

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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### STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

EVERY earnest spiritual aspirant gets anxious to know, at some point or other of his spiritual journey, if he is making progress. What are the signs of spiritual growth? Are there definite stages of spiritual growth? At what stage does one require the help of a guru? Every spiritual tradition tells us not to be concerned about progress. There is the story of a disciple who was told that it would take him ten years for self-realization. He wanted to know if he worked hard, will he reach the goal quicker? The answer was that then it will take him more number of years, because so long as there is concern for reaching the goal, one is not able to give one's best to the spiritual pursuit. Hence the injunction in *Light on the Path*, “Grow as the flower grows, *unconsciously*, but eagerly anxious to open its soul to the air. So must you press forward to open your soul to the eternal.” Yet, we must conduct self-examination at the end of the day to become aware of our strong points and our weaknesses, with the resolve not to repeat the same mistakes.

Spiritual development is a slow process. Like a good gardener we must be concerned only with nurturing well the soul-plant and not try to force its growth. It may not be big or strong enough to bear fruit when we wish it to, but some day it will, if only we are not anxious and nurture it well. “What is to learn, is to be content, or, rather, resigned to ourselves and our limitations even while striving to get above them....We cannot all at once live up to these high

ideals as some others live up to theirs,” writes Mr. Judge. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*)

We may not get any perceptible signs of our growth for a long time to come. But what is important in this journey is not how *far* we have progressed, but in what direction we are heading. There are certain signs, which indicate that we are changing and growing and that we are in the right direction. Certain experiences and insights are common to all the spiritual aspirants. Different people have different ways of progressing. Each one carves out for himself a unique path. It is not like someone going through the muddy path and leaving behind unmistakable footprints, that others only have to step on, in order to reach the goal. H.P.B. too said, “Do not follow me, nor my path, but follow the Path I show.” Each human being is unique, and though there are certain basic experiences that each one has to go through, the exact steps and the pace of growth are not the same. The Buddha says that the path of a self-realized person “is hard to trace, like a flight of birds through the sky.”

Once the process of change begins, we begin to see transformation at physical, mental, emotional and moral levels. As we progress, we are able to remain unperturbed and carry on with our work even in a sick body, because we are able to dissociate ourselves from the body. Next, we find ourselves in greater control of our thoughts and emotions. There is less need to confide in others. The usual craving for excitement and sensation is slowly replaced by love for peace. We may find ourselves becoming more forgiving and compassionate, with easier acceptance of people and circumstances.

There is a gradual shift from being self-centred to being more and more caring and selfless, which forms the core of real progress. A very rough outline of it is given by Janki C., who points out that in the first stage, we are in the Age of Innocence, when like a child we expect to be loved and taken care of. God exists to grant our wishes. In the next, the Age of Disillusionment, facing the reality of life, many become cynical and atheistic. This is followed by the Age of Responsibility, when the seeker begins to take charge of his

life. He takes a step higher in the next stage, the Age of Keeperhood, when instead of wanting others to share his pain, he wishes to relieve the pain of others. The Age of Enlightenment is far beyond that of “Keeperhood,” when love becomes universal and there is complete identification with other beings. It is the culmination of spiritual growth, the state of self-realization. (*The Times of India*, July 21, 2008).

However, in this journey towards spiritual perfection, every religious tradition speaks of definite stages, which are landmarks for spiritual growth. For instance, in the *Mahayana* Buddhist text, *The Voice of the Silence*, we are given four stages of spiritual perfection, beginning with *Srotapatti*, “he who has entered the stream” that leads to the *Nirvanic* ocean. This is the first Path. The second is *Sakridagamin*, he who will receive birth only once more.” The third is called *Anagamin*, “he who will be reincarnated no more,” unless he so desires in order to help mankind. The fourth is known as *Rahat* or *Arhat*. This is the highest. An *Arhat* sees *Nirvana* during his life (p. 50 fn.). Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher further explains these stages in his book, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*. He points out that Buddhism mentions ten fetters which bind a person to the Wheel of Life or *bhavachakra*. The Stream-entrant (*srotapatti*), is one who has developed great spiritual insight into the nature of existence, and has been able to break three of the ten fetters. These three fetters are: (1) *Satkaya-dristi* or personality view. *Satkaya-dristi* is the erroneous idea that “I am I,” a man or a woman with a special name, instead of being an inseparable part of the whole. It is the view that “I” constitute something ultimate; that I, as I know myself here and now, with this particular body and mind, this particular history, represent a sort of unchanging, fixed entity. In other words, it is the belief that “I” am real. You cannot enter the Stream until you have detached yourself from name and form, from personal existence, from all the things that you think of as being “you.” This is not to say that there is no such thing as “self,” but that every single aspect of our being is subject to change. To break this

fetter is to understand that after death, there is neither the complete annihilation of the personal identity, nor does the personal identity persist *unchanging*. Buddhism teaches a middle view. Even when the body dies, there is not an unchanging ego-soul, which continues. It is the process—mental, psychological, spiritual—which continues, in all its complexity, ever-changing, flowing on like a stream.

The second fetter is *vicikitsa* or skeptical doubt, which is the doubt or indecision of a person who sits on the fence, wavering all the time, without commitment. *Vicikitsa* is the refusal to commit oneself unreservedly to the spiritual life; you hear about it, talk about it, but keep holding back. How can you become a Stream Entrant if you persist in dithering on the bank? If you want to swim, it is no use hesitating on the edge, you have to jump in. *Vicikitsa* is that fear of jumping in and refusing to commit oneself.

The third fetter is *silavrata-paramarsa* or regarding ethical rules and religious observances as ends in themselves. Buddha always said that ethical precepts, religious observances and even study of the scriptures, are like a boat, a means to an end. You do not carry the boat on your head once it has served the purpose of enabling you to cross the river. Precepts and practices become fetters when we carry them out without due reflection. Conventional attachment to morality cannot take us very far along the spiritual path. There are people who *seem* very ethical and noble, who observe all the Precepts, but who are a bit obsessed with their own virtue, and have a “holier than thou” attitude.

In Buddhist tradition, once a person reaches the stage of “*srotapatti*,” having broken the first three fetters, there remains for him only seven more births to reach *Nirvana*. The second is the Once-Returner or *Sakridagamin*, one who returns for the last time on the earth as a human being. He has broken first three fetters and he *weakens* two more, *viz.*, *kama-raga*, or the desire or urge for sensuous existence, and *vyapada*, or animosity and anger. The third is the Non-Returner (*anagamin*), who *breaks* the five fetters, above enumerated, so that he is not born on human plane but is born in the

sphere called the “pure abodes.” The fourth is the *Arahant* (“the worthy”), who has gained enlightenment, having broken five *higher* fetters. We can see that the journey is long.

In *Raja-Yoga* tradition there are several degrees of chelaship (discipleship). There are Lay chelas and those trying to constitute themselves Lay chelas. “A Lay Chela is but a man of the world who affirms his desire to become wise in spiritual things.” Next, one becomes a Lay chela on probation, then an accepted chela on probation, and finally, an accepted chela. As to probationary chelas there is a rule that they have to *invariably* go through at least seven years of trials. These “trials” are not fixed tests but they are tests of chela’s attitude to various events and circumstances precipitating in his life. At the end of this period he may be accepted or rejected. The accepted chela on probation studies under the guidance of an older chela. A chela on probation has to work unselfishly for humanity and strive to get rid of the strength of personal idea and cultivate intuition. Some of the qualifications expected in a chela are: perfect physical health; absolute mental and physical purity; Unselfishness of purpose; universal charity and pity for all animate beings; truthfulness and unswerving faith in the law of karma; an intuitional perception of one’s being the vehicle of the Divine *Atman* (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 2). These must be developed in the inner nature by the chela’s UNHELPED EXERTIONS. Further, it is only when the chela makes himself master of his *Sarira*—body; *Indriya*—senses; *Dosha*—faults and *Dukha*—pain, and recognizes in *Atman* the highest ruler, will he be taken in hand, under the time-honoured rules, by one of the Initiates, *i.e.*, become an accepted chela.

In the stage of accepted chela, one comes face to face with one’s Master and is instructed in practical occultism. This does not happen quickly. It is a slow and long process. Once the Master (*Guru*) begins really to teach, He takes upon Himself all the sins of that pupil, in connection with the Occult Sciences, whether of omission or commission, until the pupil reaches the stage of an adept through initiation and becomes responsible in turn. Till the stage of accepted

chela, in *Raja-Yoga* tradition, the chela is not allowed to exercise the powers, which he may have acquired through his own efforts. Mr. Judge, in his article, “Of Occult Powers and Their Acquirement,” tells us how the acquired powers may lie dumb and dormant like the wheels in a music box. It requires winding of the key to start them. The Master can wind the key and thus start the machinery, but he can also refuse to give the necessary impulse to start it. Further, he may not only refuse to give the impulse, but also prevent the wheels from moving. Since They can clearly see the motive and readiness, They know when to make an exception.

Hence, the injunction in *The Voice of the Silence*, “Prepare thyself, for thou wilt have to travel on alone. The Teacher can but point the way.” Until the seeker has reached the stage wherein he has developed self-reliance, intuition and complete control over his personal nature, he gets help only from the inner planes of his being, in terms of hints, ideas and inspiration. If the *Guru* or Master were to help or interfere at every stage there would not be proper growth, as illustrated by the incident of a man who came across a cocoon with a small opening. As he watched, for several hours, the butterfly struggled to break open the cocoon and force its body through. He decided to help the butterfly and so snipped off the remaining part of the cocoon with a pair of scissors. The butterfly emerged with a swollen body and small, shrivelled wings, and remained so for the rest of his life, never able to fly. In the natural process, as the butterfly tries to force itself through the tiny opening of the restricting cocoon, the fluid from the body is forced into the wings, so that they expand and develop, and are ready for the flight. “In the world mental as in the world spiritual each man must progress by his own efforts,” writes H.P.B.

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GOOD men spiritualize their bodies, bad men incarnate their souls.

—BENJAMIN WHICHCOTE

## ON THINKING AND THOUGHTS

A SAYING is current that he who *will not* read has no advantage over the one who *cannot* read.

Even one who “cannot read” thinks. It is a fact, however, that some refuse to think in a consistent and concentrated manner. The resultant confusion and diffusion of ideas throws their lives into disorder. The ability to think is there in all human beings, but it requires knowledge and effort to develop it.

What is thinking? Is it innate? Can it be warped and deadened, or clarified, improved, sublimated?

It is generally accepted that the thinking instrument is the mind, and that our thinking is influenced by the modifications of the mind.

Some of the dictionary definitions of the word “think” are: “to form in the mind, conceive, imagine; to meditate or reflect upon; to have a judgment or opinion of; to conceive, infer, reason; to hold a view, an opinion, mental picture or notion; to consider a matter, fancy, speculate, envisage, envision, deliberate.” All these imply a being that thinks, a Thinker.

“To form in the mind... a mental picture” would imply the use of some substance or matter, however refined, which we can only think of as being plastic, impressionable and capable of being moulded into forms. This forming of an image (imagination) is an action, here and now, in the mind, which shapes substance-matter into mind-made forms.

“To meditate or reflect upon” something implies a reconsideration of images (forms of memory-data) which we made in the past and have stored.

“To conceive, imagine, speculate, fancy, envision” likewise implies the consideration of future possibilities arising out of past and present circumstances.

We have, then, a Thinker, who visualizes past, present and future, and forms the plastic mental substance into image-forms. Images made by the Thinker in the past are called, generally, memory.

Thoughts that are being generated by the Thinker *now* are called deliberations, judgments, conclusions and decisions. Images that may be made by the Thinker in the future are seen to be generally modified or influenced by the past and the present.

The Thinker and his thoughts are, plainly, two different things. The Thinker has primary creative powers, called, variously, “imagination, fancy, envisagement, speculation, anticipation,” etc. *The Thinker* may be considered to be a conscious unit, a Perceiver. *Thoughts* are forms and images made or impressed on mind-substance by the Thinker. These have an endurance quality, or a permanence, dependent on the force or power with which they were made.

We may well ask: What causes the Thinker to form a thought? What is that mysterious power—the motive power, or *cause* of thought?

At this point we pass to a consideration of the two minds in each man—the one representing the universal view, and the other, the personal, embodied, everyday view.

Man, the Thinker, the creator of his own future, the maker of his own destiny, finds himself involved in an immensely intricate emotional and sensitive relation with his whole environment of substance, vibration, subtle electro-magnetic forces—all forms of matter, visible and invisible, subjective and objective.

Man, the unit of consciousness, is, simultaneously, man, the universe of forms. To understand this statement, we could say, drawing on current science, that our body-form draws its atoms, molecules, substance in definite but mysterious ways, by the broad routes of sympathy and antipathy, as observable, for instance, in the laws of chemistry and physics, from every part of his physical universe. The air we breathe, the water we drink, even the food we eat, come, in substance, from all over our globe.

Subtler than the physical body is the electro-magnetic model body (the real man), upon which the physical lives arrange themselves to form those structures that are called skin, flesh, nerves, muscles,

organs, skeleton etc. This model body is known variously as magnetic body, astral body, *linga sarira*, double, etc. It should be clear that this model body is both finer and more durable than the exterior physical one, as it helps to preserve the physical shape and appearance of the man, while the atoms and molecules making up the physical body come and go, completely renewing it every seven years. The seat of our real sense-organs is in this more permanent, but subtle, electro-magnetic body. One of the qualities of its “astral” matter is said to be its responsive impressibility to the thoughts and feelings of the Thinker within, as well as to the impressions which come to it from without.

Still more subtle than the electro-magnetic astral substance are the “currents” of life-energy, drawn to and defined by the creative power of the Thinker. These are drawn from the Universal Ocean of Life. Just as air is drawn into our physical lungs and made part of our blood-stream, so these *pranic* currents of the ocean of Life-*Jiva* are drawn by the Thinker into the model body, which in turn sets the limits within which “astral” matter is drawn and used.

These subtle currents of life-energy are moved and impressed by the emotional being which, too, is part of the composition of our inner nature; and with it are associated the real causes of health and disease. This inner emotional being is very real; so real that the Thinker, when involved with it, may for a while identify wholly with it and its “feelings.” It is, however, distinct from the Thinker. Consider, then, that the Thinker can, at will, change his thoughts, change the subject he is thinking on, and change his way of feeling about a chosen subject; new data, more time, a wider or deeper consideration, may give him the opportunity to do this. The Thinker, with his close and intricate relation with his emotion self, is at times overwhelmingly influenced by the latter, yet preserves his identity as Thinker. Even though, at times, this identity may be characterized as a specific thinking-emotional state or response, the Thinker, *per se*, remains a distinct and unchangeable *unit*.

Technically, the emotional-man is called the *kamic*-man, the

desire-man, the man of feeling and emotion. *Kama* is a Sanskrit term used in Theosophical philosophy to comprise the vast variety of psychic, emotional, sensitive, passionate “feelings,” which can be collectively classified into positive or negative responses, sympathies-antipathies, affinities-repulsions, and so on. Still, the Thinker remains—dispassionate, deliberate and discriminative.

It has been said that “desire rules the will.” The Thinker employs his *will* to create forms according to that which he desires to “see,” using the subtle substance of mind-matter. Discrimination in regard to the use of desire and the will consequent upon desire is essential.

If we agree that the Thinker is a conscious, unchanging mind-unit, then it is obvious that it is but one of a great host of such mind-units—each having its origin in what we may dimly perceive to be the Universal Mind. Further, it is through such mind-units that the great Laws of the Universe operate, for *conscious* units (minds) are required to mirror the Universal Mind at all levels, till finally “the Universe grows I,” as the ancients said.

We all share in one another at all points. Our personal selfhood, our sphere of action, is then seen to be distinct and separate from that of others—an emotional fancy that is untrue in view of the greater reality, that “we” are in fact universal beings, imperishable and eternal in our real nature, bathing in an infinite ocean of Universality. The Thinker is a unit, though combining in himself different constituents. Substance becomes self-conscious and universal, expanding in awareness. Life is ever a creative experience, widening to the infinite.

To recapitulate: The Thinker in each one of us is a conscious unit. It is immortal and has a universal viewpoint. As a conscious unit, it lives in, and works with, the personality, constituted of (1) the body with its component organs, (2) the astral electro-magnetic body, (3) the life-principle (concentrated energy), and (4) the feeling-sensitive emotional psyche. The conscious unit, the Thinker behind the “mask,” uses several powers, such as: the power to create thoughts; the power to discriminate, because it perceives and is a

part of Universal LAW—the Wisdom of the Universe; the power to rule, guide, correct and refine the four lower constituents for which it is immediately responsible, in order that they, in their turn, may work on units of evolving consciousness of a grade still lower than theirs.

This Theosophical description of a universe of thought and of conscious beings places a responsibility squarely upon us. It makes us see that our present situation, our defects of personal character or unhappiness of life-circumstances, are self-made—the result of unregulated, ill-directed or limited thoughts engendered in the past. It demonstrates that selfish thoughts violate the laws and purposes of the universe. It shows how Karma (an immutable law or force) is coloured by our motive, and this in turn colours our future, until such time as we restore the broken equilibrium. It declares that reincarnation is the process whereby conscious Thinkers (emanations of the Universal Mind) pursue their obligatory pilgrimage.

The Wisdom of the Ancients speaks of responsibility of those advanced in understanding towards those who still have to grow, and it declares that self-education is the process whereby emancipation is obtained.

To think correctly—universally and impersonally—is the only WAY.

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Now Scripture enjoins nothing except charity and condemns nothing except lust, and in that way informs the practices of men....I mean by charity that affection of the mind which aims at the enjoyment of God for His own sake and of one's self and one's neighbour for God's sake. By lust I mean that affection of the mind which aims at the enjoyment of one's self and one's neighbour without reference to God....Now in proportion as the dominion of lust is pulled down, in the same proportion that of charity is built up.

—ST. AUGUSTINE

## INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE METHODS

WE give reasons to justify or support the validity of our beliefs or propositions. But we find that in order to justify a certain proposition X, we give reason Y, but validity of Y in turn may be proved by giving reason Z. To justify Z we have to give yet another reason P, say, and so on. The chain of reasons continues, and we get into an *infinite regress*. In order to avoid getting into an infinite regress, Aristotle, the pupil of Plato, proposed that there must be propositions that do not need to be proved, and he called such propositions, the *first principles of demonstration*. He believed that “first principles” could be discovered through *induction*. Aristotle is spoken of as the Father of Modern Science because he refused to recognize supersensible cognition as the source of knowledge. He considered that first principles or universal truths could be discovered by careful observation of the many *particular* instances of these truths, which process is known as *induction* or *inductive* method. Inductive method is the scientific method, often described as “bottom-up” approach. In this method, one begins with specific observations and then develops general theories, or draws a conclusion leading to general principle or law.

For instance, if observation of many species of land turtle shows that these turtles have shells, lay eggs and eat plants and insects, then it could be concluded that all land turtles have shells, lay eggs and eat plants and insects. Thus, in inductive method a general rule or principle is formulated based on observation of few particulars.

Aristotle believed that the first principles or the universals (or forms) are real entities, but their existence is dependent on the particulars that exemplify them. Consider, for example, a particular oak tree, which is a member of a species, and it has much in common with other oak trees. Its universal, or “oakness,” is a part of it. A biologist can study oak trees and learn about oakness. “Oakness” cannot exist apart from the oak tree. Hence, Aristotle observed that no universals exist separated from individual objects, *i.e.*, there are

no “uninstantiated universals.” According to Aristotle, if a universal exists, then there must have been, must be currently, or must be in the future, something on which the universal can be predicated. So, according to Aristotle, the form of apple exists within each apple, rather than in the world of forms. He found the *universal in particular things*, which he called the *essence of things*. While admitting that knowledge must be in terms of concepts or universals, he held that we become aware of universals only by abstracting them from the phenomena of the senses.

Plato’s method is known as *deductive* method, or “top-down,” approach, where one reasons from “general principles” to “specific cases,” as when we apply a mathematical theorem to a particular problem. “All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Hence Socrates is mortal,” is an example of deductive reasoning, the premise of the logic may be taken to be the keynote, or universal principle, which is then applied to particulars. Thus, in deductive method, we may begin with a theory, then narrow it down to a hypothesis, which may be tested. Through observations, hypothesis can be accepted or rejected. Through acceptance or rejection of hypothesis we confirm or reject the theory.

Plato taught that the Universals or *Ideas* or Forms of things, are self-existent and not dependent upon the particulars or ever-changing objects of the senses. Hence, unlike Aristotle, Plato spoke about existence of “uninstantiated universals.” In other words, Plato believed in the existence of Universal ideas, which he said, have independent existence of their own and may or may not be reflected or mirrored in objects. We can take a hypothetical example of say, “goodness.” The ideal and idea of “goodness” exists in its own right, even if it is not exhibited by people.

Plato taught that “beyond all finite existences and secondary causes, all laws, ideas and principles, there is an Intelligence, Mind, the first principle of all principles, the Supreme Idea upon which all other ideas are grounded...the ultimate substance from which all things derive their being and essence, the first efficient Cause of all

the order and harmony and beauty which pervades the Universe” (*Isis*, p. xii). This he called the “World of Ideas.” *Ideas* are the *archetypes* or *models* of which particular objects, properties and relations are copies.

In *Transactions*, H.P.B. explains how the condensed and concrete forms in the physical world are developed from prototypes in archetypal world. We are told that “prototypes or ideas of things exist first on the plane of Divine eternal Consciousness (Akasa) and these become reversed in the Astral Light.” Akasa represents higher planes of matter and consciousness, which is also called the *noumenal* or archetypal world. H.P.B. gives the analogy of the acorn and the germ to explain prototypes in Akasa and Astral Light. Acorn contains both the astral form of the future Oak and also the germ, which will grow into a tree. This tree can take any one of the million forms, depending upon the atmosphere, sunlight, soil, water, etc. These forms are contained in the acorn potentially. We are told that what exists in the Akasa is the noumenal germ. In the astral light, we have the subjective picture. The development of the oak tree is the result of the developed prototypes in the Astral Light, which development proceeds from higher to lower planes. Thus, we descend downward from the most ethereal to grosser planes till we reach the grossest plane, where there is consolidation and a perfectly developed tangible form. (*Transactions*, pp. 96-98)

Similarly the seeds of Lotus contain (as all other phanerogamus plants bearing proper flowers), even before they germinate, perfectly-formed leaves, the miniature shapes of what one day, as perfected plants, they will become. Just as future lotus leaves and immaculate petals are concealed within the seed of that plant, the ideal forms lie buried in the bosom of Eternal Ideation. Lotus, thus, symbolizes the philosophical idea, namely, the emanation of the objective from the subjective—divine Ideation passing from the abstract into the concrete or visible form. (*S.D.*, I, 379-80)

Plato called the world of Ideas, *noumenal* world, and the world of objects, *phenomenal* world. He believed that one could only have

mere *opinion* about individual objects, and the objective world of *phenomena*, because everything in the objective world is continually changing. One can have real *knowledge* about the Universals, or *noumena*.

Aristotle believed that the real knowledge could be obtained through the senses. Mind discerns the principles of things in the objects perceived by the senses and knowledge is the result of this abstraction. He considered the knowledge obtained through the senses as more reliable than any *a priori* concept of an ideal reality.

Plato, on the other hand, said that there is One Reality behind the differentiations in the phenomenal world. True philosophy deals with Ideas or *noumena*, rather than the *phenomena*. “He considered those only to be genuine philosophers, or students of truth, who possess the knowledge of the really-existing, in opposition to the mere seeing; of the *always-existing*, in opposition to the transitory; and of that which exists *permanently*, in opposition to that which waxes, wanes, and is developed and destroyed alternately” (*Isis*, pp. xi-xii). We cannot obtain true knowledge by merely observing changing things, but they can be understood in terms of the “key” provided by the permanent. He laid emphasis on intuition or direct perception, which is above the reasoning faculty. It is through intuition, which is the faculty of the soul, that Reality is perceived. Patanjali also says that if one wants to have wisdom, or knowledge without error, it cannot be through inference or testimony, in which we deal with many particulars and not with general field of knowledge itself. Parmenides the Greek philosopher, pointed out that nothing that exists can simply vanish out of existence, *i.e.*, if there is no permanence, you cannot deal with Reality. Plato made a lucid statement that anything that we see, which keeps changing, in a sense, does not have total reality. We cannot *know* it, because to *know* something is to be aware of it in all its aspects. Any such awareness that we form becomes invalid the next day, if the thing itself changes. Hence Plato states that about such things you can have *opinions*, but you cannot have *knowledge*. Hence the need to

go to Universals. It is not enough to know about all types of triangles, we must know about “triangularity.”

In understanding the nature of soul, Platonic and Aristotelian approach and hence, conclusion differs. “Plato, starting with universal principles, declared that the soul of man is derived from the Universal World-Soul, and is identical in essence with that which is a radiation of the ever-unknown Absolute. Aristotle, starting from below, approached the subject of the soul by eliminating one by one those things, which the soul is not. The conclusion he finally reached was that the soul is the form of the body. This soul, however, is plainly the astral or psychic principle.” (*Theosophy*, September 1939)

Man is the microcosm of the great Macrocosm, the Universe. When we study man, to see the correspondence and unity between macrocosm and microcosm, we must use both inductive and deductive methods. We are cautioned that while we may commence our study of man by considering various details pertaining to him, *i.e.*, by going from particulars to universals, we must not lose sight of the Platonic method, *i.e.*, going from Universals to the particulars.

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HE who would succeed in the study of this Art, should be persevering, industrious, learned, gentle, good-tempered, a close student, and neither industrious, discouraged nor slothful....Above all, let him be honest, God-fearing, prayerful, and holy. Being thus equipped, he should study Nature, read the books of genuine Sages... let him not be too eager to carry out every idea practically before he has thoroughly tested it, and found it to be in harmony not only with the teaching of all the Sages, but also of nature herself....Nor let him despair though he take many false steps; for the greatest philosophers have learned most by their mistakes.

—PHILALETES

## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

### THE TWIN VERSES—III

11. *Those who live in the pleasure-ground of fancy see truth in the unreal and untruth in the real. They never arrive at truth. (11)*

12. *Those who abide in the world of right thought see truth in the real and untruth in the unreal. They arrive at truth. (12)*

WE see the Sun rising in the East and setting in the West, whereas it is the motion of the earth that causes day and night, and seasons. Sages call our world a *Maya*, a relative reality while we exist on this plane. The only thing real is the Self within, which changes not and is the Perceiver, the witness. From birth to death there is continual change in our body, ideas, emotions and all that we call as ourselves. We are the actor who has forgotten that he is now playing a role in the drama of life. We are so identified with our bodies and sense perceptions that we are unable to go beyond what is perceived by our senses. Materialistic science too, is responsible for inculcating in us this unhealthy skepticism, with the result we hold on to the evanescent and transitory things as *reality*. It is not easy to give up what is familiar and tangible for something which is only dimly perceived and abstract. A child in the womb who knows not the real world outside is happy to remain within the mother’s womb—his only reality. A child born in the prison may find it difficult to appreciate the freedom of the outside world. We are like those children, unwilling to let go what is familiar to us. Happy to live in the world of relative realities, oscillating between pleasure and pain rather than turning within to experience true nature.

13. *Rains pour into an ill-thatched house; desires pour into an ill-trained mind. (13)*

14. *Rains wet not a well-thatched house; desires enter not the disciplined mind. (14)*

Mind is like a fortress in which lives the King. If the mind is not well guarded, then enemies may invade and overthrow the king.

House has to be thatched well *before* the rain comes. Mind has to be disciplined consciously and deliberately through practice of concentration. Krishna says that though it is difficult to control the mind, it *can* be restrained, by constant practice (*abhyasa*) and detachment (*vairagya*). We need to be vigilant as to what thoughts and desires enter our mind and take root. Mind has a tendency to fly off from any point, object or subject; to fly to some pleasant idea or to fly to an unpleasant idea, without control. One has to be vigilant all the time to permit only the wholesome thoughts and reject those which are unwholesome. This requires discrimination through right knowledge—knowledge as to what is essential and what is non-essential. Who else but the master of the house should decide who will enter his house and who will not? Yet, we have little control over our desires. They enter into our mind unasked. But if we are vigilant, they will be thrown out at once. Initially, it may take us longer to detect the presence of an unwholesome thought, but with practice, we will become adept at spotting their presence right at the door.

There is a principle that two thoughts cannot occupy the mind at the same time. The best thing to do then is to deliberately and consciously take up right ideas for reflection. We must engage our minds in the study of scriptures, thoughts of helping mankind, inculcating kindly feelings towards other beings, and the like. Cultivate such concentration that we are able to concentrate our mind on any subject or object, for as long a time as necessary. This can be achieved by doing every duty, every action, as if our whole life depended on it—with mind one-pointed, so that the thousand cords of desires will have no power to sway us.

15. *The evil doer suffers in this world and he grieves in the next; he mourns in both. Afflicted he grieves in the visualization of his sinful deeds. (15)*

16. *The virtuous rejoices in this world and he rejoices in the next; he rejoices in both. He rejoices, rejoices exceedingly in the visualization of his pure deeds. (16)*

17. *The evil doer laments here, he laments hereafter. "Evil have I done," he soliloquizes. Greater his torment when he is in the place of evil. (17)*

18. *The righteous man is happy here, he is happy hereafter. "I have done well," he soliloquizes. Greater is his delight in the blissful place. (18)*

In these verses we find a clear expression of the belief in the working of the laws of Karma and Reincarnation. As you sow, so shall you reap. When we do good we are in harmony with others and at peace with ourselves. In doing evil, there is self-assertion and infringement of harmony, which must, by reaction, bring unhappiness. The ancient sages have taught that virtue brings its own reward, and vice and sin bring their own punishment. That means, for every vice or virtue, apart from the punishment or reward from the outside or at the hands of Karmic law, there is punishment or reward in terms of degrading or ennobling of character, as also restlessness or peace experienced at mental level. Every time a man ignores the voice of his conscience he dies a small death. He produces rupture in his inner, moral nature. He is no longer in a wholesome state. His guilt makes him restless. If he persists, if he succeeds in silencing his inner voice, he corrupts his character. There is no escape from meeting the consequences of our actions, good or evil.

It is significant to note that these verses are from the Buddha, the Enlightened One, who knew what is right and what is wrong, and knew how the Law works. Our courts too differentiate between crimes committed by juveniles and adults. In occultism too, the consequences are more grave when evil is done *with knowledge*, entailing greater moral responsibilities. Death does not end the torment. He reaps the effects in after-death states and future incarnation. Heaven, *Swarga* or *Devachan* is for those who have lived righteously—the blissful state in which man lives in an ideal world of his own making, surrounded by the loved-ones and doing all those good things which he longed to do. On the other hand,

Hell, Purgatory, *Naraka* or Hades is the sojourn of evil-doers. The state is a terrible one and has many shades, particularly for the executed criminals who harbour thoughts of revenge, as also for cruel, downright materialists.

Someone might argue that we do not find virtuous people rejoicing and happy, and evil-doers suffering. Often, it is quite the reverse, and hence it is said, “Virtue in distress and vice in triumph, makes atheists of men.” But we have to understand that we have not yet reached that stage wherein we are able to see the entire cause-effect-cause sequence stretching over all lifetimes. It is not so simple and obvious. Vicious men, criminals and murderers, often go scot-free—only *apparently* so. *Karma-Nemesis*, *Lipika*, *Chitragupta* or the *Recording Angel*, records it all in the ledger of life. One must pay for every evil thought or act, sooner or later—in this life or in the future. The stone thrown into the pond produces ripples, which go to the shore and return to the point of disturbance, going back and forth until harmony is restored. Karma only adjusts, and in restoring the harmony we reap our reward or punishment. Every action will bring its results at the right time.

19. *He who quotes the Sacred texts but is lazy and will not apply, he is like a cowherd counting the cows of others. He shares not the blessings of the Good Life. (19)*

20. *He who forsakes lust, hatred and folly is possessed of true knowledge and a serene mind, craves nought of this world or of any other, applies to himself the teachings of the Sacred texts he recites, even though a few in number—such a one shares in the blessings of the Good Life. (20)*

The cowherd does not own the cows. He may take care of them, count them and be aware of birth of young or death of an old cow and thus keep a complete record of his herd. Yet, the herd does not become his. He is simply a caretaker. It is like the servant who regularly dusts an excellent collection of sacred books. He knows not their content which can transform him. Those who recite verses,

and quote the sacred scriptures, without its application in their own life, are like the cowherd or the servant. They do not partake of the benefits that come from knowing these scriptures through practice. Yes, he may be respected by the world for his knowledge—as the cowherd earns his living for his effort—but it has not become part of his nature. There is a difference between loving and talking of love, however passionately. Shila is a virtue in which there is harmony between the words and actions. When there is a gap between preaching and action, particularly when there is no effort to bridge this gap, then it amounts to being a hypocrite. If we are fortunate enough to get to know the right doctrine but are lazy and would not apply then it is an act of omission, and is to be considered a lost karmic opportunity to practice what we find to be true, and thereby benefit others and ourselves.

But there are other simple souls who may not be great orators or scholars, who would apply diligently even the few teachings they have grasped. If we practice even a little of what we believe to be true, as best as we can, we realize its true meaning and it becomes part of our nature. It enables us to develop noble character, which is carried forward to the next life. When a man takes up for study the sacred scriptures and practices them, the inner, real man rejoices. The spirit within dispels darkness and awakens understanding through intuition. Through practice, the teachings become part of our nature and are carried to future lives. This is what the *Gita* calls “Knowledge coupled with its realization.” But we have to first create the right condition by forsaking lust, hatred and folly.

*(Chapter 1 concluded)*

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I know God by God, and I know that which is not God by the light of God.

—’ALI’

## HAMLET

## A STORY OF PSYCHIC UNBALANCE—III

BUT through all his misunderstandings and omissions, Hamlet does have “qualms of conscience” regarding the vengeance. Far within—too far for him to interpret them for what they are—his higher Egoic Self is sending them out in a struggle to enlighten him. His hesitations and delays are partly due to these admonishings of his Higher Self which he does not comprehend.

They are in fact blurred by a slackness of mind in him, by a strong averseness to action, which is the other reason for his delays. Active and keen Hamlet’s mind is—on the surface; and it delights in using these qualities of itself. But back of the surface is a layer of thick passivity, a heavy sluggishness and inertia, a resistance to change. Most men have to contend with much of this mental inertia. In Hamlet his Will in the outer life is quick, even violent. But within the outer shell his Will often remains swamped in that deep layer of psychic sluggishness. The monitions of the higher Egoic, the Conscience, struggling to stir that heavy mass, to make it less dense and unreceptive to the spiritual, do not have much power. The reason is that in past lives, as in the present, they have been too little obeyed to permit their free action now; hence there is a mental deposit of torpidity.

Caring much intellectually about philosophy, Hamlet has not grasped its deeper phases that are morally regenerating. He has been content to abide by the prevalent religion and the prevalent ethics. Such inactivity in the higher reaches of thought, such psychic sluggishness, is due to the lack of practical application of what his intellect has stored, to the failure to put it into service for others and for his own growth in ethical understanding. Of such practical application, especially for others’ benefit, the drama gives almost no evidence. This failure, now and previously, to make useful what he knows, is the reason why the Ego has such difficulty in leading Hamlet to question the moral rightness of that murderous revenge

he has promised. The egoic monition does cause him to hesitate—only that—for even when he finds the King in prayer, there is no impulse toward mercy. Sensing hypocrisy, he feels merely an added motive for a still fiercer revenge, a “more horrid hent.” Thus, instead of recognizing any prompting of his own higher nature, he blames himself furiously—“unpacks his heart with words”—for his slackness, his puzzling procrastination and seeming incapacity.

That procrastination affects him almost from the beginning, as soon as The Ghost is gone. Even in the very first wording of his eagerness to do something, his vehement impulse is weakened by intellectual analyzing and his student-like search for his “tables” (his note-book) to set down his conclusions about his uncle, his country and the wretched situation—to set them down for what? Some activity in the future?

The companions of the Watch beg him to explain about The Ghost. In defending his privacy he flashes into the plan of “putting an antic disposition on” (playing insane), which involves just that—action in the future, delay in the present; because, not knowing what to do, he feels incapable, and because, under the effect of his conscience and his inertia, he really does not *wish* to do. This immediately passes into self-pity—“The time is out of joint” indeed; but “O cursed spite, that ever *I* was born to set it right.” Thus, though perceiving a need for action but unable to decide what action, he pauses, lets days slip by while he plays the antic, philosophizes and broods. Gradually he comes to excuse all this to himself by harbouring doubts of The Ghost and its word, by believing he should get better proofs, “grounds more relative than this.” For many weeks he thus drifts and dives alternately; drifts into love for Ophelia, bringing about her mental undoing; dives into the Play Scene, which gives strong proof by exactly “catching the conscience of the King”; finds as a consequence the aptest opportunity for his revenge (while the King is at prayer), but puts it by, thinking to make his vengeance even more complete. Then immediately afterward, in angry excitement with his mother, he plunges into a sudden unplanned

action that swiftly puts out of life the eavesdropping Polonius. After such blundering, perhaps with a feeling of self-contempt, he permits the frightened King to send him out of the country as a dangerous person.

Only once does the higher monition pierce through these blinding clouds successfully—that is, when his very life is threatened. Then, by quick action, he learns that the King has really sent him to his death, manages to escape and get back—but not without committing his guards (his former friends!) to *their* death, an act unnecessary and unjustifiable. His conscience as to right and wrong is now nearly silenced. Still farther he passes into incompetence; his life, purpose and opportunity are frittered away. The action of the play reflects that weakness, but with no loss of interest, for this wasting into impotence *is* the tragedy.

Once more, near the close, the higher monition warns him of grave danger to his life and could save him; but this time he does not obey. He refuses to listen to the “divinity that had shaped his end” before. At this point a vicious intrigue by the King is proceeding successfully, entangling Hamlet in its deadly folds, and soon by mistake enwrapping the Queen and others. Then Hamlet sees what has happened, and at last satisfies himself by rushing upon the King and forcing the death. So impotent is his revenge, so worthless!

Regarding him and the other chief persons as once living beings and this story as in some measure their actual story, a Theosophist shrinks at the Karma it depicts in that present and hints at for the future. Wasted lives, vitiated characters, lost opportunities, repetitions and agonies to come, because so little of that present has been understood and corrected. Yet there is no fatalism in the drama. He always has the power of choice, and the chance that every living man has to sweep away his temptations and to act on his higher intuitions.

The stage history of *Hamlet* shows that this play was always popular, for various reasons, with both actors and audiences. In the nineteenth century it was praised by some German and English critics

as the greatest accomplishment of Shakespeare. If it is accepted as the greatest, it must be so because it presents the problems of a vast number of men. What are those problems? First and foremost, psychic sluggishness or mental inertia, blinding their discrimination, silencing their higher voice, stifling their better aspirations; then, the intellectualizing of life and imagining that to be the highest attainment; also, the insistence on revenge by punishment or death as the means of redressing wrongs; further, and perhaps worst, the brooding on the dead and being misled by their influence actual or supposed; all of this being Karmic, all due to men’s present and past habitual careless disobeying of their higher monitions, to their following the conventional and selfish instead of the freshly vital and serviceable to their fellow-men in general.

Around us constantly are men struggling under these errors, needing to be understood and encouraged, and when possible advised and guided. The fact is instructive that those critics who originally stated that high estimate of this drama, found in it a picture of themselves. Search into their lives proves them to have been of the Hamlet type, their minds brilliant, unstable, their course of action not much more firm or truly intelligent than Hamlet’s own, and their ends perhaps no richer in soul-values than his. In fact, the everydayness of the problems presented in this play is what endows it with its most compelling power. It is on the level of the character and the needs of general humanity, and thereby holds its special rank.

This practicability for men’s everyday lives may often not be recognized consciously, yet it does carry a measure of its advisory power to those who feel a kinship with Hamlet. If they are spiritually intelligent enough to enter really into the deeper causes and effects of his character, they may benefit much by the half-hidden instruction. Practical application to actual life was what Shakespeare’s Adept Inspirers always wished to encourage. They would naturally, therefore, give some particular esteem to *Hamlet* as a drama.

(Concluded)

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

**Question:** How to train our minds in seeing beauty and goodness in the present state of our world?

**Answer:** Once a teacher showed to her pupils a plain white sheet with a small black dot in the middle. The pupils were asked what they could see. All of them said that they saw a big white sheet. The teacher asked, “can’t any of you see the black dot”? This is how we are in our perception of other things and people. We are quick to spot faults, vices, drawbacks and weaknesses in others, while the good in them is microscopic—always too small, as to be almost non-existent. Lord Buddha describes well the general human attitude towards faults and weaknesses in oneself and in others. “Easy it is to see the faults of others; difficult it is to see our own. One winnows others’ faults like chaff, but his own faults he hides even as a cheat hides a losing throw” (*The Dhammapada*, verse 252). We are quick to hide our faults and exaggerate our strong points. We are quick to detect blemishes in others, and slow to see and appreciate the good in them. In fact, we are reluctant to acknowledge even that which may be obviously good. For instance, it is a common experience that if a co-worker gets promotion or if a friend gets high grades in the school, very few are truly happy or appreciative. Behind his back, we hear remarks such as, “Oh! he was favoured,” or “He had joined the coaching classes,” and so on. We try to take away the credit instead of accepting that the person was indeed capable and that he worked hard, and his achievement was well deserved. Hence, H.P.B. says that it is better to sin through exaggerated praise than

through too little appreciation of one’s neighbour’s efforts.

Quite opposite is the case of beings like the Buddha. Once Lord Buddha was walking on the road with his disciples, when they came across a dead dog that was lying there with his mouth open. While all the disciples walked away in disgust, the Buddha remarked, “What lovely teeth!”

It is said, “Beauty lies in the eyes of beholder.” It may be physical, mental or moral beauty. We do say that a person with jaundiced eye sees yellow everywhere. Often it is our conceptions, which colour our perceptions. We see the world through bits of coloured glasses. A person whose family suffered at the hands of a certain community tends to develop hatred for people of that community. A Hindu may be biased towards Muslim and *vice versa*. Often, it is our inner state of unhappiness, bitterness, anger or disappointment, which prevents us from seeing goodness in anything around us. *The Voice of the Silence* says: “Close thy mind to pleasures as to pain.” That is because our inner state of happiness or unhappiness plays a great role in determining our attitudes and perceptions. Have we not experienced in the office that the day the boss is in a foul mood, he would blast his subordinate for any trifling mistake, and the day he is in a good mood, he would be willing to condone the gravest error? In order to perceive things impartially, we need to cultivate detachment and impersonality.

The more impersonal we are, the less attached are we to our looks, ideas, emotions, and more in touch with the “core” of our being, our true self. It is then that we are capable of perceiving things objectively and impartially, by taking the position of an observer. The Buddhists speak of cultivating *mudita* or sympathetic joy and to share the joys of others. It is comparatively easy to share others’ pain but not so easy to feel happy when others are happy. Another important factor is cultivation of goodwill towards all, if not love. How is it that we are able to condone the mistakes and weaknesses of our loved ones? It is because we love them. H.P.B. points out that those who normally think from higher planes of

thought are able to see beauty even in the most mundane things. She points out that to train our mind in that direction we must develop our will. It is by training, both mind and heart, that we can learn to see goodness and beauty in all things. At a deeper level, when we learn to look beyond the *changing* aspects, we shall find beauty and goodness, because *satyam, shivam, sundaram* or Truth, Goodness and Beauty are the three attributes of Divinity. Also, when we have faith in the Law, we are able to appreciate order in everything that happens, because it happens under the Law.

When there is a feeling of non-separateness, it is easier to concentrate on good side of others. We can cultivate the habit of sensing the sweet side of life. We tend to dwell on disasters, pain, and meanness of human nature. We can highlight good side of human nature. Instead of carrying and re-living the memory of such incidences of hurt and pain we may encourage ourselves to remember small acts of kindness and compassion.

**Question:** Why is Head-learning without Soul-wisdom worse than ignorance?

**Answer:** The question is based on the verse from *The Voice of the Silence*: “Even ignorance is better than head-learning with no soul wisdom to illuminate and guide it.” In the previous paragraph we are told that ignorance is like a closed and airless vessel, while soul is like a bird shut up within. The bird that is capable of flying and producing sweet melody is unable to even move in this suffocating atmosphere within the airless vessel, and finally, dies of exhaustion. Just as the body needs food so does our mind. We must try to broaden our mind, by learning to welcome truth from whichever quarter it comes, and by allowing it to contact Universal ideas, through good books and scriptures.

Head-learning is mere intellectual knowledge without application. Mere intellectual knowledge produces misplaced pride, like the *Pandit* (scholar) of the *Panchatantra* story. Once a *Pandit* was crossing a river. On learning that the boatman did not know grammar

or the Vedas he remarked that *half* the life of the boatman was wasted. Then suddenly there was a storm and the boat was about to be overturned. The boatman anxiously asked the *Pandit*, “Sir, do you know swimming”? When the *Pandit* said he did not, the boatman said, “Well sir, I must say, the *whole* of your life is wasted.” Such *Pandits* cannot cross the ocean of *samsara* (life). When knowledge is applied, it becomes part of us, else it results in spiritual darkness.

Intellect, at the simplest level, is the faculty to reason from cause to effect, or premises to conclusions. A person who regards it as the highest power of mind, not knowing the real source and real purpose of existence, is likely to use it for his own benefit. Just as we can use our intellect to figure out how to *save* a drowning man’s life, we can also use it to figure out how to *destroy* his life. We may drown him by keeping him under the water for ten minutes. A “clever” person is able to escape the punishment because he knows how to commit crime without being caught; he can dodge the laws of his country; he can cheat people and the government, and so on. Soul-wisdom is the heart quality, which is needed to guide the intellect. We should not only have an intelligent mind and compassionate heart, but also have compassionate mind and an intelligent heart.

Mr. Judge says that intellect alone is cold and selfish. We can see that in the scientific advancement of today. A Master of Wisdom says that unless science takes into account virtue and philanthropy, it cannot hope to have any help from the Masters. In fact, some enlightened people have questioned whether all kinds of knowledge must be allowed to fall into the hands of people who are not moral and altruistic.

For instance, it is felt that unlike the twentieth-century technologies, the modern technologies—robotics, genetic engineering and nanotechnology—appear to be within reach of individuals, as they “do not require large facilities and rare materials. Knowledge alone will enable their use,” writes Bill Joy, a co-founder and chief scientist of Sun Micro-Systems (*Wake Up India*, October-December, 2003). He says that the only solution is to limit

development of the technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge. Although humankind inherently “desires to know,” if open access to, and unlimited development of, knowledge henceforth puts us all in clear danger of extinction, then common sense demands that we re-examine our reverence for knowledge. It is also felt that scientists, technologists and engineers should adopt a strong code of ethical conduct that would ensure that they will desist from creating or developing any knowledge-enabled technologies of mass destruction. Material progress or scientific pursuits do not make for happiness. Individual and collective happiness rests on realization of interdependence and strong feeling of love and compassion for humanity in the heart of every individual. H.P.B. sums up the position, thus:

Great intellect and too much knowledge are a two-edged weapon in life, and instruments for evil as well as for good. When combined with Selfishness, they will make of the whole of Humanity a footstool for the elevation of him who possesses them, and a means for the attainment of his objects; while, applied to altruistic humanitarian purposes, they may become the means of the salvation of many. (*S.D.*, II, 163)

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To a good man to serve the will of God, it is in the truest and best sense to serve himself, who knows himself to be nothing without or in opposition to God....This is the most divine life that can be, for a man to act in the world upon eternal designs, and to be so wholly devoted to the will of God, as to serve it most faithfully and entirely. This indeed bestows a kind of immortality upon these flitting and transient acts of ours, which in themselves are but the offspring of a moment.

—JOHN SMITH THE PLATONIST

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Many of the greatest minds of science meet regularly in Vatican City to counsel the pope on the hot topics of the day. Learning its lessons from the trial and condemnation of Galileo in the 1600s, Vatican church’s governing body today, includes several pontifical academies and councils, and an independent Vatican Observatory, each of which deals with scientific issues—among other things—in consultation with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences is a non-religious institution, housed in a building inside Vatican City. Many renowned 20th century scientists were its members and today more than 80 international academicians, including physicist, Stephen Hawking, are its members. Their task is to advise the Catholic Church in its policies, because it is believed that many civilizations in the world are not directly affected by science and technology decision-making, but they are affected by mandates and decisions of the Catholic Church. A Jesuit brother, who is also a scientist, suggests that science poses philosophical questions and that in turn sparks religious inquiries. There are discussions on genetics and new reproductive techniques. Today the academy’s mandate involves promoting the progress of mathematics, physical, and natural sciences and participating in the study of related epistemological questions and issues. The Vatican has recently taken a firm stand on a range of science-related issues. For instance, Vatican officials stated that there was moral obligation to sustain the life of a person in a vegetative state, even if there was no hope of recovery. Vatican supports organ transplant but condemns cloning of human embryos and states that cloning, euthanasia and contraception are not scientific questions but ethical ones.

It seems to be the effort of the Church to reconcile science with religion. Father George Coyne, the well-respected retired head of the Vatican Observatory, remarked that there is no science in the Bible. The Bible was written at different times by different people. Some of the books are poetry, some of them are history and some

are stories, and that Bible should not be held up to scientific scrutiny. There are certain programs, such as, STOQ, which stands for Science, Theology, and the Ontological Quest, which aim at promoting scientific literacy within the church, through dialogue among scientists, theologians and philosophers. It is believed that science can purge religion of superstition, and religion can help science to remain inside its borders, writes Michael Mason. (*Discover*, September 2008)

In the second century of Christian era, the Roman Empire was noted for its religious tolerance, in addition to its love of learning. The only exception to this general prevalence of tolerance was found among the *orthodox* Jews and *orthodox* Christians. The *orthodox* Christians not only classed all other religions under the heading of “idolatry,” but also denounced all forms of education which were not based upon the “rule of *faith*.” This “dire heresy of separateness,” which isolated Christianity from all other religions, also separated *orthodox* Christianity from *philosophical* Christianity. The *Orthodox* Fathers refuted, ridiculed and denounced the *Gnostic* doctrines, which was put forward by three Gnostic Fathers, who tried to show the *philosophical* basis for Jesus’ teachings. (*Theosophy*, October 1936)

The original source from which the Gnostics drew their teachings is known as the *Gnosis*, which means knowledge, and refers to the ancient Wisdom-Religion, the secret science of sciences from which all true systems of religion and philosophy have sprung. (*Theosophy*, September 1936)

While it is important that religion must have scientific basis, *modern science* cannot provide sound and adequate basis, though it may, to a certain extent, aid in avoiding the intellectual suicide of believing on blind faith. It cannot help in correct interpretation of Bible. The Old Testament of the Bible rests on the teachings of Moses. Moses was an Initiate. But, Mr. Judge points out that Jews as they came out of Egypt, fastened the Mosaic *misunderstood tradition* upon modern progress. It is because of dead-letter

interpretation of Bible that it appears to be no more than an account of tribes, full of poetry, history and stories. Bible must be interpreted allegorically, and the “Key” to its interpretation lies with pagan religions and philosophies. *Light on the Path* points out the inadequacy of scientific knowledge and scientific methods, thus:

The laboratory is not the only ground for experiment; *science*, we must remember, is derived from *sciens*, present participle of *scire*, “to know,”—its origin is similar to that of the word “discern,” “to ken.”...Science is a word, which covers all forms of knowledge....To obtain knowledge by experiment is too tedious a method for those who aspire to accomplish real work; he who gets it by certain intuition, lays hands on its various forms with supreme rapidity, by fierce effort of will. (pp. 32 and 34)

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Science admits now that DNA is not destiny, *i.e.*, we are not determined by our genes. Science and casual observation seem to support the belief that our personality remains unchanged all through life, until death. Just because a thing remains stable over the years does not mean it is immutable. Perhaps we have not identified what changes it, and that is true of genes, too. There is a growing recognition that experience can silence genes or activate them. A 2006 study reported that as people age from 20 to 40, they tend to become more conscientious and emotionally stable, and after age 40, they tend to become less open to new experiences and ideas, and less outgoing. All of these traits have been linked to genes. It seems that the influence of genes wanes with age, so that as one advances toward adulthood, environment plays larger role than genetics in shaping personality, a hint of the power of accumulated experiences. “More and more research is suggesting that, far from being simply encoded in the genes, much of personality is a flexible and dynamic thing that changes over the life span and is shaped by

experience,” argues psychology researcher Carol Dweck of Stanford University. She points out that your belief that certain core traits, such as intelligence, are fixed or they can be developed matters a great deal. The kids who were told that intelligence is malleable and that the brain forges new connections through intellectual challenge were found to become more conscientious and diligent as compared to others who were not so informed. A “genetically shy” child might learn to outgrow her shyness by age 12, if encouraged by parents to mix with other kids.

If you change beliefs, you can change certain broad traits and that in turn can change personality, argues Dweck. No one claims that genes play no role in shaping personality, but DNA is not an inert set of blue prints; it responds to life experiences, writes Sharon Begley. (*Newsweek*, December 1, 2008)

Theosophy teaches that our personality is the result of the *skandhas* or aggregate of attributes generated by the Ego in past lives. The body includes one set of *skandhas*, the astral man another, and so on. These *skandhas* are being created from day to day, because every thought instantly combines with an elemental force and becomes an entity. The *skandhas* maintain a magnetic link with the Ego that evolved them. As to the link between the personality and heredity, Mr. Judge has this to say:

Heredity in giving us a body in any family provides the appropriate environment for the Ego. The Ego goes only into the family which either completely answers to its whole nature, or which gives an opportunity for the working out of its evolution, and which is also connected with it by reason of past incarnations or causes mutually set up....The limitations imposed on the Ego by any family heredity are exact consequences of the Ego’s prior lives....Transmission of trait and tendency by means of parent and body is exactly the mode selected by nature for providing the incarnating Ego with the proper tenement in which to carry on its work. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 77-79)

Though both environment and heredity play an important role in moulding the personality, using free will it is possible to rise superior to unfavourable circumstances. Theosophy teaches that up to age of seven, both Ego and body have somewhat independent existence. But after seven years, the Ego begins to have moral responsibility. After second seven, *i.e.*, 14 years of age, a distinct change comes over a child, which is not mere physical but psychical, mental and moral change, as Ego becomes more and more active, *while in the body*. After third seven, or 21 years of age, Ego has attained maturity and balanced existence in the body. From then on, he increases his Egoic power and control over body, because of his understanding of the right use of body or the reverse. By the time of 28 or 35 years of age, the Ego has undertaken the battle of life, consciously and intentionally, which is controlling the lower four principles or personality. During these five, 7-year periods, especially, we observe marked and definite changes in the personality.

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Envy is the bile on which we choke when we want something that belongs to someone else. It generally stems from competitiveness, emotional insecurity and situational dissatisfaction. Envy is corrosive, particularly because we deny being envious, and instead, try to expose unfairness and punish those who we think were unduly rewarded at our expense. We withhold support, sincere admiration and sometimes, even friendship, and damage another’s reputation in order to enhance our own. We become critics instead of becoming fans. However, the poison of envy can sometimes transform itself into something halfway constructive. At personal level, some people may be able to perform the mental magic of transforming envy into aspiration: “If she can do it, write it, sell it, dammit, I can, too!” writes Judith Sills, a Philadelphia-based clinical psychologist. (*Psychology Today*, September-October 2008)

Non-covetousness is a great virtue, as also giving credit where

credit is due. Envy is a powerful emotion. Envy is worse than jealousy, because the feeling involved is that if I cannot have then no other should have it. Envy seems to be a great hindrance to spiritual progress. Mr. Judge graphically describes its effect on the inner man. Thus:

Envy is not a mere trifle that produces no physical result. It has a powerful action, as strong in its own field as that of anger. It not only hinders the further development but attracts to the student's vicinity thousands of malevolent beings [evil spirits or elementals] of all classes that precipitate themselves upon him and wake up or bring on every evil passion. Envy, therefore, must be extirpated, and it cannot be got rid of as long as the personal idea is allowed to remain in us. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 18*, p. 12)

The power of the "evil eye" is rooted in the feeling of envy. For instance, when people fix their thoughts in envy upon a person, who suddenly gets rich, he is adversely affected by them and may lose the money. So also, the envious glance of a person on a beautiful vase or car or any other object or person may result in damage or injury to the same. The elementals precipitate down the glance of the envious person. An "evil eye" is the destructive power of thought.

We need to cultivate goodwill towards all. H.P.B. mentions that each one of us is endowed with a magnetic potentiality, which when helped by an intense and indomitable will, can be used for bringing about harm or good.

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HUMAN birth, the desire for salvation and the company of holy men are rare things on this earth. Those who are blest with all three are the most favoured of men.

—SRI SANKARACHARYA