

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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ON BUDDHIST MEDITATION

BUDDHIST meditation, scientifically pursued, produces a progressive psychical transmutation, which profoundly modifies character and develops intelligence. The detachment and serenity experienced during hours of meditation, penetrates one's whole life, leads to selflessness and permits one to look upon life impersonally. Such is the view of the practitioners of Buddhist meditation. There are meditation practices in Buddhism which aim at cultivating mindfulness or awareness, as also, cultivating positive emotions, and acknowledging and eradicating negative emotions.

Buddhist meditations are divided into two major categories—*Samatha* and *Vipassana*. *Samatha* refers to any meditation practice which aims at development of higher states of consciousness, by cultivating mental integration, which manifests as concentration and calmness of mind. *Vipassana* refers to meditation practice that aims at gaining *insight* into real nature of things. Mindfulness of breathing and *Metta Bhavana* meditation are both *Samatha* practices, which prepare the mind for *Vipassana*, by establishing concentration and emotional positivity.

Our mind is generally diffused over many things. It is pulled in diverse directions by hundred cords of desire. The Mindfulness of Breathing practice helps us to cultivate concentration of mind, by counteracting distraction. In this meditation practice breath is used as an object of concentration. The method consists in giving

continuous attention to the flow of breath, coming in and going out. Whenever we find our attention wavering, we must bring it back and put it back on the breath. The seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path is described as “Perfect Awareness” or “Perfect Mindfulness.” There are several levels of awareness. In *The Dhammapada* we are asked to be watchful or mindful of bodily-irritation, speech-irritation and mind-irritation. It is precisely because we are not mindful of things as they really are that we lack clear understanding of suffering and its causes. Explaining “Mindfulness,” Thubten Chodron, an American-born Tibetan nun, mentions *Vipallasa Sutra*, in which the Buddha describes four distortions of the mind whereby things are grasped in a way that is opposite to how they actually are. We have to be aware of *transient* nature of people and things, recognizing the impermanence of body. We have to be mindful of *unsatisfactoriness*, being mindful that things which bring pleasure also bring problems. We must be mindful of *unattractiveness*, knowing that all conditioned beings are subject to decay, and therefore should not be distressed at ageing. Lastly, we need to be mindful of *selflessness*, *i.e.*, becoming aware that real “I” is not the body, mind, emotions, or any of the changing aspects.

However, besides practising mindfulness, it is important to establish contact with our positive and negative emotions. *Brahmavihara* is a term in Pali and Sanskrit, variously translated as *divine abodes*, *divine emotions*, or *sublime attitudes*. These are four positive aspects of perfect emotion. They are four wholesome emotions, which include *maitri* or *metta*, meaning loving kindness or friendliness; *karuna* or compassion; *mudita* or sympathetic joy and *upeksha* or *upekkha* meaning tranquility or equanimity. These are four Buddhist virtues which are recommended in *Brahmavihara Sutta*, to be developed by every person, endlessly, and without limit. These are explained in *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, written by the scholar and commentator Buddhaghosa. There are four meditational practices connected with cultivation of these qualities or attitudes.

Metta Bhavana meditation helps to cultivate loving kindness by counteracting hatred. The first step consists in concentrating on oneself and becoming aware of one’s thoughts and emotions, and sending out thoughts of friendliness and kindness towards oneself and wishing happiness for oneself. The next stage is visualizing an image of a good friend and sending out strong feelings of loving kindness towards him. Next, we may visualize the image of a neutral person, someone towards whom we do not have feelings of either like or dislike, and then try to wish him happiness with all our heart, by generating intense feeling of loving kindness for him. Then we must make a mental image of some “difficult person,” with whom we do not get along, or who does not like us. Make a special effort and do not allow the feeling of animosity or dislike to come in the way, and try to generate a response of loving kindness even for this person. In the fifth stage, we make a mental image of our own self along with the other three people, *viz.*, our friend, the neutral person and the difficult person, and then develop the feeling of loving kindness towards each of them in equal measure. In the last stage, one has to expand the circle of loving kindness so as to include all the people in the family, in the building, in the locality, in the office, in the city, nation, and the whole universe.

Metta or loving kindness is a powerful positive emotion. We are asked to develop loving kindness towards all living beings. There must be overwhelming desire and wish, “May *all* the beings be happy.” A Bhikkhu must pervade all the four quarters of the world with thoughts of loving kindness. He is expected to practice the virtue of loving kindness to the hilt. In the *Parable of the Saw Discourse* the monks are advised that even if bandits were to cut them up limb by limb with a saw, they should train themselves to remain full of concern and pity, and project thoughts of loving kindness towards the bandits.

In the book, *Buddhist Meditation*, by Edward Conze, we are given the antidotes recommended by Buddha, to his disciples, to overcome hatred or anger for another. Thus, whenever one’s mind

is filled with anger or hatred towards another, one must reflect thus: When I am angry I reduce myself to a state my enemy wishes for me. First of all, even if I am dressed well and may have had my bath, I look ugly when I am overcome by anger. My enemy wishes that I should sleep badly, be without good things of life, without reputation and without friends, and when I die, I should be born in the place of woe. That is exactly what happens when I indulge in hatred and anger. If such reflection does not help to appease one's aversion for another, then one should try to dispel his malice by recalling some peace-bringing and pure quality in one's enemy. Each one has some redeeming quality. Try to dwell on good quality of your enemy, and if possible even try to bring that out in your conversation with other people. If even this does not help, then the disciple should recall the instances from Buddha's former lives (before he reached enlightenment) when he showed great love and compassion towards his enemy. If even such reflection fails to appease one's malice, then, one should contemplate on what is said about worldly life, *i.e.*, "It is not easy, monks, to find a being who has not in the past been one's mother, or one's father, brother, sister, son or daughter." Hence, it would help to think that perhaps this individual might have been my mother in the past birth, who sheltered me for nine months in her belly, who removed my urine, my excrement, spittle, snot, etc., without complaining, carried me on her hips and brought me up.

If the disciple is still unable to pacify his heart, he must contemplate on the advantages of practising loving kindness. Lord Buddha has said that when loving kindness has been made a firm foundation of one's character, eleven advantages can be expected: One sleeps at ease, wakes up at ease, sees no bad dreams, he is dear to men, he is dear to ghosts, and is protected by the gods. Also, he is not affected by fire, poison and sword. He is able to concentrate his mind quickly, his features are serene, he dies un-bewildered, and even if he may not penetrate any further, he is one who goes up to *Brahmaloka* or Brahma's world. (pp. 118-133)

In the book, *Meditation—The Buddhist Way of Tranquility and Insight*, the author, Kamalashila, a member of the Western Buddhist Order, while describing the four *brahmaviharas*, gives an outline of each quality by describing its "near enemy" and "far enemy." The "near enemy" is a negative quality which we tend to mistake for the true quality. The "far enemy," is the opposite negative quality. For instance, the near enemy of *metta* or loving kindness is sentimental attachment, and the far enemy of *metta* is hatred. *Metta* must be gradually refined, till it is free from any expectations, and is merely a desire for another person's happiness and growth.

We know that for someone who is suffering, in addition to loving kindness, we should want to relieve his suffering, by developing a deeper response, that of compassion. There are seven stages of *Karuna Bhavana meditation*, similar to *metta bhavana* meditation. It is not very easy to handle suffering of another person. The two near enemies of compassion are sentimental pity and horrified anxiety, because it is possible to mistake them for compassion. "Sentimental pity," is when we feel sorry for the suffering person, but make no attempt to understand or alleviate his suffering. The opposite or "far enemy" of compassion is cruelty.

Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, points out that in one of the Mahayana Sutras Buddha is represented as saying that if one has only compassion for the sufferings of other living beings, then in due course all other virtues, all other spiritual qualities and attainments, will follow. This is illustrated by a moving story from modern Japan. There was a young man who having led an easy life, decided to enter a Zen monastery and become a monk. When he expressed his wish to become a monk, the abbot in the monastery asked him if there was anything he was good at. The young man replied that he was good at playing chess. Then a very old monk was called and the young man was asked to play the game of chess with this monk, with the condition that whoever lost the game, his head would be cut off. As the game proceeded, the monk seemed to be winning. Hence, the young man played with greater

concentration, and it looked almost sure that he would win the game. But then he looked at the face of the old monk and thought, “My life is no use to anybody. This monk has led such a good life, and he is going to have to die.” His heart was filled with compassion, and he deliberately began to make wrong moves. Just when it was sure that the young man would lose the game, the abbot upset the chessboard saying to the young man, “You have learned two things today: concentration and compassion. Since you have learned compassion—you’ll do.” So long as there was feeling of compassion, there was hope for this apparently worthless man.

Not only should one feel compassion for the poor, for the suffering, for the evildoer, but also for the person who may be happy. The disciple of the Buddha feels compassion for the world of deluded mortals, knowing that although a person who is temporarily happy, and enjoying his possessions, is bound to come to grief because of the impermanence of conditioned existence.

Mudita or sympathetic joy is a feeling of joy or gladness in the happiness and well being of others. It is possible to share in happiness of another when we are ourselves in a happy and positive state of mind. But generally we experience a tinge of jealousy or even unhappiness at another’s success or achievement. If we are honest to ourselves, we will admit that at times, we feel a subtle satisfaction at the misfortune of another person. In a similar Buddhist practice called “rejoicing in merits,” one appreciates the good qualities of other people. In our times, when newspapers and news channels highlight ugly side of human nature, it is essential and important to dwell on the good works and virtues of our friends and neighbours. We might dwell on the inspiring example of Gandhiji, Albert Schweitzer, Mother Teresa and many other lesser known individuals, and learn to appreciate and rejoice in their virtues and noble deeds.

The *Mudita Bhavana meditation* begins by first developing the feeling of loving kindness. The next step consists in directing that loving kindness towards someone who we find as being particularly happy and joyful. They might be happy for a while, or they are

happy because of wealth, or position or success in life. We must be able to congratulate them on their good fortune and earnestly wish that their happiness continues for a long time. We have to continue the meditation by developing in us the feeling of appreciative and sympathetic joy towards a friend, a neutral person and an enemy, by dwelling particularly on their good qualities and their happiness. In the next step, we should rejoice in our own merits and good qualities, just as we rejoice in merits of others. The opposite or far enemy of *mudita* is envy or resentment. The near enemy of *mudita* is very subtle, wherein we indulge in a kind of vicarious enjoyment, without actually being appreciative of them. We may be only deriving some sentimental kind of satisfaction from our *idea* of their happiness, writes Kamalashila.

These three meditation practices lead to higher levels of consciousness and form a foundation for the fourth, viz., *Upekkha Bhavana* meditation. It is only after we have learnt to appreciate joys and sorrows of others that we are ready to practice equanimity. We begin *Upekkha Bhavana* meditation by developing a feeling of loving kindness and then try to become emotionally aware of the joys and sorrows, first of a neutral person, then of a friend and then of an enemy. We must become aware that they are responsible for the situation they are in, and yet respond to their *conditionedness* with *metta*. The quality of patient understanding will slowly inculcate the feeling of equanimity. The far enemy of *Upekkha* or equanimity is cold, hardened and fixed indifference. The near enemy is neutrality, lukewarmness or lack of interest. The main purpose of this meditation is to be aware of the feeling of indifference in us, and try to feel love equally strongly towards all. The quality of equanimity is a positive emotion that is combined with a powerful element of insight. It is not to be forgotten that the sentiments of Love, Compassion, Sympathy and Serenity are not exclusively reserved for human beings, but are to be radiated toward *all that lives*.

TO HELP AND TEACH OTHERS

THE U.L.T. (United Lodge of Theosophists) welcomes to its association all those who are in accord with its declared purposes and who desire to fit themselves, by study and otherwise, to be the better able to help and teach others. A mere desire to acquire knowledge is not enough. When any person signs the form in which he records his desire to be enrolled as an Associate, he by that act tacitly accepts the proposition that he will equip himself for two purposes which would be paramount. Once equipped by study and the other means available to him, the Associate is expected to aid and to teach. The aid which the Associate is expected to offer is special and so is the Teaching he has to promulgate. Both constitute two avenues of expression, but have one purpose only, namely, that the Associate lead his neighbour on to the right path. To the Associate, his own advance is secondary. Each of these avenues demands discrimination of a high order. Sentimental aid has been known to produce harmful effects in the long run. Adulterated teachings have been the cause of frustration, and often of misshapen lives. On the other hand, where special care is not taken, the act of promulgation may build a personal following and induce the dangerous state of self-incense. It is dangerous because it is agreeable and it may succeed where other allurements have failed to shake the aspirant.

There is a bond which binds the Associate to the U.L.T., to all other Associates, as well as, to all true Theosophists the world over. That bond is the common aspiration to serve humanity on the lines laid down by the great Founders of the Movement. This aspiration must find its channel of expression in the Associate's life. Service means work, and most often hard, unrequiting work. Often, one worker does not see eye to eye with another. Being human, there still lurk germs of jealousy, pride and combativeness. Is the aspirant strong enough to wade through these when they appear in himself or when they confront him through his own co-workers, the brethren of his own Theosophical household? In the world outside, there are

persons who claim to be Jesus; others who claim successorship to spiritual thrones; and others still who offer salvation for a fee. Since organizations for the spreading of Theosophy get their recruits from the outside world, the Associate has to be prepared to meet such claims both from without and from within, and remain unruffled and undiverted from his task.

The study required for Theosophical service may at first sight appear drab and dull and uninspiring; but it is nevertheless a study that reveals men's Souls. This type of study is qualitatively different from study undertaken for self-advancement or for the mere acquirement of learning. What knowledge best equips one for service? The answer must be that any knowledge which helps the learner to ameliorate the suffering of humanity or which enables one to bring comfort and strength to the harassed mind is the knowledge essential for service. It is true that in his efforts at enlightenment he will come across knowledge that is arcane and is so potent that in the hands of the unscrupulous and the ignorant it may become productive of great harm. Such knowledge is not for passing on. When it does dawn upon the aspirant, it has thereafter to return into silence and secrecy, but nevertheless into a hidden force that colours his life and ennobles it, which suffuses his service and makes it warm and sympathetic and creative of lasting good.

True knowledge comes from planes for which the physical has neither eyes nor ears. When it does come, it brings in its train a deep satisfaction, a repose, a strength and a spontaneous urge to help and to bless. The knowledge that transmutes service into sacrifice comes from on high. To obtain this, the devotee has to retire into the closet, isolate himself from all sights and sounds, internal as well as external. Then, as the yearning of the questing soul reaches its peak, there springs into being the light of knowledge—a knowledge moreover that is the need of the hour, for the “Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”

Unless he has irretrievably dedicated himself to the Cause of human Brotherhood, he is liable to sink back into the old ruts.

Teachings imparted in worldly centres of learning do not require nor aim at the surrender of one's personal humanity. They in fact laud rivalry even to the point of unbrotherly behaviour. As he delves deeper into his studies, the student comes to realize that for the true service of humanity, he has to adjure for ever the use of all weapons of offence and defence.

On all planes of consciousness where thought struggles to be free, there must the engines of aid be ready to the Associate's hand. These engines and equipment are not provided by study alone. Introspection provides one more kind; the struggle against one's lower nature, another; the inculcating of a spirit of charitableness towards the weaknesses of others, a third. But even all these could be of no great avail unless there is added to them a rapport—a sense of harmony between the Teacher and the pupil, the donor and the beneficiary. It is the prerogative of the devoted Associate that he draw out of his listeners or correspondents faith, hope and dedication. An unfortunate inflection of sound, a reluctant or even hesitant approach, a holier than thou attitude may repel a person who otherwise would have been an appropriate subject for help.

Experience shows that quite a few of those who volunteer for service seem to feel that they have attained the ultimate in their effort to qualify for service. Speakers sometimes lower their voices till they are no longer audible—a failing rarely met with on a dramatic stage. Devotion to the interest of others demands and insists that one give of one's best. That best comes only through a critical review of the work done. Sensitiveness to criticism is a great handicap in this effort. So is indifference to the reactions of others. The endeavour to give help and assistance, the presenting of the Teachings through lucid and convincing expositions and the building of a feeling of oneness and solidarity among co-workers require the fairy touch which comes only through the living of the life. Where harmony between word and act is established, there an aspect of spirituality is vitalized and calmness pervades the atmosphere.

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE WORLD—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Lokavaggo* or "The World." *Loka* in Sanskrit means a tract, region, district, country, province, etc. It also means world or the universe or any division of it. *Lokas* are commonly enumerated as heaven, earth and the lower regions or the nether world or Hades. A fuller classification gives seven worlds. These are, *Bhur-loka*—the earth, *Bhuvar-loka*, the space between the earth and sun inhabited by *Munis* and *Siddhas*; *Svar-loka*, Indra's heaven above the sun or between sun and the polar star; *Mahar-loka*, a region above the polar star, inhabited by Bhrigu and other saints who survive the destruction of the lower worlds; *Jana-loka*, inhabited by Brahma's sons, Sanatkumars; *Tapar-loka* inhabited by deified *Vairagins*; *Satya-loka* or *Brahma-loka*, the abode of Brahma, having gone there, the man is exempt from rebirth. Sometimes fourteen worlds, such as found in the Egyptian system, are also mentioned—seven above and seven below. The seven lower regions, in the order of their descent below earth, are called—*A-tala*, *Vitala*, *Su-tala*, *Rasa-tala*, *Tala-tala*, *Maha-tala* and *Patala*. *Loka* also means inhabitants of the world. (*A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by Sir Monier-Williams)

Various states of consciousness are like different worlds in which the person exists. Various *lokas* correspond to various states of consciousness. The arrival of exceedingly happy news may put us in seventh heaven, and ignominy or loss of self-esteem can plunge us into darkest hell. These states are very "real" for the person while his consciousness functions on that plane. From the point of view of a sleeping man, dreams and dream-state are real. But when he wakes up, he realizes his folly and calls them unreal. As compared to waking state, dream state is unreal. So also, from the point of view of One Reality, this world is unreal. Anything that is changing is impermanent and hence unreal. It is Buddha's intention to draw our attention to the illusory nature of this world. There is allusion to

two kinds of realities. There is *Samvritti Satya* or relative reality and *Parmartha Satya*, which is Absolute reality—unaffected by change. Those who have grasped the unreal and illusionary nature of the world are like fortunate birds who have escaped hunter's net.

The great ideal of Buddhist discipline, the Bodhisattva ideal, is to realize the impermanent nature of things and remain in this world without attachments. The story goes that when a beautiful courtesan wanted to go across the river, a Bhikkhu carried her in his hands and put her down on the other shore. Another Bhikkhu reprimanded him for carrying a woman in his hands. The first Bhikkhu then told him: "I left her at the shore, but *you* are still carrying her."

1. *Do not follow the law of evil. Do not live heedlessly. Do not follow the false doctrine. Do not befriend the ways of the worldly. (167)*

2. *Be watchful. Be not heedless. Follow the Law of Virtue. The virtuous live happily in this world now and also in the hereafter. (168)*

3. *Follow the Law of Virtue. Do not follow the law of sin. The virtuous live happily in this world now and also in the hereafter. (169)*

In these verses, the Buddha lays down certain dos and don'ts. He tells us to abandon the law of evil, heedlessness and false doctrines. The world may not consider anything objectionable if we do not pay attention to this advice, but since the "ways of the world" is not the correct yardstick, we are asked not to befriend the ways of the worldly. Leo Tolstoy realized this fact late in life at the age of fifty. In his book, *A Confession*, he writes:

I cannot think of those years without horror, loathing and heartache. I killed men in war, and challenged men to duels in order to kill them; I lost at cards, consumed the labour of the peasants, sentenced them to punishments, lived loosely and deceived people. Lying, robbing, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder—there was no crime I did not commit, and for all that, people praised my

conduct, and my contemporaries considered me to be a comparatively moral man.

Buddha's injunction is to abandon sin, to be watchful and obey the law of virtue and not the voice of the world. By so doing one can obtain happiness here and also in the hereafter. Customs and social norms undergo change, and what is considered virtuous may become unacceptable later on. For instance, the practice of Sati, untouchability, etc., which had the sanction of the society are no longer considered virtuous today. What may be right according to one custom may be wrong according to another. A Christian would remove his hat as a mark of respect, while a Sikh or a Muslim would cover his head as a mark of respect while praying to God. Therefore, it is best to follow the Law of Virtue or ethics. It is universal, constant and consistent. Steal not, kill not, shun drugs and drinks, do not commit adultery, bear not false witness, be humble, be charitable, be kind, love one another, forgive those that wrong you, and many such injunctions have been given to mankind in every true religion. Mr. Crosbie's suggestion is:

In considering a question bearing on the ethics of any case, we have first to be sure that we have no prejudices or preconceptions that can interfere with correct conclusions; in other words, "to be free from hard and fast conclusions as to men, things and methods." If we are thus free, we will not be liable to be swayed by the general classifications of good and evil, so common in the world. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 39)

4. *Look upon the world as a bubble. Look upon it as a mirage. Death looks not at him who looks upon the world thus. (170)*

5. *Come, look at this world; it is like a painted, ornate royal chariot. The foolish are sunk in it; the discerning are not glamoured by it. (171)*

Ignorance about the real nature of man and world is the root cause of our sorrow. The Buddha says: "Impermanent are all

conditioned beings. Full of pain are all conditioned beings. Unsubstantial are all conditioned beings. He who knows this ceases to be in the thrall of grief.” One who knows that the world and all things and beings are evanescent, would not run after fleeting things of life. World is like a bubble—short-lived or transitory. Like a mirage, it is illusionary. When we fail to realize this, we get entangled in the world through our attachment and aversion. The foolish may be glamourized by the painted, ornate royal chariot, but not the wise. He knows that even “splendid chariots of kings wear away,” and finally get destroyed. They are not glamourized by it.

There are many levels at which we function. When we are asleep, the chasing tiger, the murderer and the dark shapes that torment us in dream are all real. But when we wake up, we know that they were unreal. What we do not realize is that even the waking state has only relative reality. *The Voice of the Silence* points out, “when to himself his form appears unreal, as do on waking all the forms he sees in dream; then only shall he forsake the region of *Asat*, the false, to come unto the realm of *Sat*, the true.” However, it does not mean that we should shun the world and people, but learn to discern the one reality underlying everything. The world has value because of that underlying reality; just as the quartz is valuable because of the particles of gold scattered in the quartz. When one acts from that basis he rises above karma, and rounds of life and death. Such a man is not compelled to take birth. Such a man is not disturbed even at the time of destruction of the world. He passes from one state to another without loss of consciousness. Such are the *Jivanmuktas* or *Nirmanakayas*. *Nirmanakayas* can assume and discard bodies at will. It is said: “He holdeth life and death in his strong hand.”

6. *He who was heedless but who now is restrained and reflective is like the moon freed from a cloud; he brightens the world. (172)*

7. *He who by his good deeds transforms his evil acts is like the moon when freed from a cloud. (173)*

8. *This world is wrapt in darkness. Only a few can see here. Only a few birds escape the net. Only a few escape into the heavenly light. (174)*

Darkness of ignorance surrounds the world. In the Seventh Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna tells Arjuna, “Among thousands of mortals a single one perhaps strives for perfection; and among those so striving, perhaps a single one knows me as I am.” As Coleridge puts it, out of millions of acorns, perhaps one develops into Oak tree. Majority of the acorns fail to develop into a new living tree. So it is with human beings. “The Adept is the efflorescence of his age, and comparatively few ever appear in a single century. Earth is the battle ground of moral no less than of physical forces; and the boisterousness of animal passions under the stimulus of the rude energies of the lower group of etheric agents, always tends to quench spirituality,” writes the Master. “An Adept becomes, he is not made,” was the motto of ancient Rosicrucians.

The power to dispel darkness is inherent in every one of us. But only few make the necessary effort and manage to escape the net. A Buddha, a Shankara, a Jesus is a rare efflorescence of the age. But, even they were “ordinary heedless mortals” like us. By self-restraint, reflection and altruism, they overcame evil. We can emulate them. When a man succeeds in doing this, he shines like the moon freed from a cloud and brightens the world.

While perfectibility is inherent in man, man has to make effort to become perfect. “The pivotal doctrine of Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnation.” It is by self-induced and self-devised efforts that man can ascend through all the degrees of intelligence and reach the terrace of enlightenment. This is one of the fundamental teachings of Theosophy.

(To be concluded)

ON SOMNAMBULISM OR SLEEP-WALKING

SOMNAMBULISM or “sleep-walking” is a sleep disorder. Somnambulism is defined as moving, acting, writing, reading and performing every function of waking consciousness in one’s sleep, with utter oblivion of the fact on awakening. This is one of the great psycho-physiological phenomena, the least understood as it is the most puzzling, to which Occultism alone holds the key (*The Theosophical Glossary*). A somnambulist not only walks during his sleep, but he is also known to sit up, eat, talk, drive, cook and even leave the house. Sleepwalking can also sometimes lead to violent behaviour, including murder.

For a long time, a sense of mystery surrounded the sleepwalking phenomena, until it was investigated by the 19th century German chemist and parapsychologist, Baron Reichenbach, who made extensive studies of sleepwalkers. Initially, sleepwalking was considered to be acting out of the dream by the dreamer. Thus, for instance, repressed hostile feelings in a person against one’s father would result in a dream, which dream would be acted out during sleepwalking, by actually murdering him. However, later, it was discovered that somnambulism mainly occurs when a person is in deep sleep or dreamless sleep state. Fatigue, lack of sleep and anxiety are associated with sleepwalking. Sleepwalking could also be the result of mental disorders or reaction to certain drugs and alcohol. In the novel *Heidi*, the main character begins to sleepwalk because of the feeling of homesickness. Likewise, in Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks because of her overwhelming guilt and insanity.

“Sleepwalking is most common in children, though it may also appear in adolescents and young adults. Sleepwalking becomes dangerous only when the possibility exists of the sleepwalker accidentally injuring himself. Sleepwalking is also considered to be a *hysterical dissociative* reaction, as are also the occasional dramatic cases of multiple personality” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Some

experts in psychology have observed that in the patients suffering from schizophrenia, hysteria and anxiety neuroses a higher incidence of sleepwalking events has been reported.

In the article, “Memory in the Dying,” H.P.B. mentions the case of a young girl who had been a sleep-walker up to her twenty-second year. She performed a variety of activities during her somnambulatory sleep, of which she had no memory upon awakening. During her waking hours she was open and frank, and very careless of her personal property, but in the somnambulatory state she would take articles belonging to herself or within her reach and hide them away with ingenious cunning. This habit was known to her friends, relatives and to the nurses who were engaged to watch her actions during her night rambles. But one night, the nurse fell asleep. The young girl began to walk in her sleep and entered her father’s study. That night her father, a renowned notary, was working till a late hour preparing a will, and just when he left the study for a few moments, the sleep-walker entered his study. She took the will left open upon the desk, as also a sum of several thousand pounds in bonds and notes. These she proceeded to hide in the hollow of two dummy pillars set up in the library. She left the study before her father returned, and hiding the will and the money in the hollow pillars, she retired to her own room without awakening the nurse who was still asleep in the armchair. The next day, the nurse denied that the young girl had left the room during the night. The loss of the will involved a lawsuit, almost beggared her father, and entirely ruined his reputation. About nine years later, the young girl suffered from consumption and died. However, at the dying moment she recollected and loudly confessed to having stolen the will and the money, and of having hidden the same inside one of the hollow pillars in the library. She asked the family members to search the hollow dummy pillar in the library, and then died. H.P.B. points out that it is a very strange episode because the hollow pillars were so high that a somnambulatory person could not have reached the top of the column even by climbing on a chair, or even with plenty of time

at her disposal. The sleep-walker had managed to drop the money and the will within the hollow column without a ladder or a chair, and that too within few minutes. However, ecstasies and convulsionists seem to possess an abnormal facility for climbing blank walls and leaping even to the tops of trees, writes H.P.B. Moreover, this incident shows that the somnambulant person possesses an intelligence and memory of his own apart from the physical memory of the waking lower Self.

In recent times, there have been reports of sleepwalking people exhibiting complex behaviour while asleep. In December 2008, reports were published of a woman who sent semi-coherent e-mails while sleep-walking. In one e-mail she even invited a friend for dinner and drinks. On waking up, she had no memory of having sent these e-mails. Experts observe that such complex behaviour, involving turning on of the computer, connecting the Internet, remembering the password and writing an e-mail, which require co-ordinated movements, has not been reported before in sleepwalking.

In *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. mentions that in somnambulism, the external senses of a sleeper are completely paralyzed and inner, astral senses are brought into action. In an experiment, some persons were put to somnambulant sleep. These mesmerized somnambulists were found to be insensible to noises, such as, the sound of copper vessels or that of a heavy object falling to the ground. Somnambulant subjects were made to respire hydrochloric acid or ammonia, but they did not show any signs of irritation or inconvenience. Likewise, they showed no signs of being aware, when their nostrils, ears or feet were tickled with a feather. There is the case of a person who remained completely insensible through one of the most painful operations of surgery, and did not manifest the slightest emotion of pain on his face. Moreover, in the state of somnambulism, there seems to be development of new faculties, such as, clairvoyance, intuition and internal prevision. Two people in a state of somnambulism could distinguish the objects placed before them,

with their eyes shut. They could tell the colour and value of the cards; in the books opened randomly, they could tell some of the lines on the opened page. Two somnambulists exhibited the power of foreseeing. One of them predicted, several months in advance, almost accurately, the day, the hour, and the minute when epileptic fits would come on, while the second person predicted the time of cure. Their previsions were realized with remarkable exactness. In Sir B. Brodie's *Psychological Inquiries* and Macnish's *The Philosophy of Sleep*, are found many examples of the exaltation of the mental and psychic powers in the somnambulant state, writes H.P.B.

The perceptions of a sleep-walker are acuter and far more developed. The somnambulant works with closed or sightless eyes, and equally well in the dark as in the light. There is the interesting case of a young ecclesiastic, reported by the Archbishop of Bordeaux, and mentioned in French *Encyclopaedia*, who in the dead of night and in perfect darkness wrote sermons and music.

H.P.B. mentions in *Transactions* (p. 34), "The philosophy of Mysticism," a work by Du Prel, in which he cites a number of authenticated cases of somnambulists who, like clairvoyants, were able to perceive by the pit of the stomach. The persons in the somnambulant or deep sleep state listen to the stomach and rubbing it lightly with the forefinger, answer all questions put to them. It is as if there were two brains; one in the head and another in the stomach. While brain in the head coordinates and threads through the memory of waking state, the brain in the stomach seems to be doing that during sleep state. It is said that there is a bundle of sympathetic nerves or ganglionic nervous system in the pit of the stomach or solar plexus. During waking state the cerebral nervous system and the ganglionic nervous system act independent of each other, separated by psycho-physical threshold or threshold of sensation. However, in the deep sleep, the two seem to merge. In large number of cases, the somnambules were able to *see* with their stomachs, various parts of the body, and identify the block or disease,

and even prescribe correct remedy. Du Prel calls this an instinct, or idea which lies below the psycho-physiological threshold, which he says belongs to the consciousness of the inwardly waking transcendental Ego.

The pit of the stomach is the area of Solar Plexus or Umbilical centre. The ancients placed the astral soul of man, or his self-consciousness, in the pit of the stomach. The Brahmans shared this belief with Plato and other philosophers. Many of the Sanskrit scholars agree that this belief is one of the most ancient among the Hindus. The modern fakirs, as well as the ancient gymnosophists, by concentrating their whole thought on their navel, unite themselves with their *Atman* and the Deity. As in modern somnambulant phenomena, the navel was regarded as “the circle of the sun,” the seat of internal divine light. A number of somnambulists are able to read letters, hear, smell, and see, through their stomach. In modern Persia, when a “magician” is consulted upon occasions of theft and other puzzling occurrences, he makes his manipulations over the pit of his stomach, and so brings himself into a state of clairvoyance, writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, p. xxxix)

In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. points out that the servant-girls in a poor farm-house could speak Hebrew and play the violin in their trance or somnambulant state, and knew neither when in their normal condition, because, in that state the lower personal self is paralyzed, so that the Spiritual Ego, being omniscient or all-knowing, is able to act.

A person in somnambulant trance appears to be dead, as the body is colourless and pulseless, the muscles become rigid, animal-heat disappears, and eyes are glazed. H.P.B. cites the case of Colonel Townshend who used to say that he could die when he pleased and yet, by an effort, or *somehow* he could come to life again. Even medical men were fooled into thinking that he had really died, while he was only in a somnambulant trance.

The study of nervous diseases has established that during ordinary as well as mesmerized somnambulism, the weight of the subject is

considerably diminished, so that, in somnambulant condition the body of the subject would float on water instead of sinking. In ecstatic subjects, the rising in the air occurs more frequently than in somnambulists.

H.P.B. mentions in *Isis Unveiled* (I, 264) that *Diktamnon* or *Dictamnus* is a curious plant possessing very occult and mystical properties and was sacred to the Moon-Goddesses, Luna, Astarte and Diana. The Cretan name of goddess Diana was Diktynna, and as such the goddess wore a wreath made of this *magic* plant. The *Diktamnon* is an evergreen shrub whose contact, as claimed in Occultism, *develops* and at the same time *cures* somnambulism. Pharmacy attributes to the *Diktamnon* strongly sedative and quieting properties. Mixed with *Verbena* it will produce clairvoyance and ecstasy.

The Buddhists ascribed to the sapphire-stone a sacred magical power, for its polished and deep-blue surface produces extraordinary somnambulant phenomena. Blue is the most electric of all prismatic colours. The Buddhists assert that the sapphire produces peace of mind and equanimity; it produces a desire for prayer, and brings with it more peace than any other gem; but he who would wear it must lead a pure and holy life.

A HUSBAND and wife renounced the world and jointly undertook a pilgrimage to various religious shrines. Once, as they were walking on a road, the husband, being a little ahead of the wife, saw a piece of diamond on the road. Immediately he scratched the ground to hide the diamond, thinking that, if his wife saw it, she might perchance be moved by avarice and thus lose the merit of her renunciation. While he was thus busy, the wife came up and noticed the diamond, and reading his thoughts, asked him, “Why have you left the world, if you still feel the difference between the diamond and the dust?”

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA

MAN—MORTAL AND IMMORTAL

II

PRANIC currents circulate in the astral body as the blood does in the physical body. These currents may be purified or poisoned depending on the virtuous or vicious mode of life. Through the agency of the inner currents, the seeds of the diseases which are primarily located in the mind manifest themselves on the physical plane. The mesmeric and hypnotic healer is able to cure disease of another by imparting some of his own vitality or life to the patient. In the *Bible*, the woman with bloody discharge was cured when she touched the hem of garment of Jesus. However, as this very vitality may become the carrier of disease, mental or moral, if any, from the healer to the patient, unknown to them both, and deplete the vitality of the healer, there is danger for both of them.

The fourth principle is *Kamarupa* or the body of passions and desires. Mr. Judge tells us that desire principle has existence of its own and it is not merely the impulses from the body. Desires and passions are the cause of our rebirth in this or some other body through which we evolve. Since desire forms the basis of action and is the mover of the will, it is the most important principle. But our desires can be low or high, personal or spiritual, and from it the ways go up or down. No matter what we want to achieve, good or evil, we have to first arouse in ourselves a desire and persist in it in order to achieve the goal. It is said that when Buddha was a mere sweeper in one of his earlier incarnations, he saw the Buddha Deepankara and desired to become like him. This desire or a vow was kept alive by him in his heart through countless lives to become a Buddha himself.

Desire, along with the power of imagination, plays a crucial role in performance of many phenomena such as glamour, precipitation of letters, materialization of objects, etc., because, the will cannot act unless it is moved, directed and kept up to pitch by desire. Right now this principle is fully developed in man and rules over him.

Next is the principle of *Manas* or mind which distinguishes man from animals. Man can think and choose. He is a self-conscious being and has a power of apperception or introspection. He has free-will. Animals cannot act contrary to their inherent nature. Tiger, dove, cow or crow, each has a distinct inherent nature and instincts which it obeys. But man has power of reason. Using premises, he can come to conclusion. In animals, mind is still latent. In man, it has been lighted up by the divine intelligences or solar pitris, who had in their turn acquired this light from others in earlier periods of evolution, in other worlds. But according to science, mind is the result of molecular motions of the brain. The depth and variety of the brain convolutions are considered to be the *cause* of mind. Even the sublime emotion of love and moral sense are attributed to presence of certain chemicals in the brain. In occult philosophy, the brain is the instrument of the mind to function on this plane.

Manas is the link between the lower and the higher principles, and is the reincarnating Ego. In each incarnation, only a ray of it functions through the body as “incarnated mind,” which becomes dual as soon as it is attached to a body. One aspect gravitates towards *Buddhi*, and is heaven-aspiring. The other, tends downward, to the seat of passions and animal desires. As there is predominance of the desire principle now, mind is wholly occupied with pleasures of personal existence and enjoyment of sense objects. There is glorification of personality, exhibition of vanity, attention to display, sensuous art, and struggle for name, fame, power and position, sense gratification, sensuality, excessive attention to sexual desires. Also, if the Thinker becomes wholly intellectual without the heart quality, the entire nature begins to tend downward; “for intellect alone is cold, heartless and selfish.” But when the mind responds to the promptings from the Spirit within, animal man becomes human and humane, and human man becomes divine and immortal.

The higher trinity is *Atma*, *Buddhi* and Higher *Manas*. *Atma* is the universal principle. From it comes the power to perceive, power to act, power to know and power to become. Like sunlight, it shines

on all. *Buddhi* is vehicle of *Atman* and is compared to a lens which focuses the sun rays to a spot. Likewise *Atman* is no individual property of any man, it only overshadows the mortal. That which enters into him and pervades the whole body is the light of *Atman* radiated through *Buddhi*.

Buddhi is the highest power of intellection or spiritual discernment. *Buddhi* is the sublimated experience or the acquired wisdom of past lives as well as this one. *Buddhi* cannot act on this plane but through the principle of *Manas*. Its presence is experienced by us in terms of flashes of intuition. It speaks to the outer man as the *Voice of his Conscience*.

Having studied the nature of the seven principles, we understand that the lower four principles are evanescent and transitory. They are discarded at death. Only the higher three principles are unconditionally immortal. To become immortal, the incarnated consciousness or soul has to identify itself with the Higher Self and become united with it, while in body. From each life, only that which is spiritual, universal, impersonal and consubstantial with the immortal nature can partake of immortality.

All that we value in life—looks, status, qualification, name, fame, money, power etc., are dropped at the threshold of death. At death, only the undying qualities of the personality, such as love, goodness, charity, the love of the good, the true and the beautiful, impersonal appreciation for abstract and ideal things such as music, painting, poetry, etc. attach themselves to the immortal Self and become part of it. All that which is purely personal, sensuous, selfish, wicked, vain, proud, egoistic, unsympathetic, unkind, uncharitable, cruel, vicious, greedy, etc. form the shell which is finally left behind to form the karmic tendencies, to be conquered in future lives. They form the magnetic link with the immortal man and cause it to be reborn again after its stay in heaven. Thus, in an average man, it is only a portion of incarnated *manas* which becomes immortal after death. But in a spiritually perfected being, nothing is lost. Since he has realized his own Self, for him there are no more rebirths.

To become consciously immortal, the personal man has to become subservient to the spiritual man within, become altruistic and act for and as the Self of all creatures. Thus:

The practical suggestion is to fulfill faithfully and conscientiously every known duty. It is in and through the incidents of daily life, in work well done, in duties thoroughly performed, that we today can most readily make progress in the higher life, slow progress, it may be, but at any rate sure. These are stepping stones to better things. We advance most rapidly when we stop to help other wayfarers. We receive most when we sacrifice most. We attain to the largest measure of Divine love when we most unselfishly love the brethren. We become one with the Supreme most surely when we lose ourselves in work for Humanity. (*Vernal Blooms*, pp. 32-33)

Is this knowledge of any use to us? Positively. By our false idea of our true nature, we create false position and false destinies. Once we realize that the higher Self within is immortal, illimitable, infinite in its power of unfolding and expression, our whole perspective of life would undergo a change. We would start thinking in terms of ages instead of days of one short life; we would stop wasting our time on transitory and non-essentials. We would feel the way Mr. Judge felt:

What a petty lot of matter we spend time on, when so much is transitory. After a hundred years what will be the use of all this? Better that a hundred years hence a principle of freedom and an impulse of work should have been established. The small errors of a life are nothing, but the general sum of thought is much. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 119)

When we realize that man is really the Self within, no matter how low we might have fallen, no matter how terrible or grim may be the circumstances, we have power to go through it all and rise above them. Because the real Self is never touched by praise, blame

or circumstances. It has the power to create, sustain and even destroy that which is no longer needed. There are lessons to be learnt from life. If we try to put an end to our misery by committing suicide, only the body dies, the real man lives on. In some other life, we will be put in the same situation again, till we learn to believe in ourselves, and look squarely into the face of the difficulties and rise above them.

Death loses its sting when we know that real man is immortal and lives on forever. The desire to prolong life at any cost loses its hold on us. We are no longer afraid of death, but know that death comes as a deliverer and a friend, giving us an opportunity to take up a new body for further growth. We would then have no fear of losing our loved ones, knowing well that “those who are like unto each other and love each other will be reincarnated together, whenever the conditions permit.”

We would avoid going to séances, attempting to contact our dear departed ones, knowing that what we would come in contact with is only the discarded remains of the dead and the vilest entities which often masquerade under different names, sucking vitality of the sitters and the mediums alike and ultimately bring about ruin of the mediums. We also learn that what is invisible is not necessarily spiritual. That in the astral realm and in the astral body there are powers that can be acquired by someone who is not necessarily spiritual. We would not want to acquire these powers before we have unshakably established ourselves in the Spirit within and thereby eliminated the possibility of becoming a black magician.

We realize that all are sparks of divinity, having same powers and potentialities which can be actualized. We are not born in sin. No devil can damn us nor can any outside God save us. The self-redemption has to be sought through one’s own seventh principle, the immortal Spirit within.

(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: What are the theosophical views concerning money?

Answer: Whatever may be our possessions—money, ideas, knowledge or powers—our attitude towards them must be of *trusteeship* and not that of ownership. The trustees are constrained to use the funds only for the purposes or objects for which the trust was set up. So also, we must use our possessions for higher purposes. Mr. Judge points out that *there is a curse attendant upon money*. That is because although money could be and has been used by some to benefit humanity, very few have the attitude of “trusteeship” towards their wealth. Often, a wealthy person is tempted to exercise power on the beneficiary or ask for something in return for the monetary favour. Often, people emotionally blackmail a family member and pressurize him to lend money saying that it is his duty to help brother, sister, son, etc. The basic idea in deterring from lending and borrowing is that once we lend money and if the borrower is not able to return, it generates bad feelings, on both sides. Money is known to spoil good relationships even in a family. There is wisdom in the religious injunction: “Neither lender, nor borrower be.” It is much better to *give away* small sums of money as charity, without expecting it back than lend the same. As Buddha says, “When asked, give even a little.” Krishna and his poor friend Sudama were disciples of the same teacher. After returning home from the *gurukul*, Sudama’s wife pressurized him to go and ask Krishna for financial help. Sudama goes to meet Krishna but returns home, unable to ask Krishna for help. Krishna helps him *unasked*. Charity or lending must happen spontaneously.

Money *per se* is not bad. Wealth is auspicious, and much good can be done by proper use of wealth for the welfare of others. If you give money with a sincere desire to help another, a lot of good feeling is generated. And yet, how many people are able to view it only as a means of transaction? On account of our attachment, strong elementals get associated with money, and that is what makes it bad. If we lose our purse, we get upset and keep thinking about it for a very long time. When we give money, what matters is the thoughts and feelings associated with it. If anything is lost, we should hope that someone needy would find it and use it. If we see a money-purse, nay, even a rupee coin on the road, let us not pick it up unless, we mean to restore it to the owner or use it for helping the needy.

Most people are not able to exercise detachment. But Adept kings like Janaka and Raghu were not attached to material wealth. As the story goes, once in a year, King Raghu used to distribute all his wealth among his subjects. At one such time, when a Brahmin disciple asked for some gold coins, King Raghu decided to wage war on Kubera, the Yaksha Lord of Wealth. In the morning, as Raghu was about to set forth, the astonished officers of his treasury reported that a shower of gold had fallen from the sky. Such was the power and spiritual development of King Raghu that Kubera stood ready to serve him. As indicated in the “*Forum*” *Answers*, the Buddha never accepted money; instead people were allowed to donate food. Buddha would accept gifts of *Viharas* or parks from rich persons, for the use of the disciples, but not for himself. Likewise, occult knowledge must not be taught for money, nor occult arts be exercised in exchange for money.

We are told about elementals guarding treasures and that the Masters or Adepts can command these elementals and obtain large sums of money on which no living person or his descendants have slightest claim. But these Adepts make use of such wealth for the good of humanity. There is an instance in history, where Raymond Lully, a Rosicrucian and a Cabalist, supplied six million pounds to King Edward I of England, to carry on war with the Turks.

Question: Although science has been able to locate various centres of mental activity in the cerebrum, mystery surrounds the exact function of the cerebellum. What are the functions of cerebellum and cerebrum according to theosophy?

Answer: The cerebrum is divided into two hemispheres, left and right. While reasoning, learning, etc. are associated with the left hemisphere, creativity is associated with the right hemisphere of cerebrum. *The Secret Doctrine* (II, 301) mentions that the intellect of man may be gauged, to some extent, by the development of the central convolutions and the fore part of the cerebral hemispheres. The development and increased size of the pineal gland may be considered to be an index of the astral capacities and spiritual proclivities of any man. The cerebellum is the seat of all the animal proclivities of a human being.

Cerebellum is called “old brain,” and it is considered to have persisted and become larger during the course of evolution. For a long time, cerebellum was associated only with the co-ordination of body movement, but now it is recognized to be active during a wide variety of cognitive and perceptual activities. Recent evidence shows that cerebellum is partially responsible for speech, learning, emotions and attention. MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) studies have shown that in the autistic individuals, lobules VI and VII of cerebellum are significantly smaller or larger than normal and such a person takes longer to shift attention and respond to another stimulus, like someone calling out to them. However, the autopsy reports have not confirmed the abnormality of the lobules. But autopsy studies have shown dramatic reduction in Purkinje cells in the cerebellum. These cells are rich in the neurotransmitter serotonin. The abnormal levels of serotonin in individuals with autism may be linked to problems in mood regulation.

In *Transactions*, H.P.B. observes that the human brain is a complex structure. Comparing the nature and function of cerebrum and cerebellum she writes: “Cerebellum is the organ of instinctual animal functions, which reflect themselves in or produce, dreams

which for the most part are chaotic and inconsequent” (p. 32). “During sleep, the functions of the cerebrum cease, and the cerebellum carries him on to the Astral plane” (p. 27). Cerebellum furnishes the materials for ideation. The frontal lobes of the Cerebrum are the finishers and polishers of the materials supplied by the Cerebellum, but they cannot create these materials themselves.

We might say that both cerebrum and cerebellum function during waking hours, because H.P.B. also mentions that cerebellum never ceases to function, but during waking life, functions of cerebellum are lost in the functions of cerebrum. For instance, the activities of the autonomic nervous system which governs digestion, blood circulation, beating of the heart, locomotion, etc., go on all the time, but we are not conscious of these activities. The stimuli which proceed from the cerebellum, *during waking life*, fall below the threshold of waking consciousness, which is totally occupied by cerebrum. But when we fall asleep, the stimuli from cerebellum form the field of consciousness. During sleep, when active functioning of cerebrum ceases, cerebellum begins to throw off impressions just as a bar of heated iron radiates heat, like the embers of a dying fire. It throws off instinctive feelings or emanations which we perceive in unconnected fashion as chaotic dreams; because, cerebrum, which coordinates and brings about consecutiveness during waking hours is asleep. If cerebrum were to be active during sleep, we would have dreams with proper sequence, as it happens in day-dreams. The fact that we experience vivid dreams as we approach the sleep-waking state is due to the mechanical activity of cerebrum. This activity sometimes awakens the memory of the dream state, which acts like a current of air re-kindling the embers of dying fire, thereby recalling into activity the cerebellum which was fading below the threshold of consciousness, thereby helping in dream reconstruction. Thus, when cerebellum and cerebrum act in co-operation dream recollection becomes possible.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

For a long time scholars possessed only few clues about the lives of Inca kings. The Inca had no system of hieroglyphic writing, as the Maya did. Now, Archaeologists combing rugged mountain slopes near Cusco, are discovering thousands of previously unknown sites, shedding new light on the origins of Inca dynasty. On the basis of new evidence, Brian Bauer, an archaeologist from the University of Illinois at Chicago, believes that an Inca state had risen much earlier than previously believed—sometime between 1200 and 1300. The ancient rulers of the region, the mighty Wari (Huari) lords had fallen by 1100, partly due to severe drought that afflicted the Andes for a century or more. Over a period Inca kings had gathered large army, and they had set their sights on the wealthy lands surrounding Lake Titicaca. Sometime after the year 1400, one of the greatest Inca rulers, Pachacutec Inca Yupanqui began planning his conquest of the South, and started the process of empire building. “Under Inca rule, Andean civilization flowered as never before. Inca engineers transformed fragmentary road networks into interconnected highways. Inca farmers mastered high-altitude agriculture, cultivating some 70 different native crops and often stockpiling three to seven years’ worth of food in vast storage complexes. Imperial officials excelled at the art of inventory control, tracking storehouse contents across the realm with an ancient Andean form of computer code—coloured and knotted cords known as quipus. And Inca masons raised timeless architectural masterpieces like Machu Picchu, which continues to awe visitors today,” writes Heather Pringle. The Inca had no iron tools or wheeled vehicles, yet they managed to quarry and move stones that weighed more than a hundred tons. In the year 1911 Hiram Bingham, the assistant professor at Yale University discovered the ruins of Machu Picchu (meaning “old mountain”), an Inca ghost town that was hidden from the outside world for nearly 400 years. Subsequent studies of the site’s architecture and artifacts suggest that Machu Picchu was

Pachacutec's mountain top retreat, writes Pringle. (*National Geographic*, April 2011)

In the series of articles entitled "A Land of Mystery," H.P.B. points out how European conceit has led to almost complete ignorance of the wonders of pre-columbian arts and architecture in both South and North America. The temples, palaces and cities of Peru and Mexico rival Egyptian antiquities, and reveal a common ground of symbolism and monumental significance. The history of the Incas is traced back to the eleventh century, and H.P.B. mentions that even to these Incas the hieroglyphics found on walls and monoliths are a dead letter, but they attribute these inscriptions to their *unknown* predecessors.

Inca is the Quichua title for chief or emperor, and the name of the ruling and most aristocratic race or rather *caste* of the land, which was governed by them for an *unknown* period, prior to, and until, the Spanish Conquest. Their first appearance in Peru might have been five centuries after the Biblical "flood." The Incas, judged by their exclusive privileges, power, and "infallibility," are the antipodal counterpart of the Brahmanical caste of India. Like the latter, the Incas claimed direct descent from Deity, which, as in the case of the *Suryavansa* dynasty of India, was the Sun. According to Peruvian tradition, the Highest Deity or Sun sent down upon earth, to teach them, his two children, Manco Capac, and his sister and wife, Mama Ocollo Huaco, the counterparts of the Egyptian Osiris and Isis. These two made their appearance on a beautiful island in Lake Titicaca, and then proceeded northwards to Cuzco, and later to the capital of Incas. They taught humanity agriculture, legislation, architecture and arts. It is from this celestial pair that the Incas claim their descent. As the direct descendants of the Sun, they were the high priests, and at the same time emperors and the highest statesmen in the land, and hence like Brahmins in India, they arrogated to themselves divine superiority over ordinary mortals and founded an aristocratic caste—the Inca race. Also, like in India, as happened in palmy days of Brahmin power, no one had the right to either receive education or

study religion, except the privileged Inca caste. The extraordinary points of resemblance between India, Egypt and ancient America, not only in their general religious, political and social views, but sometimes even in the minutest details may be understood only if we accept Plato's suggestion that at that point in time the two worlds formed but one continent, and the Atlantic did not divide the two hemispheres as it does now. (*H.P.B. Series No. 12*, pp. 6-8)

Death is a morbid subject even for most adults, then, should we discuss death with children, and if so, how? Death could be a complex concept for children to handle, but not if elders deal with it gently, says Anuradha Varma (*The Speaking Tree [The Times of India]*, May 8, 2011). For the children familiar with virtual world, death is not an alien theme because they do come across killing of villains in video games. But death in real life is different. For instance, Psychiatrist Anjali Chhabria's three-and-a-half year old daughter cried all night when her pet parrot died. The next morning she complained, "I am angry with Lord Shiva. He got an elephant's head for his son, but what about the poor elephant?" However, her teacher succeeded in pacifying her when she explained that death means that the person gets a new body. The child returned home with a smile on her face, saying, "The bird got bored with his body and now has new one." Tibetan freedom activist Tenzin Tsundue is of the opinion that it is useful to speak to children about different religious views on death. Today, children *can* understand concepts such as love and death, and it would be dangerous to nurture children on the romance of life as an unending fairytale. Vatsala Shivasubramanian, a child counsellor feels that by the time children are three years old, they have encountered a pet dying or seen a flower wilting, or sometimes even seen a grandparent dying. It is important to talk about such events. Let them know that death is not a sleep-like state from which one can be awakened like Sleeping

Beauty in the fairy tale. Children's author Deepa Agarwal says that most children as young as four can grasp the finality of death through stories, and learn to deal with their feeling of loss, loneliness or guilt. A ritual like burying a dead pet animal or bird can help bring closure. Mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik recommends the story of Nachiketas from the *Katha Upanishad* for children, in which Nachiketas realizes in the end that he need not be afraid of death. The story holds a lesson for children and adults too, writes Varma.

Each child is an old soul in a new body, having its own destiny to fulfil in the midst of its family, with which it is karmically linked. Therefore, every child must be respected as an equal, recognizing our karmic responsibility for its spiritual growth and the unfolding of its latent powers and faculties. When H.P.B. wrote, "Educate! Educate! for children are our salvation," she meant that they represent the future destiny of humanity. It is important that we sow seeds of right ideas and understanding in the plastic minds. Knowing that children are but old souls in young bodies, Mr. Judge was the first who started theosophical work for children.

The two theosophical books, *Eternal Verities* and "*Because—*" *For The Children Who Ask Why*, which deal with philosophical and moral subjects, such as, Karma, Death and Rebirth, Dreams, Ghosts, Fairies, Beginning of the World, God and Prayer, are written in easily understood manner, so as not to overwhelm the understanding of a child. In the book "*Because—*" the aunt of two children who had lost their mother explains that like petunia plants dying in the frost, the worn out body of their mother had died. The children are told by their aunt to try to be happy for their Mother, because kind death came to her tired body. Like putting away the clothes that have grown ragged and old, mother had put away her body and she will come back again in a newer, better body. Death is like sleep. During sleep, for a time, we leave our bodies behind us, and live in other bodies of our souls, and live in a world of dreams and dreamless sleep, untouched by sorrow. However, their Mother's love for them did not die with her body, just as their own love for their mother did

not die because her body was dead.

The Autumn 2010 issue of *Light of Consciousness* carried the excerpt from the book *The Power and the Pain: Transforming Spiritual Hardship into Joy*, by Andrew Holecek, a Tibetan Buddhist, and the same was reprinted in November-December 2010 issue of *Utne Reader*. The author suggests that cultivating a spiritual life requires a practice of repetition. Spiritual training involves scrubbing out deeply ingrained habits, which takes time and reiteration. It is like trying to flatten the scroll which has been coiled for thousands of years. We have to press it out again and again. The person who wants to build his muscles will not lift thousand pounds of weight at one time, but he will lift few pound of weight a thousand times. In the Tibetan tradition we have been asked to repeat mantras or do prostrations a hundred thousand times because we have had selfish thoughts millions of times; bragged about, gossiped, cheated others, lied and practised self-centred actions, millions upon millions of times. The numbers are astronomical, and so is the sphere of their influence.

Spiritual path is difficult because we have to replace old habits, which come so easily, with difficult new ones. For instance, mindlessness is natural to us. We are easily distracted. After aeons of habit of mindlessness, practice of mindfulness is difficult because unfamiliar. In the initial stages the practice is called *deliberate mindfulness* because it takes effort to bring our wandering mind back. Gradually, *deliberate* mindfulness evolves into *spontaneous* mindfulness, because with enough practice it becomes effortless. When we put water for heating, there is a period when nothing seems to be happening, after which water is transformed into steam. So also, when we engage in spiritual practice, depending upon whether our efforts were half-hearted or whole-hearted, we see slow or quick transformation, but either ways, there is a period when

nothing seems to be happening. “After years of practice we ‘suddenly’ transform from an uptight, aloof person into an open, loving one; from a confused sentient being into an awakened one. Lasting spiritual changes arise from simply being present, again and again,” writes Holecek.

“Living the higher life” means waging a war not only against our *vices*, but also against our habits, beliefs, pet theories and our likes and dislikes. When we attempt this, there is an opposition, on the inner planes, from our own tendencies. A small resolve to take a walk for 15-20 minutes every day in the morning will give rise to many conflicting forces, such as our habit of late rising, reading the newspaper in the morning, etc.

Why are we habituated like this? Our body cells are made up of very tiny units of energy, called elementals. Many such elementals form one cell. All our thoughts and feelings are impressed upon these elementals. All our habits leave a deep impress upon these elementals because we have been doing it for many years and many lives. Such elementals may be compared to an army of soldiers, who are trained in a particular way to follow a given set of commands. If the colonel of the army changes and if he gives a different set of commands, it would require great effort on the part of the colonel to efface the memory of old commands. Breaking a habit amounts to washing the concerned elementals clean of their first impressions, and giving them reverse kind of impressions. However, like the smith removes impurities in the silver, little by little, vices and weaknesses must be overcome gradually. We are cautioned that violent control is not so good as gentle control which must be continuous and firmly unrelaxed. Gentleness is better because always an opposite reaction is aroused, which could throw us off-balance.

I AM seeking, I am striving, I am in it with all my heart.

—VINCENT VAN GOGH