

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 12, No. 2

June 17, 2020

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

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### PATIENT RESIGNATION

RESIGNATION means, among other things, a state of being resigned, or to reconcile oneself to the inevitable. It means the uncomplaining endurance of a sorrow or difficulty. To resign also means to surrender one's self to the guidance of another or to the God within. “The first step in *becoming* is Resignation. Resignation is the sure, true and royal road...After Resignation, follow (in their own order) Satisfaction, Contentment, Knowledge,” writes Mr. Judge. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 18)

If in the East we have people who are more inclined to resign to what happens in life, by contrast, in the West people grow up with the feeling that we should take charge of our lives, till life places them in circumstances which are beyond their control. Patient resignation could mean readiness to wait, it means forbearance, when either it is impossible to act, or one does not know how to act, what steps to take. Mr. Judge writes that in *Kali Yuga* despair, agony and doubt exist in all places. But in such times, “wise man waits. He bends himself, like the reed, to the blast, so that it may blow over his head” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 37). We may be confident that when the hour is ripe, we can act. At times, there might even be *natural changes* in the situation, as a result of working out of some Karma, so that unripe fruit gets ripe, and which either falls, or is ready to be plucked. When the hour is ripe, we can accomplish the task with much less expenditure of energy.

Patient resignation means acceptance of what the Law of Karma brings or does not bring. Sometimes we make plans with our limited understanding of “good” and “bad.” What appears to us to be “good” may not be “good” from a wider perspective, or from the spiritual point of view. And therefore, when we make plans ignorantly and even wrongly, the just and merciful Law of Karma will not permit us to carry them out. We acquire Karmic demerit if we do not accept the impossibility of achieving that plan. This requires “mental abnegation,” renouncing our attachment to the fruits of actions. By fixing our desire on accomplishing what appeared to *us* to be good, we are bound karmically. We must remember that things often turn out better than what we could have ever imagined. When the mind loses interest and stops clinging to an object, a person or a particular outcome, with like or dislike, there will no longer be a Karmic link between us and that object, person or outcome. Instead, if we could look at a given result or situation as what we “in fact desired,” and not just deserved, it will lead to strengthening of our good thoughts and that in turn will influence the astral and then the physical body, and make it stronger, writes Mr. Judge. (*Ibid*, p. 36)

The right attitude to Karmic precipitations, which are Karmic opportunities, is that of unswerving faith in the working of the Law of Karma, that the Law is unerring, just and impartial. When we refuse to take the responsibility for the calamities, adversities and painful circumstances of life, and hence continue to complain or seek to escape from the unfavourable circumstances by ceremonies and rituals, or by committing suicide, we complicate our karma. There are ceremonies performed to dodge the karmic consequences. It is questionable if such ceremonies and offerings can help us dodge the karmic consequences, and even if they do, we are only postponing the day of settlement. Explains H.P.B.: “Not even the greatest of Yogis can divert the progress of Karma, or arrest the natural results of actions for more than a short period, and even in that case, these results will only reassert themselves later with even tenfold force, for such is the occult law of Karma (*H.P.B. Series No. 32*, p. 34).

Probably there is a temporary respite, but till we have paid up our karmic debt and learnt the necessary lesson, that situation or that person will be brought back to us again in the same or in some other life.

However, “acceptance” should not be equated with passivity and helplessness. If we are able to change the situation, we must do all in our power to change it. We are not expected to remain poor, handicapped, ignorant, weak, oppressed, or whatever be our plight. One of the aphorisms on Karma points out that in a given life we can take measures to counteract wrong tendencies and eliminate defects. When intense efforts are made, the influence of the Karmic tendency is shortened. Karma has placed us where we are, but it does not hold us there.

If resignation means reconciling or accepting the inevitable or unavoidable, then we should first find out the things and circumstances in life that we cannot change, or have no control over, as that will save a lot of heart-ache, frustration and disappointment. There is the lovely prayer, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.” But it is not always easy to differentiate between what we *can* change and what we *cannot*, except for some of the obvious things. For instance, we can work towards gaining or losing weight, in changing our job, our tastes, etc. We may or may not succeed. But we do see the possibility of changing. Likewise, we may not be able to change what other people think, say, feel, or how they behave. But we can try. We cannot change our past, and with that the lost opportunity or lost time. Sri Chandrashekhara Bharati Mahaswami of Sringeri points out that we do not know the intensity of efforts needed to completely overcome the fate created by our previous Karma. For instance, we cannot see the length of the nail inside the wood. Hence, we do not know how much effort will be required to pull it out.

But destiny is the working of certain powerful causes, so that no action of ours or any other karma can avert or modify the result. For

such Karma we can say, “what cannot be cured, must be endured.” For instance, when faced with some incurable disease, and having tried all the available medicines, one has to resign to the inevitable suffering and death. At times, circumstances make it impossible for one to escape from a nagging mother-in-law, or to leave one’s job, where one is up against a difficult boss and unfriendly colleagues. But unless there is “patient,” which means “calm” resignation to one’s plight, contentment will not be the natural result. Even if we do not complain, we may not necessarily be satisfied with life. It is only when we are *truly* reconciled to the inevitable that contentment results. And this is followed by acquirement of Knowledge, says Mr. Judge. At a simple level, this knowledge may mean learning. We can use the situation as a raw material and extract necessary lessons. It might consist in learning the lessons of fortitude and sympathy, or detachment and patience, and so on. When a daughter-in-law accepts her nagging mother-in-law, and tries to understand her, she might learn the lesson of not running away from the situation and might get a better insight into human nature.

But when the attitude is not just that “I deserved this,” but of going a step further and saying, “I,” *i.e.*, my soul, desired just this situation, then one is able to “respond” to the situation, in a manner that may inspire others. Thus, often a person suffering from a loss of limb, or hearing or eyesight, not only accepts the plight with dignity, but works in that area to find out ways and means to give relief to others like himself, as in case of blind, deaf and dumb Hellen Keller.

Patient Resignation may bring Knowledge in a far higher sense. That resignation is “spiritual surrender.” In its ultimate analysis, surrender means surrendering our ego, our pride, our personal will to the Divine Will. Many of us are control freaks, who always want to remain in charge of our lives. We manoeuvre to keep out or change unpleasant and painful situations, and work towards having more of pleasurable experiences. Then something happens, which suddenly makes us aware that after all we are not in complete control

of all that happens in our lives. Our capacity is limited. A very common experience is that of doing all we can for a loved one who may be suffering from some illness, and a point comes when all our efforts become useless. Else, it could be an unexpected event which leaves us physically or mentally handicap, or causes a sudden financial loss that shakes the very foundation of our lives, waking us up from the feeling of self-sufficiency and self-confidence. We are brought down “to our knees,” so to speak, incapable of changing or managing the situation. As Nancy Colier, a psychotherapist, observes, to be able to reach true surrender we should practice surrender on smaller scale, accepting small defeats, small denials. Further, “Surrender, at its core, is the willingness to meet life as it is. . . . And remarkably, no matter what the catalyst, or whether it is a moment’s surrender or a lifetime’s, the result or gift that accompanies it remains the same: relief, gratitude, grace and sometimes even joy.”

Surrender in a spiritual sense is surrendering to the Divine, which means surrendering the personal will to the divine will, which Patanjali calls *Ishwar Pranidhan*. That surrender happens when we have truly realized the meaning of “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” When we do the will of that which we reverence, instead of working for personal ends according to our own will, then indeed will the Kingdom of God be established. “Kingdom of Heaven” is the state of spiritual bliss and perfection. It is that peace and bliss which leaves no desire for any worldly thing. It is that knowledge, knowing which, nothing else remains to be known

Unlike surrendering our will and control when we face an insurmountable problem or situation, as a last resort, *Ishwar Pranidhan*—which is one of the *Niyamas* (Religious Observances) in Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali—is the kind of surrender recommended to be practiced from moment to moment. Mr. Judge translates it as “persevering devotion to the Supreme Soul,” that follows the practice of first four observances, namely, purification of both body and mind, contentment, austerity and study which leads to the knowledge of the Self. *Ishwara* is the spirit in the body,

*Atman*, which Patanjali refers to as the preceptor of all, and therefore, the highest teacher (Book I, Aphorism 26), that is untouched by troubles, works, fruits of works, or desires. By obeying and living according to the behests of this Inner Self, we are able to receive guidance in all aspects of our life.

The article, “Surrender—The Power We All Need” discusses the concept of surrender as applied to a student-aspirant, who is at times, overwhelmed by the profound depth of the philosophy of Theosophy that he is endeavouring to promulgate. He finds himself inadequate for the task, and determines to give up the duty of promulgation with a view to equipping his mind with sufficient knowledge. But such an attitude results from the lack of a *force* fundamental to Theosophic life. Through adequate self-examination he finds that it is not merely paucity of knowledge which is the real hindrance, but the lack of power to will and to do, and to make and sustain resolves. So, he pursues study and meditation with a view to become a better expounder of the philosophy of Theosophy, only to discover that by this he cannot arouse the enthusiasm that is necessary for serving Theosophy, and that the warmth of love does not radiate from him. He finds himself looking out for approval and praise from his listeners and readers. He realizes the need to develop the Impersonal Love, which looks not for recompense, and that he has to generate the fundamental *force* of surrendering the self to the Self, and the Self will raise the self to Itself. The student must become the servant, and learn to lean upon the Self through service and devotion to the Masters (*The Theosophical Movement*, October 1946). “A devoted Chela once said: ‘I do not mind all these efforts at explanation and all this trouble, for I always found that, that which was done in Master’s name was right and came out right.’ What is done in those names is done without thought of self, and motive is the essential test,” writes Mr. Judge. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 38)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### MISERY

“MISERY” is the short story by Anton Chekhov which describes intense grief experienced by Iona Potapove, a Russian sledge-driver, an old man, for the loss of his son, who dies after a brief illness. The setting of the story is winter in a Russian town in the late nineteenth century, and the surroundings tend to amplify the misery and wretchedness of the grieving man. “Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on the roofs, horses’ backs, shoulders, caps.” But life must go on and he must drive his horse carriage, in order to feed his horse and himself. After waiting for long he gets his first passenger, a military officer. Iona tries to share his grief by telling the officer that his son died just a few days ago. Besides asking what he died of, the officer is not interested in listening to the old man, and shouts at him, “Drive on! Drive on! We shall not get there till tomorrow going on like this. Hurry up!” Several times the old man turns back to look at the officer, but the latter keeps his eyes shut and is apparently disinclined to listen.

His next passengers are three young revellers. They are not at all sympathetic, and only wish to be taken as quickly as possible to their destination. One of them is suffering from consumption, and is especially miserable. This man reacts to Iona’s story by saying that “We all shall die.” They ask Iona if he was married, and he replies that the only wife for him is the damp earth, meaning thereby the grave, as he has lost his wife. “Here my son is dead and I am alive....It is a strange thing, death has come in at the wrong door....Instead of coming for me it went for my son.” When these revellers get down at their destination, Iona is once again alone. The author describes his grief poignantly: “The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona’s eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro, on both

sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery....His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight...."

A house porter carrying a package is standing on a corner. Iona asks him the time. After answering, he tells Iona to drive on. This is the final straw. He decides to return back to the cab driver's area. A young driver gets up to get a drink. Iona tells him that his son has died, but gets no response from him. In fact, he returns to his corner, covers his head and goes to sleep. The old man is "thirsty" to talk about his feelings. "His son will soon have been dead a week, and he has not really talked to anybody yet....He wants to talk of it properly, with deliberation....He wants to tell how his son was taken ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died....Yes, he has plenty to talk about now. His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament...."

Finally, he goes to his horse, in the hope of finding a sympathetic listener in her. Iona talks to the little horse which seems to listen to him. He begins to tell the horse about his son. "He was a real cabman....He ought to have lived." Iona is silent for a while, and then he goes on. "That's how it is, old girl....He said good-bye to me....He went and died for no reason....Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt....And all at once that same little colt went and died....You would be sorry, wouldn't you?" The little mare munches, and seems to listen to his master, and breathes on her master's hands. Iona is carried away and tells her all about it.

Anton Chekhov was a Russian physician, playwright and author who is considered to be among the greatest writers of short stories in history. The above short story explores human grief and the need for human compassion. The old man's desperation to share his grief

and the memory of his son with someone gets expressed, when he thinks to himself, "To whom shall I tell my grief?" The lack of compassion he finds in the world around him increases his misery. Human beings have an innate need to share their emotions, joy, sorrow, fear, etc., with someone. We are able to appreciate this need in the old man, who is a widower, and his daughter is away from him. Besides, the late nineteenth century is the period when communication systems were not as well developed as they are today, aggravating his loneliness. When he tries to connect with his fellow men, he finds them wrapped up in their own lives. The callous and apathetic attitude of people can be seen from the way they respond to him. Ironically, it is an animal with which he is able to share his feelings, and not a human being, who has the ability to understand his grief and sympathize.

There are many reasons which lead to misery, but the misery of losing a loved one is almost always acute and unbearable, especially when it has been an untimely death, as is the case of Iona's son. He is made to say that death came at the "wrong door." In losing his son, he experiences inner deadness, and therefore he is described as sitting on the box without stirring, as "white as a ghost," not bothering to shake off the snow that falls on him, as if life has stopped moving for him. The author portrays the picture of a materialistic world, barren of feelings, little aware that money, position or power can never take the place of a lost loved one.

According to some critics, men of genius like Chekhov are usually not satisfied with flinging only criticism. So, while he condemns the sluggish current of contemporary existence, he also tries to awaken the indifferent man, and show him how insipid and tasteless life may be, when the doors of communication are closed. "Indeed, the highly torturing agony of man is the sense of solitude that he feels in the presence of the absent individuals of the crowded world of indifference." Chekhov seems to convey that great progress in science and technology is futile unless accompanied by moral and cultural advancement. It is only when all the individuals feel

the need for caring and sharing that there can be happy and joyous life.

“Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always,” is the quote giving a sage advice. If we remember that “we are our brother’s keepers” we would see our responsibility. We do not live in isolation but are interconnected. There is nothing like karma of an individual, because each man’s karma is bound up with karma of the society, community, nation and the world at large. Hence, we must always try to remember that “the indissoluble unity of the race demands that we should consider every man’s troubles as partly due to ourselves, because we have been always units in the race and helped to make the conditions which cause suffering,” writes Mr. Judge. If we fail to show sympathy to a person, it becomes an act of omission for which we are karmically responsible.

As the saying in the Bible goes: “Blow hot or blow cold, the lukewarm I spew out of my mouth.” Life brings us to a point where our eyes may be opened, and instead of drifting along, we begin to realize the true meaning and purpose of life. We not only learn through proper response to *our own* pain, which is one of acceptance instead of rebellion, but also through proper understanding of another’s pain. The extent to which we are willing to embrace and understand others’ suffering, to that extent we are better able to cope with our own suffering. But generally, we are sensitive only to our own pain. Is it possible that our incapacity to tackle our own suffering is in some way related to our lukewarm attitude when others suffered? Very rarely is there a genuine and deep concern at another’s loss, as if it were our own.

*The Voice of the Silence*, a Mahayana Buddhist text, tells us what we are expected to do when we encounter misery of another: “Let thy Soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun. Let not the fierce Sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer’s eye. But let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain, nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed.”

## RITUALS AND SACRIFICES

The greatest happiness is to know the source of unhappiness.

—FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

THE GLOBAL events of the last few months show us that we go to any length to ensure our safety and security and avoid misfortune. Every act of ours is driven by either acquiring the good, or avoiding the evil. Every act of ours is aimed at one common goal: reaching happiness. But, are we able to achieve this desired goal? At least, can we confidently claim to be doing the right things to reach peace and happiness, eventually? If there is even a shadow of doubt, it is worth examining the basis of our thoughts, and the foundation of our civilization.

The pages of history are filled with the many attempts of man to explain the riddles of life and unravel the mystery of permanent happiness. Religion was, is and will be for the foreseeable future a strong contender for man’s attention. The various rituals and sacrifices prescribed by every religion for human happiness have a grain of scientific basis, and also a large shell of superstition which has grown over it. One has to carefully segregate the two, retrieve the science and reject the superstition. Let us analyze them.

Some rituals are prescribed by wise men purely from a hygiene point of view. Mr. Judge says in his *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, that “Moses ordained some sacrifices as a religious duty from sanitary reasons of his own, since the unthinking tribes would perform devotional acts willingly which, if imposed only as hygienic measures, they might omit.” But, to view all sacrifices as merely having basis in physical health and hygiene is erroneous.

Ancient science was based on a recognition of the *Invisible* within the visible world, and an understanding of the relationship between the two. As there are potency and powers in the inner, invisible realms, it was given more prominence, the outer being merely a shadow of the former. Grasping this relationship—in man and in nature—is crucial for unravelling the riddles of ancient religions.

Every substance has not only physical characteristics, as chemistry confirms, but also, occult and hidden properties. These occult properties are many times more potent than the physical ones. Chemistry makes one a magician in the eyes of the ignorant. Similarly, by knowing the *occult property* of the same substance, one can bring about effects which appear miraculous to the chemist. At present, it is enough to know that everything in nature has an “angelic” aspect, and every atom contains the potentiality of the Sun. The Sufi saint, Mahmud Shabistari, puts it succinctly: “*Know the world from end to end is a mirror; In each atom a hundred suns are concealed. If you pierce the heart of a single drop of water, From it will flow a hundred clear oceans....The core in the center of the heart is small. Yet the Lord of both worlds will enter there.*”

The day of the week, the phase of the moon, the seasonal cycles—all of these and more, have a bearing upon the earth and its substances. One who understands this interconnection can transform a substance into a curative medicine, or turn the same into a fatal toxin. There is one common vital principle which pervades all things, bringing about a mutual interaction. H.P.B. says, “A thorough familiarity with the occult faculties of everything existing in nature, visible as well as invisible; their mutual relations, attractions, and repulsions; the cause of these, traced to the spiritual principle which pervades and animates all things; the ability to furnish the best conditions for this principle to manifest itself, in other words, a profound and exhaustive knowledge of natural law—this was and is the basis of magic.” (*Isis*, I, 244)

The other factor to be considered is Magnetism. Every thought, word and deed produce, not only chemical changes (studied by biochemistry) and electrical activities (as recorded by Electroencephalogram), but also a magnetic change in and around us. As a focal point, they attract similar influences and repel its opposite. Our magnetism permeates everything and affects everyone we come in touch with, just as asymptomatic “carriers” of viruses affect others, unknown to themselves.

Our negative thoughts of revenge, lust, greed, etc., attract towards us deleterious influences. These influences precipitate on oneself and everyone around. The only protection is to keep oneself pure in thought, word and deed, by attending to one’s duties, our foremost duty being eradicating vice and developing virtues. Magnetism was the science behind the practice of *satsang*—keeping the company of good and noble ones—and it is imperative to keep good company mentally, of compassionate thoughts and noble feelings.

We have devised ways to fumigate and sanitize a place from microbial agents. Similarly, there are ways to gather the “evil magnetism” generated from a locality and “banish it” to wilderness. This science was current among the ancient priests, who were more of occult scientists, whereas the priests of today, in general, have made a career out of human hope, fear and ignorance. The modern priest is, generally, either himself ignorant, a mere repeater of texts, or a false claimant.

It may come as a surprise, but by resorting to rituals and ceremonies to “ward off evil,” we may be exposing ourselves to a greater harm. Our personal magnetism, full of negative feelings, would attract similar influences and could bear evil fruit instead of good ones. That is, if at all the ritual bears fruit, which itself is a huge question mark, due to reasons explained subsequently.

There is a safe and sure way to attract beneficial influences and keep away inimical ones. It is not based on rituals, but on the knowledge of the divinity within our heart. The worship (*puja*) of that divinity entails sacrificing one’s vices at the altar of spirit, and making every act and duty performed as a sacred rite, uncontaminated by self-interest. This practice, even when not perfected, purifies oneself and makes one a vehicle of the divine. It requires study of the *True (Satyam)*, contemplation on the *Good (Shivam)*, and expressing the *Beautiful (Sundaram)* in our actions. In short, it is based on the science of Self.

The sages of the past helped the common man, through various means—who, then as now, is weak and unprepared for higher

studies. One of the means was to use the knowledge of occult nature and magnetic laws referred to above, to help him make his life a little more bearable. Nevertheless, they constantly reminded the child-souls to seek the mysterious Self within. Armed with this knowledge and its realisation, man realises his true nature and destiny to be divine. Studying and realising the many electric paths of connection between Man and Kosmos makes man a God. Whether criminal and indifferent, or sagely and responsible, man is inherently divine, and potentially a Buddha or a Christ.

But there is a caveat imposed by nature, a crucial condition, for it to respond to man's needs. It is this: Man has to be in sympathy with all sentient beings, and aid the grand aim of nature. He has to be a co-worker with nature. We are bound to mistake ourselves for the body, but each one of us—in our entirety of spiritual, *manasic* and physical aspects—is a crown-jewel of evolution, and have a responsible position in the evolution of consciousness.

We affect every other being on this planet—knowingly or otherwise—because we are all interconnected on the inner and outer planes by various indestructible threads. By our ignorance (and negligence) of our duties towards our enemies and friends, family and strangers, we become inimical to everyone and ourselves. Nature—the great enigmatical mirror of Man's character—takes on our psychic and moral colouring, and naturally becomes inimical to man. Man is unfriendly to every other creature, and Nature reflects back to man in a concentrated manner, his own inner nature and character. Selfishness drives out the beneficial influences in natural substances, and these intelligences “retire” to other spheres, awaiting a better age when man resumes his responsibility and becomes his “brother's keeper.”

Rituals and ceremonies in this age do not produce the desired result because the invisible, salutary influences have retired from this sublunary sphere, leaving only the husk behind. Thus, our rituals are dead, without the appropriate preconditions of duties well-performed, based on a knowledge of Man's indissoluble links with

Nature. Nature became “barren” due to man's moral bankruptcy and spiritual insolvency, while in the ancient times she was “fertile” with curative and beneficial properties, since man too was a blessing to every sentient being. This was the injunction to Job: “Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.” Such a sage need not “pray” to any god or higher power whatsoever: he commands, and the elementary powers of nature obey. A self-realized sage is one with the Universal Spirit that animates all beings, and he is a co-worker with Nature.

How can we return to a “fertile” period of beneficence? The disturbance was brought about by us in this and other bodies, and the key to restoration of harmony is in our hands only. Let us honestly take stock of our daily thoughts and feelings. How much of these are actually helpful to others, and how many are violent and retaliatory? Can we confidently claim our body-mind to be a “temple of the living God,” the most worthy instrument of *Atman*; or, have we contaminated it with lust and malice, and condemned it as a den of debauchery? Are we concerned about others' welfare and well-being, or do we silently wish for others' ill, however “evil” they are? If we have no concern for others, how can we expect Nature, a mirror of our moral nature, to reflect back anything else into our personal and collective lives? Individual happiness is inseparably bound with collective welfare. Those who wish for their happiness must, within their areas of influence, work for the good of others, sacrifice for others, and make their welfare a priority. There is a ritual and sacrifice appropriate to this age. It recognizes the body as a temple. The “fires” burning in the senses are the fire of *havan*, with the intelligences presiding over eyes, ears, etc., as the *hotris*, priests, and every sense-object as a sacrificial object. Krishna lays down the sacrifice to be performed in this age of darkness: sacrifice your selfish intention in action, sacrifice the desire for reward, while performing duties for the good of the world—*Loka sangraha*. This will be the most appropriate and best sacrifice, made in the altar of the heart, for the sake of the Divinity within—Self of All.



## EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

## WIDER ASPECT OF THE MOVEMENT

THERE ARE only a handful of genuine inquirers. Divine Intuitions all possess and carry within themselves; but how many have the good Karma to have even one or two of these awakened? It is that which is most peculiar to us all who are in the Movement. Students of our Movement are neither scholars nor mystics; we are all mediocre. Then what brought us into this Movement? We came into it because in a previous life (and with so many in the present life) our inherent impress of ideas which we call Divine Intuitions was touched, stirred and awakened. That touch cannot become a stir unless the person from this end responds in aspiration; and when the stir continues, awakening takes place. At different stages we progressively awaken or delay and procrastinate and even die in acts of crass folly, dogmatism and superstition. Doubt and suspicion and fears of various types are encountered by each one of us. Master's work, in particular with individuals, and that of the Great Lodge with the general mass of humankind, are not much known or appreciated by our students. Judge's sentence that "Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others" truly refers to the response we *feel* in the personal soul to the work of the Lodge and the Masters. In this idea there are good clues—the silent work which Theosophy does for very many, of whom only so few respond.

Theosophy is for all, but what can be done with those who say that they do not want it? The Theosophical Movement is a hidden, esoteric Motion. Do we see in the firm-standing buildings the motion of protons, neutrons and electrons? And yet the tensile strength of any building, hovel or palace is in the material, and all material is of one homogeneous substance. The psychological and moral aspect of this principle is well given by Judge in the seventh of the first volume of his *Letters That Have Helped Me*: about grieving for the suffering masses.

Also, there is the analogy: Why is it necessary in the India of

today to make secular education not only free, which is right, but *compulsory*; why? Why do not the villagers see that education is good for their children? Every suffering drunkard knows that he suffers and yet he continues; and so compulsory prohibition comes upon the very same snag. "The martyrdom of self-conscious existence" has numerous phases and this falling prey to illusion and delusion, and remaining there and even enjoying them—all are processes of human progression and unfoldment. Think along this line and you will perceive how very difficult it is to work with human nature, and so how profoundly patient is Their Labour of Compassion and Sacrifice.

Theosophy can do nothing for people who refuse to open the window of their minds. Do they want light? Then they would turn genuine enquirers. They may shop around at many counters but if they are genuine enquirers, seeking answers to many questions, they are bound to come to the one truth which is in the Esoteric Philosophy. But even when they begin, many stop. They have to come to the living fact of Teachings and Teachers. Wisdom is not easily acquired and time is needed; the priceless boon of learning truth has its own conditions and demands, and the price must be paid. I would say, leave apathetic people alone after a single and simple effort. "There is knowledge on this subject in our Theosophy. Do you wish to know?" According to the answer would be our next step—enthusiastic enquiry, doubting sarcasm, or flat denial, each has to be responded to with tact and patience and our reasoning has to be sweet. Our life, life alone, will awaken them and even then often in diverse fashions of antagonism.

The U.L.T. does not offer the temptations which personalities crave and which some other organizations supply. But full unity, deep devotion, understanding of our aims and purposes as set forth in the declaration—these our U.L.T. students have to learn to unfold. Again, if our students were to contact dispassionately the people who do not come to our meetings and let them see our normality and common sense, our Cause would be benefited.

What Mr. Crosbie says about promulgating impersonally is wise. But that does not mean that persons are neglected. From the impersonal work persons arise, seek and find their own affinities. Mr. Crosbie had his own personal devotees. To them he wrote all these letters in *The Friendly Philosopher*. By all means let the student talk Theosophy in his own circle, but let him proceed in the right way. What has he studied and how, and then what and how will he speak? Pushing himself forward and standing between his friend and Theosophy, or truly letting Theosophy speak to persons through his tongue or pen? Conversation and correspondence are avenues of promulgation as much as lecturing and writing articles. It all depends on to whom we speak or write personally, and why and how we do it.

It is true that only as we try to give out the philosophy do we realize our limitations; the act of teaching others, whether through lectures or writing, also indicates to us how much we have learnt. As to speakers, you know what *Light on the Path* says, “Attain to knowledge and you will attain to speech.” Now it is the inner knowledge which brings strength and enlightenment to the speech, and it is possible for our students, with the aid of meditation and the living of the life necessary, to become transmitters of the force of the occult world of the Masters to the public at large. But our students and platform workers must develop the attitude that they are there to be used as channels; and the right preparation of body, mind and heart should be made for such an endeavour.

Mr. Judge wrote and told us, didn't he, that we are not working for “success” but rather developing in ourselves persistence of effort; the effort to be always ready to present the Teachings and to meet and help others is what will ultimately count, and will also bring on those accretions which true unity attracts.

We have to demolish the notion in people's minds that the U.L.T. is owned by So-and-so. It arises mainly because the real connection between self-dependence and interdependence is not seen. People are either obstinate in self-dependence or mushy in other-dependence

and know little about interdependence. We should emphasize the word “united.”

Theosophy is what we have to serve, not a creed, organization or Lodge; also let us not forget that Wisdom is not the sole property of this Lodge which is a body of learners. Let us look for Truth with deep-searching eyes in all spaces—minute and large, in the atom and in the expanse of heavens and firmaments.

It is gratifying to learn that your activities are kept going in spite of the conditions now prevailing, and it is heartening for us who are not surrounded by the tragedy of war as you in London are to learn that the power and beneficent influence of Theosophy sustain you. As long as the London Centre work can go on, it should be continued, for there is more than the visible effects of words spoken and meetings held, which directly affect only a few but which invisibly impress and energize a vaster number. *You* will prevail, in terms of H.P.B.'s letter you quote, by steadfastly holding on to the Lines she laid down. Our thoughts are daily with all our colleagues and co-workers everywhere, and among them with you. You are passing through most trying times but it is also an opportunity to practise calmness, to maintain a correct firm position and sustain it by right ideation.

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IF Theosophical doctrines are to be of any benefit to the race, then they must be for all classes, poor and rich, cultured and uncultured, young and old. Some people think that these doctrines are really only comprehensible by the educated and cultured; but what has experience shown? The Theosophical propaganda has gone forward in the face of considerable opposition and coldness from the so-called better classes. Very true it is that the working, labouring classes have not pushed it, nor do they, as a whole, know a very great deal about it; yet that indefinite section of the population sometimes called the “middle class” has been its great propagator and supporter.

—W. Q. JUDGE

## THE SACRED COW

## I

THE COW occupies a special place in Hindu culture and appears on Indus Valley terracotta figurines and rock paintings. The cow is revered by the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. There are several references in Vedic literature concerning the sanctity of cow. In ancient India, the one who injured or killed a cow was severely punished. Often, the killing of a cow is equated with the killing of a human being, especially a Brahmin. In the Vedas, the cow is *Aghnya*, or one that ought not to be killed. Animals in India are considered sacred and worshipped, for various reasons. Some of them were the vehicles of gods or goddesses, and therefore became sacred by association with a particular deity. All the gods are believed to reside in the body of a cow. Her four legs are the scriptural Vedas; her horns are the triune gods—Brahma (tip of the horn), Vishnu (middle) and Siva (base); her eyes are the sun and moon gods, etc. Worshipping a cow then becomes equal to worshipping all Hindu gods. This makes cow sacred. In the Vedas, the cow is associated with Aditi, the mother of all gods.

Sacredness of some animals was dependent on their qualities or economic value, of which cow is one example. *Panchagavya*, the five products of the cow, include cow's milk, curds, ghee (clarified butter), urine and dung, each of which is used beneficially in Indian culture. Ayurveda emphasizes the sattvic quality of cow milk and believes that the dairy products, such as, milk, buttermilk, ghee, etc. provide important protein and calcium, and help in giving strength and immunity to our bodies. Cow-dung is used as a fertilizer in the field, and also as a fuel and disinfectant. Many village homes that are plastered with mud and cow dung mixture, insulate the walls and floors from extreme hot and cold temperatures, writes Avani Sukhadia. Cow urine is used both in rituals and as a medicine. Thus, a cow is seen as a particularly generous, docile creature, one that gives more to human beings than takes from them. That is how

perhaps, at a simple level, a cow is associated with abundance, and we have in the Hindu philosophy *Kamaduk* or *Kamadhenu*, “the cow of plenty,” the source of all prosperity, which is more a metaphysical than a material concept.

“In the Hindu tradition, the cow represents both the mother and the earth—the mother because cow's milk is the first replacement for mother's milk, and the earth because the cow is a symbol of fertility. In times of distress, the earth is believed to take on the form of a cow to pray for divine aid,” writes Nanditha Krishna, in her book *Sacred Animals of India*.

According to a story in the *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidas, King Dilip, an ancestor of Lord Rama, once passed by *Kamadhenu-Surabhi*, but failed to pay respects to her, thus incurring the wrath of the divine cow, who cursed the King to remain childless. Since *Kamdhenu* had gone to *Patala* (nether world) the guru of Dilip, Vasishtha, advised the King to serve Nandini, the daughter of *Kamdhenu*, for 21 days, who was in the hermitage. The King followed rishi Vasishtha's advice, but on the twenty-first day a strange occurrence took place. Nandini was attacked by a lion. King Dilip drew his bow to shoot the lion, but found that his arm was paralyzed, and he could not shoot. Realizing that the lion had some mystic powers, he begged it to let Nandini go, and instead to take him as his prey. Just as the King was about to give up his life, the lion disappeared. Nandini then explained that this was the test which the King had passed admirably, so he would now beget the desired son. The son was named Raghu. *Kamadhenu* is taken to symbolize *Dharma*, which means duty, Law, or the right, orderly way of living and being, and even sacrificial actions. The scriptures say that she, symbolizing righteousness, stood steadily upon the earth on all four feet, during *Satyayuga* (Golden Age), the Age of Truth; on three feet during Silver Age, on two feet in Bronze Age, and only on one foot during *Kali yuga*, the Dark Age.

In the Third Chapter of the *Gita*, *Kamaduk*, represents sacrifice and sacrificial deeds. Thus, “The creator, when of old he had created

mortals and appointed sacrifice, said to them, ‘By means of this sacrifice ye shall be propagated. It shall be to you a cow of plenty. By means of it do ye support the gods, and let these gods support you. Supporting one another mutually, ye shall obtain the highest felicity.’” It refers to an element of sacrifice inherent in the cosmos from the very beginning. Human beings have to emulate it and act with compassion, without attachment to result, for the sake of others, renouncing the doership (*kartabhav*). Only human beings have the capacity to sacrifice their self-interest for the purpose of a higher cause. It enshrines the principle of Brotherhood or reciprocity. Sacrifice means cooperation, keeping in mind the claims of other beings—plants, animals, human beings and even gods—on us, making our contribution to meet their requirements. Such sacrificial actions will prove to be for us “Kamadhenu,” a wish-fulfilling mythological cow of sage Vasishta, with divine qualities, and with the ability to grant any wish asked of it. If one continues to work selflessly, both material and spiritual benefits will be showered upon him. In this connection Devdutt Pattanaik, a mythologist, remarks that “all those people who tried to steal this cow from Vasishta, ended up being cursed. What people did not realize was that while *Kamadhenu* could give anything that a person wanted, her keeper, Rishi Vasishta, did not desire anything. That is why *Kamadhenu* enjoyed his company.” (*Pashu*, p. 92)

Different texts provide different versions of the story of *Kamadhenu*’s birth. According to one version, during the churning of the ocean, fourteen precious things emerged, and one of them was *Kamadhenu* (or Surabhi), the divine cow. The ocean represents the primordial *chaos* or the homogeneous, undifferentiated matter. Just as butter comes to the surface while churning the butter-milk, so also, “churning of the ocean,” represents *differentiation* of primordial, homogenous matter, which results into formation of the universe with its Milky Way, Sun, Moon, etc. H.P.B. says that the meaning and occult properties of the “fourteen precious things,” which came out during the churning, are explained only at the fourth

Initiation. Cow and bull represent the productive and generative power in nature, respectively, and they are symbols connected with Solar and Cosmic deities. (*S.D.*, I, 67)

According to another allegory, mentioned in both *Bhagavat Purana* and *Vishnu Purana*, in the race of *Swayambhuva Manu* there was a king called Vena, and the rishis made him King of the earth, but he was wicked and prohibited sacrifices and worship. As there was decay of religions, the sages beat him to death with a blade of holy grass. But in the absence of the King there was chaos in the kingdom and so the sages rubbed the right arm of the corpse of the King and there sprang a majestic son, named Prithu. When there was famine, people complained to Prithu against the mother earth. Prithu got angry and took up his bow and arrow to punish earth. Prithu tried to force the earth to yield her bounty. The earth took the form of a cow and began to run. But when she found that she was unable to run any more, she pleaded with Prithu and asked him to get a calf, through which she might secrete or ooze out milk. Prithu is requested to bring the calf, suitable for milking her. First, Prithu demonstrates the milking process by transforming the cosmic progenitor *Manu Swayambhuva* into a calf, wherein he milks into his hands, herbs and grains. Likewise, Sages milk the earth, and it is not our earth, using Soma or Moon as her calf, and that Moon is not our Moon. The Sages make celestial priest Brihaspati into a calf and milk Vedic hymns. Similarly, the gods make Indra into a calf and milk Soma juice into a golden pot. Using Kapila as calf the Siddhas extracted the milk called supernatural powers. Thus, various sorts of beings of this world and beyond, receive their desired “milk” prizes, each with the help of appropriate calves.

At a simple level, perhaps, the allegory could be understood by referring to the 7, 10 and finally 21 Prajapatis, Rishis, Munis, etc. mentioned in the Puranas, who are made the fathers of various things and beings. In the Puranas the order of evolution of plants, animals and inanimate things has been given randomly, and associated with a particular Rishi or Prajapati. Thus, for instance, “Prithu is the father of

the Earth. He milks her, and makes her bear every kind of grain and vegetables, all enumerated and specified. Kasyapa is the father of all the reptiles, snakes, demons, etc.” (S.D., II, 259 fn.)

H.P.B. points out that this allegory has a deep cosmographical significance. She draws our attention to the fact that when the Puranas are compared with the Jewish scriptures, one finds that the Puranas refer to Pre-Cosmic and Pre-Genetic periods, which are hardly touched upon in the Bible, which seems to pay more attention to material genesis (S.D., II, 252). We are told that in the Vedas, the Dawn of creation is represented by a cow. The cow was sacred to Isis, the Universal Mother, Nature, and corresponds to Vach of Hindu philosophy.

If we refer to page 137 and footnote (S.D., II) we find that Vach is differentiated cosmic matter, a permutation or form of Aditi (*Mulaprakriti*), and she is associated in the work of creation with the *Prajapatis*. She is a principle higher than Ether, and therefore connected with Akasa, and hence is the synthesis of all the forces of Nature. We may connect this with the comment in the footnote from T. Subba Row, that evolution is commenced by the intellectual energy of the Logos or the light of the Logos, and not merely on account of the potentialities locked up in *Mulaprakriti*. The light of the Logos or Fohat is the link between the objective matter and the subjective thought or *Eswara*. From this we can infer that *milking the cow* might refer to the process of transforming the potentialities locked up in the *Prakriti* into potencies, through the agency of Fohat, which is itself a collectivity of Creative Powers. The cow in every country was a symbol of passive generative power of Nature, represented by Vach, Isis, Venus, etc. In esoteric philosophy a cow is the symbol of creative nature, and Bull (her calf) is the spirit which vivifies her (S.D., II, 418 fn.). Prithu used *Manu Swayambhuva* as calf for milking. Since *Manu Swayambhuva* is the synthesis of 14 Manus connected with seven Rounds of earth planetary chain, the allegory may also apply to the evolution of earth planetary chain and not just to *our* earth or globe D.

(To be concluded)

## APHORISMS ON KARMA—SOME REFLECTIONS

### XIII

APHORISM 20: “As the body and mind and soul have each a power of independent action, any one of these may exhaust, independently of others, some Karmic causes more remote from or nearer to the time of their inception than those operating through other channels.”

Aphorism 23: “Three fields of operations are used in each being by Karma: (a) the body and circumstances; (b) the mind and intellect; (c) the psychic and astral planes.”

That the soul, mind and the body have each a power of independent action is quite comprehensible. This can be demonstrated by the facts familiar to us in our ordinary life. It is quite evident that orderly and complex physiological functions of the body go on quite independent of the functions of mind and intellect, though certain tastes, habits and actions of the body are induced by the embodied Ego, the Thinker and the Perceiver, the Soul. Some of the habits so induced in the body by the thoughts and desires of Thinker become instinctual and automatic in action without conscious awareness of the same by the mental consciousness. For instance, in the stage of infancy we made conscious effort to learn to walk till the lives which compose the legs acquired that facility so as to be able to perform the act without the aid of the deliberate and conscious attention of the mind. Physiology tells us that the infant makes a conscious effort to correct the inverted images on the retina of its visual organ of the objects it sees, and as it grows the lives of the ocular organ learn to do it instinctually without the conscious effort by the mind. Eyelids and eyelashes instinctively protect the eye from dust particles. Body immunity system and other functions take place of which the mind remains unaware. Further, through repetitive action over a long time in the performance of a task, the limbs of the body which are used acquire habitual action quite independent of the supervisory attention

of the mind. Evolutionary anthropology of Theosophy teaches that hundreds of millions of years ago when the ethereal body of man gradually became concretised, the Ego established the physiological functions and processes by conscious effort, until they became automatic and instinctive, as they are now. Thus, the body, to a great extent performs its functions quite independent of mind and intellect.

Mind or mental consciousness, though not a product of the brain, is however dependent on the health and integrity of the cerebral and neural system of the body. The latter are the instruments of the mind by which it functions on the terrestrial plane. The mind has its own powers and functions, such as, organising sensory impressions into a coherent pattern to form idea of the objects perceived, intellectual activity of interpreting sensations and discerning meaning thereof, evaluating their usefulness, raising future expectations, recalling past sensations and experiences, connecting various ideas together by the mysterious link of memory by which the notion of individuality is generated, and so on. Thus, the mind and intellect together, is a distinct principle having inherent powers and functions independent of the body.

Here we may add that as *The Secret Doctrine* teaches, when the mind is freed from the binding influence of material body it exhibits its higher psychic powers and faculties, such as clairvoyance, psychometry, etc. (I, 292). These psychic faculties and powers pertain to the *psyche*—the Astral Soul—a temporary reflection in the body, and the instrument, of the divine Ego.

The Soul, or the Ego, is the thinking *Inner Man*, is independent of both the body, mind, and psychic natures which are his instruments. The Ego acquires these instruments every time he is reincarnated by virtue of his past Karma, in order to experience and understand Nature, and, thereby, gain self-knowledge. As the Yoga aphorisms of Patanjali teach, Soul is the Perceiver, vision itself pure and simple, unmodified, and looks directly upon ideas. It is destiny of the Soul to bring order in chaos of the lower turbulent animal

matter of the material vehicles by gaining control over their instinctual, independent action, and directing the mind and body, by the exercise of the power of Will, to serve the great purpose of the Soul to gain complete Self-knowledge.

The unspent store of past Karma of the Ego is indelibly registered on the ground of the principle of mind. They are the causes sown by actions of the Ego in past lives. The unspent causes stored in mind contain potentially the effects which are to manifest when suitable conditions are furnished, because effects are wrapped in and not succedent to the cause, just as the tree is potentially existing in the seed. When appropriate conditions arise when the Ego acquires the body, mind and intellect, and psychic nature, by the just Law of Karma, the mental seeds of past actions fructify and manifest in time and space, and form the narrative of man's life and fortune, his weal and woes, his character and tendencies.

The fructification of mental deposits may uniformly occur throughout a man's life on the three planes of mind, body and soul, or each of the three instruments may exhaust unspent Karmic affinities relating to their respective planes in different degrees and intensity independently of the others. Many illustrations may be cited to demonstrate this truism.

An illustration of the first kind stated above is seen in the lives of people as steady and uniform flow of past Karma with very little variations in body and circumstance, mind and intellect and psychic and emotional character. There can also be found illustrations in the lives of people of the many varieties of changes occurring separately in the three aspects of life. For instance, a person endowed with fairly good physical health for a good part of his life since birth becomes afflicted with chronic disease at a certain stage and for the rest of his life, without affecting mental and soul nature. This is because as soon as the flow of the Karmic causes which furnished good physical health was exhausted that phase of Karma ended, the opposite kind, which had remained potentially in his mental nature, begins to flow out through the body manifesting the disease.

Illustration of opposite kind are also not uncommon.

Instances of brilliant minds born with severe nervous and other disabilities are seen. The reason for it is that the individual is exhausting a phase of bad Karma pertaining to physical life, while possessed of a sound mind and intellect as the effect of appropriate cause. The cause for the physical disability may have been created in the previous life or many lives before. In the latter case proper conditions requisite for manifestation of the cause of disease occurred many lives after the cause for it was created by the Ego in a former life, awaiting suitable bodily instrument to arise for its outflow. As an example of good physical Karma at work with bad mental and psychic Karma, we could consider a person born with a fine body and favourable circumstances but with morose, peevish, irritable, revengeful and morbid character. Mr. Judge gives an example of the Borgias, where underneath a beautiful body was hiding devilish character. The Borgias are the most infamous family of Renaissance Italy. Especially during the reign of Alexander VI, they were suspected of many crimes, including murder by arsenic poisoning. On the other hand, there could be a deformed human being having a happy disposition, an excellent intellect, sound judgement and every good moral quality.

In the working of the law of Karma is found explanation for varying degrees of development of the physical, mental, intellectual, psychic and moral natures in individuals, and its workings in each of these aspects of life independently of others. They are called geniuses in whom one or two disciplines, such as, brilliant intellectual ability with great power of memory and oratorical skills are exhibited but may be wanting in philosophical conceptions and moral sense; of artists of renown but given to indulging in vices which take a toll of their health, and so on. People with psychic abilities, such as clairvoyance, mind reading, etc., exercising them and putting them to base use and selfish ends because of lack of corresponding development of intellectual and moral faculties and spiritual perception. Eccentric behavioural traits being common among many,

popularly miscalled as geniuses. This is because such individuals have devoted themselves to development of one or the other area of interest, neglecting to develop the personality as a whole to serve as an efficient vehicle of the Divine Ego—the only true and real Genius.

The aphorisms explain how Karmic causes manifest as effects in one life differently on the physical, mental and soul planes independently of each other, and show the need to harmoniously develop each of them equally with right knowledge and effort. A thorough knowledge of the aphorisms and their practical application forms the foundation of true education which aims at harmonious and equal development of physical, mental, psychical, moral and spiritual powers and faculties, so that the whole nature of man is sensitised and made porous for the Light of the Divine Ego, to shine out to illuminate the world.

We come across a very important observation made by Mr. Judge as regards unfoldment of past Karma on various planes. In the article, “Karma” he points out that physical Karma will manifest in the physical tendencies bringing enjoyment and suffering, and the same applies to intellectual and ethical tendencies. As pounds could not be added to rupees or, rupees to dollars, so also, in counteracting bad karma with good karma it is essential that both the kinds of karma must be compatible. Thus, it appears that the results of acts done primarily on *mental plane* cannot be mitigated or obliterated by actions done on *physical plane*. But it is possible for an individual to affect his own Karma. “If a greater amount of energy be taken up on one plane than on another this will cause the past Karma to unfold itself on that plane.” Karma will be manifested only in harmony with the plane of desire. Thus, for instance, if our desires are for money, fame, name, etc.—centred on lower plane, then we create a “centre of attraction” on that plane. One, who lives entirely on the plane of sense gratification, will draw from higher planes the energies required for the fulfilment of his desires and aspirations on the lower plane. This will cause the past Karma to unfold itself on that plane.

On the other hand, in case of a person who has purer desires and who aspires higher, fixes the “centre of attraction” on the higher plane. The energies on the lower plane are drawn there, resulting in increase of spirituality. Thus, when we make a demand on lower plane for sensual gratification, the fulfilment of lower desires and aspirations happen at the expense of higher development.

That energy which should have gone in strengthening our morals and towards the fulfilment of higher aspirations is dragged down in satisfying lower desires. “By degrees the higher planes are exhausted of vitality and the good and bad Karma of an entity will be absorbed on the physical plane.” On the other hand, when we constantly struggle to fix our mind and heart for the attainment of highest ideal, our past Karma will begin to unfold on the higher plane and aid us in spiritual pursuit. Thus, for instance, if we have generated good Karma by giving large donations in the past lives, and if our heart is set on making money in this life, we may find, money, comfort and luxury coming our way very easily. But if our heart is set in acquiring spiritual knowledge then the same good Karma of the past, on the physical plane, will unfold on the higher plane and we might find that we are aided in terms of getting right kind of books, a quiet place for study and meditation, and so on. Thus, in a million different ways we are aided on physical, mental, moral and psychic planes.

How does this happen? The law is that Karma manifests in harmony with the plane of desire. It is our attitude of mind that binds our soul with Karmic cords. We can create our “centre of attraction” on higher plane, more markedly, when we take a vow, a pledge or a resolve. In that we focus our mind and heart on the higher plane and earnestly desire to purify our lower nature and become spiritually wise. Such a vow brings to the surface every latent quality in person’s nature, leading to an all-round development. In taking such a vow we are setting up our line of life’s meditation on a higher plane.

*(To be continued)*

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Can we put a price tag on nature? It appears that there are divided opinions on the attempts made to quantify even the value of some dimension of nature. Proponents argue that ignoring nature’s value when planning new homes, roads and infrastructure has adversely affected wildlife and habitats. Critics believe that putting a price on nature will lead to greater degradation of nature. The concept involved in evaluating nature, is “natural capital” or “ecosystem services,” pioneered by Gretchen Daily, the Stanford University biologist, which is being incorporated in economic decision-making. “She has also developed a metric to rival GDP [Gross Domestic Product], called Gross Ecosystem Product (GEP), which could help countries better value nature,” writes Adam Vaughan.

It is useful to pause and understand that “natural capital” is the world’s stock of natural resources, or goods and services provided by the natural environment, which includes geology, soil, air, water and all living organisms. Some of the natural capital assets provide people with free goods and services, such as, clean water and fertile soil, and are called ecosystem services, which underpin our economy and make human life possible. Ecosystem services valuation revolves around the idea that non-human life produces goods and services that are essential to life. A well-maintained forest or river may provide a sustainable flow of new trees or fish, whereas over-use of those resources may lead to a permanent decline in availability of timber or fish stocks. GDP indicates the value of all goods and services bought and sold in a country during a specific period, and is widely used by decision-makers around the world. But they do not take into account how nature contributes to economic activity and human well-being, and that is provided by calculating GEP, which can provide the value of natural world expressed using money.

In an interview with Adam Vaughan, Gretchen Daily agrees that for those who have understood nature, “nature is infinitely valuable,” but for most people who do not know nature “nature scores an



absolute zero.” In view of the fact that in the last hundred years there has been great degradation of nature, evaluation of nature must be part of economic decision-making, as a short-term measure. “Over long term, I hope very much that there is a deeper cultural shift,” says Daily. This short-term measure has been implemented successfully in China, which recognizes that though industrial revolution has helped reduce poverty, it has also poisoned water, air and land, and therefore it is crucial to ask: how much nature should we protect and how can we harmonise people with nature.

As to the international efforts to stem destruction of nature, she observes that we are expected in our lifetimes to lose at least half of the different types of life forms that inhabit the planet, but also, more countries now show interest in pursuing natural capital approach. Since people and wildlife are deeply interconnected, we must aim at bringing about a radical transformation in our thinking concerning wildlife and its trade, and how we produce food. She observes that pandemics have always been and always will be part of human experience. But since the present pandemic was spread across many countries in the world, “it has caused us to pause, and that we have come far enough in driving this transformation [of governments and other institutions valuing nature] in a very quiet and almost unknown way,” says Daily in her interview with Adam Vaughan. (*New Scientist*, June 6, 2020)

Those who have taken the trouble to understand even physical nature, know that nature is infinitely valuable, bountiful, selflessly giving without asking for any return. To understand nature, we should live in company of nature, long enough to observe and appreciate nature. It requires a certain amount of sensitivity. Underlying the physical nature is the subtle, energizing nature, and those who can fathom its depths, can learn secrets of the working of nature. But not all can access those secrets. “Help Nature and work on with her; and Nature will regard thee as one of her creators and make obeisance,” says the *Voice of the Silence*. This can be done by one who appreciates oneness or non-separateness of man and nature.

The main obstacle to the realisation of this oneness is the inborn habit in man of always placing himself at the centre of the Universe.

Theosophy teaches that the ancients have always revered Nature, never seeking to conquer it. The article, “Morality and Pantheism,” (*The Theosophist*, November 1883), expresses the Theosophical views on man-nature relationship, thus:

If an individual attempts to move in a direction other than that in which Nature is moving, that individual is sure to be crushed, sooner or later, by the enormous pressure of the opposing force. We need not say that such a result would be the very reverse of pleasurable. The only way therefore, in which happiness might be attained, is by merging one’s nature in great Mother Nature, and following the direction in which she herself is moving: this again, can only be accomplished by assimilating man’s individual conduct with the triumphant force of Nature, the other force being always overcome with terrific catastrophe. The effort to assimilate the individual with the universal law is popularly known as the practice of morality.

In the light of the above, is it not possible that the recent calamity, the Corona virus pandemic, is nature’s chastisement for our disturbing the harmony?

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Are we relieved to know that we are not a big deal? Those of us who grew up steeped in the self-esteem movement of 1990s were brought up to “love ourselves,” and think we were *special*, because high self-esteem is associated with success. “And yet this turns out to be poor preparation for dealing with the everyday embarrassments of being human,” writes Melissa Dahl, an editor of *New York* magazine’s “Science of Us.” She suggests that instead of trying to love one’s self, single-mindedly, one must adopt the attitude of indifference. In the 2000s, when the self-esteem movement was waning, psychology researchers published papers on “self-

compassion,” which Kristin Neff at the University of Texas, defined as: “Being open to and moved by one’s own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness toward oneself, taking an understanding, non-judgmental attitude toward one’s inadequacies and failures, and recognising that one’s own experience is part of the common human experience.”

In a sense, self-compassion was contrasted with self-esteem, and in a study, researchers asked college students to recall an embarrassing high-school memory. One set of students were given prompts to review it so as to bring out their self-compassionate side, and to feel kindness towards themselves as they would for a friend in similar situation, etc. The other set of students were given prompts that were intended to stoke their self-esteem. The point that was made by the researchers was that self-esteem tells you to focus on all your wonderful and positive qualities, while self-compassion asks you to acknowledge your fault or weakness.

Besides being kind to oneself, self-compassion also asks us to recognize that our own experience is part of the common human experience, and that we are more similar to others rather than different, even when we are ridiculous. If we fail then we must recognize that everyone fails and everyone struggles, and that is what it means to be human, and being part of the interconnected whole. Basically, it implies humility, and a truly humble person sees their own welfare as intertwined with the welfare of others. “You are important and worthy of love, because everyone is important and worthy of love.” The author prefers to call it self-indifference, because it is, in a way, “comfort of realising that you are not all that unique,” writes Dahl, in an article that appeared in *Aeon* magazine.

Mr. Judge asks us to cultivate *higher patience*, which is a fine line between pride and humility. How shall we be proud, when we are so small, in our *personal* nature? How dare we be humble when we are so great, in our *divine* nature? In both we blaspheme. But between these two extremes there is a place, “neither too high nor too low,” and *there* we may stand calmly, not overshadowed by any

man however great, because each of us contains potentialities of every other. That *special* skill, *special* virtue or *special* power that the other person possesses, “I” also possess. So also, every vice and weakness in the race is present in me, in the germ form, which can manifest under appropriate conditions. We would do well to learn to conquer the universal habit of pushing ourselves forward, and instead remember that “you are a very small affair in the world... Your only true greatness lies in your inner true self and it is not desirous of obtaining the applause of others,” advises Mr. Judge.

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It appears that some of us thrive in a crisis. This is the puzzling observation of the author, Vivian Gornick, during the Corona virus pandemic. When a woman, lonely and misanthrope, who was convinced that everyone in the world had a better life than she, and spent her days in envious depression, was asked by the author, during Corona virus crisis, how she was doing, she answered in a clear voice that she was fine, “because we are all in this together.” Thus, more than justice or liberty, equality is what we crave. Curious as it was, she observed this phenomenon replicate itself in other loners like her, who trusted no one, joined nothing, and yet were seen now making masks and checking on neighbours. What exactly was motivating them now to assume an attitude of solidarity?

In searching for the answer, the author recalls the case of an Italian writer, Natalia Ginzburg, who owing to her childhood circumstances, grew up to be an introvert and withdrawn individual, and continued to do so, till she lost her husband and saw everything fall apart around her, with Second World War round the corner. Life shocked her into an experience she could never have imagined. The separateness from others she had valued all these years, seemed a threat to her own survival. She realized that she must begin to feel connected, or at least *act* as though she felt connected, and she must teach herself comradeship. She writes that not only does she feel

saved, but curiously alive, “through the simple act of taking part in the fellowship of suffering.”

The author shares what was shown on television during the Corona virus crisis, wherein she witnessed the intensity of the collaborative effort being expended by a team of doctors and nurses in a hospital. And yet, she reminds us of the conclusion reached by a public figure that “all human beings are sealed into an essential aloneness from which there is no escape.” But this person also said that our engagement with a Cause, would help us to be strong and independent enough to battle with life’s irreducible starkness or loneliness, writes Gornick. (*The Atlantic*, June 2020)

Socializing is not a frivolous diversion but essential to our well-being. It is our self-centredness that has alienated us from the others. The key lies in not being dependent on others, but in achieving a balance between independence and interdependence. When we experience a feeling of being “left out,” we must introspect, and then chances are that we would work a little harder to reconnect, instead of sinking into apathy and seclusion. “Each one has a kind of heart shell in which he lives in a world of his own, and he often does not know the real outside world till the shell is broken and he can see the real world as it is...The real breaker of the shell is the accumulation of knowledge and the aspiration to use that knowledge out of love for human kind. That is where devotion, even to a few people or a single individual, is of real help to the aspirant,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. Altruism is an integral part of self-development. “Open your eyes and seek another human being in need of a little time, a little friendliness, a little company, a little work....Or else a good cause that needs voluntary workers,” says Albert Schweitzer.

There is a difference between loneliness and aloneness. It is not necessary to isolate ourselves from others, but in order to experience lasting peace and happiness, it is necessary to turn within—every day, for a few minutes. We may find this practice difficult at first, but if kept up, it would yield positive results.