

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THOUGHTS ON “THOUGHTS”

IN THE *Gita*, Shri Krishna says, “No man resteth a moment inactive,” *i.e.*, even when inactive on the bodily plane, we are all the time acting on the thought-plane. Our thoughts are mostly self-regarding, so that very seldom we find ourselves thinking about another’s sorrow or reflecting upon some verses from the scriptures. Teachers, down the ages, and especially, the new age gurus advise us to live in the present moment. We are so habituated to fly from the present that the experience of trying to stay in the present moment, even for an hour, could be daunting.

We seem to live life carrying with us a heavy load of past baggage. We live life, oscillating between the past and the future. *The Voice of the Silence* advises: “Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost.” When we recall the past, and live in those memories we rejuvenate them, *i.e.*, provide fresh energy to those thoughts. Thoughts are energy and so every time we think we lend energy. When a person walks the spiritual path he increases his power of thought, and every time he re-lives the past experiences, these impressions acquire increased power. Someone who had miserable childhood can continue to focus on it; alternatively, he can focus on what he wants. When we stop dwelling on and focusing on the past, it begins to disappear, while things we want to achieve begin to expand and strengthen. If we have done something wrong, certainly we must repent, and resolve not to sin again; and

then dismiss the matter. Remaining in constant touch with elevating ideas and scriptures helps us to fill the mind with ennobling thoughts, keeping the negative thoughts at bay. Norman Peale puts it thus: “When the mind is emptied something is bound to enter. . . . start filling your mind with creative and healthy thoughts. Then when the old fears, hates, and worries that have haunted you for so long try to edge back in, they will in effect find a sign on the door of your mind reading ‘occupied.’ They may struggle for admission. . . . but the new and healthy thoughts which you have taken in will now be stronger and better fortified, and therefore be able to repulse them.”

“Esoterically, thought is more responsible and punishable than act. But exoterically it is the reverse. Therefore, in ordinary human law, an assault is more severely punished than the thought or intention, *i.e.*, the threat, whereas Karmically it is the contrary,” writes H.P.B. (*Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 142). No doubt, the consequences for the actual act and the thought are not the same. After all, if we utter angry words, then the person at the receiving end feels angry and we have started chain reaction. But it is quite different when we control our anger. It is one thing to *think* of killing a person or raping a woman and quite another to *actually* kill or rape. However, we must take into account the *quality* of thoughts. At times, these thoughts are not intense and powerful. When H.P.B. was asked whether our thoughts are punishable, she replied that our still-born (weak) thoughts are not punishable, but we are punished for “silent” but potentially strong and intense thoughts. For instance, if a person wishes for death of another and if he has strong Will and imagination then his thought may bear fruit, and bring harm to another person. But in case the person lacks strong Will and imagination, evil thoughts come back to injure him, like a ball rebounding from the wall. However, what we experience is the sum total or resultant of good and bad thoughts. Hence, after an intense thought of harming another or of stealing, if the person repents and encourages thoughts of goodwill and charity, then these might weaken the effect of previous bad thoughts.

An “evil eye” is the destructive power of thoughts. Whenever we think, our thought combines itself with a unit of life-energy or “elemental” and forms an entity. An elemental is a colourless force or energy without any attributes, but when coalesced with thoughts, it acquires quality or colour—good or bad. Just like an electrically charged rod, these elementals carry bad thoughts to another person and cause him harm. For instance, when people fix their thoughts in envy upon a person, who suddenly gets rich, he is adversely affected by them and may lose the money. So also, the envious glance of a person on a beautiful vase or car or any other object or person may result in damage or injury to the same. The elementals charged with envy precipitate down the glance of the envious person. Envy is a powerful emotion. Envy is worse than jealousy, because the feeling involved is that if *I* cannot have then no other should have it. Only when the person towards whom such thoughts are directed, is pure—at the level of speech, body and mind—such bad thoughts are powerless to harm him.

We create with every thought, a demon or an angel. To think angrily or with hate about another is like sending, on an invisible plane, a tiny man with a tiny stick to beat that person. The length of the life of this “entity” depends upon the intensity of the thoughts. These “entities” are our “creations,” and we are responsible for them. These thoughts not only help or hinder their creator, but also are impressed on an invisible register called astral light, forming a common pool of thoughts. The astral light acts as a photographer’s sensitive plate. For every action there are two kinds of pictures impressed on the astral light. One picture is for the action and the other is for the thoughts and feelings associated with the act. These pictures in the astral light throw down upon us the suggestion to repeat the same act or thought. Each one of us attracts from this pool, the thoughts that are consubstantial with our nature. “Thoughts are magnetic, and thoughts have a frequency. As you think, those thoughts are sent out into the Universe, and they magnetically attract all like things that are on the same frequency. Everything sent out

returns to the source. And that source is you,” writes Rhonda Byrne (*The Secret*, p. 10). Mr. Judge says that we attract what we love.

It is said that “An elephant can be tethered and held captive by a thread—if *he believes* he is captive.” There is the story of a man who used to tether his cow to a pole at the end of the day. One evening he found that the rope had broken and he did not have a spare rope. He went near the cow, and as usual, only repeated the action of tying the cow to the pole. To his amazement he found that the cow had not moved from the spot till morning. This may or may not be true of cows and elephants, but it is certainly true, metaphorically, of a human being. Many of us are held back from realizing our full potential by false ideas that man is born in sin and that he is dependent on someone outside of him for salvation. Our thinking is conditioned by the thinking of our age. We are continually affecting each other at the thought level.

Megha Bajaj, a seeker, learnt profound truth about the power of thought and the reality of interconnected existence from a tiny earthworm. Once as she was sitting in the lush green lawns of her garden she spotted a tiny earthworm moving in her direction. But when it was only a few inches away from her fingers, she remembered having studied in biology that when you cut an earthworm into two—both its parts begin to move independently. As soon as this thought arose in her mind, the earthworm moved far away from her and hid under a leaf. “I realized that when an earthworm, that did not have all its senses evolved could be so sensitive to a single thought—just how much bearing must all of us be having on each other?,” writes Bajaj. The evolution of every person, leads to the evolution of human consciousness. “I realized, for the first time, that the best gift we can give anyone is actually our ‘presence.’ The more and more loving, blissful and peaceful we become—the more and more the world around us will feel these emotions.” It is our responsibility to make ourselves into such beings in whose presence others will feel loved and not judged, peaceful and not agitated, writes Bajaj. (*Life Positive*, March 2012)

Often we find a picture of a Saint or a Yogi in meditation, surrounded by ferocious animals, subdued to a state of calm. Tigers, deers, snakes and doves are all in harmony in the vicinity of such a being. The state of total harmlessness within him gets reflected outside, creating an atmosphere of calmness and harmony. Pure thoughts give rise to pure magnetism. Hence we say that the great ones entertain only such benevolent thoughts that they charge the atmosphere *with entities powerful for good alone*.

H.P.B. writes that a fixed idea amounting to an obsession may infect other minds long after the death of the man who held it, just as a contagious disease may be communicated to another after the death of a sufferer from that disease, by contact with the clothing he had worn. She explains that the intense thought or desire of the dying person can spread magnetic, unhealthy influence that affects all people for a long time to come. Just as the thoughts of the living can so work as to affect and psychologize another mind, so do the thoughts of a dead person. (*The Theosophist*, January 1882)

One who aspires to walk the spiritual path has to be especially careful and watch his thoughts. H.P.B. writes in *Raja-Yoga or Occultism* that there are people who never think with the higher faculties of their mind at all and there are those who think even upon ordinary matters from that higher plane. “The person who is endowed with this faculty of thinking about even the most trifling things from the higher plane of thought has, by virtue of that gift which he possesses, a plastic power of formation, so to say, in his very imagination.” Whatever he thinks about, his thoughts will be more intense than the thoughts of an ordinary person, and by this very intensity, it obtains the *power of creation*. Gandhiji puts it thus: “All thoughts do not possess the same potency. Only thoughts crystallized by a pure life and charged with prayerful concentration has potency. The purer the life, the greater the concentration, the brighter the faith in that Unseen Power from whom all things are, the greater the potency of thought. If I had the purity, the concentration and the faith I want, I know that I would do all my work without

speech or writing, or with the least use of either, and the power the thought would then carry would be irresistible. That is the power which every human being has to aspire to and with due effort attain.”

The creative power of thought is variously described as *Kriyasakti* and *Sankalpa sakti*. When we undertake self-discipline, we first make an ideal plan or *Sankalpa* and then execute it. *Sankalpa* means to thoroughly think and imagine so that the thing thought about gets translated into action. “The only way anything has ever been invented or created is because one person saw a picture in his mind. He saw it clearly, and by holding that picture of the end result in his mind all the forces of the Universe brought his invention into the world, *through* him....These were men who had utter faith in the invisible, and who knew the power within them to leverage the universe and bring the invention into the visible,” writes Byrne. (*The Secret*, p. 82)

The highest power of thought, *Kriyasakti*, which makes of man a creator, lies latent within each. It is “the mysterious power of thought which enables it to produce external, perceptible, phenomenal results by its own inherent energy. The ancients held that *any idea will manifest itself externally if one’s attention is deeply concentrated upon it.*” (*S.D.*, I, 293)

In the Book, *The Secret* Rhonda Byrne dwells on the power of thought. We are given an example of a person, Morris Goodman, who was completely paralyzed in an airplane crash, and doctors had predicted that he would be a vegetable all his life. By consciously eliminating negative and disheartening thoughts, and focusing on his goal, not only could he breathe again on his own—in spite of the fact that his diaphragm was destroyed—but walked out of the hospital on his own two feet on Christmas. Doctors were at a loss for an explanation. He writes: “If I wanted to sum up my life and sum up for people what they can do in life, I would sum it up in six words: *‘Man becomes what he thinks about.’*”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THE GIFT OF SANDALS

IN ONE of the ancient books the story is told how Truth is often used like a gift of sandals that came to three youths. Everyone, at some moment of life, feels the Real to be very near and, if he is alert enough to look within at that supreme instant, he may become a completely free man. Certainly the glimpse of Truth does not always come on heralded occasions, such as befell the first youth; neither does it hold the promise of special privilege which the second received. As for the third youth, perhaps his story may....But then, let each of us see for himself.

Ancient custom held that youth should receive the gift of sandals on his 21st birthday. These were the symbol of manhood, of new freedom, self-reliance and responsibility. Henceforth, the wearer became his own guide, directing his footsteps to whichever of the three paths he chose—the path of the senses, the path of the mind, or the path of the heart. Some footsteps hurry onto the broad highway of the senses that leads to worldliness and deception; others take the softer track winding through secluded lanes of intellectual selfishness; always a few noble-hearted and unknown, labour up the path of virtue and of service, the way of the heart.

The King decreed a celebration on the day on which his son received the sandals. All things echoed praises to the son of the King; he had completed his years of preparation. The sandals were to be the finest ever made and the royal sandal-maker had spent many days trying to fashion a pair that would please the King and yet be comfortable. Try as he might, however, the sandal-maker had met with great difficulty, and, as the day approached, his heart was filled with misgiving. Yes, the sandals were beautiful and different, but they were also uncomfortable, because great beauty and service often do not go together.

With pomp and ceremony the sandals were put on the feet of the youth. But, though magnificent to look upon, they did not feel so,

and the Prince soon asked to have them removed. Another pair, unadorned, was then brought forth by the sandal-maker who had wisely foreseen the need of them.

Thus the beautiful gift, hardly worn, was cast aside, as Truth often is, when embellished with awesome ritual and dogma. The Real is present, but, having become overlaid with false splendour, it meets a fate similar to that of the sandals for the Monarch's son. These found their way, finally, into the palace museum where they were placed among the royal treasures. Beautiful but, alas, not practical!

On the same day another pair of sandals was handed to a youth by the family priest. Since his early years this young man had been carefully taught what to think and so the coming of manhood climaxed his growth. Though his mind had been fairly well closed, Truth still was not far away, because of the tradition of sandal-giving. In it there lay the key to discipleship, to the path of the heart. The real meaning, however, became hidden from this youth because he looked upon it as a symbol of recognition, a mark of distinction which set him apart from others. He had been taught that the sect to which he belonged was the oldest in existence, that the custom of sandal-giving had originated with it and that other people had copied the idea. As all the sect's members wore identical sandals, these became the means of recognition, and the habit of watching for them grew naturally. Prejudice suggested to the youth that many lacked his means of salvation. Thus, in the company of separateness, the sacred gift was given and received. A dismal fate for Truth? Not so; for Truth is like the spirit in man, "untouched by troubles, works, fruits of works, or desires."

It is doubtful if many would have wanted the sandals offered to the third youth on his 21st birthday. They looked shabby, having already been worn by someone else, and they fitted not too comfortably. Besides, his family had let the custom die, as many things do when taken for granted. But when a friend, unexpectedly and with seeming casualness, presented the gift, old memories

responded within the youth and he was grateful.

A short time later the two met again, and the youth, in an excited state, immediately began to relate a strange story. He said that, after he had worn the sandals for a few days, he had noticed, to his amazement, that all discomfort was gone and they had fitted him perfectly. Each evening he had looked carefully for any sign of needed repair, perhaps a tear or a break, but not once had they needed attention. In fact, the sandals had seemed to be renewing themselves, becoming less shabby with each day and actually taking on a new appearance. The youth was so astonished by what was happening that he forgot to ask the one question he wanted so much to have answered, "Who had worn them before?"

The friend quietly listened and when the story was finished, he said, with a smile, "The sandals once belonged to a good man who made the pursuit of virtue his life's work. He travelled no great distances to find it, neither did he search the scriptures for secret formulas; he trod the steepest yet the surest path of all, the path close to each one of us, the way of service." When they parted, great happiness came into the friend's heart because he knew the sandals had once again found a disciple.

There are two kinds of truth—Relative and Absolute. Absolute Truth or Absolute Knowledge is Wisdom and is called *Paramartha Satya*. It has to be reached or realized by each one for himself. For this, we need to paralyse the appetites of the lower personality. In our world, at best, what we get is relative truth or *samvritti satya*.

When we consider "truth" in its highest sense, we find that the teachings of all the scriptures put together do not contain the whole truth. A different mode of spiritual experience is necessary to grasp the full truth. There has to be direct intuitive apprehension of Spiritual facts. So the claim of any religion that it alone possesses the whole truth is absurd. It is like the story of six blind men. When they came

across an elephant, one of them felt its trunk and said that the elephant was like a thick rope. Another touched the legs and concluded the elephant was like a pillar, and so on. All of them were right, but each had only partial truth. So also, each religion gives out only partial truth; each needs to cultivate tolerance towards other religions. Theosophy says, “There is no Religion higher than Truth.”

In the above story, three kinds of sandals represent the fact that customs, traditions, dogmas and rituals often pass in the name of truth. Whatever is written in the scriptures, whatever is performed *traditionally* tends to become sacrosanct. Mr. Crosbie says, “Truth, as we ought to know, always explains. When we have the explanation, we have found the truth.” Also, at times, there is heart response. We have the intuitive feeling from within that *this is true*. Wisdom and truth are synonymous terms, and that which is false and pernicious cannot be wise. H.P.B. points out that many in the world try to pass on their own opinions as truth based on authority. Careful analysis shows that what they possess is not even relative truth. Says Mr. Crosbie: “Truth alone can be authority; it demands nothing from anyone, but invites close examination. Falsehood disagrees with falsehood as well as with Truth; Truth disagrees with falsehood, but agrees with itself.” He points out that when someone is in possession of gold, and he is convinced that what he possesses is indeed gold, then all he has to do is to present his gold for testing. There is no need for him to exact belief in the other, based on his authority. This is the kind of authority you will find in Theosophy, says Mr. Crosbie. Only he can hope to possess Truth, who loves truth for its own sake. The *Gita* says, “Seek this wisdom by doing service, by strong search, by questions, and by humility.”

Mr. Crosbie says, “Truth is not a man, nor a book, nor a statement.” Scriptures are only pointers—means of reaching the truth. “As many benefits as there are in a tank stretching free on all sides, so many are there for a truth-realizing Brahman in all the Vedic rites.” (*Gita*, II)

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE ELEPHANT—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Nagavaggo* or “The Elephant.” The elephant is revered in India and is considered to be sacred as it reminds one of the elephant-headed god—Lord Ganesha. The elephant symbolizes strength, fearlessness, wisdom, endurance, patience and self-restraint of a truly wise one. Majestic like a king, the elephant is not afraid of other animals. So is the wise one; he is fearless and has indomitable will to combat fierce opposition. The trunk of an elephant has the unique capacity of performing both gross and subtle activities. An elephant can use his trunk to uproot a tree, as also, to pick up a coin or a needle from the ground. Similarly the wise one can tackle every complexity, big or small, with ease and expertise. Lord Ganesha is said to have broken one of his tusks in order to write the *Mahabharata*. One of the meanings of the broken tusk of Ganesha is that a man of perfection, rooted in the supreme wisdom, is not swayed by the pairs of opposites, like joy and sorrow, honour and dishonour. The elephant’s big ears represent sensitivity, they are open to take in the cries and sorrows of the world and respond. An elephant eats a lot and is able to digest what he eats. A spiritual aspirant should be able to consume and digest whatever experiences he undergoes. He should be able to “stomach” everything without being thrown off-balance.

Strong and intelligent, it is tamed and trained to serve on the battlefield, in the timber industry to carry heavy logs, in circus, in temples, and on hunting expeditions. Peace-loving and gentle, the elephant does not pick up fight with other animals. Lord Buddha himself is called *naga* or *mahanaga*, the great elephant. *The Light of Asia* mentions that queen Maya saw a dream in which the Buddha descended from heaven and entered into her womb in the form of six-tusked white elephant. The dream-reader said that the dream was good, and it symbolized that the Queen will give birth to a child who will, either grow up to be a holy man of great wisdom

delivering humanity from ignorance, or, rule the world as great monarch.

1. *I shall endure abuse even as the elephant on the battlefield endures the arrows shot from the bow. The many of this world are ill-natured. (320)*

This ought to be the attitude of the one who desires to meet the Master or Guru. One of the occult rules in *Light on the Path* says: “Before the voice can speak in the presence of the Masters, it must have lost the power to wound.” To have achieved this is to have destroyed in oneself the instinct of self-defense and self-preservation, the idea of one’s rights of whatever sort and even the pleasant feeling of self-respect and virtue. The disciple has to give up all weapons of offence and defense; all weapons of mind and heart, and brain and spirit. Never again can another man be regarded as a person who can be criticized or condemned; never again can the neophyte raise his voice in self-defense or excuse. He returns into the world as helpless, as unprotected, as a new-born child. To have lost the power to wound implies that the snake of personal self is not only scotched, but killed. The disciple endures arrows of abuse or slander aimed at him by evil minded people, even as the elephant endures arrows shot on the battlefield. It is not that he is weak or afraid of them; he endures because he lives by the highest standard of universal brotherhood. He does not consider anyone as his enemy but treats them as part of himself. He knows that it is ignorance which makes people behave selfishly. He forgives them all. The less identified with personality we are, the better we are at taking blame and abuse.

2. *A tamed elephant is led on to the battlefield. The king mounts a tamed elephant. The tamed is the best among men—he who in patience endures hard words. (321)*

3. *Good are mules when tamed. Good are Sindhu horses when tamed. Good are great elephants when tamed. Better than all these is he who has tamed himself. (322)*

4. *With such mounts no man can reach the untrodden land called Nirvana. A tamed man riding on his tamed self*

arrives there. (323)

A great gulf of “self-conscious” mind separates man from animals. Man can think and choose. He has the power of reasoning and a free will. He uses his intelligence to trap and tame even the most powerful animal, be it an elephant, a mule or a horse. By taming the animal, he canalizes the brute force to achieve desired result. But better than all these is he who has tamed himself. Only a tamed man, riding on his tamed self can reach the untrodden land of Nirvana. Man possesses dual nature—animal and divine.

The book *Through the Gates of Gold* mentions that not only is man more than an animal because there is the god in him, but he is more than a god because there is the animal in him. But, no brute of the earth is so brutal as the man who subjects his godly power to his animal power. He turns all the divine powers of his being into this channel, and degrades his soul by making it the slave of his senses. The god, deformed and disguised, waits on the animal and feeds it. So long as the animal rules there will be the keenest sufferings in consequence of change, of the vibration between pleasure and pain, or the desire for prolonged and pleasant physical life. But, force the animal into his rightful place, that of the inferior, and you find yourself in possession of a great force hitherto unsuspected and unknown. The god as a servant adds a thousand-fold to the pleasures of the animal; the animal as a servant adds a thousand-fold to the powers of the god. *And it is upon the union, the right relation of these two forces in himself, that man stands as a strong king, and is enabled to raise his hand and lift the bar of the Golden Gate.*

5. *The elephant Dhanapalaka even in captivity is uncontrollable when, at the time of rut, his temples are running with a pungent sap. He will not touch food but longs for the elephant grove. (324)*

6. *Sluggish and gluttonous, spending time in sleep rolling from side to side, eating like a hog—such a foolish fellow falls to birth again and again. (325)*

7. *Aforetime this mind of mine would wander as it liked,*

as it desired, as it pleased. Now I control it completely even as a rider controls with his hook a rutting elephant. (326)

Man is not only an evolving animal but is also an unfolding god. It is this fact which enables him to control the animal within and make it serve him. This is not easy. Animal stands for our lower desires and instincts. The instinct of self-preservation, procreation, caring for its young, etc. is predominant in an animal, and the animal obeys it automatically. But man can analyze his desire before responding to it. However, when the desire is very strong, it becomes uncontrollable. Thus blinded by passion he loses discrimination and longs for the gratification of his desire, just as the rutting elephant longs for the elephant grove. In the Third Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna tells Arjuna to conquer this sin which can destroy all knowledge and even spiritual discernment. Thus:

It is lust which instigates him. It is passion, sprung from the quality of rajas; insatiable, and full of sin. Know this to be the enemy of man on earth. 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. By this—the constant enemy of the wise man, formed from desire which rageth like fire and is never to be appeased—is discriminative knowledge surrounded. Its empire is over the senses and organs, the thinking principle and the discriminating faculty also; by means of these it cloudeth discrimination and deludeth the Lord of the body. Therefore, O best of the descendants of Bharata, at the very outset restraining thy senses, thou shouldst conquer this sin which is the destroyer of knowledge and of spiritual discernment.

Dhanapalaka was the elephant of the King of Banares. When rutting, it was uncontrollable even in captivity. Rutting elephant is driven by his natural impulse, and seeks a mate. Food is then unimportant to him. Similarly, when worldly desire takes possession of a man, he becomes desperate. There is then one pointed devotion to the desired object and all else is forgotten. Therefore, desire needs

to be controlled as a rider controls a rutting elephant with his hook. Otherwise, man is no better than an animal. He will fall to rebirth again and again.

Mind is like water that takes the shape of the vessel it is poured into—it becomes that to which it is devoted. For instance, when we are planning a holiday abroad or planning to have a birthday party, we begin to picturize it so vividly that our mind is totally identified with the situation. We then say, “I can’t help thinking about it.” Is this desirable? The mind may be compared to a horse. Would it be a good thing if the horse took the rider to its stable and not where the rider wanted to go? Since mind is altered into the shape and other characteristics of any object, mental or otherwise, this causes it to have four peculiarities. *First*, to naturally fly off from any point, object, or subject; *second*, to fly to some pleasant idea; *third*, to fly to an unpleasant idea; *fourth*, to remain passive and considering naught, as happens during sleep, or in the abnormal condition of going towards insanity. Arjuna tells Krishna that the restraint of mind is as difficult as that of the wind itself. But Krishna tells him that it may be restrained, by constant practice and absence of desire. He also tells him:

When he hath abandoned every desire that ariseth from the imagination and subdued with the mind the senses and organs which impel to action in every direction, being possessed of patience, he by degrees finds rest; and, having fixed his mind at rest in the true Self, he should think of nothing else. To whatsoever object the inconstant mind goeth out he should subdue it, bring it back, and place it upon the Spirit. Supreme bliss surely cometh to the sage whose mind is thus at peace; whose passions and desires are thus subdued; who is thus in the true Self and free from sin. (*Gita*, VI)

(To be concluded)

THE STUFF OF GREATNESS

II

We praise or adore the good, the noble, the courageous, the spiritually advanced Fravarshis (aura of divinity) of the pure and the righteous.

—*The Holy Gatha of Zarathushtra*

IT SEEMS that the tradition of adoring the great souls and recalling human greatness in any form are ingrained in human psyche. Fortunately for us, the magnificent exploits and achievements through heroic ventures and other forms of greatness are recorded for posterity, found in the romance of immortal epics and legends belonging to many ancient civilizations. Apparently they seem to be the narratives, in some form, of the daring and noble deeds of the heroes and heroines of those monumental days. But they also provide the proof and the solace arising from the conviction that such heights of greatness are possible to men, even of the lower strata, in some future stage of soul-maturity. They show that at the end of the Great Adventure the hero becomes fit to help, teach and inspire his fellows who are travelling behind him on the same journey. So, the real hero, behind the mask of a celebrity or a genius, is the radiant consciousness silently present as the man's "central being." And this "inner fire" is not the sole property of the talented few, but the unrecognized godly heritage of all souls on their way to their glorious destiny.

The fundamental teachings of all great spiritual traditions and the philosophical schools in the East are centred in the affirmation of the origin, progress and the final consummation in divinity, of the inner man centred within the outer changing personality. Intuitive poets have called it "the imprisoned splendour," "the divine fragment," etc. On account of the birth (emanation) of this immortal spark from the Eternal Reality, the source and sustainer of everything, man is intrinsically endowed with the highest possibility of spiritual unfoldment destined for all souls. This is why "Hope

lies eternal in human breast." Such intuitive settled hope is in reality the Soul's memory of his essential nature and his sacred origin.

Secondly, man is endowed with the same powers and luminous consciousness and energy inherent in the whole cosmos, waiting to manifest. Hence, greatness in man and nature in any form—physical, mental and spiritual—is logical outcome of their destined "evolution" culminating in perfection. What is noted as the "all-round evolutionary impulse within the Cosmos," extends its influence on man also. It gets transmuted into the spiritual drive, motivating every soul to strive ever upward and onward, even though it may be obstructed by the individual soul's karmic destiny and its outer garment. This is the key to the ultimate triumph of man over not only his outer conditions, but more poignantly, the inner obstacles which we call the "evil" in man. For instance, the legendary "Labours of Hercules" symbolically represent the soul's trials on his journey to the spiritual victory and the heroic and awesome achievements of the man of courage and faith, throughout the history.

It is always through the trials and suffering and even sacrifice, that the immortal individual Ego grows, gains power and knowledge, and fulfils his destiny, namely, to create himself the Hero that he is in reality, in his inner nature. Thus, the secret source of all greatness is centred within every man, even though it may manifest on the plane "where the heart is set," and in the immediate pursuit chosen by the seeker. That is why there are the multiform types of greatness. Broadly, there are three main avenues to their expression—the physical, the mental (including the psychic), and the moral or in reality the spiritual. The last is indeed of the rare kind.

The spiritual traditions of all countries, like Theosophy, consider the works of the "spiritually great," as the most beneficent force for the man and nature. Nevertheless, these are the rare efflorescence of the centuries in human history. All the same, the simple forms of spiritual "gifts"—which St. Paul enumerates as, love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance—gifts from the higher nature to the lower, can be understood in the light

of dual nature of man—the immortal and the transitory. There are the intermediary kind, mainly belonging to the inspired mind, which too leads them toward some form of greatness.

We have some truly great men of science, as well as, of the arts, who through their good and humble nature have deep reverence for Nature. They are able to see the intelligent plan and order in the universal scheme, governed by Law. Sometime these men attract what Thomas Paine called, “those [inspiring] thoughts that bolt into the mind of their own accord.” The great scientist Max Planck was the first to recognize, since the rise of modern science, that the energy of radiation is emitted not continuously but in integral multiples of certain indivisible “quanta” of energy. He referred to the radiation formula which he sponsored as having a standing of “*a law disclosed by a lucky intuition.*” Men like Max Planck who deserved such invisible help are humble enough to sense such “inspirations,” which are, at times, help from the Adepts, available to those inwardly ready. The first such qualification to receive such intimations is inward integrity, as also, intense search for truth, hard work and receptivity. Albert Einstein and others who knew Max Planck acknowledge that this great inspired scientist was “high-minded,” and of serene “faith in the natural world order.” Max Planck ascribed his discovery to “a gift of intuition and willingness to work hard.” At Planck’s commemorative service, Einstein spoke about “idealistic search for truth,” and that “this ideal was personified in rare perfection, in the person of Max Planck.”

Similar rules may be applicable to the phenomena of “genius,” the sturdy men of iron will and concentration, some divinely inspired poets and creative geniuses, as also some higher or lower gifts of clairvoyance or prophecy. But we must distinguish the beneficent spiritual as against the intellectual and psychic faculties, however astonishing. There have been true “Adepts,” and rare “Initiates” worthy to become the spiritually inspired leaders. But we frequently hear of “miraculous healers, god-men and yogis,” publicly claiming to be our guides, as the heads of their affluent institutions and

sprawling ashrams. We must learn to distinguish between “popular” genius and those rare individuals who do not need “promoters,” and the public limelight, since their higher gifts are used sparingly with great responsibility and sagacity. Therefore, we must remember that “greatness” is of two types, depending upon the “source” of their gifts, and how they have unfolded, and more importantly, how their lives have affected human welfare. Sometimes, there are the truly great men of goodwill who roam unknown, unheralded and yet are beneficent to men and nature.

Here we would do well to consider that Hero-worship can also be overdone due to lack of discrimination and exclusive enthusiasm that blinds a man who values things on the surface appearances and hear-say. People could be easily brain-washed into believing things that appear imposing and captivating. “The world is still deceived with ornaments,” writes Shakespeare. Human nature can be easily swept away by the glitz and glitter, loud claims and status symbols. On the other hand, one has to be equally cautious of the cynical attitude towards anything great and noble.

While considering the two categories of the phenomena of “genius,” we often come across the stories of “child prodigies” of striking precocity in talents and intellect. It is also found that in their adult life they have weakened or lost the original cerebral brilliance and lucidity. Then there is the form of “genius” which Thomas Edison described as the fruits of, “ninety-nine per cent perspiration and one per cent inspiration.” He must have been referring to the men of admirable talents in arts, science, athletics, etc. We might call them “geniuses” in their own field.

Unfortunately, the word “genius” is indifferently used. In its Dictionary meaning, the word genius implies lower forms of “influence” over-shadowing the man. Etymologically, it is originating in Latin “*genere*” meaning “to beget,” *i.e.*, to create. Hence, it is popularly believed that genius is a man endowed with tutelary deity or a Spirit. Occultism seeks its “origin in the light of the Immortal Ego.” Hence the intuitive and spontaneous state of

mind and expression from higher consciousness is the “inner genius,” and which overshadows the true man of genius. In its lower form it is the “familiar spirit,” or *daimonian* of Socrates. Many of the so-called “mystics” are under such influences which sporadically inspires the speech and other faculties. The real greatness in the genius is the uncommon efflorescence of the soul. In people of true greatness there is a spiritual force which draws us towards them. The Irish poet, George William Russell felt enraptured whenever he heard Mr. Judge speak at a theosophical centre, and Mr. Judge himself was drawn to H. P. Blavatsky with complete sense of trust when he first met her, and when they mutually recognized each other as life-long companions from the past.

Finally, we must learn to discriminate between the surface sheen and the true depth and the light when we meet greatness in the form of poetic and other genre of inspiration, intuition, prophecy, clairvoyance, messianic fervour and other forms of “gifts” exhibited by some distinguished leaders. Mainly, the men of virtuous mind having such gifts may be designated as the true great souls worthy of our full adoration and emulation.

There is the one trait with the price of greatness. It is a heavy “crown of Thorn,” for the head so gifted! Emerson said: “To be great is to be [often] misunderstood,” perhaps because “the world cannot live at the level of its great men.” We students have a glorious example. Even after the passing away of H. P. Blavatsky, some people spoke about her as an “enigma,” or a “fraud”! Even students are prone to judge, as they would others, from the surface view, unable to fathom her pure heart. Hence, no biography of such great men and women of wisdom and compassion, has ever been complete or reliable. Also, nobody knows the heavy weight such noble souls carry for the sake of the colleagues whose welfare and spiritual progress they watch with concern.

(Concluded)

THE WORLD OF THE ELEMENTALS

I

TRADITIONALLY, an elemental is considered to be a mythological being, first mentioned by Paracelsus in his alchemical works. Elementals are the soul of the elements. There are four types of elementals pertaining to four elements, also known as, “nature-spirits.” The elementals of fire are called “spirits of fire,” or Salamanders; of the air are called “spirits of air,” or sylphs; of the water are called “spirits of water,” or undines (also known as nymphs), and of the earth are called “spirits of earth,” or gnomes or elves. In the earlier times, most people believed in the existence of elementals. In the myths and fables of almost all nations, they appeared under various names, such as, fairies, dwarfs, djins, peris, goblins and pixies. They are called *devas*, generically, by the Hindus. H.P.B. points out that some of these *devas* are superior and some inferior to man. The term *deva* literally means the Shining Ones, and they cover spiritual beings of various degrees. The nature-spirits, or, gnomes, sylphs, fairies, etc. are termed *Deva Yonis*. They are elementals of lower kind and belong to the three lower kingdoms. After a very long period these beings will be evolved into men.

In the scientific age, we brush these aside as mere superstition and fancy, because we are not able to see the elemental beings by our physical eyesight, but they can be seen by the person with inner or clairvoyant vision. These elementals or “lives” are described as units of life energy, or centres of energy or force. We must not think that vegetables, birds, fishes, insects and men are the only living things in this world. There are tiny beings or “lives,” we do not ordinarily see, just as there are colours seen by some people, which others cannot see. Elementals have no form of their own. They have neither tangible nor intangible astral form, as ghosts are supposed to have.

The form or shape assumed by these elementals is subjective in its origin. It is the thoughts of human beings that unconsciously

give them the shape. Thus, where people believe in Santa Clause, and think about him and picture him, for them Santa Clause really exists. Many such people might report having seen the Santa Clause. Likewise, a person who believes in the existence of Devil and has imagined him to be having a certain specific form—with red eyes, horns, black face—would *see* Devil, especially in the state of intense nervous excitement or in the diseased condition. Thus, in the state of religious frenzy or ecstasy, people might see the figure of their favourite deity. They may feel that they saw Jesus or Krishna or Ganesa, but actually in their peculiar psychic condition they evoke elementals which are clothed by the picture strongly impressed in their minds. We are told that at Salem in the United States, hysterical and mediumistic women saw devil. The devil they saw was the form taken by the elementals from their own imagination. Likewise, more fairies dwell in places such as England and Ireland, where people believe in and think of fairies. There are instances of the English and Welsh people reporting to have seen water-nymph beside a quiet pool, or a tiny elf perched upon a swaying flower. Mr. Judge mentions that sometimes elementals of the earth have been seen by the clairvoyant miners in the form of gnomes and that has given rise to the superstition among the Irish regarding the fairies. The London *Spiritualist* of June 1877 mentions that when a storm was approaching, a person with clairvoyant perception saw “a bright spirit emerge from a dark cloud and pass with lightning speed across the sky, and a few minutes after, a diagonal line of dark spirits in the clouds.” H.P.B. explains that these are the Maruts (storm-gods) of the Vedas.

These elemental beings are without intelligence, without moral character or tendencies. H.P.B. describes them as “a combination of sublimated matter and rudimental mind.” They could be directed by human thoughts, which can give them a form as also certain amount of intelligence. As soon as a thought arises in the mind, it combines with an elemental and becomes an entity. The water and air elementals act almost like a phonographic record, recording words

and laughter of the people living in the vicinity. A sensitive person could hear those voices and sounds impressed on the elementals. There are certain classes of elementals which preserve the record or pictures of houses and various occupations engaged in by the people. These elementals gather about a place which has not been occupied by human beings, throwing out or presenting the pictures of houses and busy life, thus beckoning people to come to that place and build. These pictures are seen by receptive men with an inner eye and they are impelled to begin the work of building. When these settlers have abandoned the place, the elementals preserve the record (in ether or astral light), and when man comes that way again, the pictures of human activity and houses are once again telepathically transmitted to the new brains, who begin the work of building. Sometimes, these cities, with its houses and roads, which were once occupied by men, are covered over by trees, and debris of all sorts, and then on the ruins of one city another city is built, writes Mr. Judge (*Heart Doctrine*, pp. 185-188). Thus, there are cities under cities, and great cities are built on the exact spots where others had stood long ago, as is the case of Troy, Babylon and Delhi. This building and rebuilding at the same spot happens because of the elementals in the atmosphere—carrying the thoughts of ancient peoples—which draw the new settlers to that spot, just as a magnet draws iron filings, and urge them to build.

These elementals do not know any rules of right or wrong but they act under the impulse in keeping with the laws pertaining to the plane of nature to which they belong. We might say they are like gunpowder or lightning. When gunpowder is ignited, it will invariably explode. Likewise, lightning strikes without regard for man, love, beauty or goodness. It will destroy alike an innocent person as wicked man, or burn the property of the good as of the bad person. It has always been said that fire elementals are the wisest, airy ones are also wise, but those of water are dangerous.

H.P.B. mentions some of the important Elemental Spirits which help in various tricks performed by the jugglers. These are wicked

elemental spirits, generically named *Madan*, which literally means, “one that looks like a cow.” *Shudala-Madan* is a half-fire, half-water demon which helps in transforming one form into another. When a juggler makes his audience see things such as snake, or any other object, which actually does not exist, he makes use of these elementals. *Shula-Madan* is described as furnace-demon, concerned with pottery and baking. It is with the aid of these elemental spirits that a juggler performs the feat of raising a tree from a seed, along with ripened fruit, in quarter of an hour. *Kumila-Madan* is undine proper (or spirits of water). He is concerned with feats related to water. Thus, the phenomena of producing rain, or divination by water, wherein future or the present is to be shown, are performed with the help of this class of elementals. *Porthu-Madan* seems to be earth elemental which is concerned with feats where physical force is required. Thus, he is used in the feats of levitation—rising above the ground, as also, in taming of wild animals, where he will help the performer by keeping him above the soil, or will overpower a wild beast before the tamer has time to utter his incantation. (*Isis*, I, 495-96)

The nature-spirits or elementals live in and through all objects and beyond the earth’s atmosphere. Normally, a human being contains the elementals of all the four kingdoms in almost equal proportions, any slight preponderance of one or the other determines the so-called “temperament,” writes H.P.B. In the article “Kabalistic Views on Spirits,” H.P.B. quotes the views of Paracelsus and Eliphas Levi, who suggest that the astral currents entering the body of the pregnant woman carry with them various types of elementals and help in the formation of the astral body of the child. Says Paracelsus: “The current of astral light with its peculiar inhabitants, gnomes, sylphs, etc., is transformed into human light at the moment of conception, and it becomes the first envelope of the soul—its grosser portion; combined with the most subtle fluids, it forms the sidereal (astral, or ethereal) phantom—the inner man.” Eliphas Levi suggests that at the birth of a child, these elementals influence the four

temperaments in a child. Thus, the element of the gnomes predominates in melancholy persons; of the salamanders in the sanguine; of the undines, in the phlegmatic; of the sylphs, in the giddy and bilious.

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

In *The Theosophist*, August 1883, H.P.B. gives an explanation of the invulnerability of mediums to fire, who can handle burning coals, red-hot iron and walk through the beds of blazing fire unscathed. She points out that some of these mediums can not only handle fire without being injured but also are known to have laid burning coals on the heads of non-mediums, as also, on paper and books, without injuring the person or property. This is because the medium contains an unusual proportion of fire-elementals or Salamanders in their constitution, which is the result of an abnormal combination of elemental forces in his foetal development.

(*To be concluded*)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Question: Could we regard the reading of the newspapers and watching of the television a hindrance to our spiritual growth?

Answer: What we read and what we see certainly leave an impression, and sometimes deeper than we suspect, on our minds. We are responsible for the use we make of our brain-mind. When it is used for the noblest purposes, it can evolve the most refined form of energy. A Newspaper is considered to be a storehouse of information and knowledge at the cheapest price. Mark Twain said, “If you don’t read the newspaper, you are uninformed. If you read the newspaper, you are mis-informed.” Probably because all that appears in the newspapers is not completely true. Some newspapers tend to exaggerate facts, while others tend to dilute the facts. Moreover, we need to be always discriminating and awake, rather than being passive receivers of views regarding sensitive social, religious or political issues that appear in the newspapers. A good newspaper could be a wonderful instrument for arousing public opinion, and spreading spiritual and moral ideas, as was done by Gandhiji’s *Harijan*.

Certainly, we must read the newspapers in order to be aware of what is happening in the world around us, but when we read the newspaper or any other book, disregarding the quality of the content, with the intention of killing time, *i.e.*, reading for the sake of reading, then we fill our mind with a mass of half-dead images. Reading trashy and sensational literature, in the newspapers or elsewhere, stupefies and degrades the mind, wastes time and energy, and makes our brains a mere storehouse of brute force, writes Mr. Judge.

We should choose with care the programmes we watch on television. Though entertaining, informative and at times educative, television watching could be both good and bad. Like all the electronic gadgets, there is always the danger of being addicted to television. In watching the television, it is important to ask ourselves, for how long we watch it. Before the advent of television, people used to be occupied with many other useful activities and hobbies during their pass time. Unlike in reading of the newspapers, television watching is the kind of relaxation which makes the viewer completely passive. A spiritual aspirant has especially to be careful, and see to it that there is not too much dependence on television to fill the void, or watching television does not alienate him from his family members and other human beings. Social connectedness is directly related to health and happiness. In fact, the more one advances spiritually, the easier it should be for him to sacrifice his recreational activities, such as watching television, for the sake of attending to the needs of another person.

The impressions made by what we read and what we see are stored in the conscious or unconscious memory. The article, “Phantasy and Psychism,” (*Theosophy*, November 1928), mentions that as soon as the mind is free from some pressing task, these pictures and impressions continually appear before the mind’s eye, and that is what practically forms the whole of the mental life of the majority of men and women, except when one is called upon to attend to some work. This faculty of evoking thoughts, images and impressions from the storehouse of memory is called *phantasy*. Newspapers, novels, certain kind of movies, television serials, advertisements, as also gossip, form a diet on which it grows luxuriantly. It is nourished and enlivened by all that we see, or hear, or read. Phantasy is automatic, wherein the Ego is not in the complete control. When there is intermittent control of the Ego, phantasy takes the form of day-dreaming. On the other hand, in the process of reasoning or imagination, there is conscious control of the Ego, and purposive rearrangement of thoughts and images in the mind.

Phantasy is the chief obstacle to meditation. We have to wage a war upon this rebellious faculty of ours. As soon as we sit down for meditation, and attempt to concentrate the mind, images, impressions and sensations from the past begin to troop through the brain. “If the mind be full of impressions, there is also a self-reproductive power in it which takes hold of these seeds of thought and enlivens them,” writes Mr. Judge. In the mind of the Adept phantasy has no place. He is all the time master in his own house, selecting and using just such impressions from without or within as he wishes; and at will shutting them off altogether.

Both, our psychic and mental natures require food. As we sincerely attempt to live the life, sit regularly for meditation, we would find that gradually our taste refines, and we will seek more depth and substance in that which feeds our mental and psychic natures. Whether it is reading of newspapers, books or watching movies and television, one has to use discrimination. “There is no help like association with those who think as we do, or like the reading of good books,” says Mr. Judge. He suggests that we may read the books, which by experience we have found to elevate our consciousness.

Question: We cannot write as beautifully as the machines write, as for instance, the work produced by typewriter or computer. Are not machines superior to man?

Answer: The marvels of the machines are many. Not only can a machine beautifully write, but it can apparently “think.” A good “thinking” machine can remember, classify, choose between alternatives on the basis of logic and, acting on past experience, can even correct itself; but activity of any one machine is strictly limited to the instructions with which it is fed, in the form of mathematical formulae or other code mechanisms. In spite of its speed, precision and infallibility, the most “intelligent” computer cannot correlate dissociated ideas and events spread out in time and space and present an original thought or an unexpected query.

Supporters of the theory of “Artificial Intelligence” feel it probable that computers and computer-guided robots will eventually—with their superior intelligence—make human beings superfluous. They have arrived at this conclusion by comparing the electronic circuitry of computers with the human brain. But, the brain is only an instrument of the mind. However, the same is not likely, because machines are automatic and fixed. A typewriter or a computer will give fixed output based on the way they are constructed or programmed. A machine has limitations and is dependent upon human intelligence. A machine is designed by human mind and a human mind is capable of designing a better machine, which can give better output. It is human mind that constructed typewriter, then electronic typewriter and finally computer. Moreover, it is not as if human mind is incapable of machine-like precision. The person who knows calligraphy can write even more beautifully than a machine.

In 1958 International Business Machines (IBM) had constructed a machine that was claimed to be able to produce an abstract of a scientific article of some 2000 words. The designer of the machine had figured out a “thought pattern” for the machine. It was to pick out as being significant those sentences which contained largest number of important words used most often in the article. A human operator had reduced the article to a magnetic tape, using an electrical code similar to the Morse telegraphic code—the beep-beep-beep that stands for different letters. The machine “read” the tape, counted the number of times particular words were used and chose the sentences containing the greatest number of those frequently used. After three minutes, the machine’s typewriter typed out the abstract, consisting of four sentences. Remarkable as it may sound, it is clear that whatever “thinking” was done by the machine, it was built into it by a human being in advance. The only thing that machines cannot do is creative thinking on their own.

We are made aware of the need, not only to distinguish between brain and machine, but also between the brain and the mind. Mind is not an epiphenomenon of matter, as some believe, and brain is

only an instrument of the mind. As far back as the 1930s Wilder Penfield who was a pioneer in the use of electrode stimulation of the brain, kept his patients fully conscious and stimulated various portions of the brain until he found the damaged tissue during epileptic treatment. These experiments gave rise to what Penfield termed “double consciousness”—the patient was fully aware of the hospital setting and his actions, and at the same time “reliving” the memories stored in the stimulated portions of the brain. At the end of extensive research he had this to say:

It seems to me certain that it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action within the brain, and because it seems to me that the mind develops and matures independently throughout an individual’s life as though it were a continuing element, and because a computer (which the brain is) must be programmed and operated by an agency capable of independent understanding, I am forced to choose the proposition that our being is to be explained on the basis of two fundamental elements. (*The Mystery of the Mind*, pp. 80 and 114)

To explain certain phenomena, such as, prophetic dreams and soul memory, distinction has to be made even between the higher (*Buddhi-Manas*) and the lower (*Kama-Manas*) mind. Not only can man create machines, but he has a greater and mysterious power of thought called *Kriyasakti*. A man-monster created by Frankenstein, in Mary Shelley’s mystic tale, which destroyed him after committing numerous atrocities, is said by one of the Masters to be a possibility in nature. Man is superior to machine on account of his self-consciousness and freedom of choice. Regardless of mechanical and chemical developments, the higher powers of the mind will remain, apparently, the undisputed prerogative of man. Unlike the machine, man has intuition and imagination, compassion and the will to create and to sacrifice and serve.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

According to World Health Organization figures, more than a million people commit suicide each year worldwide. There is a rising trend in youth suicide. Recently, a young actress of Indian cinema committed suicide because life seemed hopeless, as she was depressed over her career and her love life, making people wonder if suicide was the only remedy for pain. If death obliterates pain, it also obliterates hope. If she had remembered to look over the hill she would have seen the rising sun just waiting to break through the dark clouds. It is only when things cannot get any worse that they start getting better. She forgot that time is a great healer, and if given a chance, it would work a great wonder. “They say there is no greater sin than that of suicide because you are kicking god’s gift of life in the face and proving you are not worth it. If you believe in afterlife and rebirth, books on the subject suggest that people who quit life voluntarily without learning their life lessons are bound to be born to such lives again and again till the lesson is learnt. Life is not always easy and it is the duty of parents to ground their children and instill values that will help them deal with the tougher moments. And, it is our duty to ourselves that we learn to accept the brickbats with the bouquets, that we learn to deal with difficulties just as we learn to enjoy the benefits of life and living. There is no greater cowardice than enjoying your spot in the sun and quitting the stage the moment life gets a little rough,” writes Vinita Dawra Nangia.

Some of the reasons for increase in suicide rates are breakdown in traditional family system, financial insecurity and unemployment—with the young, it is pressure to perform, and to prove themselves repeatedly. Nothing is worth ending your life for, and hence a person contemplating suicide would do well to remember that “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Try to think of those who are less fortunate than you. “Look at life in its entirety and understand the smallness of your present depression. Never take a drastic step in the darkest moment. Things

will look better soon,” advises Vinita Nangia. (*Times Life!* [*Sunday Times of India*], June 16, 2013)

It is true that there has been unprecedented increase in the number of people committing suicide and some of them for trifling reasons. True and lasting happiness does not arise from money, amenities and luxuries of life, is the lesson which is generally learnt the hard way. Weakening family bonds and deteriorating human relationships wherein we are not sensitive to the needs and sorrows of another human being, are also to be blamed for increasing number of suicides. Modern man is too busy and has no time to listen to the problems of another and give him solace.

Ultimately, what we need is the right philosophy that by ending our life, we are trying to run away from a person or the situation in which we are placed under Karma, in this life. We may seem to succeed in escaping, but not forever. The fact is that even the most unbearable and painful situation we are placed in has come to us under Karma, and only we are responsible for it. All we need to do is to try and learn the necessary lesson, if we are unable to change it. In any of our next births we will be once again placed in that same situation from which we tried to escape by committing suicide, till we have learnt to handle that situation and learnt the lesson. Hence the advice is, “Accept the woes of birth.” “Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self.”

Theosophy also teaches that a person committing suicide finds himself in the astral atmosphere only partly dead, only minus the physical body. Such an entity moves around in the astral atmosphere, near the earth, wanting to satisfy certain desires but unable to do so in the absence of the body and the consequent risk of generating terrible karma by trying to satisfy them through some living body. If the person committed suicide at the age of thirty and his natural life term was seventy then the astral entity will remain in the astral atmosphere for next forty years, only after that there is final separation of the Ego from the lower principles.

How could values degenerate if God is omnipresent? When people see evil all around, they wonder if God really exists, and if he does, why does he not do anything to make things better. On the other hand, there are those who believe that God is omnipresent—present in every creature, and every particle. If God is everywhere, why are things going from bad to worse? Why should anyone pray? If we argue that God has given free will and all that is evil is the result of human failings, then what purpose is served by God’s omnipresence? The very act of prayer is contrary to belief in God’s omnipresence. If God is omnipresent why does he need to send messengers to mankind at different points in history in order to rid humanity of evils? If God is present everywhere in the world there should be no need to undergo penance in order to attain to *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth. The belief in the omnipresence of God is most likely an erroneous extension of God’s omnipotence. Since God is Almighty, the faithful believe that He is also present everywhere all the time. But if a person or thing is present somewhere, the qualities of that person or thing can be experienced there. For example, a jovial person spreads cheer, a kind person spreads kindness. Likewise, if God were present everywhere and in everyone, we should be experiencing His virtues and powers all the time. If God were omnipresent, the world would not witness any moral or spiritual degradation that would necessitate His intervention. Mistaken beliefs, including that of an omnipresent God, are the result of human ignorance. Those who truly love God can experience His company everywhere and at all times. His powers and virtues are boundless but for that reason He need not be omnipresent. (*Purity*, June 2013)

In theosophy God is described as an omnipresent, omnipotent, immutable Principle. Perhaps, to admit that God is not omnipresent is to accept that God is finite—probably a person sitting on a golden or lotus throne, on the outskirts of a planetary chain or a solar system. God, in theosophy, is symbolized by Absolute Abstract Space. Space is really the container of everything—itself limitless, without

beginning or an end. It remains unchanged by presence or absence of objects contained within it. Coming into existence of the Solar systems and Galaxies or their destruction has no effect on Space. There are two aspects of One Reality or God: transcendental and immanent. In the *Gita*, Shri Krishna says, “I created this whole universe with a single portion of myself and yet remain separate,” alluding to His transcendental aspect. The Eighth Chapter of the *Gita* is entitled, “Devotion to the Omnipresent Spirit named as Om.” This Omnipresent Spirit refers to *Atman* or Spirit or Life or Consciousness which pervades and animates all worlds and beings.

The Spirit or the Self shines in all but it does not shine forth equally in all. It is the Great or Eternal Spectator mentioned in the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita*, which has been observing the drama of evolution. *Atma*, the One Life, mirrored in *Buddhi*, or *Atma-Buddhi* monad, is the *Eternal Spectator*. The *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* triad is the *Eternal Pilgrim*, which is the experiencer, the sufferer, the enjoyer who learnt in the mineral and grew in the vegetable and moved in the animal, and acts, feels, wills and thinks in the human. The Spirit in man has nothing to learn, and it does not evolve, but from it comes the power to create, to preserve, to destroy and to regenerate. The God in us, though omnipotent on its own plane, is quite helpless on our plane, till it is reflected in or assimilated by *Manas* or Mind. Mind is dual: (1) When involved in desires and passions, it is *kama-manas*, making man an animal-man, leading to degeneration of values. (2) When mind turns to the God within, the divine nature, it makes man divine, and then a human being is able to manifest all the virtues of kindness, compassion, fearlessness, as also, other “god-like” qualities.

H.P.B. writes: “Eastern wisdom teaches that spirit has to pass through the ordeal of incarnation and life, and be baptized with matter before it can reach experience and knowledge. After which only it receives the baptism of soul, self-consciousness, and may return to its original condition of a god, *plus* experience, ending with omniscience,” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 26*, p. 8). Each one of us

is *essentially* and *potentially* divine, which we must actualize. When we are able to transcend the self-identifying attachment to not only family and loved ones, but also to physical form, ideas, desires, emotions, and overcome all sense of separateness, we reach the realization that “I am verily the Brahman,” while we are in the body. The *Avatars* and messengers come to this world, again and again, to remind us of the presence of the divinity within us.

The journey of life is journey to enlightenment, and it consists in cultivation of *bodhicitta*, *i.e.*, awakened and noble heart and mind. On this journey we are moving towards a whole new way of thinking and feeling, and a new way of perceiving reality. In this *bodhicitta* helps us to connect directly with *what we already have*. *Bodhicitta* is available when we feel gratitude, appreciation and love, or in any moment of tenderness or happiness. Once we learn to acknowledge these moments and cherish them, then no matter how tiny this good heart may seem, it will gradually, at its own speed expand. But *bodhicitta* is available to us even in the hardest of feelings like rage, jealousy, envy or deep-rooted resentment, provided we acknowledge them with open mind and heart and realize that these feelings are shared by all of us. Such awareness endows us with the capacity to soften and dissolve the barriers between ourselves and others.

In cold countries like Nova Scotia the lake gets so hard during winter that people can drive their cars and trucks on them. But that ice melts when spring comes, and we get back the essential fluid, and find that the quality of water had not disappeared. The essential good heart and open mind of *bodhicitta* is like that. At times, our minds and hearts are so frozen, that nothing seems to be able to melt them. But then we must make a special effort to melt that hardness by *generating more warmth*. A good way to do this is to think of a

person, a pet or a plant, towards whom we feel appreciation or love or gratitude. In other words, we begin by trying to connect with the warmth we already have. Another way is to think of a person or a situation which evokes the feeling of compassion. “Compassion is our capacity to care about others, and our wish to alleviate their pain...*Love and compassion are like weak spots in the wall of ego.* They are like a naturally occurring opening,” writes Pema Chodron, a Buddhist nun. (*The Speaking Tree*, [*Sunday Times of India*], June 23, 2013)

Mind is the reason for our freedom and our bondage. We must aim at acquiring creative mind or enlightened mind. The creative mind *responds*, instead of reacting. The creative mind loves *unconditionally*. Unconditional love or *Dana* is the first requirement on the spiritual path, and it is the first step we can take from our natural goodness. A spiritual man has *Mahaprajna* (or Great Spiritual Insight) and *Mahakaruna* (or Great Compassion).

When we practise love and charity we are in a totally different state of mind than when we are bent upon taking revenge. *The Voice of the Silence* compares charity with a “sunny glade in the dark forest depths, a spot on earth mirrored from Amitabha’s paradise.” Imagine journeying through a dark forest, with its terrifying darkness, and then walking along, when you come across a “sunny glade,” *i.e.*, a patch of ground free from darkness, you feel great joy and relief. Our everyday consciousness, or our consciousness when we harbour thoughts of criticism, anger, hatred or dislike for another, is like the dark forest. But when we consciously entertain thoughts of good will, affection, love and charity, we create in our consciousness a “sunny glade.” This state of mind is like a “spot on earth mirrored from Amitabha’s paradise,” *i.e.*, it is as if our consciousness temporarily reflects the purity and clarity of Amitabha Buddha’s consciousness.