

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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### FASTING AND MORTIFICATION OF THE BODY

PHYSICAL BODY is called *Annamaya Kosha* or sheath made up of food or sustained by food. Our body is the instrument of the soul and it must be kept strong and healthy. Manu has said, “*Shariram adhyam Khalu dharma sadhanam.*” Our first duty is to care for the body, because it is the foremost means to pursuit of spiritual life. *The Chhandogya Upanishad* mentions that the food that is eaten is divided into three forms: the gross form of food is not absorbed into the system and is thrown out as excreta; the middle form of food gets converted into flesh; the subtle vibratory aspect, that which is produced by the essential nature of the food influences the mind itself. So it is that the capacity of thinking and the way of thinking are influenced by the food we take. In the same Upanishad the Master asks the pupil to go without food for fifteen days, and he does so. When the pupil returns to the Master the latter asks him to repeat songs and chants, but the pupil was unable to remember anything.

Fasting means going without food, and often, even without water. Today, we are familiar with two kinds of fasting: Fasting or dieting for physical benefits, and spiritual, or rather religious fasting. There are juice fasts, water fasts, fruit fasts, undertaken purely for physical benefits, such as, purification and detoxification of the body, for reducing weight and for attaining a state of inner balance and harmony.

There are religious fasts observed on certain days of the lunar month, almost ritualistically, and these are often, no better than a *change of diet*. The regular food is replaced by the food permitted by the scriptures. On the other extreme, some people observe most stringent form of fasts that are enervating.

Fasting is one of the oldest and most sacred spiritual practices which has been used by sages and *rishis* for bringing about purification of the body, mind and soul. Fasting as a spiritual discipline is called *Upvas*. *Upvas* means to dwell closer to God. If true fasting means nearness to divine within, then it cannot be achieved by merely restricting the intake through mouth. We need to restrict and purify our sensory intake. In other words, when we undertake fast, we must be equally aware of purifying the food that we take in through our eyes, ears and hands, just as much as the food that is taken in through the mouth. The sights and sounds which are imbibed during the fast should be pure and wholesome. A fast should also be the time of silence, so that divine energy is conserved, which is otherwise dissipated through useless speech. The mind and the senses must turn within.

Mind and body are intimately connected, and when we refrain from eating food, or even heavy food, the mind tends to become more focused and alert. When the physical is paralyzed or weakened, the psychic and spiritual nature of man manifests itself. The custom of fasting is said to have arisen from the observation that in times of war and famine starvation brought on religious ecstasy accompanied by dreams, visions and the hearing of voices. When this austerity was seen to subdue the passion and clarify the mind, it took on a religious significance. Savages, such as those of New South Wales and the Andaman Islands, and also those remnants of a once great people, the American Indians, practised fasting as an ethico-religious rite. The fasts which preceded initiations and followed deaths were based on knowledge. Spiritual teachers have always stressed mental as well as physical fasting in order that the outpouring of the spiritual force which follows such austerities might benefit humanity.

Fasting reminds one of Gandhiji's rite of fasting, which is commented upon at length in *The Theosophical Movement* for April 1939. The article describes Gandhiji as more a prophet than a statesman; whose methods are most difficult to evaluate, and which brought about strange and unexpected results. Gandhiji's observance of fast has been viewed differently by different people. In March 1939 Gandhiji personally visited the Ruler of Rajkot to request him to keep his promise of bringing about political regeneration of his subjects. Political maneuvering had led the Ruler to give a different interpretation to his promise, and he refused to abide by it. As a result of this decision, Gandhiji began a fast unto death, unless a change of heart should lead the Ruler of Rajkot to abide by his promise. He himself expressed that his fasts unto death must appear strange to the Western mind. Some of the "educated" people saw no connection between fasting and a broken promise, and thought the fasting quixotic. Many looked upon his fasting as pressure put on the Ruler, to force him to abide by his promise. Gandhiji's fasts have been puzzling only to people devoid of spiritual discrimination. But Gandhiji's fasting was a real expression of Soul Force. Gandhiji's fast was brought to a close by the wise intervention of the Viceroy who undertook to see that the Ruler's promise should be accurately interpreted by the highest judicial authority and that he should be made to observe his pledge. One of the beneficial results of Gandhiji's purely sacrificial soul action was that a feeling of regard for the British Viceroy was awakened, and also the feeling of inimical resentment, on the part of millions of Indians, against the British had weakened to some extent. The article mentions that "genuine students of Theosophy cannot but salute with esteem the motive of Gandhiji's fast, the method employed to right the spiritual wrong, and its flowering effects, spreading fragrance far and wide." In the statement made, immediately after breaking the fast, Gandhiji wrote that he wanted to give out the best of his thoughts while the effect of fast was still on him, and while *he was full of spiritual exaltation*. He wrote:

Fasting is an institution as old as Adam. It has been resorted to for self-purification or for some ends noble as well as ignoble. Buddha, Jesus and Mahomed fasted so as to see God face to face. Ramchandra fasted for the sea to give way for his army of monkeys. Parvati fasted to secure Mahadeva himself as her Lord and Master. In my fasts I have but followed these great examples no doubt for ends much less noble than theirs. (*Harijan*, March 1939)

However, Gandhiji himself discouraged fasting for those not pledged and trained to mental and moral *ahimsa*. Thus:

Fasting like some very potent medicine can only be taken on rare occasions and under expert guidance. It is wrong, it is sinful for everybody to consider himself an expert....The weapon of fasting, I know, cannot be lightly wielded. It can easily savour of violence unless it is used by one skilled in the art. I claim to be such an artist in the subject....I would like all friends and sympathizers rigidly to refrain from embarking on sympathetic fasts, even for one day. (*Harijan*, March 1939)

Elsewhere, in his writings he warned friends and sympathizers against copying him blindly. "Let all such qualify themselves by hard work and selfless service...and they would have independent light if their time for fasting has come." When one reads the entire statement made by Gandhiji, after he ended his fast, it is clear that he, like his predecessors, gained in spiritual perception and moral stamina, after the fast. He does not imply that all who fast, be they hunger-strikers in or out of political prisons, or those who survive on locusts and honey in wilderness, will gain in spiritual wisdom. The article mentions that just then Hitler had broken his word, but it was easy to see that any or all of the other signatories to the Munich agreement going on fast would not bring about a change of heart in him. The prerequisite, for the fast to be efficacious, is years of self-purification. Moreover, pure and true moral outlook is also absolutely necessary. In the given case, it can be seen that the moral outlook of

Hitler or Mussolini, on the one hand, was not different in kind from that of other European signatories to the Munich agreement, as all of them held fast in their consciousness, the doctrine that *Might is Right*.

The *Dhammapada* also makes it clear that fasting on the part of a sense-enslaved person will not suffice to purify him. Spiritual discipline is necessarily from within, without. In the sense of *Upvas*, a fast is different from "Anshan," which is hunger-strike or bodily mortification. *Upvas* is primarily a spiritual act whereas "anshan" refers to fasting with a view to produce certain effect, and is often a tool for coercion.

As for the philosophical basis for fasting, gluttony is considered to be one of the seven deadly sins. When severe strain is put on the vital energies by overtaxing the digestive machinery, the best and only remedy is to let it rest for some time and recoup itself as much as possible. Fasts were instituted simply for the purpose of correcting the evils of overeating. The Buddhists do not have institution of fasting but they seem to fast daily, and all their life, by following the injunction of moderation in eating. The idea is to learn to control the desires. Hence, we are told that *it is no use fasting so long as there is desire for food*.

The article, "The Elixir of Life," mentions that instead of fasting one must begin with the diet of milk and fruits. Then gradually, very gradually, one must decrease the *quantity* of food consumed. It is possible to survive on little quantity of food. The article points out that many of the simplest organisms have no excretion, such as common guinea-worms. All that is consumed is applied to its growth and propagation. It is possible for a human being to come to such a stage, when he is able to derive nourishment from the Ether (*Akasa*).

The Seventeenth Discourse of the *Gita* mentions that those in whom *tamas*, or the quality of ignorance and indifference, predominates, practice severe self-mortification, *i.e.*, physical restraints and self-denials, which includes fasting and torturing of the body. The phrase "mortification of the body" has been taken

literally, and hence it is erroneously believed that severe physical asceticism is conducive to spiritual growth and development. Since physical body is an aggregate of physical matter, it can be changed and controlled only through the thoughts, emotions and actions of the thinker. Every time that we change our thoughts or emotions, we experience conflict, and that is because we are fighting with our habits. To break the habit is to impress the cells of the body with pure and wholesome impressions. The mortification of the body must be from within, without. There is no need to starve, but we should be able to do without food when the occasion demands.

For spiritual progress, the physical man must be rendered more ethereal and sensitive and the moral man more self-denying and philosophical. As a person abstains from the gratification of his base physical desires, a time comes, when all those particles which were given lower impulse due to indulgence in vices, will have departed. Since the base desires are abstained from, the particles of the physical body are gradually refined, and following the law of consubstantiality, the new particles attracted to the body which replaced the old particles, will not have in them the tendency to repeat the said acts. When a person abstains from entertaining “gross” thoughts, feelings and actions, he will tend to diminish relative density and coherence of outer shell or physical body.

What are the physical desires to be abandoned and in what order? First and foremost, the person must give up alcohol in all forms. Consumption of alcohol causes the rush of life energy, which in turn causes stress, which can be sustained by very dull, gross and dense elements of the body. As a result, from the surrounding atmosphere, gross particles are attracted to the physical frame, which thwarts the purpose of etherealizing of the body. Likewise, meat-eating can give rise to violent passion and energy of action, which tend to make the body “gross.” Mortification is thus, more a matter of mind than of the body.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT ON HELPING OTHERS

MASTER, how can I open the eyes of men to the Truth? I see so much being done that can but destroy. Yet the people see it not. Words have no effect; the mind is closed to logic and the heart to the good of others. I am in despair. Help me with thy Wisdom.

O Friend, your despair is that of a beginner on the Path of Compassion and it will stay with you till the end, changing only into the Love that hurts because it is unable to stay the suffering. Did not Jesus say in sorrow, “They seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.” Did he not also cry, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” So take heart. One success in hundreds of failures is all that can be hoped for. Did not Jesus have to deal with Judas and the Buddha with Devadatta?

Turn to the *Gita* when in distress. Even those that perish through the grinding of the teeth of Krishna enter into his being by that very grinding. There need be no despair; only pity and sympathy and love that binds. Yet the effort to open the eyes and ears of Humanity must be made. We must never give up trying.

Master, is there perhaps some better way of trying than that which I am following—speaking to men, pointing out their errors? This way seems to make them even more determined to destroy themselves. Is there a better way?

Yes, my Friend, there is; but it is a hard way. There is much to be learnt from taking a vow of silence. To be able to control the tongue which longs to give advice is the first step towards right helping. Try it and you will see that by listening to others you will find a place in their hearts where you can plant a tiny seed of Truth. That seed will grow some time, though you may never see its full fruition. If you speak much and warn again and again, like the monsoon rain you but wash away any tiny seeds of Truth that may be in the loose

soil, and the condition of the one you want to help is worse than before. How often does advice strengthen the existing belief of the one whom we wish to advise!

But Master, am I then to stop spreading the Truth?

No, my Friend, but spread it where the soil is already prepared and ready, that is, where it is *asked* for. To say the Truth, to spread it broadcast, is good. Where those seeds of Truth fall, we know not; but fall they must, whether on the right soil or on barren ground. Our duty is done when we have sown the seed. Only when the soil is ready comes the demand for the seed that will grow. Even then the inquirer can only take in those seeds that suit his particular soil of mind and character, and when he has taken in all he can, he goes his way. But the seeds taken in take root and begin to grow, either at once or at some future time when conditions are more propitious. Indeed it is true that the longing to help must give way to the longing to *listen*. The doctor may long to help the patient, but first he must listen to the patient's history of his condition and observe the symptoms with his trained faculties before giving the medicine, or he will give the wrong medicine. Is not this lack of understanding of another's point of view the reason why we so often fail to help him, however great our desire to help? Do we not give the wrong medicine? Very few of us are trained to observe a man's symptoms or to listen to him in order to find out what help is really needed.

O Master, this increases my despair! What shall I do?

Friend, look into yourself. Are you interested in occult medicine, in the art of helping others? If so, begin to *learn* how to help. Look within and think of those who have helped you in the past. How did *they* help you? What kind of help did you turn down? The impersonal passing on of the Truth, my friend, is the best; stop trying to help individuals. Why do you try this? Is it to help *them*? Is it because *you* want to help them? Is it that it makes you feel good to speak and argue with another in order to turn him away from his ideas? The path of helping is beset with dangers. Take a vow of silence temporarily and watch results. Never *offer* help. Wait until it

is asked for. Herein is the crux of the matter. Of whom do people ask advice? Of those who inspire confidence; who are friendly without being officious. Are you such an one? If not, begin by listening, pondering and learning. People are helped more by the example of one's character than by words. By listening you can also ponder on what *you* have that will help a particular situation or a particular person. To one in great sorrow the doctrine of Karma is of little help. How did the great Buddha deal with the sorrow of the bereaved mother whose child had died? He showed her the way by which she could learn for herself the truth that death is a universal phenomenon.

Do not forget that the heart speaks though its words cannot be heard. Learn to help by and through the heart and not through the words, and you will find the field before you growing larger and larger. It is the one Heart that beats in all. Open up your heart to all and all will seek refuge in it. *Then* your words will bear fruit. They will be few, but each word will be full of power to change the mind of man. And remember, Truth does not belong to you or to anyone. You have but discovered it again in your own heart. It lies in the hearts of all men. Let the radiance of your own heart help to uncover it in the hearts of all.

Master, I thank you, I see where I have been wrong. I am no longer in despair for you have shown me the way to that silent, invisible help, which is what I have received and which I shall pass on, as you have to me, by words of power born in the silence.

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The world is obviously in need of help. Humanity is suffering individually and collectively—from lack of food, of employment, of moral stamina, and from lack of knowledge of the way out of the manifold difficulties. In his article, "Humanitarianism," Alok Pandey echoes Theosophical views when he writes, "Humanity needs help and urgently so. But what is the real disease? Hunger, physical and emotional deprivation, wars, petty family quarrels, legal disputes,

the breaking of hearts, the fear of exams, mounting stress, broken homes, deserted children, crime and rape...are but symptoms, not the illness proper. If we treat the symptoms without care for the disease itself, then the illness will return in another name or form. Outer help, devoid of an inner change, is like putting a nice plaster and paint to conceal the cracks of a house in shambles. There are only a few who want and work for inner change....” True help aims at removing the *cause* of suffering, and not just giving temporary relief by dealing with the effects. We are called upon to become wider philanthropists by ministering to the needs of the thinking man, who must be given right philosophy.

We can help others, not by making them dependent on us, but by showing them the cause and cure for their sorrow. As the proverb suggests, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Sentimental aid has been known to produce harmful effects in the long run. To help people in the right manner one has to cultivate intuition. When one is genuinely concerned for the suffering of others, there comes a heart response, and one is able to give the right kind of help.

When we look around us we find that more than the *physical* it is the mental, moral and emotional suffering, which needs to be addressed. Everyone seems to have the need to be heard. There are bottled-up feelings, anxieties, anger, frustrations, but no one “close” enough to share it with. The first step in helping, these days, consists in learning to be a patient and sympathetic listener.

Pain has a definite and important place in man’s life. Growth involves change and every change is accompanied by pain. Pain arouses sympathy in us. Pain often brings out the best in a human being. Pain increases the moral capacity. Hence, many times, the best way to help another is to aid him in giving the right response to adverse, painful situations, that he may find himself in. Let each human being learn to appreciate that every unfavourable situation is but an opportunity to learn and grow.

## STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA ON DEATH—II

TO OVERCOME death implies that we want to keep an unbroken continuity of self-consciousness in spite of births and deaths. It is really the condition of *sushupti*, but *sushupti* itself is an illusion in terms of that Higher Spiritual Consciousness which we must attain. The goal of evolution is to become beings, such as are described in verse 15 of this discourse: “Those great-souled ones who have attained to supreme perfection come unto me and no more incur rebirths rapidly revolving, which are mansions of pain and sorrow.” Those beings are the *Mahatmas*. The second class of beings who go to *Brahman*, the Supreme, are the *devas*. The third class of beings, who are compelled to take birth again and again, are ourselves. Let us examine these three classes of beings.

The *Mahatmas* never return because they never go. They are periodically in existence in this world. They keep in a physical body or outside of a physical body, but they are in fully awakened condition. If *pralaya* (dissolution) were to come and the whole of the manifested Universe were to be merged, it would not disturb these Higher, Perfected Beings. The opening verse of the Fourteenth discourse mentions that such Beings are not disturbed at the time of general dissolution, or disturbed at the time of awakening and manifestation. These Beings tread the Path of Renunciation, and willfully choose to take birth, through their own compassionate volition, because they want to help mankind that has not yet reached the perfected state.

The second class of beings, the *devas* or gods, tread the path of liberation or emancipation. They have not renounced the peace and bliss which they can enjoy in their state of *Nirvana*. They have overcome the death and birth of the physical body. They are not compelled to reincarnate. But they are disturbed at the time of *pralaya*. They go to sleep when *pralaya* sets in, and they wake up again at the beginning of a new manifestation. And so, they have

not overcome death in the same sense as the *Mahatma*. The Path of these *devas* is known as the Path of Light. We, who have not become *devas* or *Mahatmas*, are treading still the path of darkness, and it is for us to choose the path of light or liberation, or the path of renunciation, which is the path of Krishna himself. For the time being we are so identified, mixed-up and entangled in *mulaprakriti* that the very knowledge of our own physical body affects our consciousness, and we lose the thread every time the change occurs in the substance in which we are clothed, or in the state of consciousness we enjoy. What we wish to achieve is not to allow that thread of self-consciousness to be broken by death.

Theosophy teaches us that the goal of evolution is to become *Mahatmas*, perfected self-conscious beings. Potentially, we are all *Mahatmas*. How to become *Mahatmas* was hinted at in the close of the Seventh discourse, when Krishna gave the cause of birth and death, and the description of the Spiritual Man. Shri Krishna says that he who is confirmed in spiritual knowledge is content in and through the Self. He has not only purified his lower nature, so as to make it the proper instrument for the Soul, but he has so developed and unfolded that Soul that it has become a fit vehicle for the Spiritual part of his nature. As students of Theosophy our aim to become *Mahatmas* must first express itself as our desire to become channels for the great force of the Perfected Beings or Great Lodge of Adepts. It is for him who has overcome not only the lower nature, but also that Divine illusion of the higher nature, *i.e.*, gone beyond both personality and individuality.

In the Seventh discourse Krishna says that he who labours for deliverance from birth and death must overcome completely the attraction of likes and dislikes, and purify his *kamic* nature. In this discourse, in answer to Arjuna's question, Krishna proceeds to give the ethical basis for this subject of death, and from the fifteenth verse onward it is nothing but a discussion on how to apply the teaching about death. Krishna says that he who wants to go to Him at the time of death, must meditate on Him and fight. In order to

meditate on Krishna at the time of death, we must meditate on Krishna at all times during the life. There is a two-fold process—meditation on the Higher Self and meditation on the embodiment of the Higher Self, *i.e.*, the Perfected Beings, and then fighting the lower nature. The very fact that Krishna asks Arjuna to fight at the time of death implies that “death” does not mean only the moment of death of the physical body. For, we go through the experience of death every time we succeed in killing out an evil tendency or weakness in our lower nature, and in meditating to such an extent on the true nature that we can express a little better the Divine Light of the Spiritual Self. Krishna says that both the mind (*Manas*), and *Buddhi*, must be placed on Him, which implies that the person is no longer directed by all the many activities of the senses and *kamic* nature. In other words, man must control his lower nature, and obey the dictates of his higher Spiritual Nature. The same teaching is given in verses 12 and 13 of this discourse: “He who closeth all the doors of his senses, imprisoneth his mind in his heart, fixeth his vital powers in his head, standing firm in meditation, repeating the monosyllable OM, and thus continues when he is quitting the body, goeth to the supreme goal.”

Here, we have the description of what we have to practice throughout life. We have to imprison the mind in the heart. Mind and heart are simply symbols of *Manas* and *Buddhi*. *Manas* must be centered and imprisoned in *Buddhi*. The mind is the organ through which *Manas* works, and the heart represents the Spiritual Self in the body. He who is constant in meditation on Krishna, is able to fix his attention on Krishna at the time of death, and he goes to Krishna. What is this constant meditation? It is the chief aim, the highest ideal which we have throughout our life, and for which we work. It is really known as the line of life's mediation, and our last thoughts are simply the result of the thoughts we have had and sustained throughout our life. When we say that the *last thoughts* determine his state in the heaven world, these *last thoughts* are the legitimate unfoldment of the meditation of mind—on which the heart of man

was set during life.

This constant meditation implies the control of thought at every single moment of time. We must purify the lower nature in order to be able to fix our thoughts in the heart or *Buddhi*. Thoughts are constantly attracted to the *kamic* tendencies. And it is for us to bring the thoughts or vital powers from the senses into our centre. This demands separation and detachment from the lower nature, and unison and harmony with the higher nature. In other words, we must begin to turn inwards, and every single time we do so, the conjunction is made permanent, which enables us to be Perfected Beings or *Mahatmas*, and never lose the thread of our own self-consciousness, or spiritual experience. The *Mahatma* then is that man in whom *Buddhi* and *Manas* have united themselves permanently, never to be separated again. The discipline then is not only to meditate on our real Self, but also to purify and discipline the lower nature. People think that because the difficulty seems to be in the lower nature, separation from that lower nature and isolation from all activities would be the great remedy. However, the difficulty is not in the lower nature but in the man who runs after the lower nature, and so it is not isolation from the lower which will provide the remedy, but the right use of that lower nature. We must not renounce all action and become inactive beings but become wise active beings and begin to perform right action. Right Performance of Action is the subject which will be taken up again in the Ninth Discourse, which divides the *Gita* into two parts. The Ninth Discourse is entitled “Kingly Science,” or *Raja Yoga*.

The goal of evolution is to become Perfected Men. To reach that aim we must first prepare ourselves to be pupils of the Perfected Beings, and to achieve that, we must prepare ourselves through the understanding and application of this great teaching of the Kingly Science, which alone enables man to understand what he is working for, and what the goal of his evolution is.

(Concluded)

## THE SYMBOLOGY OF HANSA

A SYMBOL is a visible representation of an idea. “To be a just and correct symbol, it should be such as that the moment it is seen by one versed in symbolism, its meaning and application become easily apparent,” writes Mr. Judge. “A symbol is an embodied idea, combining the conception of the Divine Invisible with the earthly visible,” writes H.P.B. Every object can be a symbol. A tree is a symbol. But it means different things to different minds. The word “tree” brings up one kind of idea in the mind of a child, and a very different kind of idea in the minds of a botanist, a poet, a painter, a philosopher and a mystic. Every symbol must have a deeper meaning besides the obvious one. In fact, H.P.B. observes that each symbol has at least seven keys to its interpretation.

*Hansa* or Swans are the largest of the aquatic birds, closely related to the Goose. The symbolism of *Hansa* varies greatly with different cultures and religions. For some, the swan is a symbol of peace and tranquillity. In ancient Greece swan was seen as a traditional symbol of beauty and grace. Swans are sacred to Apollo, who is the god of music, among other things. Legend to the contrary, swans utter a variety of sounds from the windpipe, which in some species is looped within the breastbone; even the mute swan, the least vocal species, often hisses, makes soft snoring sounds, or grunts sharply. In literature, the swan was fabled to sing a melodious song, especially at the time of its death, and the metaphor, “Swan song,” represents final performance or work of a person before death or retirement. Poets and singers are often designated as “swans,” just as Shakespeare is often referred to as “Bard of Avon” or “Swan of Avon.”

There are a variety of *hamsas*, such as *Maha-hamsa*, *Raj-hamsa*, *Kala-hamsa* and others. The *hamsa* or swan is considered to be the *vahan*, i.e., mount or vehicle of Brahma. Also, *Parabrahmam* is called *Kala-hamsa* and *Brahma-Prajapati* is called *Hansa-Vahana* by the Orientalists. H.P.B. points out that *Kala-hamsa* is erroneously

regarded as the vehicle of *Brahma-Prajapati*, and which is purely esoteric gloss. Esoterically and logically, *Kalahamsa* is *Vahan* of *Parabrahmam* and the latter is called *Hansa-Vahana*, or one whose vehicle is *Hansa*. We are told that it is impossible for that *Parabrahmam* to manifest itself in this Universe but through the vehicle of male logos or Brahma. We get further explanation in the article, “Why the *Vahan*?” H.P.B. mentions that in Theosophical metaphysics, *Vahan* or vehicle is something which is more gross or substantial than that which it carries or bears. For instance, *Buddhi* is the *vahan* of *Atman*, which is the purely immaterial principle. In the same way the brain is the *vahan* of super-physical thought or mind. We are able to appreciate that likewise, Brahma, though, symbolizing whole of the creative power, and creator of the universe, is still, more substantial, compared to the One Reality, and therefore, is the *Vahan* of *Parabrahmam* through which the latter finds expression. *Vahan* is defined as a vehicle, the carrier of something immaterial and formless.

The term *Hamsa* hides within itself, *aham-sa* (“I am he”) and *So-ham* (“he is I”). Thus, in the term *Hamsa* is contained the universal mystery of the identity of man’s essence with god’s essence. *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 78) mentions that “*Kalaham-sa*” or “I am I” in the eternity of Time answers to the Biblical “I am that I am.” The manifested Logos, Brahma of the Hindus, and Ormuzd of the Zoroastrians, as also every individual, are *not different in their essence from the Absolute*, explains H.P.B.

When Moses asked God, “When I will go unto children of Israel and tell them that God, your Father, has sent me and if they ask me your name, what should I tell them?” God said, tell them that “my name is ‘I am that I am,’” or “*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*,” as in the Hebrew Bible (*Exodus* 3:14). *Hayah* means “existed” or “was” in Hebrew. In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 538-39) H.P.B. gives out its interpretation by two different scholars. One scholar mentions that when Moses requests the Lord to show him his “glory,” the Lord tells him: “Thou canst not see my face...thou shalt see my *a’hoor*, my back...” *i.e.*,

visible universe, or lower manifestations. “As a man still in flesh thou canst not see my invisible nature” (*Exodus*, xxxiii, 18-23). Another scholar gives a numerical interpretation. In *Kaballah* each letter is also a number. The sum of the value of the letters of the word Moses is 345; while the value of “I am that I am,” or “*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*,” or AHYH ASHR AHYH, is 21+501+21=543. Thus, the value of Moses which is 345, is reverse of God’s name, *i.e.*, 543. God wanted Moses to know him by his reverse, *i.e.*, by Moses himself. God says, “Thou canst not see my face,” but thou *shalt see my behind*, because *behind* or reverse of 543 is the *face* of 345. In the article, “Things Common to Christianity and Theosophy,” (*W.Q.J. Series No. 15*), Mr. Judge explains that the Brahmanical doctrine of the unapproachableness of *Parabrahmam*, is reflected in the story of *Exodus*. *Parabrahm* is not to be known, and that Man is a small copy of God through which in some sense we may perceive God, because Man is identical in essence with God.

Swan, Goose, Pelican or aquatic fowl, are all birds moving over water, and they represent Spirit of God moving over waters of Space, or Primordial Substance, and which finally emerges as Manifested Logos with seven creative rays. H.P.B. points out that Moses forbids eating of both Pelican and Swan and he classes them as “unclean” which could well mean “holy.” The same is the case when Russians refuse to eat pigeon for food, the reason being, the Holy Ghost descended on Jesus, when he was being baptized, in the form of a Dove.

AUM along with the *ardha-matra* (or half-metre) represents four states of consciousness: Waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and *Turya*. In the *Voice of the Silence*, AUM is said to represent *Kalahamsa*, where “A” represents the bird’s right wing, “U” represents its left wing, “M” its tail, and the *Ardha-matra* is said to be its head. The footnote explains that the Yogi who bestrides the *Hansa*, *i.e.*, one who meditates on AUM, is not affected by the Karmic influences. This has been explained in *Nadabindu Upanishad*. *Kala* means time. Thus, in a sense, *Kala-hamsa* may

represent Brahma or “Swan-in-time,” as well as, *Parabrhamam*, which is “Swan-out-of-time.” Since AUM represents the Higher Self, *Hansa* may also represent the same.

*Hansa* symbolizes Wisdom, that which is beyond the reach of ordinary men. As to why, of all the birds, the symbol of *Hansa* is used to represent the wise ones, nothing much is said by H.P.B. But there is much to be discerned in exoteric symbology. For example, Ganesha was given the head of an elephant by Siva in place of his own head. The trunk represents the faculty of discrimination arising from wisdom. 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, and also to pick up a coin or a needle from the ground. So also one must aspire to reach discrimination that can penetrate the realms of material as well as spiritual worlds. Likewise, in exoteric allegory, *Hansa* (or *Hamsa*) is a fabulous bird, which when given milk mixed with water for food, separated the two, drinking the milk and leaving the water, thus showing inherent wisdom. Milk symbolizes spirit and water symbolizes matter, writes H.P.B. (*S.D.*, I, 79). In mythologies, *Hamsa* is said to feed only on real pearls—pearls of wisdom. *Hamsa* is the bird which moves gracefully in water and it is comfortable both in water and in air. It represents one’s ability to function on physical, astral and even spiritual planes, and shows that the soul has to journey through material and astral realms before reaching the plane of spiritual perfection. *Hamsa* is a migratory bird having great stamina, symbolic of the strength of the Holy Ones. It is known to fly from central Asia to India and back, at great heights of 35,000 feet and therefore has the reputation of flying over the Himalayas. *Hamsa* is reputed to fly to Manasarovar in order to quench its thirst; lake *Manasa* is often translated as spiritual lake. Occultism teaches that the Four Vedas were delivered by Primeval Sages on the shores of the Lake Manasarovar, tens of thousands of years ago. *Hansa* represents the individual soul which has to soar higher towards *Buddhi*, and which can ultimately lead to emancipation.

There are many versions of the story about the twins, Castor and Pollux. According to the Greek Poet Homer, Castor and Pollux were the sons of Tyndareus and Leda, the king and queen of Sparta. Another account identifies the twins as the sons of Leda and Zeus. In this story, Zeus appeared in the guise of a swan in order to attract Leda, and the twins are born from the egg to which Leda gives birth. In Pindar, Pollux is the son of Zeus, while Castor is the son of the mortal Tyndareus. Thus, Castor is the son of the Mortal, while Pollux is the progeny of the Immortal. When Pollux finds his brother dying, in his despair he calls upon Zeus to slay him also. “Thou canst not die altogether,” answers the masters of the Gods; “thou art of a divine race.” But he gives him the choice: Pollux will either remain immortal, living eternally in Olympus; or, if he would share his brother’s fate in all things, he must pass half his existence underground, and the other half in the golden heavenly abodes. This semi-immortality, which is also to be shared by Castor, is accepted by Pollux. *And thus the twin brothers live alternately, one during the day, and the other during the night.* This is no poetical fiction, says H.P.B. Among other things, this myth alludes to “the ‘Egg-born,’ Third Race; the first half of which is mortal, *i.e.*, unconscious in its personality, and having nothing within itself to survive; and the latter half of which becomes immortal in its individuality, by reason of its fifth principle [*Manas*] being called to life by the *informing gods* [*Manasaputras*] and thus connecting the Monad with this Earth. This is Pollux; while Castor represents the *personal*, mortal man, an animal of not even a superior kind, when unlinked from the divine individuality. ‘Twins’ truly; yet divorced by death forever, unless Pollux, moved by the voice of twinship, bestows on his less favoured mortal brother a share of his own divine nature, thus associating him with his own immortality.” (*S.D.*, II, 122-23)

H.P.B. points out that the Third-Race humanity is the most mysterious of all the hitherto developed five Races. The history of the Third Race shows that there has been gradual transformation

from being “Sweat-born,” to “Egg-born” and then Hermaphrodite. The Third Race humanity began to separate in their pre-natal shells, or eggs, and issued out of them as distinct male and female babes. After the separation of sexes, the mind of man, which was lying latent like an unlit candle, was lighted up by the *Manasaputras* or *Agnishwatta pitris*, endowing man with self-consciousness, and the power to think and choose. It is the sovereign power of choice which can make of man a God. Man, before the lighting up of *Manas*, was man only in form, but no better than an animal in his consciousness. It is Mind which links the impersonal Divine nature in man (*Atma-Buddhi*) with the personal, mortal man, represented by Castor.

In the ancient times there lived only one caste in India, called *Hamsa*. They were yogis, devotees of the Lord, or knowers of *Brahman* engaged in studying the Vedas. Among the *Hamsas*, those who on the strength of devotional service, yoga or impersonal knowledge distinguished themselves over their respective groups were accepted by them as *Paramahamsas*. As explained by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, there are four successive stages in the life of a *sannyasi*, namely, *Kutichaka*, *Bahudaka*, *Hansa* and *Paramhansa*. In the stage of *Hansa*, the ascetic lives apart from his family and the world, maintains himself on alms collected from seven houses, devotes himself to the contemplation of *Parabrahmam* and carries one-knotted bamboo. *Paramhansa* stage is the same as the previous three stages except that the ascetic wears the sacred thread and his hair and beard are quite long. This is the highest of all these orders. A *Paramhansa* who shows himself worthy is on the very threshold of becoming a *Dikshita*.

The founder of the mystic sect of the Druzes of Mount Lebanon is also known as *Hamsa*. They are the *Sufis* of Syria. They call themselves the “disciples of *Hamsa*,” their Messiah came to them in the ninth century from the “Land of the Word of God,” which land and word they kept religiously secret. (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

## STEED AND RIDER

ANALOGY is one of the means to be used in trying to understand or explain Theosophy. Many years ago, in the great English race, the Derby, the jockey resisted the impulse to show a whip to his horse, when the race was nearing the end, even as the other horse crept beside his horse. Instead, he gave all the help he could with his hands, and discovered with joy that his gallant little horse, with only one lung, had won the race. He had done his best, his utmost for the rider who loved him, who “helped him with his hands.” He had vindicated his master’s faith in him, in spite of his great handicap.

There is an inspiration in this for all of us. The horse is lower *Manas*, with its disabilities from this and prior lives. The rider is *Manas*, the thinker, who has chosen the vehicle for this life-cycle. He trains it, as best he can; it begins to respond. He learns to love it, to expect something of it, when the testing-time comes. Too often, the student bends his effort to the subduing of his moral nature, and lashes it to frenzy with his whip of scorn. Even if such a rider should win his race, his steed will be exhausted, useless, at the end. He knows not its disabilities. But he who, having trained it, grown to love and understand it, even if he lose this time, for him there will be other chances in this and future lives. It is natural that *Kama-Manas* should look to *Manas* for guidance and help, and receive it from the higher part. But if *Kama-Manas* is ridden too hard, too suddenly, the results are dire, and delay and failure for that incarnation ensue. How different the response of the animal nature to the trainer who treats it with understanding neither indulging nor forcing it, but “helping with his hands,” the immense effort both are making. Magnetism flows through such hands, and the animal feels himself not conquered, but helping to conquer, and steed and rider are one. Even so *Kama-Manas* and *Manas* blend in the long run when the purpose of both is the same, when the Rider knows his creature, and the creature trusts his Master.

## EMERSON'S CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN THOUGHT

### IV

IN THE ARTICLE, "The Cycle Moveth," H.P.B. mentions that there are thousands of men and women who do not call themselves Theosophists, and "yet each of whom carries on his brow the mark of the mysterious Karmic seal—the seal that makes of him or her a member of the Brotherhood of the Elect of Thought." What better credential can be acknowledged on the early torch-bearers and fore-runners such as the unconscious but great American Theosophist, *in actu*, like Emerson. H.P.B. must have visualized and known the early heralders of the universal Movement she inaugurated when she wrote the above-mentioned words.

When Thomas Carlyle brought forward the movement for "Human Rights," both in Europe and in America, there were leaders who sensed that the Rights to Liberty, Equality and pursuit of Happiness were not claimed only for France and America. Abraham Lincoln too recognized the universalizing power of the movement for Liberty from all fetters on mankind, in addition to being a Constitutional necessity for all Nations of the World. He wrote at the end of the Civil War:

I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept the confederacy so long together. It was not the mere separation of the colonies from the (European) motherland, that the sentiment found in the "Declaration of Independence" which gave Liberty not alone to the people of this country, but also hope to all the world for the future time. It was that Liberty which gave promise that in due time the weight [of slavish dependence] would be lifted from the shoulders of all, and all should have equal chance.

There is another responsibility for the allegiance to Rectitude. Emerson writes, "Virtue and vice both emit a breath every moment,"

and do affect near and dear ones first. This is an awful responsibility we cannot escape. As to the "sacredness" the popular religion talks about, Emerson suggests, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own soul." Also, "Nothing can give you peace but the triumph of Principles." This is why it is called "Integrity" meaning undivided whole, or morally wholesome state, and not just a matter of being fair and honest.

Integrity has many shades: Integrity, like the mathematical "integer" represents wholeness which resists dis-integration. The latter is felt within body, mind and soul when the moral soundness is shaken. Integrity as character trait, maintains an all-round wholesome state, just like the creative impulse, speaking in terms of, psychology and aesthetics. The *test* of ethical propriety is in the condition of peace with oneself and others, and in remaining in well-regulated efficiency.

According to Emerson the philosophical basis for the practical and valid ethics, are mainly derived from the knowledge of the true nature of Man himself, and the primacy of the Law governing both Nature and Man. In his essay on the "Sovereignty of Ethics," Emerson wants us to take an independent moral stand, "for the sake of Truth," as that Reality itself which is the source and the centre of one's Being. Therefore, he defines Ethics as "Triumph of Truth," as the ethical principle, since Truth is also the base of our true Being. "For the Truth was in us before it was reflected to us from the natural objects." "God offers to every man its choice between Truth and repose. Take what you please, you can never have both." He wrote: "If we live truly we shall see truly." We seldom realize that the true "Seer," a man of spiritual insight and certainty, is essentially a "Holy One" who is forever true to himself (his Higher Self) and to others.

"A man must be honest to himself first and foremost." "Let us seek our own peace, by fidelity to ourself," and also by being true to others. This fidelity demands our willing response to the native "Law of our Beingness," our true *dharma* or our essential character as god-sent "*Manushya*" functioning as the conscious Thinker and

Chooser. "The soul is the Perceiver and also the revealer of Truth." "Man is his own Star. At the centre there is unity and simplicity of Cause."

Ethics are the "statement of the Universal Law of our own Being," and not of the conventional morality. They form the "values of life" which alone can give worth, meaning and direction to our motives and action.

Then there is the Law of Retribution that watches our actions, and to it we are answerable. This ancient Law is called Karma in the East. It is a mechanism which manages the root, and fruits arising from one's way of life and character. It takes into account one's moral stamina and other incidentals. "The eternal beneficent Necessity (Law) is always bringing things right, at the end." Ethics therefore means we have to work on with the Law which finally resolves into harmony.

"I see the unity of thought, of morals running through all the animated Nature." Only Emerson can say this with confidence, being always in a friendly relation with Nature. The same Law is later called the "Universal Brotherhood," where all Beings are inter-linked. "(Real) Man is made the citizen of the world of souls, so he feels what is called Duty. He is morally aware that he owes a higher allegiance to do and live as a 'good member' of this universe, till he rises to the Universal Life."

Considering the fidelity to one's Higher Self, Emerson reminds us of one more opportunity or rather our ethical duty to warmly respond to the voice of our inner "guide" and of which we must be vigilantly aware. We are all endowed with the psychic as well as spiritual impulses, such as a moral impulse as simple as the *voice of conscience*. There are many other forms of "promptings" such as the saints and mystics have experienced. Those who "intuitively" feel that it is one's responsibility, or duty to respond properly to the "inspiration" from the soul's luminous part, must heed what Emerson says about the nature of "Genius," our spiritual guide. "Every man is a receiver of the descending Holy Ghost. He may well *study the*

*Law of its flux,*" and be vigilant before his response. For, there can be other misguiding "voices," and he must learn to discriminate its ethical value.

Many good souls can testify to such universal experience when they are confronted by a moral dilemma. At last something higher than themselves, speaks to them either as hints or in clear terms, such as what happened in the life of some mystics, as a luminous experience. We have a historical instance in the holy St. Joan of Arc, about this sacred phenomenon. During the war between the British and the French, a simple village girl in France, called Joan, used to receive some clear "calls from above" to save her country and to lead the French soldiers to victory. She responded most courageously till the victory. But she was betrayed and had to stand on "trial" before the Church Authorities who branded her as a "witch" deserving to be burnt at stake! When they sought her last explanation she insisted that she had to obey the inner "heavenly" voices. The Church felt offended by the simple audacity against the Religious Authority by a mere village witch's daring replies. The Head said: "Do you dare to set *your* judgement against that of the Church?" She simply replied: "By what other judgement could I judge?" Truly, by what other yard-stick can a pure soul like St. Joan of Arc decide to act or rather obey, except to the simple voices of her heart-felt purity.

Dr. William James, in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, mentions many such "mystical" experiences calling them ecstasy, trance, enthusiasm, genius, etc. But he also encourages us to cultivate this sacred gift for ethical purposes. Emerson calls them "disclosure of the Soul," and "the solution of the soul's own questions." Emerson spoke about his own abiding faith in the intimate experiences and trust in his own soul: "More and more the surges of everlasting nature enters into me.... Thus reverencing the Soul, man will come to see that the world is a perennial march which the Soul worketh."

(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:** A passage in *The Voice of the Silence* (pp. 39-40) reads: “If Sun thou can’st not be, then be the humble planet....Point out the ‘Way’—however dimly, and lost among the host—as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness. Behold Migmar, as in his crimson veils his ‘Eye’ sweeps over slumbering Earth. Behold the fiery aura of the ‘Hand’ of Lhagpa extended in protecting love over the heads of his ascetics. Both are now servants to Nyima left in his absence silent watchers in the night. Yet both in Kalpas past were bright Nyimas, and may in future ‘Days’ again become two Suns. Such are the falls and rises of the Karmic Law in nature.” (a) Why is the Sun considered more significant or important as compared to planets? After all, are not the planets the product of the sun as explained in *Transactions*? (b) Why are Mars and Mercury called watchers in the night and not the other planets? (c) How will these two planets become a sun again? Do all planets become the sun again? (d) Why is it considered to be a “fall” to become a planet?

**Answer:** *The Voice of the Silence*, a Mahayana Buddhist text, is full of precepts for the guidance of disciples in living the higher life and hence the above passage must be taken metaphorically and not astronomically. There is a suggestion that service of our fellowmen, help to those who come in our contact, is the way not only to happiness but also to progress, to growth, to evolution. The example given is that of the sun, the planets and the stars.

However, astronomically, as stated in *Transactions* (pp. 145-146), the mass of matter first detaches itself from the Milky Way and becomes wandering comets, which wander for a long time. Then they settle down and become suns when conditions are prepared by

*Fohat* or *Daiviprakriti*. Then the sun goes into *Pralaya* and gets resolved into millions of fragments. Each of these fragments moves in space, and collects fresh material to become planets which settle down in their orbits when equilibrium is reached through the laws of attraction and repulsion and become part of some higher and better system.

Sun is the star which gives light of itself whereas planets shine by the reflected light from the sun which can dispel darkness to some extent. In the night, in the absence of the Sun, in a sky full of stars, Venus or Mercury or Mars make their own little contribution in lessening darkness. We are expected to dispel darkness of ignorance to the extent we have acquired some knowledge, and help others who know less than us. We are asked to become like the two planets, Migmar and Lhagpa, which stand for Mars and Mercury and are represented by “Eye” and “Hand” in Tibetan Astrology.

*The Voice of the Silence* mentions that both were Suns in past *Kalpas* and may in future *Kalpas* again become two Suns under the Karmic Law. When we say planets we mean the presiding deities over these planets and we must not think of them as superior or inferior. A certain celestial being may be performing what appears to be an inferior function, but he may have performed superior function in the prior *Manvantaras* and may perform superior function in *Manvantaras* to come. Sometimes they have the function of guiding humanity, or only looking after animal kingdom or presiding over only a race or a nation, and so on. All this is depending upon Karma. “Falls and rises of Karmic law in nature,” refers to Karma of humanity, because great beings do not have such karma as to be compelled to take birth. Depending upon the Karma of the people and the need of the hour, these beings take up different functions. In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 233), H.P.B. mentions that there are certain persons on this earth, living and working as ordinary human beings, but in their divine nature they are immeasurably higher, and have a definite status and function in the supersensuous regions. Mr. Judge tells us that H.P.B. was herself an example of this. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet*

No. 16, p. 9)

Sun is considered important because even materially it must be of the nature which could become suitable substratum for the light, power and force of the Central Spiritual sun to radiate through. Brain is the instrument or vehicle of the mind. Therefore, in human evolution a certain quality of brain had to be developed—the brain of man had to be of much deeper and better capacity than that of any other animal—and only then mind of man was activated or lighted up. Astronomically, Mars and Mercury are smaller planets as compared to Saturn and Jupiter, and they are not as bright as the sun. Thus, they may be considered to be performing humbler function as compared to the sun. While the *Voice of the Silence* speaks of their re-becoming the sun depending on the karmic necessity, astronomically, we have not been told anything about planets re-becoming suns. Astronomically, the planet is said to die and become a dead planet like the Moon, and then its inner principles give birth to another planet, as the Moon gave birth to our Earth.

*The Secret Doctrine* (I, 575) mentions that Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, and Venus along with the three others are the heavenly bodies in direct astral and psychic communication with the Earth, its Guides, and Watchers—morally and physically; the visible orbs furnishing our Humanity with its outward and inward characteristics, and their “Regents” or *Rectors* with our Monads and spiritual faculties. The article “Mars and Mercury,” (*W.Q.J. Series No. 8*), mentions that according to the Masters, the relation borne by Mars and Mercury to the earth will not be spoken of or explained by them, as the questions relating to these planets pertain to the highest initiation. It is said that Mars is in the state of obscuration, while Mercury is getting out of obscuration. Venus is in her seventh round and therefore does not have any satellites.

The stars and the sun are like the great Masters, great Spiritual teachers. They shine by their own inherent light; while others shine, though they may look great, by the borrowed light of the sun and the stars. But all of us are learning to shine by our own light. Therefore

if we cannot shine like the sun in all its brilliance and splendour, we have to learn to shine like planets. In the spiritual life, each aspirant is at a different stage from all others. As the star-studded firmament dispels physical darkness and lights up the way of solitary wayfarers, helping them to reach their destination, so the light of truth helps one on the moral and spiritual planes. The student-practitioner has to emulate, in however humble a manner, those glorious figures down the ages who have pointed out the “Way,” and who are eager and anxious always to have new recruits for their army of peace.

If we cannot shine yet by our own light, we practice shining by borrowed light of the Spirit, of the Philosophy, the Science of Truth, Theosophy, so that we gradually become clean and pure, in our mind and moral nature, in our sense and bodily nature, till presently our own spiritual, luminous, radiant, bright Self will shine, as in the case of the Masters—Spiritual Stars.

We have to learn to shine by our own spiritual light within us, and by doing good actions every day—not now and then, not once in a year, not once in six months, not once a week, but in all the daily little things of life—to remember that we are souls, and act as souls: that is the way of growth, and therefore of happiness.

**Question:** What are the practical lessons we may learn from the knowledge of the Law of Cycles?

**Answer:** One of the fundamental propositions of Theosophy is that the law of cycles or law of periodicity prevails in all departments of life. Cycle means return of that which was before. Forms die but the essence returns embodied in new form. One of the lessons cycles teaches is the lesson of detachment, of not clinging to the form. Cyclically, everything that comes to birth must die. It is good to remember that even the most wonderful form to which we have got attached will die and be replaced by another form. However, at the same time we learn the valuable lesson of respecting and valuing life. We have to regard each life as a *rare* cyclic opportunity, which is going to come again only after 1000 to 1500 years, which is the average time spent in *swarga* or *devachan*, after death, by an

averagely good person. It is only proper, therefore, to question every action and every aspiration: “Is this the thing I will take with me to Devachan?” In *The Friendly Philosopher*, Mr. Crosbie writes: “Opportunity to understand and apply Theosophy comes under Karma to the very few....This comes from neglect or misuse of opportunities in former lives, in many cases” (p. 379). “There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries,” says Shakespeare.

Cycles also make us aware of certain auspicious periods when more can be achieved with less effort. Just as in the entire day the physical and psychic atmosphere of the early morning is the most conducive for study and meditation, so also the period between Christmas and Easter is best suited to make resolves, because the astral life of the earth is young and strong between Christmas and Easter. Those who form their wishes in this period will have added strength to fulfil them consistently.

Cycles teach us to encourage positive and wholesome thoughts, feelings and actions because impressions created by our thoughts, feelings and actions recur periodically. Hence, we say, “History repeats itself.” By paying attention to cyclic return of impressions, we can save time and effort in training of mind and body. If we eat at regular times, our digestive system is ready and active so that the food is digested well. If we study at a fixed time every day, then the mind comes ready for work so that more work gets done.

Cycles teach us to be aware of rise and fall—as there are ascending and descending cycles for an institution, nation, race and civilization, but not to get overpowered or lose hope and enthusiasm during the descending cycle. Even when the cycle is descending—for the civilization, race or *yuga*—an individual can still rise superior. “My friend, the golden age hath passed away, only the good have power to bring it back,” wrote Goethe.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

“Old age isn’t a battle; it’s massacre,” is how the novelist Philip Roth described old age. Roth’s disparaging comment is based on onset of pain, disease and disability along with a gradual diminishing of senses, brain function and the mind, which accompany ageing process. On the other hand, traditionally, almost all over the world, old age has been revered for its experience, wisdom and insight. Viewed scientifically, time was when neurologists used to believe that the adult brain was “hardwired” with a fixed circuitry which was immutable, but now they find many instances in which brain rewiring takes place in response to specialized training. They also have solid evidence of the birth of new brain cells occurring in adulthood which can persist well into old age. It is called neuroplasticity, where the brain is able to lay down new pathways for old, and renew itself at any given time.

For those who wish to keep their brain cells healthy and active till the end, without the onset of dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, etc., there are two scientific avenues, namely, “experimental action,” and “lateral thinking.” Experimental action forces the brain to learn things in a new way which is neither tedious nor a no-brainer. For instance, while using a laptop, switch to using the track pad with the left hand if you are normally using right hand, and *vice versa*. Though difficult to begin with, it is mastered in a week’s time, as the brain picks up the task and stimulates the cells to grow and connect with each other by laying down new pathways. In the same way, it is suggested that one should try brushing the teeth, or soaping or shaving or operating the remote or dialling with the opposite hand—opposite to the hand one is normally using.

Lateral thinking is another method suggested to keep the brain active, by asking oneself questions such as, how many timekeepers there are in the house. One may only count wristwatches and clocks, and then on second thought may remember the ones in laptop, microwave, washing machine, cell phone, etc. The greatest enemy

of increasing years is mental inactivity and lack of stimulation which is the result of lethargy and ennui-ridden angst of having been there, and done that, which accompanies old age, writes Mukul Sharma. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India, May 15, 2016*)

Besides doing the routine activities in a new style, brain cells are stimulated when deliberately one engages in rational and creative activities. An article that appeared in *The Free Press Journal (Sunday supplement)* for May 22, 2016, mentions the decline in creative graph of the Indians with age. It is felt that our education and society seems to encourage structured way of thinking which kills imagination. However, there have been people who have ventured out to learn and do something new and innovative, even after the age of 40 or 50. The article suggests that to keep one's creative juices flowing one may take up writing, scripting, painting, interior designing, pottery, learning a new language, or even cooking.

H.P.B. cautions that ordinary intellectual activity moves on well-beaten paths in the brain. But every conscious mental picture formed means change and destruction of the atoms of the brain. When any new mental effort is made it involves carving out of new "brain paths," and if indulged in injudiciously it may do serious physical harm to the brain.

Brain is the instrument of the mind. It is mind that affects the quality of the brain. "The depth and variety of the brain convolutions in man are caused by the presence of *Manas*, and are not the cause of mind," writes Mr. Judge. Our brain is not *receptive* and *porous*, to communication from our divine nature, as it is entangled in everyday activities and concerned with only mundane plane. We can change the quality of our brain by living according to the dictates of the soul—by taking up or ideating on universal ideas or even metaphysical ideas, and living a morally pure life. An article by Altaf Patel that appeared in *Mumbai Mirror* (May 24, 2016) mentions that a vast majority of senior citizens engage in productive activities, *i.e.*, making a constructive contribution to human life. Research regarding such productive activities tells us that they can enhance

mental and physical health.

"The brain is such a complex thing, both physically and metaphysically, that it is like a tree whose bark you can remove layer by layer, each layer being different from all the others, and each having its own special work, function, and properties," writes H.P.B.

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Compulsive action, it seems, may not be the virtue it is considered to be. In spirituality *Karma bandhana* is being bound to consequences of one's good and bad actions. But if Karma is action, then *Karma bandhana* would also imply bondage to action. Each one of us is conditioned to act. Even as primitive tribals we had to act in order to protect ourselves. Action was necessary for survival. However, we have now moved on from the Nomadic age to the Information Age, when there is no longer life-threatening danger around us. So there appears to be no need to jump into action at the stir of a leaf. The proclivity to act keeps us busy all the time, but as Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang puts it, "A wise man is never too busy; a busy man is never too wise. Busyness is not a virtue as many of us are given to believe. Leisure is a greater virtue. All culture is a product of leisure." Through the credo, "work is worship," our culture has indirectly lauded workaholism, and these workaholics very erroneously call themselves *karma yogis*.

It is useful to ponder over the radical concept—inaction is higher than action. However, inaction does not mean laziness. But even laziness has been praised in *Ashtavakra Gita*, which says, "*aalasi shiromani*," *i.e.*, the lazy person is the king amongst men. Idlers can often be as effective as hustlers. Andrew Carnegie used to say that whenever he had a complex problem, he would call upon the laziest person on his team to solve it, who being prone to inaction was likely to come up with the easiest solution!

A person addicted to work finds that every fresh piece of work, such as a project, involves many different kinds of actions, and the

more you do, the more is created for you to do. Time management tools help to create time—time to do many important things that one’s business or profession requires. Ideally, time management tools must be used to create time for leisure. Another problem with action addiction is that it does not leave us time or inclination for expressing appreciation and gratitude for all that we have already accomplished and also for all that God has bestowed upon us.

“Going slow on action gives us enough opportunity for work-life balance. It helps us deepen our immediate relationships to make them more intimate and meaningful....On the professional front...it helps us focus on quality *vis-à-vis* quantity. It helps us build rapport with all at work....Lesser action-addiction also translates into greater time availability to consciously work on the body and spirit, leading to improved health and accelerated inner transformation,” writes Bhaavin Shah, Mumbai-based trainer, healer, life and business coach. (*Life Positive*, May 2016)

It is not what is done and even how much work is done, but the “spirit in which the least thing is done that is counted.” Each one of us can give our best contribution to the world if we have the habit of performing our work carefully and cheerfully, instead of doing it with the attitude of “getting done.” In spiritual sense, “the truest work is done on the inner planes, and without this there could be no work done on the outer planes.” Forbearance is another form of inaction. To forbear means to desist or abstain. Forbearance involves checking a hasty conclusion, decision or action and hence deliberation before acting.

An important concept in Lao Tzu’s philosophy is that of *wu-wei* which means “without doing,” or “absence of action.” Yet, “*wu-wei* is not an ideal of absolute inaction; on the contrary, it is a particular efficacious attitude since it makes all doing possible,” writes Max Kaltenmark. The doctrine of inaction seems to suggest that although inactive physically, all things are possible to one who is active on the inner planes. On the other hand, when one is “inactive” or calm on the inner planes, one is able to accomplish more.

Whether it is work in the office or any other duty, Mr. Judge’s sage advice is, “If you will just do what lies before you without thinking about all the other things, and without troubling your mind about all the things you cannot do, then it will all be different and everything will grow brighter for you....What will help you in all these matters is to be content, to do what you can, and to let the rest go; act with a high motive...do some little act of kindness every day.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 177)

A recent discovery of a baby goat with human features, born in Southern Malaysia, has left people confused. Social media has gone into a frenzy after the birth of what appears to be a fawn, the mythical fusion of goat and human. The newborn goat with a human face did not live for long after its birth and the carcass has now been handed over to the Veterinary Services Department. The baby goat belonged to a farmer in the village of Felda, named Ibrahim Basir, who refused several offers of money from people interested in buying the carcass. Instead of selling the remains, the 63-year-old farmer decided to hand them over to experts who wanted to carry out an investigation on the strange-looking kid. “When I went to check I was quite shocked but fascinated too as its face, nose, short legs and even the condition of its soft body seemed like that of a human baby, whereas the light brown fur covering its whole body resembles that of a goat,” Ibrahim said. He added that despite the features the fawn-like creature did not have any umbilical cord. The farmer originally thought that the baby was trampled by its mother, causing its bizarre features. (*The Sun*, April 26, 2016)

Other sources report that state Veterinary Services Department laboratory is currently investigating the reason behind the goat’s human-looking features, which includes exploring the possibility that a human might have violated the mother goat.

Theosophy explains that during pregnancy, the women (mothers) become particularly receptive to influences of the astral light, which

assists them in the formation of the child and constantly presents to them the images of the forms with which it is filled. It is thus that sometimes very virtuous women have offspring bearing unmistakable resemblance to someone other than her own husband. The creative faculty of imagination can fashion the coming child into whatever form she likes. The image of the object, making strong impression on the mother's mind, is instantly projected into the astral light. Her magnetic emanations then attract and unite themselves with the descending current which bears the image upon it. It rebounds, and re-percussing more or less violently, impresses itself upon the foetus (*Isis*, I, p. 395 and 398). This might explain the Germanic face of a child born to Asian parents settled in Germany or a black offspring born to white parents.

H.P.B. quotes several instances of the power of imagination producing monstrous deformities in animals. In one such case, a tame dove was frightened daily by a parrot, and in her next brood of young there were two squabs with a parrot's heads, the resemblance even extending to the colour of the feathers. H.P.B. mentions, based on the experience of several animal breeders, that by exciting the imagination of the mother, the external appearance of the offspring can be largely controlled. (*Isis*, I, 397-98)

As for the possibility of the baby goat with human face being hybrid of man and goat, one can turn to the case of anthropoid apes. Theosophy teaches that mindless men of the Third Race, millions of years ago, committed the sin of uniting with huge she-animals, producing man-like monsters. Such union was possible because man as well as animals were in semi-astral form. While the unnatural union between man and animal was *invariably* fertile in that remote period, that is not the case now. "Medical science records such cases of monsters bred from human and animal parents, even in our own day. The possibility is, therefore, one of *degree*, not of fact." (*S.D.*, II, 689)