or air-elementals, and *Salamanders* or fire-elementals. Our body is made up of panchmahabhutas or five elements. As a result, not only our physical body but also the astral body is made up of these "lives." Corresponding to astral body in man there is astral light in nature, which continually influences us. Eliphas Levi, a Kabbalist, points out that pregnant women are, more than others, under the influence of the astral light, which assists in the formation of the foetus (*Isis*, I, 395). In the article "Kabbalistic Views on Spirits," H.P.B. quotes the views of Paracelsus and Eliphas Levi, who suggest that the astral currents entering the body of the pregnant woman carry with them various types of elementals and help in the formation of the astral body of the child. Says Paracelsus:

The current of astral light with its peculiar inhabitants, gnomes, sylphs, etc., is transformed into human light at the moment of the conception, and it becomes the first envelope of the soul—its grosser portion; combined with the most subtle fluids, it forms the sidereal (astral, or ethereal) phantom—the inner man.

Eliphas Levi suggests that at the birth of a child, these elementals influence the four temperaments in a child. Thus, the element of the gnomes predominates in melancholy persons; of the salamanders in the sanguine; of the undines, in the phlegmatic; of the sylphs, in the giddy and bilious. In *The Theosophist*, August 1883, H.P.B. gives one more explanation of the invulnerability to fire, of western and Hindu mediums, who can handle burning coals, red-hot iron and walk through the beds of blazing fire unscathed. She points out that some of these mediums can not only handle fire without being injured but also are known to have laid burning coals on the heads of non-mediums as also on paper and books, without injuring the person or property. This is because the medium contains an unusual proportion of fire-elementals or Salamanders in their constitution. Thus:

The explanation...is that the fire-proof individual is a medium for these fire elementals, and contains in himself an unusual proportion of Salamandrian properties, the result of an abnormal combination of elemental forces in his foetal development. Normally, a human being contains the elementals of all the four kingdoms in almost equal proportions, any slight preponderance of one or the other determining the so-called "temperament."

H.P.B. also explains in this article the cases of exhalation of fire from the mouths of certain people. She points out that it could be mere trickery, and the feat may be achieved by using dry powder of *Lycopodium*. However, in other cases it could be explained in terms of preponderance of fire-elementals or Salamanders in the person. She offers this explanation also for the case of a young man who had the gift of generating fire through his breath. He would take anybody's handkerchief and hold it to his mouth, and while vigorously rubbing it, breathe on it. The handkerchief would be set on fire and burn till consumed. Likewise, he would collect dry leaves and by breathing on them start the fire. He invariably felt exhausted after performing such a feat and was found to be in a state of intense

excitement while performing the feat. "Writers upon sorcery and mediumship have frequently recorded anecdotes of the bursting forth of the flames from the doors, windows, chimneys or roofs of the buildings without apparent cause, and in fact at times when there was no fire in any part of the house, nor any article stored within, such as cotton, cotton-waste, greased rags, or other substances liable to spontaneous combustion. These mysterious burnings have sometimes been attended with stone-showers or throwings, equally unaccountable." She points out that the agents in all these cases are nature-spirits or elementals.

In *Vernal Blooms* (pp. 167-68), Mr. Judge seeks to explain certain other phenomena, on the basis of the preponderance of one kind of elementals in the constitution or aura of a person. For instance, there are people, who seem to be able to find metals (treasures containing gold and silver) with ease, i.e., they are lucky in that direction. The natural tendency of the elementals connected with mineral kingdom and with metals is to hide treasures. However, the person who is fortunate with metals, say gold or silver, has about him more of the elementals connected with metals than other people. Hence there is less conflict or strife between these elementals and the ones that are guarding and hiding the treasure—both being of the same class and kingdom. "The preponderance of the metal-spirits makes the person more homogeneous with their kingdoms, and a natural attraction exists between gold and silver lost or buried and that person." He further explains that the preponderance of any one class of elementals in one's constitution or in one's aura is determined by many factors. It would depend upon the peculiarities of soil, climate, nation, family and race.

There is one more explanation possible—one that is given to explain invulnerability to blows and bullets. Many travellers have witnessed the insensibility of human body to the impact of heavy blows and resistance to penetration by sharp points and musket bullets. There lived in an African village, an Abyssinian who allowed a party of Europeans to fire at him from a distance of not more than

two yards, for a trifling fee. The bullet was seen to travel only a little away from the muzzle of the gun, quiver in the air and then after tracing a parabola, fall to the ground. When a person fired the gun with the muzzle touching the body of the Abyssinian, the barrel burst into fragments, while this man walked off unhurt, writes H.P.B. She points out that every person emanates astral fluid from his body. "The astral fluid can be compressed about a person so as to form an elastic shell, absolutely non-penetrable by any physical object, however great the velocity with which it travels" (*Isis*, I, 379-80). This fluid has resisting power greater than that of air or water. Probably the elastic shell formed by the compressed fluid could work as a protecting cover so as to make the person invulnerable to fire.

"THE GREAT renunciation is made up of little self-denials." Who, indeed can deny the master admission to his house; and who can enter the house of the *strong man* and spoil his goods unless the strong man be first bound hand and foot; and again, who can bind him but his lawful vassals who dwell in his house; and who can restrain these but the master of the house?

To be master we must have control in all things pertaining to our kingdom or house; if we are swayed by impatience, by irritation at the words and acts of others, by impulse, habit of mind or body, "we" are not in control. We frequently are thus swayed, while knowing better, which indicates that we have not gone to work in earnest to obtain control, or perhaps in the wrong way. Applying analogy, it would seem that the latter consists in the modern method of proceeding from particulars to universals, and that the process should be reversed. We would then begin with the idea, attitude, and purpose of control in all things that concern the vassals of our house.

—*The Friendly Philosopher*

MENTAL HYGIENE—A PERSPECTIVE

THE MODERN science of "Hygiene" is hardly considered in the sphere of the mind or character. It had always been a minor branch of general Medicine. In the dictionary, "Hygiene" is defined as the sanitary principles and practice; the science of prevention and preservation of physical health. "Hygiene" is derived from *Hygeia* the goddess of physical health, in classical mythology. She is the daughter of Asclepius with whom she was worshipped. Hygiene is a recent branch of preventive Medicine. But "Mental Hygiene," is now popularized as the latest fad found in a number of self-help books on self- development, mind-control, stress-management, goal-achievement, etc. In the midst of this ocean of books and workshops commercially arranged by the event-managers, plus the "spiritual" claims by the flourishing god-men with their instant remedies for human ills, is Theosophy one more "aid" dealing in the preventive sanitary principles?

"Sanitation" itself is a word derived from Latin root *sanitas* and the French *sanus* meaning soundness. Hence, colloquially "sanity" pertains largely to mental soundness. A "sane" person is considered to be not only rational but also "able to anticipate and judge the effect of one's action." This is only one of the excellent signs and measures of "sane" health. We can think of many other character traits and faculties related to the true and higher form of sanity or Wisdom.

The "Preventive Medicine and Psychology" are the recent academic subjects. These were well known to the Ancients and their principles were duly observed by them, of whom Theosophy speaks with due deference. They practiced them under different names, in those Races, as a matter of one's duty to oneself and for the well being of the human society and of Nature. There were no hard-and-fast prescribed formulae, but were based on the sound knowledge concerning the "principles" of human constitution, including their essential functions (*dharma*). These were aided by

the knowledge of the universal "laws of life" about which much is said in the philosophy of Theosophy.

Coming back to our times, we are fortunate to have some socially conscious scientists and psychologists who have been ringing the warning bells concerning the mental, psychic and moral conditions of the society, especially the "advanced" ones in the west. A book by a practicing psychiatrist, *The Mental Breakdown of a Nation*, presents frightening scenario with the facts and figures observed in the United States of America. The stress and strain of coping with the fast pace of ever changing complex conditions and still worse, the mode of "discharging the tension" through free sensuous outlets and compulsive consumerism, were perhaps not imagined even fifty years ago. W. Q. Judge mildly wrote a warning note in his letters to the student, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, thus: "What a petty lot of matter [trivialities] we spend time [and energy] on, when so much is transitory. After a hundred years what will be the use of all these?" (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 119)

There have been thinkers and therapists in the field of social sciences and psychology in the west, like Dr. Erich Fromm, Dr. Abraham Maslow, and more particularly Dr. Alexis Carrel (an inspired Bio-chemist). They have independently thought out, each in their own field, and rightly diagnosed the disturbing state arising from the social and moral decadence on open and wider scale. There is a near agreement among them about the causes that have led to the vitiated psychic condition in the advanced nations. Perhaps their suggested remedies may not be fully in line with the Theosophical teaching, but their sincere concern for the upliftment of society through transformation of human nature, deserves our admiration.

Dr. Carrel in his book, *Man, The Unknown*, mentions the neglected (unknown) side of Man, such as his higher possibilities and potentialities evidenced in active form in some rare individuals. The latter may appear as the "gifted" ones, but thinkers agree that for such "healthy" state to emerge on a larger scale in our society would surely require appropriate gradual change in the whole social

environment. It would also depend on the right knowledge about Man in all his aspects, to guide the development, education and all-round progress of both the young and the old. Above all, what is expected is the sincere intention and zeal in the would-be reformers and educationists to undertake such a stupendous task, in the spirit of human service.

Dr. Carrel is at pains to show that we know too much about our latest gadgets of convenience but not enough about the true nature of Man himself and his real higher needs. He feels that the open-minded scientific inquiry on a wider scale is necessary for the good of human progress. It should cover all the facts of man, normal and paranormal, in all the departments, *viz*, the physical, mental, psychic, moral and spiritual planes and parts of his total constitution. Scientists of different specialities will have to interact and *work together* to understand both the known as well as the recondite systems as yet not acknowledged properly concerning the human make-up.

By way of just two examples, as given by Dr. Carrel, the phenomena of clairvoyance and telepathy including mind-reading, belong to the uncommon but evidenced and recorded facts of experience. Such "paranormal" phenomena need to be explored by open-minded scientists and thinkers. Are these exceptional faculties naturally accruing in some men or should these be considered abnormal or symptomatic of some mental illness? Can these be cultivated? Many such "gifts" need to be explored.

Mental health, or illness, is an area not fully understood as preventable, in spite of the claims by the "authorities" and the learned "theses" in the scientific journals. Dr. Carrel suggests that it is quite necessary to organize on a wider scale, an inter-active scientific inquiry, which would explore certain levels of human consciousness, presently considered irrelevant for modern "electronic age"! The other problem is that the academics tend to dissociate, in theory and practice, the functional health and "unity" of the body from that of the mind and spirit. The latter is thought to be the domain of the priests!

Even good "Health" is measured mechanically in terms of the "normality" of certain bio-chemical parameters, whereas true health should be considered as an integral state of well being of the whole man. It is a state of functional harmony between all the planes and parts of the being, which are closely interrelated within the whole constitution. In this close-knit psycho-biological system, called the human personality, what affects one aspect affects others sooner or later. The mental hygienists, in their preventive mission, have to keep in view this mind-body relationship responsible for health or illness.

The problem is that we may lose the focus on the poor "Man himself" when we make the compartmental study of systems and tissues, (the more and more of less and less)—under the modern complexity of specialization and their further advancing subdivisions! Dr. Carrel gives, as a result, an example. The medical hygienist, who takes great pains to segregate people with certain infectious diseases, have never thought to quarantine the carriers of *mental and moral contagion* such as corruption, violence, criminality, certain mental aberrations and moral deviant, which ought to be classified as being, as dangerous as the physical contagion. The crux of his thesis can be summed up as follows: "The care of the health of the intelligence and of affective sense, also moral discipline and spiritual development are as necessary as the health of body" (*Man, The Unknown*, p. 50). His concluding words are: "The Science of life has shown to humanity its goal and placed at its disposal the means of reaching it. But we are still immersed in the world created by the sciences of inert matter without any respect for the laws of our [higher] development." (*Ibid*, p. 289)

A few thinkers from different disciplines have similar views. Dr. Erich Fromm, a practicing psychiatrist, observes how by ignoring the true worth and "dignity" of man as a free thinker and independent but responsible chooser, he has made himself a slave to the outer demands of career, wealth, pleasure, social status, etc., which are valued disproportionately to his true *inner needs* and development.

The latter are to be found in the artistic expression and aesthetic appreciation, in cultural and creative works and altruistic involvement, in the religious and mystical intuition, etc. Dr. Fromm classifies these men so inclined, as those of "Productive Orientation." He writes in his book, *Man for Himself*: "Our moral problem arises from man's indifference to himself. We have lost the sense of our own significance [as *Manushya*, the Thinker], and our uniqueness as an individual. We have made ourselves into merely an instrument for the purposes outside ourselves. We experience and treat ourselves as commodities for others." The remedy suggested can be tersely put: "We have to become what we are potentially within ourselves." What lends "dignity" to man as a unique species on earth, is his being the "crown-piece of evolution," having such specific "human" assets as nowhere to be seen, and these need to be nourished with care.

There is a feeling among some thinkers that Man is, in his true nature, not simply an "Energy System" (of Dr. Eric Burn), but has in him "creative" drives. These are observed remarkably in some rare "self-actualized" people described at length by Dr. Abraham Maslow in his works on the psychology of Motivation. Those are the people with sound and very *positive mental health*. Mental hygienists and the counsellors as well as the psycho-therapists will have to go a step higher to recognize and encourage the *positively wholesome state* which is possible of developing further, given the right condition, education, and nurture. Indeed, there are great and pure minds that are so by nature and by birth, even in spite of the limitation of circumstances.

We saw that the "sanitary" principles in the field of mental hygiene require understanding and application of the knowledge of the true nature of man in all his inter-related components, and also the Laws governing Man and the Nature of which he is an integral part. We have to accept that all men are endowed, more or less, with the latent wonderful powers of mind and heart (Soul), which can surface in large number of individuals. These are not always demonstrable

in all because they are inhibited due to the inborn limitations of the instruments of their expression, such as the body, brain and mental and moral stage of development. Also, these potential powers and faculties are hindered in most of us by the external forces and internal "drives." These obstacles can almost stunt the possible human development we would have reached if we were furnished with proper knowledge and self-effort from the early years of our life.

For instance, human Thought and Will are great and insuperable powers when freed from the clutches of what the *Gita* calls "the hundred chords of desire-nature" or kama-principle active in man. This subtle part of our lower nature uses up the Spiritual Will or "the energy of Spirit in action." When freed, the force of Will is the most useful means to help transform the inner and outer conditions of man.

It needs a great mental and moral change in the human society, starting with the nucleus of a few committed and enlightened individuals who have in their heart the true human welfare and happiness as the most important idea to be pursued as the urgent goal of their life. Late Dr. Carrel, although he was not an Occultist, seemed to be fired with such refreshing ideals. With honest scientific temper he was able to speak out with compassion on behalf of *Man, the Unknown*. He may be considered, what Theosophy calls, a Friend of Humanity.

SHALL there not be as good a "then" as "now"?
 Haply much better...Therefore fear X not;
 And therefore, Holy Sir! My life is glad,
 Nowise forgetting yet those other lives
 Painful and poor, wicked and miserable,
 Whereon the Gods grant pity! But for me,
 What good I see, humbly I seek to do,
 And live obedient to the law, in trust
 That what will come, and must come, shall come well.

—*Light of Asia*

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: At our level we are unable to know how exactly karma works, i.e., we do not always know the causes that brought certain results. Would it not be better if we could really "see" or "know" the causation? Why is it not so?

Answer: The Law of Karma is the law of cause and effect. It is adjustment of effects flowing from the causes. When the effect is adjusted back to its cause, the being upon whom and through whom that adjustment is effected experiences pain or pleasure. But to the ordinary person this process is not always clear because in many cases he experiences the consequences but is unable to know the *cause*. Though we never seek to find the cause for our happiness, the question that is asked in the middle of the intense suffering or calamity is, "What have I done to deserve this"? Not always are we able to find the cause of our suffering or calamity in the *present* life. Even when we are unable to see the cause in this life we are told that it is possible to suffer in this life as a result of our actions in some prior life. Thus, a good person who suffers now must be guilty of disturbing the harmony by some wrong action in one of his past lives. Many people feel that if we could remember the actions in our past lives it would be easier to bear the consequences and even to take remedial steps.

Mercifully, a veil seems to separate our present from the past, and prevents our looking into the past. Could we imagine what would be our state if the memory of actions done even in the *present* life kept cropping up as we lived the present life? We tend to remember and brood over the past. There is the case of a woman called AJ, who is known to possess what the researchers call

"superior autobiographical memory." When she heard a date, memories from that date in previous years flooded her mind like running movies. She describes the phenomenon as nonstop, uncontrollable and totally exhausting, and finds it a burden rather than a gift. "I run my entire life through my head every day and it drives me crazy," she laments.

Even if we had control over recalling the memory of the past there would be another problem. In this life itself we have difficulty forgiving others and ourselves for the wrongs done. Often, what keeps our mind in turmoil is the memory of harm done to us. We are asked to forgive, and largely to *forget* so as to restore back the peace and lucidity of mind. If we could know the people who harmed or deceived us in any way, we would be busy settling scores with them. Is it easy to look into the past and learn that in one of the previous lives, one was a murderer or a rapist? It is sure to cast a shadow on this life. There would be cases when even if we are able to know the cause we might feel that karmic backlash or consequences were too severe for a trifling cause. Queen Gandhari, the mother of 100 Kaurava princes seems to have possessed the power to look into her past lives. It is said that when Gandhari wanted to know why her 100 sons were killed in the *Mahabharata* War, she was asked to look back into her past lives and on looking into her fifty-first life, discovered that she had poured water on an ant-hill killing one hundred ants. The story may only be *symbolic* to drive home the point that depending on the degree of development of the person there could be great karmic backlash for a trifling sin. Have we learnt to appreciate this aspect of Karma? More often than not we would only grumble that the punishment meted out by the law was too severe. We might even justify the actions for which we are punished, just as we always try to justify our wrong actions in the present life. Hence, till we have reached a certain stage in our inner development the merciful law hides the past from us.

We are told that only a person who is ready to be accepted as a chela (disciple) is taught "unerring discernment of *Phala*, or the

fruits of causes produced." He will be able to trace back the effect to its cause and know what cause produced the present effect. At a still higher stage sages and rishis have the faculty of not only linking the effect back to its cause but also to predict in advance the effect of present action because the effect is wrapped up in the cause. These great beings have the knowledge of the ultimate division of time or cycles.

We know that for many consequences we suffer in this life, the causes are known to us. It is useful to ask what do we do even when the cause is known. Do we at once begin to take remedial steps? The answer is no. We prefer to deal with the effect side keeping the cause intact. If overeating causes stomach-ache, then, instead of practising moderation in eating, we would take a digestive pill! Have we done anything to curb our ambition, competitiveness, anxieties, even though we know these to be the culprit in causing ulcers and cancer?

Also, the Law of Karma does not work on one-to-one basis, i.e., more often than not instead of one cause producing one effect, there are several causes which lead to a single effect. Moreover, it is not always necessary to know the cause in order to learn the lesson from the event. Those who are *not* inclined to draw the lesson from their suffering would not do so even when they know the cause. Yet, it is stated that before we take a new birth there is a preview when the soul is able to see for a moment all the causes that led it to the life it is about to begin, and knowing it to be all just, to be the result of its own past life, it repines not but takes up the cross again, and takes up a new body, writes Mr. Judge.

Question: Some of us are convinced about the doctrine of rebirth, according to which we have been coming back to this earth, again and again. Then why do we not recognize some of the people after their death—ordinary or Holy Ones—as the souls that were known to us in our earlier lives?

Answer: Theosophy points out that only in rare cases when the dying person has any intense unfulfilled desire or something

important to communicate to someone, the "soul," or "real man" remains behind for brief period and can communicate with a person, immediately after death. There are many instances in which a person is known to have appeared before his mother, wife, friend or a relative, to convey some important message. After that communication the ego passes into *Devachanic* stage or the heaven world. Likewise, when a holy saint, adept or a yogi dies, instead of entering into *devachan*, which is only an illusionary state, needed for the rest of the soul, he remains in the invisible atmosphere, clothed in an ethereal body, as a *Nirmanakaya*. Such *Nirmanakayas* can communicate after death, occasionally, with deserving people.

The important thing to understand is that whether it is the "soul" of the dear-departed one or a *Nirmanakaya*, when they visit some living being, the apparition which visits the person *carries the appearance of the dead person*. It is by the likeness to the physical appearance, voice and the mannerism that we recognize the "soul" that has returned for a few moments after death. Were it to assume different appearance and adopt different ways of walking and talking we would never be able to recognize even if it was the soul of our dear-departed one. In fact, we operate on the personal, physical plane and know things and people by their appearances. Why should humanity make the fatal error, again and again, of not recognizing the divine teacher when he appears among them in human guise? The great and holy "souls" have come and gone but humanity failed to recognize them *or*, recognized them too late. If Buddha or Jesus were to be reborn, perhaps a few people may recognize them to be great souls. But by recognition if we mean being able to link them with their personalities of the past, we do not yet have that faculty. To see a person in this life and recognize him to be the friend, wife, mother, father or a teacher from the past life, calls for remembering Our past lives, which at the present stage we are unable to do. It calls for continuity of consciousness from one life to another, which is not there at our stage of development.

Hence, at our stage, we have to remain satisfied with the feelings

that are aroused when we see another person. At times, there is an instantaneous affinity and a feeling of familiarity, so that we spontaneously say to ourselves, "We are not meeting for the first time. It feels as if we have known each other." Even when there is an intense feeling of hatred we can be sure that we must have forged a strong bond of aversion with that person in the past life. No man is our enemy or friend by virtue of our conduct in this life alone. Any kind of conscious recognition would call for inner sight. Mr. Judge gives a very poignant description of his first meeting with H. P. Blavatsky, and he writes: "It was as if but the evening before we had parted, leaving yet to be done some detail of a task taken up with one common end....So, friends from the first, I felt safe. Others I know have looked with suspicion on an appearance they could not fathom." Here we can see that there was a soul-to-soul recognition, independent of the personality.

Dr. Walter Semkiw, the author of two books, *Born Again* and *Origin of the Soul*, worked with a trance-medium, Kevin Ryerson, who "channels" a soul-spirit called Ahtun Re, who makes accurate reincarnation matches. There was a suggestion from the spirit that Dr. Semkiw, was a reincarnation of John Adams, the second President of the United States. On studying the same, Dr. Semkiw found that in some of his pictures, he looked like Adams, and that many people that figured in Adam's life seemed to have reincarnated in his life. Likewise, going by the similarity between life and work of Mahatma Gandhi and Tennessee born lawyer, Van Jones (1968), it is suggested the latter might be reincarnation of Gandhi (*Mumbai Mirror*, June 16, 2009). Perhaps only an occultist can make "accurate reincarnation matches." It is stated in our literature that Napoleon Bonapart was reincarnation of Charlemagne. Likewise, Fredrick III of Germany was reincarnation of Clovis I. In both these cases, the two incarnations are separated by 500 to 1000 years.

We are promised that those who are like unto each other and love each other will be reincarnated together whenever conditions permit.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Macrobiotics is an approach to physical and emotional wellness through consuming foods that are balanced energetically and nutritionally. One of the key elements in this approach is the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) which is concerned with diagnosing each organ and which points out that each organ in the body is governed by a particular emotion. Hence, any problem in these organs can lead to emotional disorder. Thus, for instance, mood swings are a sign of disturbed liver, which also gets expressed as anger, violence, impatience, frustration, resentment, etc. On the other hand, a person with healthy liver is generally calm with unwavering judgment. Likewise, kidney and bladder when in disharmony are governed by fear and insecurity. Fear can injure the kidneys. Any disorder in the functioning of spleen and pancreas can make a person mentally stagnant and extremely compulsive, in turn affecting his creative potential. Lungs are associated with grief. People with weak lungs tend to stifle their sadness, especially in letting go off relationships and emotions. Those with healthy lungs keep their commitments, hold on to their principles and are able to deal better with grief and sadness. Macrobiotics suggests that healthy food nourishes and regenerates organs and that in turn helps to generate positive emotions, says Shonaalii Sabherwal, Macrobiotic food consultant, chef and instructor. (*Mumbai Mirror*, December 30, 2009)

Thomas Carlyle calls the body of man, a temple. "We touch heaven when we lay our hand on a human body." However, at the same time, the body of man is described as the great inscrutable mystery. For instance, pineal gland, which science describes as a horny gland with a little sand in it, is in reality the seat of the highest and divinest consciousness in man. Likewise, heart is the organ of spiritual consciousness while brain is the centre of the psycho-Intellectual consciousness. It appears therefore, that when a particular organ is described as seal of a principle, it means that it is the centre

through which a certain state of consciousness has the facility to work. Heart is said to be the organ *par excellence* through which the Higher Ego works and is therefore said to be the seat of spiritual consciousness. Similarly *Kamic* consciousness has its seat in Navel, stomach, liver and blood.

In *The Key to Theosophy* H.P.B. points out that neither physiologists nor biologists understand the function of spleen and liver. Spleen is the seat or physical vehicle of the astral body. But since astral body is a vehicle of *prana* or life energy, spleen is also a centre of prana. In the article, "Psychic and Noetic Action," H.P.B. points out that spleen, liver, stomach and navel are kamic organs, associated with and influenced by *kama* and therefore by

Our thoughts, feelings and actions, of lower or higher nature, make an impression on the cells of our body. In this connection, H.P.B. writes that the memory of the purely daily-life functions, such as eating, drinking, planning to harm another or gratification of desires, etc., has nothing to do with the higher mind, but is related to lower mind or personal ego. So also, on the physical plane, it has nothing to do with heart and brain, because they are organs of power higher than the personality. These impressions are made on *kamic* organs, such as spleen, liver, stomach, etc. It is the hungry stomach which first evokes the memory of last banquet, which stimulation is then passed on to brain and lower mind which then remembers or sees it in the astral light. It is only the superconscious mental experiences, which are impressed on the brain and heart cells.

It was discovered recently that Rom Houben, a Belgian, was wrongly written off as vegetative for 23 years. Though he was conscious and heard the doctors trying to communicate with him, nobody was aware of this fact. He said that he felt worse than frustrated, being trapped in the body. Such a condition is described

as LIS or Locked-in-Syndrome. Are people being written off while they are still living and thinking? If so, then it raises disturbing uncertainties over issues such as organ donation and euthanasia, writes Richard Woods (*The Times of India [The Crest Edition]* December 5, 2010, courtesy *The Sunday Times*). Even when there are tiny movements in the eyes or fingers, it is difficult for a doctor to say how much of the brain is functioning and to dismiss these movements as random and involuntary. In 1996 study, experts at the Royal Hospital for Neurodisability in London discovered on examining that of the 40 patients that were diagnosed vegetative, 17 had been misdiagnosed. While many healthy people may feel that it would be better to die than be kept alive in such a condition of being trapped in the body, majority of victims (patients) do not see it like that. A study by Laureys, head of the Coma Science Group at Liege University hospital in Belgium, found that "patients typically self-report meaningful quality of life and their demand for euthanasia is surprisingly infrequent." Another patient suffering from LIS described later that it was unbearable to hear the doctor conclude that one was going to die and to consider turning off the life-support machine. A European project called Decoder aims at creating a brain-computer interface to enable victims to express their thoughts and operate their equipment. In another development, a chip implanted in the brain of a paralyzed man enabled him to open e-mails and operate television. Though the chances of recovery of LIS patients is very low, doctors need to take care that in the bodies that appear to be mere shells there are minds still living, thinking and trying to be heard.

The morality, legality and practicality of physician-assisted suicide have always been debated. A doctor's calling is to heal and never to harm. Apart from the financial burden it is not true that it is no use keeping alive a person in a vegetative state. A little reflection shows this amounts to "suicide." The soul is deprived of its opportunity to go through the experience of coping with the state of being trapped and learning its lesson what it is to work through a body in

vegetative state. By trying to end life, we leave behind unexhausted Karma—which is like leaving a debt unpaid—so that in some future life we will be placed in a similar situation by the unerring law of Karma, till the lesson is learnt. It must be terrible disappointment for the soul, so trapped, to have the bodily instrument but not be able to use it. Could it be the result of misuse of one's body in the past? It is perhaps an opportunity for the family members also to learn something in attending to a vegetative patient, and have patience to allow him to complete his life-term, even when we feel it to be a meaningless existence. H.P.B. writes:

No man...has a right to put an end to his existence simply because it is useless. As well argue the necessity of inciting to suicide all the incurable invalids and cripples who are a constant source of misery to their families...There is a vast difference between the man who parts with his life in sheer disgust at constant failure to do good, out of despair of ever being useful...and one who gives it up voluntarily to save the lives either committed to his charge or dear to him....One *takes* away his life, the other *offers* it in sacrifice to philanthropy and to his duty. (H.P.B. *Series No. 15*)

Do we all have a tendency to rush towards conclusion? We try to seek conclusion or endings to stories, processes, journeys, relationships and even our life. But what we perceive as "the end," or "conclusion" is an illusion. When we say a movie has ended, we only mean that the images have stopped playing on the screen. However, it continues in the consciousness of the viewers. A relationship ends, so that we may never physically see and meet that person again, but the relationship abides within our consciousness, as our memory, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. What awakens us to the "illusion of

conclusion" is the operation of various cycles in the world—the water cycle, the carbon cycle, the economic cycle, the night and day cycle, and the cycle of the seasons, which are never-ending and perpetual in their motion. Even death is not the end, because the body disintegrates into its five constituent elements and the consciousness is not destroyed. "Every moment could be viewed as an ending and as beginning, thereby cancelling each other out and creating perpetual continuity," writes B. K. Mike George. (*Purity*, December 2009)

Why do we jump to the conclusion so quickly only to discover that it was not a conclusion at all? It may be in pursuit of happiness. Thus, for instance, we may want to conclude or end a journey, a task or a relationship because we do not like it or, because it does not bring joy, and so we rush to end and move on to something better. Little do we realize that the missing joy cannot be discovered in the task, relationship or the journey but only within ourselves. It may be because we are given to believe that there are endings in life. However, we know that the chocolate bar comes to an end, but the memory of the taste lingers and that in turn sets up craving for the next bar and what appears to be new pleasure. Though the stimulated pleasures may end, the real pleasure is self-generated. Then again, we arrive at hasty conclusions about another person and hold on to that judgment as final because it is too inconvenient or too challenging to get to know and understand the other person. The final judgment reached by the judge in the courtroom on the defendant is based on his "history," but that person's life goes on and on. We reach such final conclusion about ourselves when we say, "I have always been like that, or behaved like that, it is my nature, it is fixed." In saying that we are avoiding to make the effort needed to change ourselves. Writes Mike George:

One of the greatest paradoxes of our modern lives is we create the illusion of a thousand conclusions, of fixed and final endings, while at the same time we fear "the end." But reality is always there to remind us that what is "real" goes

on. Life flows on. When we fully see and willingly embrace the perpetual never-endingness of all that is real we enter the "flow," and the joy of living both dissolves and replaces the desire and the fear of all forms of possible endings.

A Master of Wisdom says that "past, present and future" are clumsy words. The subdivisions, which seem natural, are man-made and purely subjective. It is impossible to point out the dividing line between the past and present, or the present and future. Even as we say, "now," it has moved into the past. Our divisions of time are relative to the observer's point of view. H.P.B. implies that time is but a by-product of consciousness. In the experience of the mystic, past, present, and future merge in the Eternal Now. Cycle means return of that which was before. A cycle is a period of time marked by sequence of stages. After one day and one night is completed, there would start another cycle of 24 hours which also would have all the four stages, but the morning of this day is not exactly like the morning of yesterday. But a cycle is not a circle, it is more like a spring or spiral so that we come back to the same point but at a higher level. We have to regard each life as a *precious* cyclic opportunity, which is going to come again only after 1000 to 1500 years. Death is only a passage or bridge that takes us to the other side. Death is not dying, it is waking into another life, say the Upanishads. There is no death, what seems so is transition. Spirit and matter are co-eval and co-eternal.

Since everything is in a constant flux, we would make a grave error in labelling a person to be "this" or "that" as if he would remain so for ever. As the Buddha says, "Fair virtues waste with time, foul sins grow purged thereby." In spiritual quest the policy of arriving at hard and fast conclusions could be fatal. A true spiritual aspirant never asks, "Is this the final answer?" but instead is engaged in an ongoing quest for Truth and hence asks, "What is Truth?" There is no finality even to perfection, as there is an ever-growing perfectibility.
