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The Living of the Higher Life**

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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MAN’S ETERNAL FOE

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA is the song of war—the greatest of all wars; the war in which every man and every woman is engaged. It is the war between our lower and higher natures. Because the *Gita* teaches us how to fight our own demoniac or Asuric nature, and raise the lower self, with the help of the Higher, it also is the Book of Peace and goodwill towards all—friends and enemies and strangers alike. So, we must not read the *Gita* as history; it is the drama of the Soul evolution.

What is spiritual evolution? It is the ability of the Monad (*Atma-Buddhi*) to express itself through the body and the mind. Just like the lamp consists of glass around the flame, and through which the light shines, so also, the body, mind, emotions, desires are the instruments or vehicles through which the light of *Atma* shines forth. But it depends upon the readiness and purity of the instrument. The programmer may know many complex things, but if the computer is not of an advanced stage, then he can only use it for simple calculations and typing letters, etc. So also, it is true of instruments. We see that some animals are intelligent, and some trees are considered more sacred. We say a man is higher than animals, stones or trees. That is because the soul evolves better and better instruments, so that it can express itself more and more. The connecting link between the physical and the spiritual is the mind, and the light of mind was given by a class of celestial or spiritual beings called *Manasaputras* or *Kumaras*.

Mr. Judge explains the meaning of wandering of the Pandavas or spiritual nature in man for thirteen years, and it is only at the end of thirteen years that they are able to govern or rule. Here, the Pandavas represent spiritual principles, and they are supposed to govern the lower principles in man. Theosophy teaches that even after the monad reaches the human stage, a man was man only in form, the divine nature had no connection with the body. Like animals, a man was guided by instinct. It is only when the latent mind was activated that it became the link between the body and the divine spark or the monad. The mind in man was activated only when his brain was of much better and deeper capacity than that of any other animal because that brain has to act as an instrument of the mind. That point when the mind was activated may be taken as the point when thirteen years of exile of the Pandavas was over, and they returned to Hastinapur. Then there is war because the Pandavas or the higher principles now want to take charge of man and therefore, they have to fight with the Kauravas or the lower principles. The control of the higher on the lower is through the principle of mind, which has to turn for guidance to the higher.

In the *Gita* the four characters of Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana, Arjuna and Krishna play a great role in the drama of the soul's evolution. Dhritarashtra, the eldest of the Kauravas is the blind king and the father of Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra is a nominal King. He was holding the reins of the kingdom but not really directing or governing it. He was merely a caretaker. The body is an instrument of the soul. In *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* Mr. Judge compares blind King Dhritarashtra with the body, which is brought into existence by a thirst for life or *Tanha*. It is the desire for life and worldly existence which brings us back to earth. The hundred chords of desire bind man to earthly existence. It is caused by delusion. But the one who has overcome delusion becomes free and is one with the Supreme.

Dhritarashtra is blind because the body *per se* has no power of sight or feeling. As explained in the Upanishads, these powers reside

solely with the inner organs of the soul, using the material body as the means for experiencing the phenomena of material life. Without the presence of the indwelling, informing, hearing and seeing power, this collection of particles called the body is dead or blind. Arjuna and his brothers are unjustly deprived of their share in the kingdom by their cousin Duryodhana, aided by his evil brothers. When all efforts at reconciliation, assisted by none other than Krishna failed, the great Mahabharata war between the two factions of the Kuru clan—Kauravas and Pandavas—became inevitable.

It is important to note that if our body is blind, our Spirit is all-seeing. The body can really see, *i.e.*, understand and evaluate only when the Lord in the body, Shri Krishna begins to work in the body. For most of us Krishna is the Divine Voice that speaks from without the body. Krishna advises and instructs Arjuna, the Human Soul because it is only when that soul is fully triumphant that the Spirit fully incarnates and the Mahatma is born.

In the body there are two powers represented by the two characters—Arjuna, the Human Soul and Duryodhana, the Lower Demoniatic or *Asuric* Nature or the Animal Soul. The Great War is between Arjuna and Duryodhana. On one side is Duryodhana—Wealth of wickedness: the very name indicates two chief powers. Wealth means strength, force, resourcefulness, and wickedness means passion, lust, anger, and greed. This strength and resourcefulness come from what we call our thinking mind which is enslaved by passion or Kama. Wickedness is Kama, the directing energy of desire. Therefore, Duryodhana is the Director and General of the Kuru Army. Desire-Kama is in reality, the General or leader. The brain-mind or lower mind is the soldier, who is made to do the dirty work of General Kama.

On the other side is Arjuna, the Human Soul, the soldier and warrior. Krishna, the Spirit is the leader, Director and General. Arjuna is the Reasoner, Thinker, Devotee and Disciple, who guides the animal soul. The Human Soul has to show *Viveka*, discrimination and *Vairagya* or dispassion and it can do so only when it recognises

that Kama is his enemy. Krishna can only befriend the Soul when Soul is ready for the fight against his own Kama or lower nature. Krishna tells Arjuna, “because, thou art my devotee and my friend.” In many others, the fight has not seriously begun and therefore Krishna-Spirit is silent in them.

Human beings may be divided into two big groups, and one special one. (1) Very large one of people whose self is Kama, who are only energized by their desires, and are *Kama-atma*, says the *Gita*. (2) Fairly large class in whom the ideal has arisen and they want to better their characters, improve their minds, subdue their passions and are looking for some way to attain their ideal, as in case of religious people, enquirers of all sorts. (3) Special small class who have found that there is a Science of the Soul, a philosophy of the Spirit, and a Divine Wisdom according to which Kama has to be purified and the Soul has to learn—Arjuna belongs to this class.

Each one of us must try to find out where we fit in. On analysing our nature, we may discover that we belong to the first class, and are moved by desire. *Or*, we may belong to the second and realize that we have a lower nature, but also there is something within us that prompts us to seek knowledge to overcome that lower nature. *Or*, we may have found the truth, the Noble Path, the Arjuna Path, the Way of the Soul. But one thing is certain that *all*, save the perfected and emancipated Mahatmas, are troubled by Kama. It is interesting to note the question even Arjuna asks and the clear but almost frightening answer given by Krishna in the second chapter of the *Gita*.

Arjuna asks, how is it that people have the knowledge and yet they commit offences, seemingly against their will? What is that unknown force which drives them to such folly? Krishna's reply is, “It is desire which instigates them. It is passion sprung from the quality of *rajas*. . . .As the flame is surrounded by smoke, and a mirror by rust, and as the womb envelopes the foetus, so is the universe surrounded by this passion. . . .Its empire is over the senses and organs, the thinking principle and the discriminating faculty also.” Three

illustrations are given to show how our desires delude our rational capacity and cloud our discrimination. These three illustrations cover three *gunas* (qualities) and three kinds of desires. There could be inert (*tamasic*) desires, such as sleep and idleness; active *rajasic* desires for power, name, fame, wealth, love for gain, etc.; and divine or noble (*sattvic*) desires such as for achieving peace, happiness, knowledge and perfection.

Fire is enveloped by smoke, but it is only partially veiled by it. A flame could be seen through the smoke. When a whiff of wind clears off the smoke the flame becomes visible. So, even the *sattvic* desire could veil the infinite glory of the Spirit. It is quite possible to be like Mejnour in *Zanoni*, who is the pure intellect that has won its wisdom through detachment from the life of the senses. He is not touched by human passions, but also his wisdom is of no benefit to humanity, as he denies his relationship with the world. He says, “I live but in knowledge, I have no life in humanity.” Bulwer Lytton describes him by saying, “He asks no charity and gives none—he does no evil and seems to confer no good.”

Likewise, the Spirit or Truth could be obscured by our desire for glory and power. Here, there is more or less complete obscuration, as in the case of a mirror covered by dust or rust. We are unable to see our reflection in the mirror covered by dust and it needs to be wiped with a cloth. Such are the *Rajasic* desires, more difficult to overcome, as they are gross, egocentric, passionate and selfish—exhaustion of *Rajasic* desires requires consistent efforts.

A foetus enveloped by the womb shows complete obscuration of the divine by *tamasic* desires. It is only after nine months that the foetus develops into a full-grown baby, when it is ready to emerge out of the womb. So also, it is difficult to change the *tamasic* nature and unfold the divinity within. All the lower desires—for wealth, comfort, name, fame, drinks and drugs, and all fleshly enjoyments—are composed of *Rajas* and *Tamas*. What we call fleshly appetites or desires of the body have their origin in thought. It is not easy for a person who is deeply steeped in evil to undergo a sudden

transformation and become equally powerful for good. Hence, the advice is to control your thoughts. "Attachment to things or results comes by thinking about them. You can have no attachment for a thing you do not think about; neither can you have a dislike for a thing you do not think about" writes Mr. Crosbie.

There are specific remedies suggested for our three classes mentioned earlier. To the desire-energized man, it says, suffering and death are his doom. Duryodhana has to die, he cannot live, he will not survive, and desire brings suffering. How does desire bring suffering? Consider the triple desires. There is a triad of desire that the *Gita* speaks of as the gates of hell. These are passion (*kama*), anger (*krodha*) and greed (*lobha*). When we desire a thing we go after it and one of the two results ensue; (a) we get it, (b) we fail to get it. If we succeed, we become greedy and want more; if we fail, we get sad. Either way, we increase the fervour of desire and fail to be satisfied. In reality, people who live in desire live in a vicious circle—a circle of vice. When greed and avarice and covetousness increase, failure is bound to follow and that leads to anger.

If we can break the circle, we would save ourselves much pain and anguish. But how? If we just asked the simple but straightforward question—why do I feel pain or sorrow? The answer is—*tanha*, *trishna*, or *kama* is the great cause of all suffering. Therefore, the *Gita* recommends meditation on pain, decay and death. This will help the person belonging to the first class to move to the second class.

Most of us belong to the second class because we are not merely centred in sense desires, but we want to know, to learn. We all get irritated and impatient, and we are all at times selfish and vindictive. We are aware of it. What is the remedy? Shri Krishna shows Arjuna the method of overcoming desire. "In the first place, restrain thy senses." If we neglect the senses and begin by controlling mind and heart, we gain nothing, because the foe remains undisturbed in the senses. It is by means of outward senses and their inner counterparts that a great turmoil is set up first in the heart, and "the restless heart

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snatches away the mind from its steady place.” Like a tortoise withdrawing its feet and head within the shell at the approaching danger, we have to draw in all the senses and restrain them from running in their accustomed directions. But simultaneously with the control of the senses, one must control the mind and heart. It is important to recognize that *ultimately*, it is the *mind*, and not the senses that lead us astray. For instance, when we put ice cream on our tongue, the tongue reports that it is cold and sweet, but it is the mind that intervenes and says, “I like it, I want more of it.” We are cautioned in *The Voice of the Silence*, “Thou shalt not let thy senses make a playground of thy mind.”

We must strive to forget the lower self by remembering the Divine Self. Let us put our thoughts every morning on our Higher or Divine Self—the Soul within. The *Gita* says: “The spirit in the body is called *Maheshwara*, the Great Lord, the spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also the *Paramatma*, the highest soul. He who thus knoweth the spirit and nature, together with the qualities, whatever mode of life he may lead, is not born again on this earth.” Spirit—the great lord in the body—is the spectator, which observes the lower self, admonishes it when it goes astray, sustains it when it does right, and enjoys, *i.e.*, learns from the good experiences. When we follow this discipline, we move into the third class; for when we listen to the voice of the Lord within, then there emerges a very definite and precise mode of inner life. May we all succeed in this greatest of all wars.

IT TAKES a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.

—ALAN COHEN

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A PASSAGE TO INDIA—I

A PASSAGE TO INDIA is a novel by E. M. Forster published in 1924. The novel is based on his experiences in India, as he wrote this novel after travelling to India in 1912. It is set against the backdrop of the British Raj and the Indian Independence movement in the 1920s. It was selected as one of the hundred great works of twentieth-century English literature and won the 1924 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. It was included in *Time Magazine*'s "All Time 100 Novels" list. The novel portrays the relationship between the British and the Indians in India.

The novel is divided into three parts: Mosque, Cave and Temple. In the first part, readers are introduced to the characters, their background stories and the divided British-Indian society of the fictitious city of Chandrapore, situated on the banks of the River Ganges in north-eastern India. The Marabar caves, modelled on the Barabar Caves of Bihar, are twenty miles away from Chandrapore. Adela Quested, a young British school mistress and her elderly friend, Mrs Moore, visit the city of Chandrapore. Adela is supposed to decide if she wants to marry Mrs Moore's son Ronny Heaslop, a magistrate in Chandrapore. The two women desire to see a more authentic side of India than what is known through British clubs and theatre performances. Aziz is a young Indian Muslim doctor, and a widower with three children. He is frustrated by the poor treatment he receives at the hands of the English. Aziz and his friends often engage in lively conversation about whether or not an Indian can be friends with an Englishman in India. Dr. Aziz meets Mrs Moore when he visits a mosque. When he discovers that she has respect for native customs and treats him like a friend, he explores the mosque with her and their friendship persists throughout the novel. However, Ronny, Mrs Moore's son, becomes indignant when his mother relates her experiences at the mosque.

Mr. Turton, the city tax collector, invites numerous Indian

gentlemen to a party at his house, so that Adela and Mrs Moore may have the opportunity to meet some of the more prominent and wealthy Indians in the city. The party turns out to be an awkward event. However, Adela meets Cyril Fielding, who is a principal of Chandrapore's government-run college for Indians and invites her, Mrs Moore and a Hindu Brahmin professor named Narayan Godbole, along with Dr. Aziz, to a tea party. When Ronny arrives, he finds Adela "unaccompanied" with Dr. Aziz and professor Godbole and rudely breaks up the party. Adela feels that Anglo-Indian life has changed Ronnie and now she does not want to marry him, but a car accident brings them together and they are engaged. At tea, Aziz and Fielding form a friendship. Aziz is motivated to show his hospitality and invites them all on an expedition to the nearby legendary Marabar Caves. Fielding and Godbole are supposed to accompany the expedition, but they miss the train.

The next section, "Caves," begins with a detailed description of the Marabar Caves. Aziz and the two women explore the caves. When they enter the first cave, the servants and villagers pile in behind them, making Mrs Moore feel faint and claustrophobic. The stench in the cave and the masses of people, together with the terrifying echo, cause her to panic. After emerging from that cave, she refuses to enter any more caves. Therefore, Adela and Aziz, accompanied by a guide, climb to the upper caves. As they walk, Adela asks Aziz about his family. At first, he is happy to answer, but when she asks if he has more than one wife, he feels insulted. He disappears into the entrance of a nearby cave to smoke a cigarette and collect himself. Adela is unaware that she has offended him. She follows at a leisurely pace and wanders into a cave, and is supposedly assaulted by someone there. When Aziz comes out, he learns from the guide that Adela has gone into a cave by herself. Aziz looks for her but does not find her. Assuming that she is lost he decides to go back to camp. Something catches his eye at the entrance of one of the caves and recognizes it to be Adela's binoculars, with the leather strap broken. He picks them up and continues to move

towards the camp. He discovers that Godbole and Fielding, who have missed the train, have arrived in Miss Derek's car. He sees Adela speaking to Miss Derek, but while he is busy talking to Fielding, the two ladies drive off without explanation.

When Aziz, Fielding and Mrs Moore return to Chandrapore, Aziz is unexpectedly arrested. He is charged with attempting to rape Adela while she was in the caves. The charge is based on Adela's claims that Aziz has followed her into a cave and tried to assault her. She had fought him off with her field glasses, breaking the strap, and had escaped. The police find the field glasses in Aziz's pocket. Although the only evidence that the British have is the field glasses in possession of Aziz, yet they believe that Aziz is guilty. However, only Fielding believes that Aziz is innocent. He alienates himself from the English for siding with Aziz. Aziz is imprisoned and a trial date is set. Adela's time before the trial is marked by wavering mental health and uncertainty. She is further destabilized when she meets Mrs Moore who speaks of Aziz's innocence. Ronnie sends his mother back to England. A riot breaks out in Chandrapore and tensions between the English and Indian populations rise. Mrs Moore dies during the voyage. Her absence from India becomes a major issue at the trial, where Aziz's legal defenders assert that her testimony would have proven Aziz's innocence.

At the trial, Adela is put under pressure by the rest of the English to condemn Aziz outright. She has a vision of the cave, and it turns out that while in the cave, Adela had received a shock similar to Mrs Moore's. The echo had disconcerted her so much that she became unhinged. At that time, she mistakenly interpreted her shock as an assault by Aziz. She truthfully confesses that she has made a mistake: Aziz is not the person or thing that attacked her in the cave. Aziz is set free. The British community ostracizes Adela as they feel that she has betrayed them. She seeks refuge in Fielding's college. He allows her to stay while he is away until her passage on a boat to England is arranged. Fielding begins to respect Adela, recognizing her bravery in standing against her peers to pronounce

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Aziz innocent. He also tries to persuade Aziz to forgive Adela and not claim damages. Ronny breaks off his engagement with Adela.

Although he is vindicated, Aziz is angry that Fielding befriended Adela after she nearly ruined him. Their friendship suffers, and Fielding departs for England. Aziz believes that he is leaving to marry Adela for her money. Bitter at his friend's perceived betrayal, he vows never again to befriend a white person. He plans to look for work in a remote part of India, away from the influence of the English, and begin a new life. Two years later, in Mau, in central India, Godbole is the Minister of Education, and through his influence, Aziz becomes chief physician of the Maharajah of Mau. Fielding visits Mau on his tour to India. One day, walking through an old temple with his three children, he meets Fielding and his brother-in-law, Ralph Moore. It turns out that Fielding has not married Adela but Stella Moore, who is Mrs Moore's daughter from her second marriage. Aziz befriends Ralph and renews his friendship with Fielding as well. Before Fielding leaves, the two of them go for a ride together. Aziz, who has not given up his dream of a free and united India, tells Fielding that the two of them cannot be friends until India becomes independent from British rule.

The title of the novel is derived from the title of Walt Whitman's poem "Passage to India," which he wrote in 1869, after the Suez Canal was first opened. The poem was inspired by two major achievements—the opening of the Suez Canal and the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, which he believed made India and the East more accessible to European countries. The opening of the Suez Canal greatly reduced the distance between Britain and India and led to an increase in passenger and merchant shipping. The English did not come to India as invaders or conquerors in the seventeenth century; they came as traders. Later, however, they involved themselves in Indian affairs and succeeded in ruling all of India. It is believed that ancient India traded in goods such as spices, perfumes and textiles and in return accepted only gold, which prompted the Romans to fix the epithet "Golden Sparrow" onto

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India. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Europeans were attracted by the material wealth of India. Columbus wanted to find a new route to India, China, Japan, etc. because if he could reach these lands, he would be able to bring back rich cargoes of gold, silks and spices. However, very few could appreciate that ancient India also possessed a wealth of knowledge and architecture.

In his poem, Walt Whitman describes an imaginary journey that he wants to take into fabled India. He seems to suggest that the completion of the physical journey to India is only a prelude to some day finding and walking the spiritual pathway to India and the East, and ultimately to God. He sees India as a mysterious place, once visited will lead to the rejuvenation of his soul. He seems to suggest that all the explorers and voyagers that have struggled to reach India are reflecting God's purpose, and His plan is that "The earth...be spanned" and that "the people...become brothers and sisters." He wants all kinds of people to intermingle, marry and become neighbours. "The oceans to be crossed, the distant brought near, the lands to be welded together." The poet perceives India as an ancient land of morals and legends, and a historical cradle of civilization. The return of the poet and his soul to the East and the passage to India are metaphorical, implying not only a journey back to the cradle of mankind, where many religions had their birth, but it is also a deeply spiritual journey wherein the poet and his soul seek a mystical experience of union with God in the realm of spirit. All through the poem, we are able to see the gradual evolution of the symbol of India, from being a geographical entity to a timeless craving of man for the realization of God. Therefore, at the beginning of the last section of the poem, Whitman says that the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey is "Passage to more than India!" He is impatient and passionate about beginning this journey. He asks if the human race has not stood in the same spot for long enough like "mere brutes," and that we should set out like the explorers of old, for the places never visited before.

(To be concluded)

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

DUTY

DHARMA is the law of self-nature, not of the lower self-nature but the incarnated ego's self-nature. The incarnated ray of the human ego is one thing and that ray getting involved with kama is another thing. We must make a distinction between Kama-Manas and the *Antahkaranic* being which separates itself from Kama and goes in the direction of the parent over-brooded by Atma-Buddhi. The individual *Dharma* of the ego is really of the nature of the Atma-Buddhi-Manasic Monad in relationship to its Parent Star or original Dhyani-Buddha.

Narrow and circumscribing feelings and thoughts, which conventions consider good, remain narrow and circumscribing for the soul. This is the real test of the earnest student of Theosophy. As Mr. Judge points out, we often have the defects of our qualities. Do we not often form a wrong conviction or an overestimate of what we call our duty? If we apply the word *Dharma*, the property of the soul, it must manifest in action as burning is manifested by fire; then we would not be worried about right and wrong duties. The fire gives warmth, but the fire also burns up and destroys; our duties or actions must be such that they give warmth and comfort to others, but at the same time consume and destroy the personal ties and possessions of our own lower nature. This is the idea that you should keep in mind in this period when things must look very grim.

We have to do duties and remain detached. This is the *Buddhi Yoga* of the second chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita*. We have to become devoted and think of Masters all the time, and that need not mean neglecting the duties of earning a livelihood or doing tasks at home, which too can and should be theosophized.

Our daily chores may seem bothersome, but they teach (1) patience, (2) steadfastness and (3) how to derive joy by looking up to their archetypes. "Hitch your wagon to a star," and the slowness and fatigue of the jogging journey begin to disappear. That is what

we have to do. We can and should be and are learning. “A calm reliance on the Law,” you say—that is the real thing we need. If we actually had it we would neither fret nor be bothered, and anxiety and worry would vanish. As to patience, if you try to develop it in small things you will not only find it possible but will also speed up the unfoldment.

You will find as you strive that each effort leads to success—however slow in coming that success be. Of course, it is but natural that your ordinary family vocations “bore” you; but don’t be bored, my friend. You are acquiring a new attitude and readjustments are always troublesome. Keep on loving all and working for them. The ties of Home are kindred to the ties of Heaven.

About the duty of another being dangerous: Judge’s Aphorisms clarify several points. It always seems to me that much simplification results by a primary application of the teaching—“That which is not *necessary* for you to do is not your duty.” A big bulk falls away; among it all “the duty of another.” Lending a helping hand is our duty; Judge’s Aphorism is very clear. There the genuine difficulty is that the “help” depends on our knowledge and capacity to understand so as to help. Of course it is a very difficult problem; but *Vairagya* as one of the seven aspects of Compassion Absolute gives us the clue and very often reveals what should be done and how. One factor: in helping another we must not do his job but must aid him to accomplish it.

Our duty to our Higher Self may produce what looks like conflict of duties in the personal life; but if we apply to our myriad duties the Law of Necessity we see daylight and are able to resolve the conflict. That which is necessary alone is regarded as duty. It does estrange us sometimes from family and friends. But if we live truly according to Esoteric Principles the bonds and bondage of Karma fall away. One should not break them; the Good Law and Its Custodians remove afflictions of personal Karma. It is said, Karma always opens the door.

Of course the Law of Necessity is difficult of application. But it certainly helps us to eliminate many a so-called duty. Then naturally arises conflict of duties on a higher spiral. There the need must be

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felt by the soul. Helping of others—kin, friends or strangers—is the need of one’s own soul, as much as it is needed by those others. But in this “Let Every Man Prove His Own Work” becomes our guide. Between duty and inclination the choice is to be made; also to avoid impulsive words and actions and to be deliberate in speech and deeds is necessary. It is a Great Game—the recreation side of the School of Occultism.

The Law of Necessity offers awkwardnesses and obstacles; inclinations call out in the name of necessity. *Sva-dharma*’s one aspect is duties which are congenital; but the perceiver and determinator of every *dharma* is the lower self of likes and inclinations. Then comes the next stage—the conflict of duties; that is where you now are. Immediately follow higher motives and inclinations and the conflict is between the lower and the higher, as you are experiencing at this hour. It is at this stage that we have H.P.B.’s pointer—justice to one’s own soul-self. Theosophical work is not a matter of choice only. Do we not need it? Do we not feel the deep necessity to attend to the chosen job? Body needs nourishment—all recognize that; some of us recognize the need for mental and for soul food and the latter Theosophical work and service provide. As we develop discrimination we are able to see to which duty preference is to be given and in that resignation (inner) is the aid. Conservation of time and energy goes a great way in our success.

Once again, I am exceedingly sorry to point out to you that in trying to do many things your execution of your own duties is becoming poorer. Why meddle in things which don’t concern you? Well, I know you have not been well bodily; then why not *strictly* attend to your own *dharma* and not try to help here and there? All that is necessary for you in your relationship to others is to be friendly, not to do things for them involving time and energy. Unless you learn to use your leisure to recoup your own strength and magnetism you will fast deteriorate in doing your own work. This is not a threat; it is a warning. I suppose I can never make you catch up with the work so as to have respite. Whenever you have time it is spent in unnecessary work. You would be able to accomplish more if you minded your own duties, without inventing something in the name of duties.

METAPHYSICS—SOME REFLECTIONS

III

IF there is a need for a sound metaphysical basis to understand the nature of man, it is absolutely necessary for grasping the nature and evolution of the cosmos itself. H.P.B. observes that occultism is concerned with knowing the soul and spirit of the Cosmic Space, while physical science is engaged in finding out the far away and unknown aspects of physical man and universe. Kepler, Kant, Herschel and Sir W. Oersted were concerned with the Spiritual World and that is why occultists who are concerned with occult cosmogony would attempt to understand the theories of these scientists and find out to what extent they come close to the true, spiritual concepts concerning the cosmos. Since modern cosmology and astronomy are not concerned with spiritual views, we find contradictions arising in various scientific theories, on every subject. (*S.D.*, I, 589-90)

However, even the metaphysical concepts of Kant, Kepler, etc., though are far above the metaphysics of their days, fall far short of the metaphysics of the occult sciences and that is what H.P.B. tries to convey in the article, “The Beacon of the Unknown.” She differentiates between the “metaphysics” of occult sciences, which she calls *meta*-metaphysics, and the metaphysics of even certain enlightened scientists. Thus, for example, even without the aid of present-day methods or instruments, the metaphysical thought of Kant showed him the identity of the constitution and essence of the sun and the planets, which he *affirmed*, while other astronomers of his time *denied* it. Yet, he failed to prove the true nature of that essence. Physical sciences can come close to the truth that can be accepted by the occultists only when they combine reason and observation with intuition or corroboration from the sixth and seventh senses of the divine *Ego*.

Laplace had put forward what is known as Nebular Hypothesis, and it is considered to be a modified version of Kant’s hypothesis.

Kant assumed that primordial matter, which was considered to be supernaturally created, consisted of small, hard and cold particles. Laplace supposed that matter or nebula from which the sun, earth and other planets were formed, was in the form of intensely hot gas. This mass of matter was spherical and rotated slowly on its own axis. As the mass of matter grew colder and contracted, it rotated faster. There was centrifugal force produced due to rotation, which exceeded the centripetal force, and also because there was greater cooling and condensation at the periphery than at the centre, the outer layer of the nebula was moving faster than the centre which was slowly cooling and condensing, and as a result, outer ring or layer separated from the remaining part of the nebula. This separated ring of material started moving around the centre. This one ring was divided into nine rings and then each ring moved away from the remaining rings. The material of each ring was still comparatively hot and gaseous, and it started condensing to form a planet. Thus, the nine planets were formed from the nine rings, while the central mass or nucleus formed the Sun. The satellites were then formed from the planets by a similar process.

There are several objections to this theory, such as, Laplace says nothing about the source of nebular material nor about the source of heat and motion. If the sun is formed from the nucleus of the nebula after the irregular ring of material was separated then Sun should have a bulge at its equator, which it does not have, and so on. The perceived deficiencies of the Laplacian model stimulated scientists to find a replacement for it. During the twentieth century many theories addressed the issue, including, the planetesimal theory (1901), according to which, planets were formed from the material drawn out of the Sun. The modern widely accepted theory of planetary formation, presented by the Soviet astronomer, Victor Safronov, is known as the Solar Nebular Disk Model (SNDM), in which almost all major problems of planetary formation of the planets seem to be formulated and some of them solved. His ideas have been further developed by other astronomers.

It is useful to consider the observations made by the Theosophical Adepts regarding Laplace's theory. Adepts do not reject the general propositions of this theory, nor do they deny those aspects of the hypothesis which are approximately true. But they say that the theory was not complete at that time. Thus, for instance, Laplace's theory is supposed to account for why all planets rotate on their axes and revolve around the sun in the same direction. The satellites of the planets move in the same direction as their primaries, etc. However, it raises many questions which remain unanswered. The satellites of Neptune and Uranus display retrograde motion. A planet nearer the sun must have greater density than those that are farther away. Yet, Venus, which is nearer to the Sun than Earth has lesser density than our Earth, while Uranus which is farther away than Saturn has greater density than Saturn.

H.P.B. writes that occultism agrees with the mechanical origin of the universe. However, behind the mechanically or automatically operating machine, there is someone's intelligence at work. The same applies to the process of formation or birth of the universe. Therefore, someone who knows the principles of mechanics can come up with a theory of the birth and formation of the Kosmos out of chaos, but such a Kosmos will be like Frankenstein's monster, *i.e.*, it will be an objective world and will say nothing about the hidden side of Kosmos. In a novel by Mary Shelley, the main character, Victor, was inspired by the power produced by a bolt of lightning to construct a new human being from the body parts of dead persons. At that time, many believed that electricity can reanimate dead tissue, and maybe, even restore life. We read a passage in the *Secret Doctrine* which says that perhaps in future it would be possible to create a Frankenstein, but no chemist, or Alchemist either, will ever endow such a "Frankenstein's Monster" with more than animal instinct (II, 349). In other words, the physical nature, when left to herself, can produce minerals, vegetables and lower animals, but for the production of man, the help of independent, spiritual and intelligent powers is necessary.

C. Wolf, an astronomer, observed that to find out the origin of all the heavenly bodies as well as the two classes of nebulae—postulated by Laplace and Kant—we must go to ultimate primordial matter or primitive chaos. If we assume this primitive chaos to be a *cold luminous gas*, then the attraction would make it contract, and that would make it hot and luminous, and that could explain the origin of Laplace’s nebula only. On the other hand, if we assume that primitive chaos was composed of incandescent particles, then it could explain the origin of Kant’s nebula only. These are some of the points that are difficult to explain and therefore come in the way of accepting the nebular theory and also in providing satisfactory explanation as to what could be the nature of primitive chaos.

A cosmogonical theory, in order to be complete and correct, has to start with a primordial Substance that is spread throughout space, and which is divine and intellectual, writes H.P.B. What is Primordial matter according to occult philosophy? Can it be cold or hot luminous gas? According to Theosophy, Primordial matter is coeval with Space. It is Eternal Seven-Skinned Mother-Father or *Mulaprakriti*, which is without beginning or end, neither cold nor hot, and devoid of every quality. Heat and cold are the qualities that pertain to manifested worlds. Motion contains potentialities of every quality in the Manvantaric worlds. Fohat or *daiviprakriti* is motion or the energetic aspect which brings about differentiation and thus endows matter with qualities such as heat and cold. (*S.D.*, I, 82)

The rotation and the revolution of the planets cannot be explained on the basis of the presence of Ether and the force of attraction. Though there must be a mechanical cause behind such motion, Newton himself said that besides the natural forces there must be something else which gives the original impulse for such motion. Newton claimed the existence of an intelligent and all-powerful Being, while Kepler spoke of Angels, or *Rectores* which guide the movement of the planets. H.P.B. says that the “personal working God” of Newton and the Rectors and Angels of Kepler are identical to the metaphysical *genii* and the *devas*. She observes that if someone

like Newton had to admit the limitations of natural laws, modern materialistic scientists must do the same, as they cannot know better than Newton, whom she describes as one of the most spiritual-minded and religious men of his day.

Immanuel Kant, the Prussian philosopher, put forward his nebular hypothesis for the origin of the solar system on the basis of Newtonian laws. It was based on Newton's laws of gravitation and rotatory motion. H.P.B. observes that either Kant was inspired by some Nirmanakayic being or he was the reincarnation of some advanced being. His primordial matter is Akasa of the occult philosophy. Newton could not explain what could be the original impulse imparted to the planets, which Kant tried to explain by postulating a universally pervading primordial substance. Kant says that the rotation of the planets and the fact that the orbits of the planets are on the same plane cannot all be explained on the basis of matter *which fills the heavenly spaces at present, i.e.,* Ether, but on the basis of that matter *which filled the space and was space, originally.* It is that matter of which sun, planets and comets are formed, and that matter has preserved its quality of motion and that quality of motion has been imparted to the nuclei of these heavenly bodies which now directs their motion, rotation as well as revolution.

H.P.B. observes that Kant's explanation needs some adjustment. The occult or esoteric doctrine teaches that it is the original, primordial *prima materia*, divine and intelligent, or *daiviprakriti* (Fohat), which formed the nuclei of all the "self-moving" orbs in the Kosmos. Fohat is closely related to One Life. It is variously described as electric vital fluid and electric vital power. Since Fohat stands for the collectivity of Dhyan-chohanic intelligences, Kant's idea of the mind and soul of stars and Suns, which explains the basis of motion itself thus fills the gap left by Newton. H.P.B. says that these physical planets are a dwelling of planetary angels, called "Sons of Light" or Informing Spirits of the planets, or "Heavenly Snails," because just as the invisible creature within the shell of a snail, moves and carries the shell with it, so also, these informing forces carry the planets.

According to C. Wolf, Nebular theory does not tell us about the *evolution of the Universe* or Kosmos. It only endeavours to explain phenomena concerning the solar system and those concerning stars and nebulae, by use of telescope and spectroscope. He observes that the nebular theory of Laplace does not consider comets to be part of the evolution of the solar system. In his hypothesis, comets are strangers to the planetary system. They are formed by the condensation of nebular matter distributed throughout the universe.

According to the adepts, it would not be very useful to explain the nebular theory in isolation without considering the entire esoteric cosmogony or the occult views on the origin of the universe or cosmos. To receive that explanation, modern astronomers will have to accept and understand the role of Fohat and the “divine builders.” H.P.B. tells us that according to esoteric doctrine the formation of all the worlds is chiefly because of the comets. This has been explained on pp. 203-205 (*S.D.*, I). Once a laya centre is formed, that homogeneous mass of matter condenses at that point and is then animated or awakened so that it becomes a fiery mass, which becomes a comet. This comet will then in its course of evolution accumulate matter from other masses, or it can be drawn into greater masses because of their force of attraction. We might say that a nucleus of primordial matter which is animated passes through the cometary, then the sun stage and then becomes planets and worlds.

Mahat or Cosmic Mind represents divine ideation in active operation. The highest group of builders build Solar systems, while the middle group is concerned with building the planetary chains. They are said to be intelligent masons who fashion matter according to the Ideal plan which is “ready” in Cosmic Ideation. The Builders are the Rishi-Prajapatis, or Seven Ameshaspendis of the Zoroastrians.

Thus, according to the occult philosophy, the nebular theory is unable to satisfactorily explain the evolution of the solar system and that is because of scientific materialism and reluctance of science to consider *meta*-metaphysics.

(To be continued)

CHILD SOULS

THE WORD “Soul” is used even within regular parlance in phrases such as Soul-music or Soul of things. By Soul, we mean, the indwelling, informing and animating principle that is the noumenon of its outer covering which is the phenomenon. When this definition is applied to Man, the Soul takes on three distinct aspects. Clearly, the principle that is most readily accessible to introspection, the personality, which is the instinctive answer to the question, “who are you?”, is one aspect of the Human Soul. It is what we identify as ourselves, that which acts and either enjoys or suffers the effects thereof. On inspection, we see that this aspect is not very much more developed than that of the higher animals. While with them this principle is innate and instinctive, with us it is self-consciously self-serving. As such, this aspect is called in Theosophy the Animal Soul.

However, there is that in man which puts him immeasurably higher than even the most intelligent of animals. To illustrate this point, consider the following thought-experiment. Let us say a man and a chimp are marooned on two separate islands which are identical in every other aspect—weather, availability of food-source, water and dangers such as predators or venomous snakes. Both the man and the chimp have to use their individual strength and innate abilities to survive. After a few years, who has a better chance of surviving? The balance of probability would greatly tilt in favour of an average chimp outliving an average man in such a situation, especially if the man were an ex-urban-dweller. Now consider the same experiment, but instead of a single man and chimp, assume there are a group of a hundred humans and a troop of a hundred chimps of the same size and demographics as humans, marooned on the same two islands. Which group has a greater chance of survival? Chimps being highly territorial would likely atrophy some lives away in fighting. After a few years, they may even exhaust all the food sources on the island and perish entirely. However, the group of a hundred humans would

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have likely collaborated to build shelters, cultivate the land, build irrigation, specialize in hunting or fishing and even attempted to build boats to escape from the island altogether. This aspect of man which has among other faculties, the ability to introspect, ideate, empathize, collaborate and communicate, is that which uniquely distinguishes him from even the highest of animal-kind and as such is denominated the Human Soul.

Lastly, the fact that men such as Buddha and Shankaracharya, who were born as any ordinary man, yet raised their inner natures to the highest possible degree of perfection, thus demonstrating the perfectibility of human nature is proof that there is a Divine aspect to man's Soul. Of course, this aspect does not find expression in an average man who is dominated by his animal passions. The purpose of life is to bring about the full expression of this divine nature wherein man achieves the ultimate pitch of perfection through "*self-induced and self-devised efforts*" across many lifetimes, all the while acting under the law of Karma. As this aspect of man's soul appears godly to our terrestrial eyes, it is called in Theosophy the Divine Soul.

Furthermore, when we apply the qualifying word "child" to the three aspects of the soul discussed above, the word takes on two distinct connotations. Of course, the most popular meaning is that of chronological age since embodiment is reflective of a lack of development or maturity, otherwise expressed by the adjective "childish." And the other connotation is the adjective "child-like," implying purity of motive, non-assertion of individual rights such as ownership, non-retribution and innocence in the face of evil. These qualities are innately found in a child due to primeval purity and they are also perceptible attributes of the personality of a perfected man as virtues that he has won through transcendence of the illusory self. The combination of the three aspects of the soul with the two connotations of the word "child" provides us with the canvas on which to explore this topic.

The most obvious application of the phrase "Child Souls" is in

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reference to children because in the general case, children are old *human* souls in young bodies. When seen in this light, the parent-child relationship takes on a whole new colour. Children do not belong to their parents. Only their bodies are placed in trust with the parents until the old sovereign soul in the young body can take hold of it and pursue its independent stream of karmic current that it is here on earth to fulfil. However, it is the parent's bounden duty to not only care for the body but to impress the formative *animal* soul with higher impulses so that it may best serve the monad's evolutionary purpose during its lifetime. H.P.B writes, "Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all men, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves. We would reduce the purely mechanical work of the memory to an absolute minimum, and devote time to the development and training of the inner senses, faculties and latent capacities. We would endeavour to deal with each child as a unit and to educate it so as to produce the most harmonious and equal unfoldment of its powers, in order that its special aptitudes should find their full natural development. We should aim at creating *free* men and women, free intellectually, free morally, unprejudiced in all respects, and above all things, *unselfish*." (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 268, Indian Ed.)

"Do as I say, not as I do" is an idiom that simply does not work with children as they are absorbing and emulating their parent's behaviour in subtle yet profound ways. So, the parent cannot just philosophize but needs to exemplify those teachings in practice, starting first with charity in the sense of a charitable attitude or *Dana*. A parent of Theosophical background must be able to treat their own children with "charity and love immortal" before extending it to all sentient beings, thus corroborating the saying, "charity begins at home." Parents have as much to learn from children as the other way around.

Manusmriti points out that those in whom there still lingers a longing for *Kama* (desire) and *Artha* (wealth) must enter the

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Grihastha ashrama or the householder stage, have children and be responsible for their *Shodasha* or sixteen Karmas (*samskaras*)—all of which have an occult significance in the child’s development. For a person who has not transcended *Kama* and *Artha*, the office of householder offers a natural Dharmic bridge to *Moksha* (liberation), which is the final *Purushartha* (exertion). Through sacrifice, a householder supports the whole community around him, thus perpetuating the wheel of life set in motion, for which in Vedic times he was referred to as the *Yajamana* or sacrificer.

Occultism teaches that biological children are not the only progeny for which we are responsible. Every ardent thought or desire of man is an entity unto itself that is clothed in the life-atoms or elementals that get coloured by the quality of that thought and receive their impulse from that thought. These life-atoms then react upon humanity in general as they go to make up his tabernacle, the vehicle of the soul in its various gradations. Just as parents unleash their children who are the reflection and embodiment of their upbringing upon society, the thinking man is continuously generating causes that react upon the world in even more profound ways. And just as the sins of our children reflect upon us to the extent that the quality of their upbringing is causal in such action, similarly the progeny of our thoughts constrain us karmically like the webs that a spider weaves eventually bind it. Says *The Voice of the Silence*, “If thou would’st not be slain by them, then must thou harmless make thy own creations, the children of thy thoughts, unseen, impalpable, that swarm round humankind, the progeny and heirs to man and his terrestrial spoils.”

On the flipside, these life-atoms are incipient human souls, destined to be man in a future cycle and the impulse we give them through our thoughts determines their trajectory as being either progressive or regressive. They are veritable “Child Souls” awaiting their turn to graduate into manasic thinking entities like a man. As such, we are even more responsible for our mental progeny than we are for our biological children since our thoughts are entirely

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our own creations, and unlike our biological children, they do not come with their own prior Karmic baggage. This is one reason why thoughts are said to carry a higher Karmic charge, in one sense, than even action. And also why, the *Dhammapada* says that “All that we are is the result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts.”

Furthermore, it is a fact of nature that people vary just as widely in their spiritual development as they do in their physical and mental acumen. Hierarchies are an inexorable consequence of free-will and Karma. Those that focus their attention on any one aspect of life are able to progress along that line and outstrip general humanity in that particular area. As such, every society will always have its Alphas or those at the top of the social hierarchy and Omegas at the bottom. It is foolish to attempt adjusting circumstances so as to bring about equality of outcomes. Instead, occultism teaches the logical corollary of the realization of the nature of reality which is that all sense of separation is an illusion. Unity across humanity can be compared to bodily unity that we feel so keenly, wherein even though our right hand is stronger than the left, still they both work as one unit to accomplish any task. And if any cell goes against the harmony of the body, it becomes cancerous and afflicts the whole, including itself. When this fact of Universal Brotherhood is profoundly internalized, the Alphas will willingly sacrifice themselves for the upliftment of the Omegas as they realize that real development is only possible collectively and not as separate units. And any individual progress one seeks is only to “fit themselves, by study and otherwise, to be the better able to help and teach others.” In society, it may seem that the Omegas are only able to advance themselves by serving the Alphas, whereas, in the hidden nature of Spirit, the law is entirely the opposite.

Similarly at the scale of monadic evolution within a cycle, individual monads achieve the human stage at different times based on their own Karmic merit from previous cycles. And in the grand economy of nature, young human souls take up old bodies, meaning

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they reuse life-atoms from older and advanced civilizations, the life-atoms that are made pliable to higher impulses and purposes by their previous owners. Thus, merciful nature affords the young human soul the best opportunity for further progress. Similarly, it is the duty and responsibility of the old souls or the Alphas, to guide, teach and uplift the Omegas, just as the Alphas in their turn are helped along in their development by the more progressed elder brothers of humanity. As *The Voice of the Silence* says, “Give light and comfort to the toiling pilgrim, and seek out him who knows still less than thou; who in his wretched desolation sits starving for the bread of Wisdom and the bread which feeds the shadow, without a Teacher, hope or consolation, and—let him hear the Law.”

The final and grandest sense of the phrase “Child Soul” is as applied to the personality of a realized pupil. Once in full accord with his divine nature, such an advanced disciple gives up all imagined rights of his illusive personality and becomes as innocent and defenceless as a child. His external personality betrays not one bit the stupendous internal progress he has made and hence would appear as “nothing” in the eyes of others. As *The Voice of the Silence* says, “The pupil must regain the child-state he has lost ere the first sound can fall upon his ear.” But in due progress, every pupil needs to seek a guru who is to give him a second or spiritual birth. And such a guru is said to take on immense responsibility for the consequences of such an initiation, brought about by the chela’s subsequent actions, just as a parent bears complete responsibility for their children’s actions.

This taking on of ever-increasing responsibility, starting from biological children to our invisible mental progeny, the omegas of society and finally culminating in the guru-chela relationship are the milestones on the road to perfection taken by the pilgrim, his final destination. And in each case, it is that act of self-sacrifice alone which is redemptive. Hence, H.P.B.’s words, “Children are our Salvation” is shown to be true in every sense of the word.

THE EVOLUTIONARY PLAN

AN EVOLUTIONARY theory or teaching endeavours to explain the series of steps by which Man and Nature have become as they are. In Theosophy this includes not only *how* they came to be as they are, but also *why*—that is, the purpose involved, as well as the Goal towards which the whole process aims.

Modern science seeks only to explain the *how*, while refusing to acknowledge Plan, Purpose or Goal. It strives to demonstrate that all of Life can be interpreted in terms of physical matter alone. But Theosophy declares that matter is only one of the three broad divisions that comprise Man and Nature, the other two being Consciousness (Mind, Intelligence) and Spirit. Therefore, to understand the Evolutionary Plan is to know the origin of these categories, which have combined to produce Man and Nature as we now find them.

Of these three, Spirit remains always the same, from the dawn of Manifestation throughout the many changes that ensue. For Spirit is Life itself, uncreate and indestructible. Forms and beings exist because there is Life or Spirit to sustain them. When Spirit is gradually withdrawn at the beginning of *Pralaya*, a period of dissolution or repose, forms and beings cease to be, until the advent of the ensuing *Manvantara*, a period of manifestation.

We have now to understand the origin of Matter and Consciousness. At the beginning of the *Manvantara*, there are present two universal Principles—Primordial Matter and Cosmic Ideation. The former is the source-material from which are derived all the degrees of substance or matter that appear on the seven planes of the manifested world. Cosmic Ideation or Cosmic Mind is the origin of all intelligence, from the instinct displayed in the lower kingdoms to the mind of man. Whether conscious, as in the lower kingdoms, or self-conscious, as in man, it is all an expression of the Intelligence resident in the Cosmic Mind.

These two Universal Principles are independent. To produce any

form of Life, both are required. As an example, consider the electric bulb emitting light. To produce this light both the bulb and the electric current are required. One without the other will not do. Similarly, in the universe, every form of matter—on whatever plane—expresses a degree of intelligence. And while the potentiality of intelligence is limitless, the actual use of it is confined to the ability of the form to contain or express it. Thus a 200-watt bulb gives more light than a 40-watt bulb.

In the process which begins at the highest level and continues through the various planes, there is implicit an overall Purpose. That is, to evolve an individual mind which can reflect all the facets and aspects of manifested Nature. This individual mind is found in every man; and that is why man has been called the microcosm of the macrocosm.

But before an individual mind may appear on the scene, a vehicle must be prepared for it. Since this vehicle represents all of Nature, a vast amount of time is required to fashion all the parts that will make up this form. As an analogy to this process, consider the production of an automobile. After the model is conceived in the mind of the designer, careful plans are made to acquire the many hundreds of parts necessary to its successful functioning. Each of these parts is manufactured by a separate factory. Then they are brought together and fitted into the automobile. Even then, the car cannot fulfil its purpose until a man—or woman—drives it away.

Similarly, the man-form is fitted with “parts” evolved in the lower kingdoms. Thus, potential contact is made with every department of Nature. Then man, the thinker, steps into the form and the next stage of evolution commences—the evolution of the mental, psychic, spiritual man.

The purpose of this joining together is to provide the field of experience for the Incarnated Ego. The successful fruition of this experience will add to the store of knowledge already existing in the Ego. It will also develop its potential higher powers, and thus aid the Ego to become, eventually, a conscious worker with Nature, a Sage, a Mahatma.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

In Greek mythology we read about Achilles about whom it was foretold that he would perish at a young age. Since river Styx was supposed to offer powers of invulnerability, Achilles' mother Thetis dipped him in the magical water when he was a baby, and she held him by the heel. As a result, his entire body was made invulnerable except his heel, where she held him. Achilles grew up to be a great warrior, fought many battles but could not be killed. He died when a warrior shot him in the heel by a poisoned arrow. The myth symbolically conveyed the message that even an unconquerable warrior would have some weakness, which if found, could be used to defeat them.

In human relationships, especially close ones, we try to find out what makes the other person happy as well as that which makes them sad. Gradually we discover their Achilles heel. After a few months or a few years of marriage, partners become aware of each other's Achilles heel. It is human nature to subconsciously pick at another's weaknesses once we become aware of them. "Unfortunately most people use this Achilles heel in relationships to hurt rather than to protect or heal them." For instance, if a husband discovers that his wife's weakness is her mother then in a fight, he will bring her up and say something that will affect his wife, and thus believes that he has gained the upper hand by hurting her where it matters the most. Manipulating weaknesses is common in the corporate world. Sportsmen not only work on their strengths but they also use weaknesses of others against them to reach a desired goal.

"Sometimes we forget that in winning a point or feeling good for that moment, we end up losing something much more important: the love, trust, or peace of the other. What is the point of winning something at the cost of losing something much more important?" The way to build lasting relationships is to create a secure environment for each other, and know another's weakness only to help them

overcome it, without ever being tempted to use them for another's hurt even when they use our weaknesses to hurt us, writes Megha Bajaj. (*Life Positive*, November 2022)

A vulnerable person is the one who is open to emotional or physical injury. Vulnerability refers to a person's state of being susceptible to manipulation, persuasion, temptation, etc. Our efforts are towards fortifying ourselves against physical, mental and emotional hurt. And yet, experiences of life show us that it is not possible to be *completely* invulnerable, even physically. That seems to be one of the implications of the myth of the Greek god Achilles and the story of Duryodhana in the epic of *Mahabharata*.

Even weakness for something as simple and harmless as food, can be used by others to exploit us and bring our downfall. A person in a certain Buddhist order had a weakness for plum cakes. Everyone in the order knew that you could get almost anything done from this person by offering him a plum cake! A person as great as *Dharmaraja* Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava prince, brought about the downfall of the entire Pandava family, through his weakness for the game of dice.

It is our "vulnerable point," our "Achilles' heel," through which nature gives us the opportunity to grow, if we could only learn to handle it. It could be money for some, and anxiety for another. In a relationship, there are emotional blackmails. Your deep and strong love for another could be used as a weapon against you. When the calamities come pertaining to that particular weakness, we find them troublesome and difficult. But if we handle them well, we are able to burst through the shell, *i.e.*, overcome that one inhibiting factor in our character. Vices and weaknesses of man can become the stepping-stones on the ladder of progress as they are surmounted, one by one.

Light on the Path asks the disciple to learn to be completely vulnerable. A disciple has to learn never to raise his voice in self-defence or excuse, or in condemning or criticizing another person. He has to become as helpless and as unprotected as a new-

born child, and only then does he become fit to acquire *spiritual* powers. At the root of such vulnerability lies the acceptance and realization of the unity of all that lives and breathes.

Self-knowledge or knowledge of one's true personality can be based on our own perception of our personality, and that of people around us. Which is more accurate? Can such self-knowledge lead to a better life for oneself and also for those who interact with us? The need for self-knowledge has been suggested by Socrates when he says that the unexamined life is not worth living, and by Rene Descarte who emphasized introspection. However, psychologists observe that it is difficult to assess the accuracy of the way we perceive ourselves without an objective criterion for comparison. Researchers have tried to overcome this difficulty by comparing self-perception with other people's perceptions of oneself. David Dunning at Cornell University in New York is of the view that when it comes to assessing the traits that are important to us and traits that are ambiguous, we tend to overestimate ourselves, and that can manifest as "illusory superiority," wherein people overestimate their qualities. Other people's perceptions are likely to have a more objective view, though each of them would have their own biases and blind spots. In general, the suggestion is that if we are seeking a complete picture of our personality then we should seek out some feedback, partly because we are not likely to know about our blind spots and implicit biases through introspection, because there is a set of mental processes that affect our judgements and decision-making, of which we are not conscious.

The question arises: What do we gain by knowing about our blind spots and getting a more accurate self-view? Some believe that it can help us make better life decisions, such as, what careers to pursue, who to form relationships with, and so on. There are those who believe that there is no conclusive evidence to show whether self-knowledge is good for us or not. Mitchell Green, a

philosopher at the University of Connecticut, who has studied self-knowledge, is of the view that self-knowledge, which includes other people's perceptions is valuable. However, Simine Vazire, at the University of Melbourne feels that family might not be the best judges and that "the ideal person is someone who knows you well but whose identity is not fused with yours." The author, Daniel Cossins, says that for him tapping into other people's perceptions of his true nature did not prove to be a great eye-opener, and yet it was a worthwhile exercise, because he now has a much clearer idea of where his delusions lurk. (*New Scientist*, December 10, 2022)

Introspection or self-examination, either daily or periodically, is essential for self-knowledge, *i.e.*, knowing what kind of person we are, so that it can lead to self-renewal and ultimately to self-realization. In this process, perception of people around us could be of immense value, especially of our elders, teachers, and those who are spiritually wise, as it is most likely to be based on sympathy and understanding. Whether it is our own perception arising out of introspection or that of others, it must be impersonal, based on unbiased and clear judgement. Most people are unable to see their own weaknesses, and therefore, the practice of self-examination takes *a long time*, before one is able to come face to face with one's faults and blemishes. Only when real sincerity of heart and honesty of mind are sufficiently developed are we able to evaluate our weaknesses. The first step is to become aware, even before we can start the work of transformation.

There might be instances in which we are not quite sure whether we did the right thing. At times we may feel very sure that we are right, only to discover subsequently that we were wrong. Hence, it is very important to have a firm basis for justifying or criticizing ourselves. Instead of pleading on behalf of our personal self, and justifying its every misdeed, we must be our own impartial judges. To be a good judge, who judges impartially and correctly, we must have knowledge. It is important therefore to study and understand the laws of life, ethics and morals, as also to cultivate discrimination

and detachment. We are asked to do self-examination in the light of the *Paramitas* or Transcendental Virtues, and in the light of the Higher Self; otherwise we would not have proper yardstick for judging the good and the bad. We must take Universal Ethics as our basis of judgement and not social morality or what may have worked for a few individuals.

Each one of us passes through many experiences in life. Often, we hear people say, “How do I know what I had to learn from this experience?” In order to learn our lessons in life, self-examination is very essential. It also helps us to become better human beings, to act rightly in the day-to-day duties, work and recreation.

“I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society,” wrote Henry David Thoreau, speaking of his cabin in Walden. Based on these lines comes the question: “How much time do you spend on the three chairs in your house—one that stands for solitude, second for friendship, and the third for society?” asks Marguerite Theophil. She says that for Thoreau who lived in that rather isolated place, this line meant one thing, but for us who live in crowded cities it may mean other things as well. Different people reacted differently to the enforced solitude during the Corona Virus Pandemic. Some of us were able to accept the isolation and used that time in reading books, engaging ourselves in online courses, creative pursuits or even clearing our shelves and cupboards. Others found it difficult to pass time and went crazy in the absence of travelling, meeting friends and relatives, etc.

However, it is possible that the chair for solitude can become the only chair we pay attention to if we are introverts, and agree with Thoreau when he says, “I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time.” But the more extroverted would be thankful for online connectivity as their focus would be on second and third chairs. The chair of friendship includes both casual and close friends for most of us, but Thoreau spoke of friends as those who “elevate

one another,” and bring out the best in each other, being the giver and also the receiver. The third chair reminds us of our involvement with the society, which for some of us could be passive, in terms of knowing through newspapers and television, while there are others who discuss the issues and contribute, when possible, to make the world a little better place.

We all need all three chairs—solitude friendship and society—but it is important to strike a balance and that can be done through reflection. If we are self-obsessed then we miss out on friendship and social connections. If we pay too much attention to our social image and friends then we tend to neglect understanding our own self. If too much time is given to working for a noble cause, then personal relationships take a backseat.

The three chairs may be looked upon as representing three aspects of spirituality. For instance, solitude gives us the opportunity for self-discovery, to find out whether we have left undone what we ought to do; and have done things which we ought not to do. Friendship gives us a chance to cultivate empathy and spirit of sharing. These two aspects when cultivated lead to social sensitivity and commitment, writes Marguerite Theophil. (*The Speaking Tree, The Times of India*, December 6, 2022)

The trinity of solitude, friendship and social or human relationship reminds us to cultivate the right kind of independence that does not lose sight of interdependence. Solitude of an introverted person is self-centredness. He needs to cultivate friendship in which there is care and concern for the few like-minded people. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, observes that the essence of friendship is communication. We do not stay healthy and happy if we are shut up in our own shell without much communication with others. Being able to share our thoughts and feelings with another human being is the great benefit and blessing of friendship. In Greek and Roman times, friendship was thought of as being an essential constituent of both a good society and good life. However, as Professor C. S. Lewis remarks, such companions with common interest create

a barrier between themselves and others, and thus form a *partial brotherhood*. Friendship based on pure love and tenderness does not depend upon like-mindedness, shared interests or reciprocity, but is broad and generous enough to accept other human beings with varied idiosyncrasies. Impersonal friendship is the highest form of friendship, which contains warmth, understanding and affection that remain unshaken and undisturbed by the storms of personalities. Such friendship is based on adaptability and impersonal love. Mr. Crosbie says that among other things, impersonality means we should feel ourselves expanding in sympathy and get to like our friends better, and extending the circle.

When we look at it from a higher perspective, the trinity may imply that we should learn to be *in* the world, but not be *of* the world. For this we must appreciate that loneliness acts both in good and bad ways, and we have to learn to make good use of it. Right Loneliness of the Noble Eightfold Path is “want of pleasure in congregations of men,” which implies not being *dependent* on the company of other people, but unfolding companionship with our Inner Ruler, through regular practice of meditation followed by companionship with fellow pilgrims. Companionship is necessary not only for ordinary people but also for a spiritual-aspirant who has to engage in *sat-sang* or being in the company of good, which calls for considerable discrimination. It also implies that whenever and wherever and for whomever one finds a feeling the reverse of loving friendliness, better to throw it out, as quickly as possible. One cannot possibly change others, so an aspirant should try to bring about in himself the spiritual transmutation. One has to develop the traits of amicability and also adaptability, writes Shri B. P. Wadia. Ultimately, solitude reflects itself in the stage where we learn to go on alone as far as receiving affection, love and care from others is concerned. Our concern is to give those very things to thousands of people who need them. That is why no true lover of mankind is ever “lonely” as we understand this word, because he lives to “benefit mankind.”

