

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### THE LURE OF THE INVISIBLE

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If you cannot be happy without phenomena you will never learn our philosophy. If you want healthy, philosophic thought, and can be satisfied with such—let us correspond. I tell you a profound truth in saying that if you (like your fabled Shaloma) but choose wisdom, all other things will be added unto it—in time. It adds no force to our metaphysical truths that our letters are dropped from space on to your lap or come under your pillow. If our philosophy is wrong, a *wonder* will not set it right. Put that conviction into your consciousness and let us talk like sensible men.

—MAHATMA M.

It is not physical phenomena that will ever bring conviction to the hearts of the unbelievers in the “Brotherhood” but rather phenomena of *intellectuality, philosophy* and logic, if I may so express it.

—MAHATMA K.H.

THE lure of the invisible, the sense of the marvellous, are romantic and attract not a few natures—among them students of Theosophy, who ask : “What is wrong with observing in a practical way the Third Object of the Theosophical Movement? Why should we not experience and experiment with the invisible and develop our own hidden powers?”

The actual words of the Third Object must be examined: “The

## A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

THE LURE OF THE INVISIBLE	289
WE MAKE OUR FUTURE	294
THE MEANING OF SYMBOLS	300
SEEKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF	303
TRUE DEVOTION	308
METHODS OF LEARNING	315
IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY	318

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investigation of the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers latent in man.” What it advocates, therefore, is not the development of hidden powers, but the investigation of the *laws* of Nature which are not explained by modern science, thus helping to further the very cause of that science along right lines; similarly, the student is called upon, not to develop his latent psychical powers, but to investigate the laws governing them. The safe way pointed out by Theosophy is the way which is used by us in acquiring ordinary knowledge: theory before practice. Theoretical knowledge is followed by the knowledge of how to make an experiment, and then only is the actual experiment made.

Those who would pursue the Third Object have many opportunities and ample scope to satisfy themselves in a healthy and legitimate way. Today, even scientists are attracted towards the invisible and are engaged in investigating abnormal happenings, or what are called psychical, parapsychological and paranormal phenomena. But their investigation consists mainly in recording a number of dream experiences, visions, apparitions, ESP phenomena and so forth, and no satisfactory explanations are yet forthcoming. The Theosophist, unlike the psychical researcher, deals with laws and not with phenomena; thus he goes straight to the heart of truth, while the psychical researcher goes round and round. Study of ancient philosophies reveals that they have thought out all the psychic and psychological laws of Nature, and have given a system which is scientific and explains them all with minuteness. It is the investigation of this system of philosophy that Theosophy recommends, so that when we come to look at the things about us we may be able to understand and explain them.

Explaining the Third Object, H.P.B. wrote in *The Key to Theosophy*:

What we have to do is to seek to obtain *knowledge* of all the laws of nature, and to diffuse it. To encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people, the so-called Occult Sciences, *based on the true knowledge of nature*, instead of, as at present, on *superstitious beliefs based on blind faith and authority*.

So, the “investigation” that we are called upon to make does not mean “experimentation.” Investigation implies *study* of known laws and powers; for it is only when the student has thoroughly mastered the theory or science as given, that he can wisely or safely begin to experiment. True knowledge of Nature and of Man, therefore, is necessary before any right effort can be made in the direction of the Third Object. Theosophy, which embodies a record of the laws that govern the evolution of Man and Nature, has to be studied, assimilated and applied to daily life, before the student is in a position to understand and apply the more recondite laws of the Science. A theoretical grasp of the Philosophy is wise and necessary, but practice should begin in our everyday relations, considered in the light of our real nature, and as this course is followed, the inner nature and perceptions are afforded fuller and freer range of action.

With these considerations in mind, what is to be said of the psychic characteristics that are showing themselves in our age? Men and women are striving to exercise powers and faculties which are as yet not understood and are, therefore, but too often ignorantly misused. It is a dangerous thing to go into phenomena such as telepathy, hypnotism, etc., unless the ground has first been prepared by showing men why they should be moral, why they should not practise these things for selfish purposes. For, those who practise telepathy, hypnotism and the like for their own selfish ends are just as immoral as the burglar or the thief. No one has the right to break into the mind of another to discover secrets for his own profit.

The function of Theosophists is to open men’s understandings to the dangers of a conscious or unconscious exercise of powers which pertain to the *lower* planes of nature. Those who are seeking for powers should know that within themselves lies the key to unlock the door; that the very first step toward the finding of that key is the acquirement, in truth, of the feeling of universal brotherhood, and that the selfish desire to obtain psychic powers is a bar to such attainment. Therefore it is that Theosophists, unlike the “occultist”-boasters, do not strive to become sky-walkers,

clairvoyants, telepaths or the like, but labour for the Souls of men in secrecy and silence, and help by Wisdom and purity. They are those who seek after Divine Wisdom, the method of solving all life's riddles. They aim to place before the thinking public a logical, coherent and philosophic scheme of man's origin, destiny and evolution—a scheme pre-eminent above all for its rigorous adherence to justice. And, that they may broaden their criterion of truth, their research extends to an inquiry into the nature of the less known forces, cosmic and psychical.

Writing of the Third Object, under the sub-heading "Occultism," H.P.B. wrote in 1889:

Though but a minority of our members are mystically inclined, yet, in point of fact, the key to all our successes is in our recognition of the fact of the Higher Self—colourless, cosmopolitan, unsectarian, sexless, unworldly, altruistic—and the doing of our work on that basis.... We know that a comprehensive term for the Eternal Verity is the "Secret Doctrine"; we have preached it, have won a hearing, have, to some extent, swept away the old barriers, formed our fraternal nucleus, and, by reviving the Aryan Literature, caused its precious religious, philosophical and scientific teachings to spread among the most distant nations.

If we have not opened regular schools of adeptship in the Society, we have at least brought forward a certain body of proof that adepts exist and that adeptship is a logical necessity in the natural order of human development. We have thus helped the West to a worthier ideal of man's potentialities than it before possessed. The study of Eastern psychology has given the West a clue to certain mysteries previously baffling as, for example, in the department of mesmerism and hypnotism, and in that of the supposed posthumous relations of the disincarnate entity with the living. It has also furnished a theory of the nature and relations of Force and Matter capable of practical verification by whomsoever may learn and follow out the experimental methods of the Oriental schools of Occult science. Our own experience leads us to say that this science and its

complementary philosophy throw light upon some of the deepest problems of man and nature; in science, bridging the "Impassable Chasm," in philosophy, making it possible to formulate a consistent theory of the origin and destiny of the heavenly orbs and their progeny of kingdoms and various planes. Where Mr. Crookes stops in his quest after the meta-elements, and finds himself at a loss to trace the missing atoms in his hypothetical series of seven, Adwaita Philosophy steps in with its perfected theory of the evolution of differentiated out of undifferentiated matter, Prakriti out of Mulaprakriti. ("Our Three Objects": *Lucifer*, September 1889)

In brief, the aim and desire of Theosophists is to help, in at least some degree, toward arriving at correct scientific views upon the nature of man, which carry with them the means of reconstructing, for the present generation, the deductive metaphysical or transcendental philosophy which alone is the firm, unshakable foundation of every religious philosophy. Slowly but surely Theosophy is fulfilling its mission and helping men towards the attainment of true wisdom, which is not by means of phenomena, but through the development which begins within.

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THE path to Occult Sciences has to be trodden laboriously and crossed at the danger of life; that every new step in it leading to the final goal, is surrounded by pitfalls and cruel thorns; that the pilgrim who ventures upon it is made first to confront and *conquer* the thousand and one furies who keep watch over the adamantine gates and entrance—furies called Doubt, Skepticism, Scorn, Ridicule, Envy and finally Temptation—especially the latter; and that he who would see beyond had to first destroy this living wall; that he must be possessed of a heart and soul clad in steel, and of an iron, never failing determination and yet be meek and gentle, humble and have shut out from his heart every human passion, that leads to evil. Are you all this?

—MAHTAMA K.H.

## WE MAKE OUR FUTURE

THE law of cycles functions in nature, and it is an infallible law. The difference between manmade laws and the laws of nature is that while human laws are incomplete, have exceptions and must be revised, the laws of nature are ever the same, are exact in their operations, have no exceptions, and therefore can be relied upon. Every natural phenomenon occurs under the law of cycles, not only in the visible, but also in the invisible universe.

A cycle is a circle—a circle of time. A circle may be small, it may be large, it may be immense. The main characteristic of all circles is that the curved line comes back to the point from which it started. For instance, a day is a cycle of 24 hours. It starts at a point called sunrise, and the cycle is completed when the point of another sunrise comes. There is a somewhat larger cycle called the month—lunar month, from new moon to another new moon; or solar month, based on the movement of the sun in the great belt of the zodiac. A still larger cycle is the year; and so they grow large and larger till what commences in a second, the 60th part of a minute, goes on till we come to immense cycles, not of millions but of billions and trillions of years.

The ancient Hindu sages, taught by Narada, knew the ultimate divisions of time and therefore also knew the immensity of the great cycles. To pass on a bit of their knowledge to the multitudes, these sages used the symbol of the circle, *Chakra*. The *Chakra* of Vishnu or of other personifications all teach of the many and varied cycles, large and small. Our day is of 24 hours; Brahma's day is called a *Kalpa*—8,640,000,000 years!

Of what use is the knowledge of old religious philosophies if it cannot be applied to our problems day by day! This knowledge of the law of cycles can be so applied. A little understanding of this universal law comes through study; and when we catch even a glimpse of the true knowledge, we can utilize it. To understand this, we must grasp the next principle connected with our subject.

Each man, each woman, makes his or her own particular cycles.

Take a simple example: Each day the sun rises at its fixed moment, but we do not wake up at that moment. Some are already awake, ready to welcome the rising sun; others are still snoring away when the sun is rising! This is a point to be noted. There are general cycles of nature and there are particular cycles made by each one of us.

The law of cycles is operating everywhere, all the time. Therefore there is nothing in human experience which is not rooted in and which does not result from that law. We are hungry, we eat, and become hungry again, according to our cycle, made by ourselves. Some people want to eat several times a day, others eat only two or three times. Some need only five or six hours' sleep; others require eight or nine hours. For everything there is a beginning and an end, and that end is the starting point of a new beginning. We begin to die the moment we are born. We begin to get hungry the moment we have finished eating. Sounds strange, but it is true. And because there are cycles for everything, they overlap and intersect one another. Some of the actions of the law of cycles are more easily understandable, like the rising of the sun and the cycle of sleeping and waking. But there are cyclic activities that are complex and difficult to understand.

If we were to tell a person that his moods of irritability and anger also are cyclic, his reaction probably would be that of disbelief. It only means he has not studied himself; he has not questioned how these moods arise. They are so irregular that he refuses to believe that they are the result of the law of cycles. To one who has not studied astronomy, the rising and setting of the sun seems most irregular. But if he perseveres in his observations over a long period, he will find out that the sun is very regular indeed and has a method in its irregularities! So also a person will find out by study and observation that his moods, good or bad, are regular in arising and subsiding and that they do occur according to the law of cycles. Not only our bodily activities, like sleeping and waking, eating and digesting, are cyclic, but our thoughts and feelings, our moods and habits too are cyclic.

Once this fact is well understood, we find ourselves in a position to *use* the law of cycles. To make use of it, we have to find the answer to the most natural question: Who is the maker and the creator of the cycle? Who makes the cycle of waking and sleeping, eating and digesting, depression or exhilaration, and so forth? Let us face the fact that each person makes his own particular cycles. One might say, "But that is not true; surely I did not make my sleeping requirements to be so many hours; do not remember doing any such thing." Do we remember crying at the moment of our birth? Yet we did cry, otherwise we would not be breathing now. Similarly, we do make all our personal cycles, but as we do it unconsciously to ourselves, we do not know that we are responsible for those cycles. Knowing that each one creates his own particular cycles, let us ask the next question: How does one create them?

To understand this, we must go to the simple figure of the circle which the old sages gave as the symbol of the law of cycles. A circle presupposes two things—a centre and a radius. Without these two there could be no circumference. Mathematically speaking, a circle is composed of a centre, a radius and a circumference. Of these the centre is the most important; there can be a centre without radius and circumference, but not *vice versa*. Next, there can be a centre and a radius, *i.e.*, a straight line, without the circumference, but again not *vice versa*. So the centre is the most important, next the radius, and then only the circumference.

Now our own soul, our self-consciousness, is the centre; our mind rooted in the soul is like the radius. The soul and the mind acting in the world of matter make the cycle. We can immediately see that each one of us draws innumerable circles. Every time a thought is generated, a circle or cycle is made. We can use this figure of the complete circle to know about the law of cycles; the symbol yields very useful and practical information when thought about.

The human soul, the thinker, is the creator and maker of his own cycles. But a circle or cycle has a starting point to which its curved line returns. The soul thinks, *i.e.*, uses his mind, uses a

radius; some are small and petty thoughts and others are noble, elevating ones. According to the subject on which the soul dwells, will the length of the radius be determined, and this radius in turn determines the size of the circle. Next, the circle starting curves back and returns on itself to meet that very starting point. So there are two factors—the starting point and the ending point. The end is the effect of the cause, which was the starting point.

Take again the example of sleeping and waking. We sleep at a particular moment; then according to our habit, temperament and circumstances we wake up at another particular moment; these two moments meet in what we call our memory. We wake up *because* we went to sleep; waking up is the result. When we wake up we may have no memory of our sleeping through the night. This is exactly what happens with innumerable events and experiences of our lives. A hundred things happen to us, and we wonder why. The principle of the law of cycles needs to be understood. As we have forgotten about the starting point from within the mind, the result that comes at the end of the cycle puzzles us. All of us are concerned about the results, the effects of our visible, active life.

We are so accustomed by habit and education to look outside of us for the cause of what happens to us that we fail to relate effect to cause, to see our own part in the unfolding drama of our life. Our circumstances, and the day-to-day happenings which improve or worsen those circumstances, are only the results of causes generated by us in the past. It should also be noted that now and here we are starting new circles or cycles by our own thoughts and feelings. What forms the basis, the foundation of our present thinking is our *attitude* towards our environment and the events taking place in them. Besides our attitude there is the *use* we make of those events. It is important to note these two factors.

So, we are feeling, experiencing, encountering the results of what we ourselves started by our own thoughts in the past, and which we do not now remember. Next, now and here we are starting new cycles by our thoughts, our present ideation and imagination,

but in doing this we neglect to take into account the fact that they *will* produce their own results in time.

We should make good use of whatever comes to us in our lives. Whatever our environment, whatever events take place, whatever experiences come to us, *can* be used and *have* to be used. People do not use them in the right way, therefore they do not learn. The correct method of using them lies in our own attitude. We will improve our environment and our circumstances not by trying to change them, but by forming and holding the *right attitude* to them in our own mind. Present attitude produces future environment; present circumstances are the result of our past attitude. We may say that mental attitude is the soul and physical use is the body. If we have the right attitude, we shall soon find out the right use to improve our circumstances.

The practical lesson that we can learn is not to give too much attention to outer circumstances, but to watch our thoughts, our feelings, our moods; watch carefully our own mind—for *in the mind is the formation of the attitude*. Our usefulness to others, our happiness, our calm, contentment, strength, do not lie in our outer environment, but in our inner attitude which soon reveals to us the right use we can make of wealth and poverty, of health and disease, of elation and depression, of knowledge and ignorance. People pray to some outside god to give them wealth, health and happiness, yet they do not get it because they do not know what god is or how to pray.

What connection has any one of us to the great cycles in nature? As a human being grows more and more, he creates his own individual cycles to coincide with those of nature. An evolving soul perceives that his connection with nature is most intimate; that he possesses in latency all the powers of nature, both visible and invisible. This evolving soul thus finds that real freedom, true emancipation, profound and unalloyed bliss and wisdom, are his if he works with the laws of nature and creates his own cycles, first to approximate and then to coincide with those of nature.

The cycles of life of a Jivan-Mukta, a Mahatma, a Master,

coincide, mathematically, with those of nature. The Master is one who has conquered nature by understanding and by obedience. Therefore these Great Ones, in conformity with the law of cycles, endeavour to help humanity. By their ideation—and more, by their incarnation in our midst—they teach us the great truths of the Science of Life. Krishna says that he comes from age to age not by some whim, caprice or fancy, but under the law of cycles. So with other Great Souls who have come amidst us.

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THE first thing which it is necessary for the soul of man to do in order to engage in this great endeavour of discovering true life is the same thing that the child first does in its desire for activity in the body—he must be able to stand. It is clear that the power of standing, of equilibrium, of concentration, of uprightness, in the soul, is a quality of a marked character. The word that presents itself most readily as description of this quality is “confidence.”

To remain still amid life and its changes, and stand firmly on the chosen spot, is a feat which can only be accomplished by the man who has confidence in himself and in his destiny. Otherwise the hurrying forms of life, the rushing tide of men, the great flood of thought, must inevitably carry him with them, and then he will lose that place of consciousness whence it was possible to start on the great enterprise. For it *must* be done knowingly, and without pressure from without—this act of the new-born man. All the great ones of the earth have possessed this confidence, and have stood firmly on that place which was to them the one solid spot in the universe. To each man this place is of necessity different. Each man must find his own earth and his own heaven.

—*Through the Gates of Gold*

## THE MEANING OF SYMBOLS

H.P.B. calls the Secret Doctrine the “accumulated Wisdom of the Ages,” and adds that Occult symbolism has such power that this vast body of Knowledge was recorded “on a few pages of geometrical signs and glyphs.” This symbolical record was the result of painstaking research by “countless generations of initiated seers and prophets.” The oral traditions of the early races were originally the teachings of those Great Beings who guarded and taught Humanity in its initial stages. The sages and seers referred to checked and verified these ancient traditions by using their own spiritual visions, and nothing was accepted as true unless it agreed with the researches and experiences of other adepts.

What is the source of true symbols? The Ancients, who were in possession of true teachings, knew that nothing could be preserved in human memory without some outward symbol.

From the very beginning of Aeons—in time and space in our Round and Globe—the Mysteries of Nature (at any rate, those which it is lawful for our races to know) were recorded by the pupils of those same now invisible “heavenly men,” in geometrical figures and symbols. The keys thereto passed from one generation of “wise men” to the other. (*S.D.* I, 612)

What is a symbol? *The Theosophical Glossary* defines “Symbolism” as “the pictorial expression of an idea or a thought. Primordial *writing* had at first no characters, but a symbol generally stood for a whole phrase or sentence. A symbol is thus a recorded parable, and a parable a spoken symbol.”

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P.B. gives some indication of the importance of symbols in raising our consciousness, as they convey something more than the obvious meaning.

A symbol is ever, to him who has eyes for it, some dimmer or clearer revelation of the God-like. Through all there glimmers something of a divine idea; nay, the highest ensign that men ever met and embraced under the Cross itself, had no meaning, save an accidental extrinsic one. (Carlyle, quoted in *The Secret*

*Doctrine*, I, 303)

Next, we find that, as hinted above, symbols have more than one meaning. In fact, each symbol has seven interpretations. “Every symbol,” H.P.B. declared, “must yield three fundamental truths and four implied ones, otherwise the symbol is false.”

Every religious and philosophical symbol had seven meanings attached to it, each pertaining to its legitimate plane of thought, i.e., either purely metaphysical or astronomical; psychic or physiological, etc., etc. These seven meanings and their applications are hard enough to learn when taken by themselves; but the interpretation and the right comprehension of them become tenfold more puzzling, when, instead of being correlated, or made to flow consecutively out of and to follow each other, each, or any one of these meanings is accepted as the one and sole explanation of the whole symbolical idea. (*S.D.*, II, 538)

Why, then, have students of Theosophy to bother with this difficult subject? To begin with, the language of symbols is a complete language, and we cannot understand any great Scripture unless we learn it. In the Scriptures of the world is to be found, for him who can read them with the eye of understanding, the history of nations and races, of worlds and of the Cosmos itself, in their sevenfold natures.

There are no ancient symbols, without a deep and philosophical meaning attached to them; their importance and significance increasing with their antiquity. (*S.D.*, I, 379)

Since the symbolic formula attempts to characterize that which is above scientific reasoning, and as often far beyond our intellects, it must needs go beyond that intellect in some shape or other, or else it will fade out from human remembrance. (*S.D.*, I, 473)

The religious and esoteric history of every nation was embedded in symbols; it was never expressed in so many words. All the thoughts and emotions, all the learning and knowledge, revealed and acquired, of the early races, found their pictorial

expression in allegory and parable. (*S.D.*, I, 307)

So we see that a study of symbology is important. Trying to extract the hidden meaning from the seemingly fantastic or nonsensical gives our minds exercise. Such exercise develops our intuition. We get a further clue to its importance in the article by Mr. Judge on “Theosophical Symbols”:

In symbology the symbol is only right when it fitly represents all the ideas meant to be conveyed, and in all its parts is consistent with the whole, as well as being in conformity to tradition and the rules of the ancients. It should also when understood be of such a character that when it is looked at or thought of, with the image of it in the mind, all the ideas and doctrines it represents recur to the thinker. (*The Heart Doctrine*, pp.157-58)

A symbol has to be meditated upon, and the more we do so, the more spiritual knowledge we shall gain. The keys to Universal Symbolism are still in the keeping of the Initiates. The suggestive clues given in Theosophical teachings can help us to penetrate into the underlying meaning of symbols. For a deeper study of the subject the sections on Symbolism in the two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* may be recommended. Perhaps the most striking fact such study reveals is the universal agreement of ancient symbols, when read esoterically, testifying to the underlying unity of concepts in widely separated parts of the world, and furnishing one of the best proofs of the once universal diffusion of the primitive Wisdom-Religion and of its Mystery language, which is now called symbolism.

Every symbol—in every national religion—may be read esoterically, and the proof furnished for its being correctly read by transliterating it into its corresponding numerals and geometrical forms—by the extraordinary agreement of all—however much the glyphs and symbols may vary among themselves. For in the origin those symbols were all identical. (*S.D.*, I, 443)

## SEEKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF

“MAN, Know Thyself,” has been the cry of ages. Every Sage and Saviour has tried to impress upon men's minds that there is a vast difference between Soul-Wisdom and Head-learning. One is eternal and infinite; the other is ever-changing and at best can last but for one incarnation, as it is not woven into the fabric of one's own being. Soul-Wisdom belongs to one's immortal nature; Head-learning, to the mortal. Soul-Wisdom leads one from manhood to godhood. If man wishes to cultivate deliberately godlike qualities and divine virtues so as to have inner illumination and radiate that light on others, he must have the vision and the strength and the courage to carry on life after life the task indicated by the great Teachers. Even the poets have distinguished between the two. William Cowper, for instance, states:

Knowledge dwells  
In heads replete with thoughts of other men,  
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own....  
Knowledge is proud that he has learn'd so much;  
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.

What is Soul-Wisdom or Self-Knowledge? It is Wisdom about the one united Spirit of Life Divine in its manifold aspects, acquired by the human ego, the self-conscious thinker. It is not given as a gift or endowed as a favour, nor is it gained through book-learning or university education. It is solely the result of self-effort and self-discipline continued through many incarnations. It is the expansion of the heart and heart-qualities that leads one to the acquisition of Self-Knowledge or Soul-Wisdom. As *The Voice of the Silence* states: “To reach Nirvana one must reach Self-Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child.” It is only when the heart opens spontaneously to the sorrows and sufferings of others, as the lotus opens itself to absorb the warmth and light of the rising sun, that the Light of the Higher Self can illuminate the path of the aspirant. That Higher Self knows no change, for it is knowledge itself, and only true devotion to the

interests of others can bring that knowledge out on the surface. The individual Self has to understand the different vehicles working under its command, their nature and qualities, and how to achieve harmony within and without.

Today the world is in sore need of Soul-Wisdom, of inner illumination which is the result of the awakening of the Buddhic faculty now lying dormant in most individuals because the mind is constantly engaged in lower activities. When the mind is cleared of all dross and the heart is full of love and sympathy through the practice of true morality, then only will the knowledge of the Self, the Wisdom of the Soul, express itself in the living of the Life.

All the devotional books provide us with the teachings that will enable us to unfold Soul-Wisdom; they are the outcome of the heart experiences of the Teachers, and therefore it is important to make of such books our daily companions and seek guidance from them at every turn.

In the Fourth Discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Sri Krishna indicated to Arjuna a particular method which would be helpful to every aspirant on the Path of the Higher Life. It is a solemn promise:

Seek this wisdom by doing service, by strong search, by questions, and by humility; the wise who see the truth will communicate it unto thee, and knowing which thou shalt never again fall into error, O son of Bharata.

The encouraging note is struck a little further on: “Even if thou wert the greatest of all sinners, thou shalt be able to cross over all sins in the bark of spiritual knowledge.” No one is debarred from entering the Path; even the greatest of sinners can take a turn for the better. So the unique fourfold method indicated in the verse quoted above is to be adopted. Unfortunately, no school or college curriculum recognizes its importance.

Sri Krishna gives the foremost place to service as a qualification for seeking Wisdom. This service is not of an ordinary type rendered in a mechanical way, where the chief motive is money, and where the higher the salary or wages, the better off a man is supposed to be. The service referred to has to be rendered in a different manner.

Any work, any duty, apparently high or low, has to be performed with a pure motive, that is, with unselfishness of heart, without the thought of personal benefit to oneself. It is this attitude of mind and of heart that makes drudgery divine. The spirit in which one serves and gives of oneself is more important than the kind of work one does. There is no thought of competing with others or rising above others, by honest or dishonest means; all that matters is co-operation with others, the helping of others, the sharing of our possessions with others, in terms of the needs of each, in a spirit of true friendliness and brotherliness. This enables the server to commune with the Divine because each of his actions is dedicated to the Divine. It is the Soul within that is serving, making the person more perfect through the performance of his own duties in a detached manner. It comes in closer contact with the Divine Parent, receives its light and strength, and unfolds Wisdom from within.

The next qualification is strong search. Unless and until one undertakes a strong search of his own being, of the Nature around him, of the scriptures of the Soul, he cannot gain Wisdom. He must be a lover of Truth if he hopes to find out the meaning and purpose and goal of existence. He has to search his own mind and find out the obstacles in the way of the unfolding Wisdom. The search of the scriptures will enable him to understand the common source of all that the great Teachers have taught. So a comparative study of religions, philosophies and sciences in terms of the second object of the Theosophical Movement has to be undertaken, for a true student does not belong to a particular cult or sect but belongs to each and all. In making this search, one needs to understand the ideas behind the words, to grasp the spirit and not the letter of the law. As Madame Blavatsky has well stated:

There never was, nor can there be more than one universal religion; for there can be but one truth concerning God. Like an immense chain whose upper end, the alpha, remains invisibly emanating from a Deity—in *statu abscondito* with every primitive theology—it encircles our globe in every direction; it leaves not even the darkest corner unvisited, before the other

end, the omega, turns back on its way to be again received where it first emanated. On this divine chain was strung the exoteric symbology of every people. (*Isis Unveiled*, I, 560)

When this is realized and assimilated to some extent at least, further research at higher levels can be made so as to nourish the world spiritually with right concepts and right teachings.

The asking of questions is the third necessary step in the fourfold method put forward by Sri Krishna. Questions on what, and asked of whom? It is the teachings that have to be questioned until they satisfy the mind and the heart. Each one has to be a lamp unto himself. Nothing is to be taken on blind belief, because then it will only remain head-learning, and not become Soul-Wisdom or Self-Knowledge. To question the why and the wherefore of every event and experience is a necessary discipline to understand life, the Self of all beings. The Scripture of the Soul, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, is a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. It is because of Arjuna's constant questionings and inquiries to the Teacher and the latter's illuminating answers that we have the privilege of receiving such priceless instructions. So also Lord Zoroaster questioned Ahura Mazda on all points. This can only be understood when taken in the sense of the questioner being the human soul, Manas, the thinker, and the answerer the Divine Parent. Each experience, each event, fortunate or unfortunate, each problem in life, however trivial or difficult, should always be questioned and a reasonable answer sought.

The last and the fourth qualification for the gaining of Wisdom is humility, an essential virtue to cultivate in our civilization. *The Voice of the Silence* emphasizes its importance: "Be humble, if thou would'st attain to Wisdom. Be humbler still, when Wisdom thou hast mastered." An attitude of humility must be cultivated, for pride may mar the work accomplished at any moment and may bring about a fall on the spiritual path. Arrogance obstructs progress. One must realize that what he has gained is nothing in comparison with the achievements of a perfected being, and that he has to go a long way yet. It is important to keep constantly in mind the

injunction of *Light on the Path*: "And that power which the disciple shall covet is that which shall make him appear as nothing in the eyes of men." To show oneself off, or to harbour a sense of superiority, is a characteristic of head-learning. He who is preparing himself for the service of his fellow men needs to remain humble at all stages of life.

From this it can be noted not only that Head-learning and Soul-Wisdom are different, but that the method of acquiring them is also not the same. The first and the fourth qualifications, service and humility, open up the heart; the second and the third, strong search and questioning, illuminate the mind; and together they enable Wisdom to spring up spontaneously from within.

Then only can the promise made by Sri Krishna be fulfilled: "The wise who see the truth will communicate it unto thee, and knowing which thou shalt never again fall into error, O son of Bharata." What is that error? The error of regarding the mortal and the perishable as the real and the true; the error of strife and disunity; the error of attachment to self-inclinations; the error of ignorance, leading to a thousand and one errors of all kinds. It is very encouraging to remember that help is always given when one deserves it, and that the Great Ones never fail to do so at the proper time, when the aspirant has put forth his best effort.

True Knowledge is of the Spirit and can be acquired through the higher mind alone. In other words, it is in the Hall of Wisdom only that the Truth can be communicated, the Hall wherein all shadows are unknown, and where the Light of Truth shines with unfading glory.

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THEOSOPHY holds that man, being an emanation from the Unknown, yet ever present and infinite Divine Essence, his body and everything else is impermanent, hence an illusion, Spirit alone in him being the one enduring substance, and even that losing its separated individuality at the moment of its complete re-union with the UNIVERSAL SPIRIT.

—*The Key to Theosophy*

## TRUE DEVOTION

“Devotion” is a much misunderstood term. Sentimentality, emotionalism and religious fanaticism often go under the name of “devotion,” and have led many, including aspirants to the higher life, astray. They have taken the false for the real, without understanding. A definition of true devotion is given by the great Shankara:

Among all means of liberation, devotion verily is the most potent. The fixing of the attention on the true Master, the Divine Self, is declared to be devotion.

So true devotion is union with the Divine Self, the Supreme Spirit. In the Eleventh Discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Sri Krishna states: “I am to be approached and seen and known in truth by means of that devotion which has me alone as the object.” It was because of his devotion to Krishna that Arjuna was able to see the Universal Form of the Supreme Master of Devotion. All the discourses of the *Bhagavad-Gita* deal with devotion—devotion by means of action, devotion by means of knowledge, devotion by means of renunciation, and so on. Devotion is the keynote of all the 18 discourses.

The various systems of philosophy and religion in India lay great stress on the treading of the path of devotion, *Bhakti-Marga*. The whole country abounds with various classes of sadhus and fakirs, who wander the length and breadth of the land, exploiting innocent people who submit to them passively and look upon them as their gurus and guardians. Also, throughout the world, wherever people, following custom and convention, throng churches and temples, mosques and synagogues, where ceremonies are performed and true knowledge is not given, there we have exploitation of the rich and the poor alike, from the mental, moral and spiritual points of view. When religious people consider their particular religion the best and their own prophet the greatest, one chosen of God, they manifest fanaticism, not true devotion. A politician is not truly devoted when he considers only the good of

his own country and nation, forgetting the good of the rest of the world. Thus, we can multiply examples of false devotion, exhibited in various walks of life.

*Bhakti-Marga*, the path of devotion, is but one of the many paths indicated in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and all of them bring about a harmonious development, together leading to the goal of perfection. When one practises knowledge-*jnana*, action-*karma*, renunciation-*sannyasa*, meditation-*dhyana*, devotion-*bhakti*, on the correct basis of God-Law-Evolution, then one is on the path of *Raja-Yoga*, the Kingly Science and the Kingly Mystery, the science of life and the art of living. *Hatha Yogis* are false pietists of bewildered soul because they have false concepts of God and Man and Nature, and torture their bodies, thinking that is the way to liberation.

What is true devotion? It is the holiest, purest feeling of the human soul. It includes heart-prayer, love, reverence, duty, steadfastness, gratitude and other virtues. It is the result of union with the highest in us.

When, moved by the law of Evolution, the Lords of Wisdom infused into him [primitive man] the spark of consciousness, the first feeling it awoke to life and activity was a sense of solidarity, of one-ness with his spiritual creators. As the child’s first feeling is for its mother and nurse, so the first aspirations of the awakening consciousness in primitive man were for those whose element he felt within himself, and who yet were outside, and independent of him. DEVOTION arose out of that feeling, and became the first and foremost motor in his nature; for it is the only one which is natural in our heart, which is innate in us, and which we find alike in human babe and the young of the animal. (*The Secret Doctrine*, I, 210)

Devotion is not something that belongs to our lower, personal nature; it is the highest trait of the self-conscious thinker that each of us is, and has to be developed and acquired at this stage of our evolution. Therefore, *The Voice of the Silence* instructs us to “make of pride and self-regard bond-maidens to devotion.” As long as

these lower tendencies exist, they act as barriers on the path of true devotion, just as the light of the sun is obstructed by the clouds. Therefore it is necessary to clean and clear our own lower, personal nature of sense-inclinations, passions and attachment to material existence. “Restrain by thy Divine thy lower Self. Restrain by the Eternal the Divine,” says *The Voice of the Silence*.

Sri Krishna is the Supreme Master of Devotion, and it is because of his devotion to the welfare of humanity that he comes age after age “for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness,” as stated in the Fourth Discourse of the *Gita*. He constantly calls Arjuna his devotee and friend. Arjuna was devoted to Krishna and wanted to tread the Path according to the instructions of his Master. Right at the close of the Eighteenth Discourse of the *Gita* it is stated: “Wherever Krishna, the supreme Master of devotion, and wherever the son of Pritha, the mighty archer, may be, there with certainty are fortune, victory, wealth, and wise action; this is my belief.” Each one of us is Arjuna in his human aspect; each one of us is Krishna in his spiritual and divine aspect—*Nara* and *Narayana*. In our human aspect we have to be skilful archers, keeping our aim as high as possible.

Having taken the bow, the great weapon, let him place on it the arrow, sharpened by devotion. Then, having drawn it with a thought directed to that which is, hit the mark, O friend—the Indestructible. OM is the bow, the Self is the arrow, Brahman is called its aim. It is to be hit by a man who is not thoughtless; and then as the arrow becomes one with the target, he will become one with Brahman. Know him alone as the Self, and leave off other words. He is the bridge of the Immortal. Meditate on the self as OM. Hail to you that you may cross beyond the sea of darkness. (*Mundaka Upanishad*)

How different this true devotion is from the sentimental type that we see around us! It is necessary to raise our consciousness to the level of the heaven-aspiring Superior Mind—*Vohu Mano*. Then only will our daily life, with its various activities on different levels,

become fruitful from the spiritual point of view.

It was devotion to the welfare of humanity that made Lord Buddha leave his home and family and kingdom and go in search of truth, of the cause and cure of all suffering and sorrow. And when he gained enlightenment, it was his devotion that made him renounce the peace and bliss of *Nirvana* and come back to the suffering world to point out the Way. In a single verse he indicated the remedy:

Evil swells the debts to pay,  
Good delivers and acquits;  
Shun evil, follow good; hold sway  
Over thyself. This is the Way.

This is the only way in which suffering on the physical, mental and moral planes can be relieved.

The ancient pledge of Kwan-Yin is also the expression of pure devotion:

Never will I seek nor receive private, individual salvation;  
never will I enter into final peace alone; but forever, and  
everywhere, will I live and strive for the redemption of every  
creature throughout the world.

The great Masters of Wisdom and Compassion, out of their devotion to humanity, sent out Madame Blavatsky as Their Messenger to re-proclaim the teachings of the Wisdom-Religion, so that peace and harmony may be established on earth and men and women may be bound together into one family by the four links of the Golden Chain—Universal Unity and Causation, Human Solidarity, Karma, and Reincarnation.

On her part, H.P.B. has stated that her unswerving devotion to her Master was the only cause of her success. It was her devotion to the Cause of the Masters that has kept the Theosophical Movement going.

Mr. Judge’s devotion to Theosophy, his loyalty to H.P.B. and the great Teachers, enabled him to carry on the work of the Movement alone in America after H.P.B. left for India. He was

considered a bridge between the trans-Himalayan School and the Western world. It was his whole-hearted devotion that kept going his monthly journal, *The Path*, which H.P.B. called “pure Buddhi,” and through which he poured out his soul-wisdom.

When students of Theosophy in various parts of the world distorted the original teachings and departed from the lines laid down by H.P.B., it was again the man of devotion, Robert Crosbie, who had the vision and the courage to start anew along the right lines and strengthen the Theosophical Movement which had fallen to pieces. So, out of his heart-devotion he started, in 1909, the United Lodge of Theosophists, the fruit of which succeeding generations have been fortunate to enjoy.

Devotion to the Divine Principle men call God can only be expressed through the selfless service of our fellow beings. This is well expressed by Leigh Hunt in his poem “Abou Ben Adhem and the Angel”:

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
 Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
 And saw, within the moonlight of the room,  
 Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
 An angel writing in a book of gold;  
 Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
 And to the Presence in the room he said,  
 “What writest thou?” The vision rais’d his head,  
 And with a look made all of sweet accord,  
 Answer’d, “The names of those who love the Lord.”  
 “And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”  
 Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
 But cheerily still; and said, “I pray thee, then,  
 Write me as one who loves his fellow-men.”  
 The angel wrote, and vanish’d. The next night  
 He came again with a great wakening light,  
 And show’d the names whom love of God had bless’d,  
 And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.

This shows how important it is to act devotedly on the basis of knowledge and reflection and discipline, renouncing all the time

the fruits of action. When that harmonious development takes place, the heart, the head and the hands work in unison, all conflicts cease and man becomes an integrated being. It can be said, then, that one is on the path of *Raja Yoga*, the Kingly Science and the Kingly Mystery. One works whole-heartedly with his senses, mind, heart and understanding, and performs consecrated acts.

The very first clause of the Declaration of the United Lodge of Theosophists proclaims its policy of “independent devotion to the cause of Theosophy.” That cause is the great ideal of Universal Brotherhood, which makes one act for and as the Self of all creatures. The human soul, the self-conscious thinker, has to be constantly devoted to its Divine Parent, Atma-Buddhi, so as to receive its light of Wisdom and power of Compassion. This is the way to immortality in this mortal world. The human soul, which has to be constantly vigilant of the working of the lower, personal self, is the link between the Divine Parent on the one hand and the lower self on the other. This lower self has to be so refined and elevated that it is able to carry out the orders of its master, the human soul, the self-conscious thinker.

The first step in spiritual life is to be devoted to the spiritual interests of others. This enables one to recognize other pilgrim-souls as the rays of the One Supreme Self, the source of all.

One has to be absolutely devoted to the Law, the action of the One Life, cheerfully and understandingly, realizing that this one Law is also the Law of our own being. “Karma-Nemesis is no more than the (spiritual) dynamical effect of causes produced and forces awakened into activity by our own actions” (*The Secret Doctrine*, I, 644). It is necessary to generate causes for the benefit of others; to help the whole of Nature and to work on with her, so that Nature herself opens up her treasures, not to the physical eyes, but to the eye of Spirit.

In the Twelfth Discourse of the *Gita*, Sri Krishna points out different modes of devotion for people at different stages of evolution. Each one can find out for himself where he stands, and adopt the mode suited to him. Krishna also enumerates the qualities

of a true devotee, which can be cultivated by all.

To them thus always devoted to me, who worship me with love, I give that mental devotion by which they come to me. For them do I out of my compassion, standing within their hearts, destroy the darkness which springs from ignorance by the brilliant lamp of spiritual discernment. (*Bhagavad-Gita*)

Not only is the darkness of ignorance removed by the brilliant lamp of spiritual discernment, but, as *The Voice of the Silence* states, true devotion may bring us back the knowledge which was ours in former births.

So life after life one has to practise devotion to regain the lost knowledge impressed upon the plastic mind of humanity in its infancy. Then only one may get the inner version or the right perception of existing things, the knowledge of the non-existent. And the Voice of the Silence will begin to whisper to the inner ear the truth about the divine life and light, the justice of the divine law and the love and compassion of the divine beings who live and labour for the upliftment of human souls and of the whole universe.

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To LOVE justice, to long for the right; to love mercy, to pity the suffering, to assist the weak, to forget wrongs and remember benefits; to love the truth, to be sincere, to utter honest words; to love liberty, to wage relentless war against slavery in all its forms; to love wife, and child, and friend, to make a happy home; to love the beautiful in art, in nature, to cultivate the mind; to be familiar with the mighty thoughts that genius has expressed, the noble needs of all the world; to cultivate courage and cheerfulness, to make others happy; to fill life with the splendour of generous acts, the warmth of loving words; to discard error, to destroy prejudice, to receive new truths with gladness; to cultivate hope, to see the calm beyond the storm, the dawn beyond the night; to do the best that can be done and then to be resigned—this is the religion of reason, the creed of science; this satisfies the brain and heart.

—ROBERT G. INGERSOLL

## METHODS OF LEARNING

WHY has there been a long succession of prophets, teachers and spiritual leaders in the world, all teaching the selfsame truth about man's origin, his mission and his destiny? The answer is simple: We all forget, and our way of learning, like Nature's way of teaching, is—repetition, repetition, repetition. When we understand that this is the only way any being learns—not through a long succession of unrelated experiences but through a continual repetition of the same lesson, then perhaps we can understand better why our progress is through repeated lives on earth.

Anybody can easily verify for himself or herself that even with the best of intentions to be accurate, to get correctly what is offered to us, and to transmit correctly what we have received, such is the nature of our mind at the present stage of evolution that it is almost impossible for us to get anything straight and to transmit it to another exactly as we received it. There is a game that children play: they arrange themselves in a circle and then someone whispers a story to the next one, and the second child whispers it to the third as faithfully as he can, and so on, each repeating it to the one sitting next to him. The last child then has to tell the story out aloud, and the way that tale gets twisted and gains and loses in the telling affords an illustration of how the teachings of spiritual teachers get distorted in the progress of time.

The teachings of Jesus, for instance, are quite simple; yet disputes as to what Jesus meant have been carried so far that there are today any number of Christian sects, all claiming to represent Jesus and his message, yet all of which have distorted whatever he taught and meant out of all semblance. The teaching of reincarnation, to take one instance, has been converted in the Christian Church into the doctrine of the resurrection of the physical body, and its eternal duration after it has been resurrected; yet that utterly impossible myth is a direct growth from, a straight perversion of, the original teaching of reincarnation. The Hindus believe that when a man who has not performed the prescribed

ceremonies dies, he will be turned into a maggot, a worm, a cat, a dog, a monkey, a tiger, a sheep, or what not. Here is the teaching of reincarnation corrupted in another fashion. Most other teachings have likewise been corrupted.

Is it any wonder, then, that the great teachers are extremely reticent; that they give out the simplest of fundamental teachings, not by telling man “thou shalt do this; thou shalt not do that,” but by placing before him principles of conduct, not rules and commands? Take Jesus: He asked us to treat our neighbour as we would like to be treated by him. The Christian world has been preaching that for ages and not practising it. And so with all the other teachings, so simple that the ordinary person can understand them, yet converted by successive generations into theologies and sects, and finally into sheer atheism and hypocrisy.

No teacher worthy of the name has ever come forth as a revealer of new and hitherto unheard-of facts, but each in turn has restated part of the unchanging truth. Who among them all ever revealed his highest spiritual doctrines to the crowd? There are cogent reasons for this silence:

*Firstly*, the perversity of average human nature and its selfishness, always tending to the gratification of *personal* desires to the detriment of neighbours and next of kin. Such people could never be entrusted with *divine* secrets. Secondly, their unreliability to keep the sacred and divine knowledge from desecration.

It is for this reason that

every ancient religious, or rather philosophical, cult consisted of an esoteric or secret teaching, and an exoteric (outward public) worship. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that the MYSTERIES of the ancients comprised with every nation the “greater” (secret) and “Lesser” (public) MYSTERIES—*e.g.*, in the celebrated solemnities called the *Eleusinia*, in Greece. From the Hierophants of Samothrace, Egypt, and the initiated Brahmins of the India of old, down to the later Hebrew Rabbis, all preserved, for fear of profanation, their real *bona fide* beliefs

secret. The Jewish Rabbis called their secular religious series the *Mercavah* (the exterior body), “the vehicle,” or, *the covering which contains the hidden soul, i.e.*, their highest secret knowledge. Not one of the ancient nations ever imparted through its priests its real philosophical secrets to the masses, but allotted to the latter only the husks. Northern Buddhism has its “greater” and its “lesser” vehicle, known as the *Mahayana*, the esoteric, and the *Hinayana*, the exoteric, Schools. Nor can you blame them for such secrecy; for surely you would not think of feeding your flock of sheep on learned dissertations on botany instead of on grass? Pythagoras called his *Gnosis* “the knowledge of things that are,” or *e gnosis ton onton*, and preserved that knowledge for his pledged disciples only: for those who could digest such mental food and feel satisfied; and he pledged them to silence and secrecy. Occult alphabets and secret ciphers are the development of the old Egyptian *hieratic* writings, the secret of which was, in the days of old, in the possession only of the hierogrammatists, or initiated Egyptian priests. Ammonius Saccas, as his biographers tell us, bound his pupils by oath not to divulge *his higher doctrines* except to those who had already been instructed in preliminary knowledge, and who were also bound by a pledge. Finally, do we not find the same even in early Christianity, among the Gnostics, and even in the teachings of Christ? Did he not speak to the multitudes in parables which had a twofold meaning, and explain his reasons only to his disciples? “To you,” he says, “it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables” (*Mark*, iv, 11). “The Essenes of Judea and Carmel made similar distinctions, dividing their adherents into neophytes, brethren, and the *perfect*, or those initiated” (*Ecler. Phil*). Examples might be brought from every country to this effect. (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 8-9)

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A CANDLE loses nothing by lighting another candle.

—ERIN MAJORS

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

How the universe came into being is a question that is intriguing scientists and the public alike. That it began with a Big Bang—a gigantic explosion with matter and radiation created out of nothingness—has been the theory advanced so far; but where in the universe did the Big Bang happen, if at all it happened? Edward L. Wright, professor of physics and astronomy at the University of California at Los Angeles, has this to say:

The simplest answer is, nowhere or everywhere. Astronomical observations allow two possibilities: Either the universe is the same everywhere, or it is centred exactly on one location. If the Big Bang occurred at what is now the Milky Way, galaxies should be receding from this spot, and there should be more of them close to us than there are far away. Observations of the universe do in fact show that galaxies are receding from us in all directions, making the distant universe appear broadly the same, no matter where you look. But the density of galaxies appears to be independent of their distance, so we reject the Milky Way-centred hypothesis.

When cosmologists try to make simple models of a universe that is the same everywhere and in all directions, we find three forms such a universe could take: a saddle-shaped, curved infinite space; a flat infinite space; or a spherical, curved finite space. In all these models, the universe has no unique centre. If the universe is infinite, then by definition it cannot have a centre. If the universe is spherical and finite, the Big Bang would have been an explosion of space that took place everywhere at the same time—and thus every location in the visible universe could be called the centre of the Big Bang. (*Discover*, December 2002)

The universe, with its “centre everywhere and circumference nowhere,” could not have had merely a mechanical origin, and cosmologists are beginning to admit this, though they cannot explain all its mysteries. Life takes on a new meaning when viewed from the perspective of the vast expanses of space teeming with galaxies and universes, with new ones appearing or re-forming

from time to time, and old ones dying out. “This process,” says *Isis Unveiled* (II, 265), “has been going on from all eternity, and our present universe is but one of an infinite series which had no beginning and will have no end.”

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The irony of our times is that advances that are supposed to make life more comfortable also make it more dangerous. Technology and progress, it is claimed, have helped eradicate disease, but they can also exacerbate it. Geoffrey Cowly writes in *Newsweek* (May 5):

SARS, Ebola, Avian flu. The parade of frightening new maladies continues, each one confirming that our species, for all its cleverness, still lives at the mercy of the microbe. It didn't seem that way 30 years ago—not with smallpox largely defeated, AIDS still undreamed of and medical science evolving at an unprecedented clip. But even as optimists proclaimed victory over the germ, our megacities, factory farms, jet planes and blood banks were opening broad new avenues for infection. The dark side of progress is now unmistakable....Some 30 new diseases have cropped up since the mid-1970s—causing tens of millions of deaths—and forgotten scourges have resurfaced with alarming regularity. “Infectious diseases will continue to emerge,” the Institute of Medicine declares in a new report, warning that complacency and inaction could lead to a “catastrophic storm” of contagion. So what's to be done? Is preparedness our ultimate weapon? Do we know enough about the genesis of new diseases to prevent them?

As scientists study the causes of disease emergence, they are finding that human activity that disrupts the natural environment is a significant force. Thoughtlessly interfering with ecosystems in the name of progress can be hazardous to our health. Nature always strikes back.

Other contributing factors mentioned by Cowly include medical technologies like transfusions and transplants, which raise

the risk of spreading bloodborne diseases. Air travel also helps spread the bugs. “We are interconnected in ways that weren’t true a century ago,” says Dr. Mary Wilson of Harvard. At the same time a breakdown of social traditions is affecting us adversely.

Will physical measures alone—like checking the spread of microbes, improving basic health care, stockpiling antiviral drugs, etc.—wipe out diseases or prevent their recurrence in new forms? That diseases have psychic roots is now being recognized to some extent, though not fully. What is needed is knowledge of the sevenfold constitution of man, and especially of the activity of one factor, *Kama*—desires and longings—which plays a major role in tracing the cause and cure of diseases.

As with other processes and phenomena in life, diseases follow a cyclic course. Just as fast as old diseases disappear, new ones spring up. As far as medical science is concerned, it never can conquer disease *per se*. This fact may seem disheartening, but it is easily comprehended if one follows the teaching that physical diseases are but the outer manifestations of inner disturbances; ailments are the results of causes set in motion, for the most part, in the mental or moral planes of being. These causes are merely working their way out from within, and when they reach the physical plane they manifest themselves as diseases. This final manifestation may be made to disappear for a time. But unless the cause which is *not* physical has been removed it is bound to come forth again under another form. Many diseases that were prevalent in decades and even centuries gone by, have now been wiped out, but new ones are developing.

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As with disease, so with pain—doctors are saying that it has not just physiological roots, but also “spiritual, cultural and emotional ones.” Dr. Sherwin Nuland’s musings on the complex problem of pain (*Newsweek*, May 19) contain food for thought. The clinical professor of surgery at Yale has this to say:

As long as humans have kept records, they have reflected

the awareness that there is far more to pain than mere discomfort at the site of injury or disease. To the Babylonians and to the most modern of neuroscientists alike, the evaluation and treatment of pain have been understood to require methods that deal not only with the origin of the noxious stimulus, but with emotions as well. Nowadays, the International Association for the Study of Pain defines the subject of its research as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with either actual or potential tissue damage,” but Plato’s description was not much different: he said that pain is physical while also an experience in the soul. Thus, both ancient and modern sources leave wide latitude not only for understanding the complex origins of pain but for seeking clues to help deal with them.

Still, even such generalized words as “physical” and “emotional” encompass far more than merely the site of origin, the neurological pathway to conscious awareness and the psychological accompaniments. Pain when sufficiently severe is capable of setting off a cascade of biochemical actions that affect hormone and enzyme production, circulation, voluntary and involuntary muscle, and reactive tissues in numerous organs of the body. The unpleasant consequences of all these responses are multiple and additive....

Not only that, but pain’s accompaniments and effects vary from individual to individual, for a combination of reasons that are only partially organic. When we invoke a word like “psychological,” we include in its components an entire set of cognitive factors that are different for each person, including past experiences, cultural influences and the setting in which the stimulus occurs. Even if a jolt of pain were a purely physical phenomenon, it would have a specific meaning to the individual who feels it, and would accordingly be interpreted in ways that increase or decrease its many effects....

It is for reasons such as these that the specific pain experienced by any given person is so difficult to evaluate. Pain is notoriously resistant to efforts aimed at objectively measuring it, largely because its degree and its consequences are so individualistic.

People in general are illiterate about pain. They have no

educational or emotional background for comprehending it or coping with it. Pain, like all frustrations and disappointing happenings of life, has lessons to impart without which we should never learn dispassion, compassion and discriminative action. One of its important services is to arouse questioning. The whole question if viewed in the light of Karma and Reincarnation takes on a new angle which is almost completely ignored by medical and public debate on the issue. A state of chronic pain may, in fact, be needed by the soul to learn some lesson, to discharge some debt.

The Buddha's doctrine of *Dukkha* (pain) and its ceasing can prove enlightening for all. The universality of the experience of pain needs no proving.

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The Law Commission in India has initiated a debate on the most humane way of carrying out the death sentence. But should there be the death sentence at all? The pros and cons of the issue are discussed in the View-Counter-view column in *The Times of India* (May 5). While there are those who argue that some criminals cannot safely be allowed back into society lest they cause further harm and destruction, the arguments against the death penalty are more weighty:

There can be no humane way of carrying out the death sentence, which is a brutal act of revenge. Advocates of the death penalty almost always cite deterrence as a justification....Several studies have shown that the death penalty is not a deterrent. Albert Camus in his *Reflections on the Guillotine* says: "Capital punishment is the most premeditated of murders to which no criminal's deed, however calculated, can be compared." As for those who commit premeditated crimes, such as professional killers or "hit men," they are even less likely to be deterred by the thought of death, for the simple reason that for them any penalty, including capital punishment, is a risk already taken into account.

The death penalty is society's revenge on an individual, and

this cannot form the basis of a civilized polity....Does it not amount to legalizing murder? Indeed, by sanctioning violence, the death penalty brutalizes society as a whole. Who can bear the burden of having taken the life of someone who later may be proved to have been innocent? The system is neither fair nor efficient. There's no certitude if justice has been done or in fact undone. The latter possibility alone dictates against the death penalty.

The barbarism of capital punishment reacts adversely on those living on earth. Mr. Judge wrote in *The Theosophical Forum* for May 1895:

He [the executed criminal] is dead so far as the body is concerned, but is astrally alive. Worse than a suicide he is filled with hate and revenge which he must wreak on someone. At first he is not able to do much, but soon he finds that there are sensitive persons on the earth who can be filled with his vicious raging passions. These poor souls are then influenced to commit crimes; being filled mentally—from the inner planes—with the ideas and passions of the criminal, they are at last moved to do what their mind is filled with. The executed criminal does not have to know what is going on, for his raging passions, untouched by the executioner, excite and influence of themselves whoever is sensitive to them. This is why many a crime is suddenly committed by weak persons who appear to be carried away by an outside force. It seems hardly possible that anyone could believe in theosophical and occult doctrines and at the same time commend capital punishment.

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The 20th century has been said to be the most violent in recorded history, notably for its two World Wars and innumerable conflicts within and between nations. We are barely into the 21st and already the world has witnessed first hand the full-scale horrors of violence and war.

If there is one ideal that humanity has collectively dreamt of,

it is of peace and harmony in the world. Some hints on how to make peace a reality are offered by Suma Varughese in *Life Positive* (May 2003):

Peace is not an abstract concept, or a theoretical ideal to be spouted at conferences and seminars and relegated to the briefcase. Peace has to be worked upon and wrought—moment by moment, piece by piece....

When it comes to peace efforts, mankind has traditionally favoured two ways. One, which is external, focuses on creating political, economic, and social systems that favour peace, and establishing a network of checks and balances that discourage abuse of the systems. The other, favoured by the Orient, is to go within and root out the disquiet there. “Wars begin in the minds of men,” observed Victor Hugo. Accordingly, the effort should be to eliminate the root cause of the malaise. Both efforts are necessary and mutually supporting....

What stops us from being peaceful? According to the spiritual wisdom of the East, the root of suffering is desire.... When we take responsibility for our reactions and choose to favour peace and happiness, regardless of circumstances, we will have won the inner war. We will then radiate peace, joy and love. When we do so, we exude a rare alchemy that converts the negativity around us to positivity. This is the stage when we can actually help transform the outer world....

There are various levels of peace. There is the basic level, which is the absence of war. But one has to go beyond that and take the peace from the peace of the graveyard, to that of sustenance for life. This requires the formation of a socio-economic fabric by reducing inequities, inculcating trust between sections of society, and actively working for welfare. The final stage will be when the fabric is activated to create a new society with new relationships and new ethics. Transformation, in short.

To create peace, one must be pro-peace, not anti-war. Anti-war is reactive, pro-peace is constructive.

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