

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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PURITY—SOME REFLECTIONS

THE TEACHINGS of Zarathushtra revolve round one word *Asha*, which means among many things, Purity and Righteousness. To be pure and righteous is considered to be man's highest duty. A religious and pious person, in our times, pays attention to his bodily cleanliness, performs rituals and ceremonies and strives to achieve worldly goodness, whereas our life and true spiritual growth should be guided by Righteousness or pursuit of that which is morally right. “He whose thoughts are pure, whose words are true, whose acts are virtuous, is the custodian of real permanent wealth which is Righteousness,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. When the mind is purified by Wisdom, and heart is energized by Devotion, one can follow the Path of Righteousness, which is full of tests and trials, and which ultimately leads one closer to the Divine within.

In one sense, the path of spiritual growth is the Path of Discipleship, which involves transformation, from being ordinary, good people to spiritually wise people. This process involves rigorous cleaning. We start with our ordinary self with its various desires and interests and discover with pain that morality often requires giving up some of our desires that we consider legitimate. We experience an inner conflict. “Living the higher life” means not only getting rid of our *vices*, but also our habits, beliefs, pet theories and our likes and dislikes. Each spiritual aspirant has “at the first step to take himself steadily in hand and put the bit into his own

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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mouth; no one else can do it for him,” says *Light on the Path*.

The section “Desire Made Pure,” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 7*), shows that we can purify our desires, step by step, by first overcoming the desire for the things of matter. The second step is to overcome subtler desires such as those for power, knowledge, love, happiness or fame. How to achieve this? The answer is, “Life itself teaches these lessons,” because even when we get what we want, we are likely to lose it, or it may not be what we had expected it to be, or it loses its charm once we have attained it. Thus, our life experiences show that it all turns to dust and ashes in the mouth. Gradually, after many such experiences, we begin to intuitively perceive that satisfaction is attainable only in the infinite, so that at last, we begin to use our “Will” to centre all our desires on the Eternal. On the other hand, pain, when received in right manner, could prove to be a great purifier and an uplifter.

This cleansing process is compared to the process of purification and transformation of a base metal into pure gold. Chelaship is defined, as a “psychic solvent, which eats away all dross and leaves only the pure gold behind.” This process of purification begins, the moment one genuinely and earnestly resolves to live the higher life. One’s determination and aspiration acts as heat, which works on one’s lower, psychic nature, and brings to the surface, hidden good as well as bad qualities. One’s greed for money, tendency to lie or gossip, pride and vanity, which was so far lying latent, comes to surface, and the aspirant has to work far harder to remove the same. For becoming an Accepted disciple, when he is ready to be taught by the Guru, an Initiated Adept, one has to acquire seven qualifications, and one of them is “Absolute mental and physical purity.” Ultimately, that is what enables the God within us to act outwardly. H.P.B. says that every student-aspirant owes to himself the duty, “to control and conquer, *through the Higher; the lower self*. To purify himself inwardly and morally.”

The purity of mind and body are interlinked. A pure mind makes for pure thoughts, words, actions and desires. Also, pure thoughts

lead to purity of astral body and *prana* or life currents circulating through it. These *pranic* currents, influenced by one’s thoughts, feelings and desires, affect physical body, and ultimately stream forth as magnetism.” Man makes his magnetism with his mind,” says an Occult aphorism. Regular cleaning of the body, combined with clean habits, ensure material purity of the body. However, physical purity does not ensure magnetic purity or pure magnetism, though cleanliness of skin, hair, nails, etc. contributes to it. Thus, it is possible for a physically pure person to send out impure or foul magnetism. At the base of a pure magnetism is constant awareness of what kind of thoughts, words and desires one allows to take root in one’s mind. Instead of drifting through life, one learns to take charge of one’s life, with conscious thought and deliberate action.

In India, people are reluctant to shake hands. This is not an idle fancy or superstition, because every person has a magnetic exhalation. A person may be in perfect physical health, but his exhalation may be harmful for others who are sensitive to such subtle influences. These magnetic exhalations are more intense from the eyes, palms, fingers, soles of the feet, etc. Careful physicians wash their hands before leaving each patient. Just like physical disease, impure magnetism can be communicated by touch, and hence the reluctance to shake hands. The tradition among the Hindus, of not shaking hands with others, is the foundation for the *sine qua non* condition in spiritual life, of not allowing one’s magnetism to become impure by external influences. Thus: “A *Lanoo* (disciple) has to dread external living influence alone (magnetic emanations from living creatures). For this reason, while at one with all, in his *inner nature*, he must take care to separate his outer (external) body from every foreign influence: none must drink out of, or eat in his cup but himself. He must avoid bodily contact (*i.e.*, being touched or touch) with human, as with animal beings.... A disciple has to live, so to say, in his own atmosphere in order to individualize it for occult purposes” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*). The meat of each animal preserves the psychic characteristics of that animal, and animal food

imparts to the eater the qualities of the animal, and tends to make his physical body grosser and denser.

Dwelling on high and noble themes, ethics and metaphysics of Theosophy, can certainly help to change the quality of one's *prana*. In the ultimate analysis, pure magnetism, built on the foundation of clear conscience and an intense desire to help others, *i.e.*, altruism, works as a wonderful talisman, repelling evil influences. Any person who lives a morally pure life can purify his own magnetism and also the *psychic atmosphere* around him.

Mr. Judge suggests that when a spiritual aspirant advances sufficiently so as to make a difference in this world of moral darkness, the dark forces get busy to thwart his efforts and deviate him from the right path. The black forces cannot affect a person unless he offers an opening, unless he has a chink in his armour. It is through one's vices, however subtle, that evil forces can make an entry. This is symbolized in a story in the *Mahabharata*, that of the King Nala. Kali (personified evil) could not harm Nala so long as he was stuck to the path of virtue. Such was the purity of Nala that it took twelve years for Kali to find a small fault in him and bewitch his soul. One day, Nala went for his evening prayers without properly purifying himself, and this gave a chance to Kali to enter his body. Under the vile influence of this deity, Nala gambled and lost his kingdom and all his wealth to his fraternal cousin. Both Nala and his wife were subject to a series of calamities, before being reunited. So, it does not take a spectacular mistake or slip on our part to let in a bad influence. Hence, "Eternal Vigilance is the price of safety." In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, we read: "By gentleness, detachment, strict attention to duty, and retiring now and then to the quiet place, bring up good currents and keep back all evil ones." (p. 84)

Self-examination helps to reveal one's obvious vices, weaknesses and prejudices, but one has to undertake occult self-introspection to become aware of the seeds of prejudice and pride in one's possessions, knowledge, and subtle forms of vanity, feeling of self-righteousness, intolerance, etc. "Think not lightly of evil, saying, 'it

will not come unto me.' Even a water-pot is filled by the constant falling of drops of water," teaches the Buddha. If evil company corrupts good manners, much more do evil thoughts and mental criticism of others, corrupt good souls.

"Deeds of sacrifice, of mortification, and of charity are not to be abandoned, for they are proper to be performed, and are the purifiers of the wise," advises the *Gita* (XVIII). The *Gita* asks us to perform these actions, over and above our daily and obligatory duties. The right performance of duty requires right motive and right method. The Second Chapter of the *Gita* is called *Buddhi Yoga* or Mental Devotion, which teaches that without mental purification that leads to mental equipoise, skilful actions are not possible. The attitude of mind reflects itself in the doing of deeds. The right kind of attitude can arise from the conviction that we should not be overanxious about the results of actions. When we practise this long enough, it enables us to experience contentment, so that we are not disturbed by adversity, nor elated by prosperity, and find ourselves becoming free from anxiety, fear and anger.

Great is the benefit of practising *Dana* or impersonal love, as it guarantees quick spiritual progress based on firm foundation. "For every flower of love and charity he plants in his neighbour's garden, a loathsome weed will disappear from his own, and so this garden of the gods—Humanity—shall blossom as a rose," writes H.P.B. Is it easy to love others, or even feel goodwill towards them, by overlooking their faults and weaknesses? But when we are determined to be kind and loving to another person, who, say, is greedy, or dishonest, or a liar, we are forced to make some inner adjustment and overcome in us the aversion for greed or dishonesty or lying. At a minor level, perhaps, we are applying the principle: "Don't hate vice; don't love vice, but understand it." Thus, love for another helps us to get rid of "loathsome weed" of our own vices and weaknesses, leading thereby to morally good and even sacrificial actions.

We are willing to share out of the surplus. But very often our

needs come into conflict with needs of other people. That is where sacrifice comes into picture, which is “giving to others, more than to oneself,” *i.e.*, self-sacrifice. To practice self-sacrifice, one should be able to deny something to one’s self, which means mortification. H.P.B. hints at true mortification when she says that the duty of a theosophist is to control and conquer his lower, through his higher self, and to put into practice the loftiest moral ideas and to drink without a murmur up to its last bitter dregs whatever the cup of life may hold for you. Occasions for mortification, as also for sacrifice, come in our day-to-day living. We must not get irritated or angry if the food has a little more or less salt. We must not be disappointed if things do not go the way we expected, or others do not live up to our expectations. Mortification is thus, more a matter of mind than of the body. Austerities of the right type, performed with the right motive, should help the Inner Ego to get a better control over its vehicle, the personality. We may consider observance of periodic silence of the senses and desires, as well as of the tongue, to be useful mortification, which enables the individual to hear the voice of his higher nature, guiding him.

If we follow spiritual discipline and make it our line of life’s meditation, setting our whole heart on it, then we are assured that we will be able to carry it to next life. Hence, if some of us are naturally attracted to and find it easy to follow spiritual discipline in this life, it is because we would have made that our line of life’s meditation in prior lives. A Master of Wisdom beautifully describes the process of self-purification, with the promise that no effort is lost. Thus: “The process of self-purification is not the work of a moment, nor of a few months but of years—nay extending over a series of lives. The later a man begins the living of the higher life, the longer must be his period of probation, for he has to undo the effects of a long number of years spent in objects diametrically opposed to the real goal. . . . *If his aspiration is genuine—a settled conviction and not a sentimental flash of the moment—he transfers from one body to another the determination which finally leads him to the attainment of his desire.*”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE CRUCIBLE—I

THE CRUCIBLE, is a play by the playwright Arthur Miller, written in 1953. It is the fictional retelling of events in the American history concerning Salem witch trials. There are as many as 500 books and many articles and plays written in varied languages based on more or less true story of Salem witch trials, which occurred in colonial Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. More than 200 people were accused of practising witchcraft and around nineteen of them were executed, while one was stoned to death for refusing to submit to a trial on witchcraft charges. The author has named many of the characters in his play after real people. According to the original account of Salem witch trials, Reverend Parris’s daughter showed the signs of supernatural affliction, moaning and thrashing about one moment, but remaining silent and still the next moment.

The play begins with Reverend Samuel Parris discovering that his daughter, Betty, is lying unconscious and appears very ill. He lives with his daughter and his niece, Abigail Williams, aged seventeen. Betty is taken ill after she was discovered by her father, dancing in the woods with Abigail, Tituba, who is Parris’s slave from Barbados, and other local girls. The local physician is unable to determine the cause of Betty’s illness, but suggests witchcraft as a possible cause. When questioned, Abigail denies having participated in witchcraft, but Parris suspects that she is lying.

Just then Thomas and Ann Putnam arrive and tell Parris that their daughter, Ruth, is sick. Mr. Putnam is one of the wealthiest landowners in Salem. Ann Putnam says that she had sent her daughter to Tituba who could communicate with the dead and had found out who murdered Mrs. Putnam’s seven children, who had all died during infancy, under mysterious conditions. As a result, Mr. and Mrs. Putnam are convinced that evil spirits are at work in Salem, and try to persuade Parris to declare that he suspects witchcraft.

Abigail worked as a servant in John and Elizabeth Proctor’s

house but when Mrs. Proctor discovered that Abigail had an affair with her husband, she dismissed her. Mercy, the servant of Mrs. Putnam, and Abigail, try to wake up Betty. Mary Warren, Elizabeth Proctor's servant tells Abigail that people of Salem suspect witchcraft as the cause of Betty's illness. Mary Warren is frightened that people will label them as witches. Just then Betty wakes up and accuses Abigail of drinking blood and having cast spell to kill Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail threatens three girls, Mary, Mercy and Betty, that she would practice witchcraft on them if they told any of those things about her, and asked them to maintain that they were all only dancing in the woods. It is easy to see that desire to possess John Proctor has motivated Abigail to exercise witchcraft to kill Elizabeth, because living in the Puritanical society, the only way Abigail could obtain John Proctor was by marrying Proctor after his wife's death. Abigail threatens to harm the girls by witchcraft, if they do not do as she wished, and later she is seen to eliminate her enemies by accusing them of witchcraft.

When John Proctor comes to see the sick daughter of Parris, Abigail gets an opportunity to speak with him alone, and reaffirm their relationship. But Proctor makes it plain that he is no longer interested in becoming involved with Abigail again. Abigail is very angry. She is determined to deal with Elizabeth to ensure that she would not lose Proctor completely.

When parishioners sing a hymn, Betty begins to scream and cover her ears. Mrs. Putnam interprets this as a sign of witchcraft, saying, "she cannot bear to hear the Lord's name!" Rebecca Nurse, an elderly and kind woman, a well-respected citizen of Salem, who is present there, tells everyone to be quiet and she stands near Betty till she calms down. Rebecca warns Parris that an attempt to show witchcraft as the cause of Betty's illness, will set a dangerous precedent and lead to further problems in Salem. Her words prove prophetic. Next, Mrs. Putnam asks Rebecca to visit her daughter Ruth, who is ill. Ruth is the only child of Mrs. Putnam to survive, as all her other seven children died in infancy. Mrs. Putnam is jealous

and suspicious of Rebecca, as all her children are healthy. She attributes loss of her own seven children to witchcraft.

Putnam accuses Parris of concerning himself more with material gains than doing his work as a minister, and believes that a minister who is obsessed with obtaining material goods cannot really serve God or minister to the inhabitants of Salem. Parris has been feeling insecure, and thinks that inhabitants of Salem do not recognize his authority, and also refuse to acknowledge their "obligations towards the ministry." He is afraid of being removed from his post and therefore has been constantly asking for the deed to his home, so that he is assured of a place for himself and his family, in case he is removed. Putnam accuses Proctor of stealing wood from land that he does not own, but Proctor says that he purchased the land from Francis Nurse five months ago. Putnam claims that Francis had no right to the land and, therefore, could not sell it. It is plain that Abigail's purpose is to accuse Elizabeth and obtain Proctor for herself, while Putnam's purpose is to accuse any person who he feels took away the land, which he believes belongs to him. Likewise, Rebecca Nurse is charged with supernatural murder, because she served as a midwife to Mrs. Putnam, who lost her seven children.

People of Salem call Reverend Hale, a scholar from Beverly, considered an expert in witchcraft to ascertain if witchcraft is behind the children's illnesses. He questions the girls who had been dancing in the woods and they either confess to witchcraft or having seen the Devil or having given oneself to Devil, and so on. As a result, eight days later, Proctor and his wife Elizabeth hear that many people have been charged with witchcraft by a court presided over by the deputy governor of the province. John Proctor submits a deposition signed by ninety-one locals attesting to the good character of many of the accused, but it is dismissed by the court as illegal. John Proctor submits his servant Mary's deposition, which declares that she was forced to accuse people by Abigail, and that the girls who admitted to witchcraft were pretending. Abigail denies Mary's assertion. John decides to expose Abigail, and therefore boldly confesses his affair

with Abigail, and that she is now trying to murder Elizabeth so that she can marry him. Not knowing that her husband has confessed his affair with Abigail, when Elizabeth is called to confirm John's story, she denies saying that there was no affair. Confusion and hysteria begin to overtake the courtroom. Abigail and other girls run about screaming and claiming that Mary's spirit is attacking them in the form of a yellow bird, which nobody else is able to see. Mary withdraws her accusations against these girls, saying that she was forced to do so by John Proctor, who is then arrested.

Three months later one finds that many villagers have been charged with witchcraft; most have confessed and been given lengthy prison terms and their property seized by the government; twelve have been hanged, and seven more are going to be hanged for refusing to confess, which includes John Proctor. Meanwhile, Abigail, fearful of the consequences, steals Parris's life savings and disappears on a ship to England. Reverend Hale is deeply remorseful and blames himself for the hysteria. He requests the deputy governor of the province to pardon the seven accused who were to be hanged, and also counsels those who were condemned, to make false confession and thus avoid execution. John Proctor first agrees to falsely confess but then refuses altogether when he is asked to make a public confession. So, he is conducted to the gallows to be hanged. Proctor's wife says that he has gotten his "goodness" back.

The Crucible is the play which tries to bring home what happened several centuries ago, and retell the story of hundreds of innocent people suffering at the hands of few powerful men. In a prologue to his play, Arthur Miller explains that the witchcraft trials originated from the particular moral system of the Puritans.

Salem was a Puritan community. Though the Puritans and the Church of England both adopted Calvinism, the Puritans had opposed many of the traditions of the Church of England. Thus, they were religious dissenters, and to escape religious persecution they migrated and settled in Massachusetts, seeking to build a Bible-based society according to their own chosen discipline. The Puritan

society may be described as restrictive and rigid society, which discouraged individuality and individual desires. Puritans punished anyone seeking material and sexual gratification, because they considered material and sexual desires to be unnatural and evil, and therefore, the work of Devil, as they connected good with God, and evil with Devil. They believed in the supernatural, and regarded witches as devil's agents on the earth. These witches acquire from Devil, the power to harm others, and in return are loyal to him.

Therefore, it is not surprising that when strange and unexplainable events started taking place in their community, the only explanation coming from religion was that God was angry and had sent Devil to punish them, who was using certain individuals or "witches," as his agents. Thus, while religion played an important role in Salem witch trials, according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "the outbreak at Salem, where nineteen people were executed, was the result of a combination of church politics, family feuds, and hysterical children, all in a vacuum of political authority." Salem Village was known for its internal disputes concerning property rights, grazing rights, church privileges, etc.

While witch trials had begun to fade out across much of Europe by the mid-seventeenth century, they continued in the American Colonies. The account of Salem witch trials shows that one particular chief justice of the court was determined to prosecute anyone accused of witchcraft even based on *spectral evidence*, which is the testimony of the afflicted who claimed to see the apparition or the shape of the person who was allegedly afflicting them. The judges were advised not to convict on the basis of something a witness had only imagined, which included visions of women flying through the air, or turning into cats and birds. The then President of Harvard had denounced the use of spectral evidence, saying, "It were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person be condemned."

According to some critics, the title of the play is symbolic, as a crucible is a container made of a substance that can resist great heat, and the term also means a severe test. The witch trials serve as a

metaphorical crucible, which bring to the surface true intention and character of each individual. We witness martyrdom of some of the accused, who are innocent and noble, while those guilty of witchcraft accuse others of it, in order to avoid punishment.

Are “witches” real? Do they really exist? According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, a witch is a person, especially a woman, who is credited with having, usually, malignant supernatural powers. Or, it refers to a woman who is believed to practice, usually, black magic, often with the aid of a devil or familiar (spirits). We come across this meaning of “Witch,” and “Witchcraft” in the Christian religious beliefs.

In the past, a witch was perceived to be an evil person, who must be put to death by burning or hanging. However, in our times, men of intellect and learning refuse to admit the possibility of existence of such a person as a “witch.” According to Henry More, the scholar of Cambridge, in the seventeenth century, the words *witch* and *wizard* signified a wise man or a wise woman. The term *witch*, is derived from *wit*, and the noun “wit” is from the verb *weet*, which means, to know. Thus, a “witch” is a knowing woman. This seems to be the probable meaning of the two words, as they are corroborated by the Slavonian-Russian names for them. Thus, a witch is called *vyedma* and the wizard is *vyedmak*, derived from the verb, *to know*, and the root of these words is positively Sanskrit, as *Veda* means knowledge. He goes on to explain that in the course of time, these terms came to represent a person who has the knowledge and skill of doing or telling things in an extraordinary way, by virtue of implicit or explicit association with some *bad spirits*. In *Exodus* (Ch. 22, verse 18), Moses directs, “Thou shalt not suffer (allow) a witch to live” (*Isis*, I, 353-55). This injunction of Moses was followed by his religious descendants, to the letter, in Salem, Massachusetts, in England and in Scotland, writes Mr. Judge.

(To be concluded)

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS CONTROL OF LOWER NATURE—I

DO NOT get despondent because you always fall short of your ideals; who doesn’t? Often I have thought how the Masters themselves must feel, looking at the aspirations on the part of so many and the lack of effort to realize those aspirations. If we did not notice that we are not raising ourselves to our ideals it would be a dangerous thing; that would be self-satisfaction. We know our limitations and we know what we want to become and want to do; between these there is the gap, and the more clearly we recognize it, the more steadily we will be able to go forward in our endeavours. Don’t let a morbid attitude to what you may regard as your own weaknesses overpower you. It is better to note the important factor that within ourselves, in our own egoic nature, we have powers, faculties and moral stamina, which are out of all proportion to the defects which inhere in our lower nature. It will not do for us to give thought overmuch to the defects and the mistakes that we might have made in the past. It is better to take note through self-examination of our limitations and mistakes; but concentrate all the time on the spiritual powers of a moral and metaphysical nature which inhere in the Manasic ego. By thinking of our weaknesses we give them strength without meaning to do so; while, thinking of our own good, we awaken the inner resources and bring them down through a brain made more and more porous by study and reflection.

It is too bad that we mortals seem to get so bound up in our personal trials; but we do. As Theosophists, though, we have more of a chance to right the wrong; for, once we see how we are allowing any little personal fault to interfere either with our physical health or directly with the work, we can turn around and make every effort to counteract the bad effects. It keeps us on a constant watch for every quality or weakness as it shows itself forth.

Do not be pessimistic about yourself. All of us make mistakes of judgment and blunder in discriminating between true and false,

spiritual and non-spiritual. As long as we pick ourselves up and go forward, gaining the inner strength through experiences of daily life, we have no need to despair.

If we remain true to ourselves, keep honest our thought-processes and clean and pure our feelings, the inner peace and prosperity work themselves out in our brain and through our life. The personal self is the opponent and enemy of the Soul-self and the former has its own power to copy the method of self-devising which the latter invariably follows. To be on our guard in reference to that personal self, not only in reference to its weaknesses, but also to its virtues, is important.

Hold on, and hold fast, to the Truth and to the Way you have already known. The clouds are bound to lift, and never forget that the very hardness of the Law is but seemingly so and under it are hidden its mercy and compassion. You are not alone. There are others who are fighting with *their* lower natures as you are with yours. All of us are in goodly company. Be just and also patient with yourself. Never think that you are without the aid of thoughtful friends; as you remain calm and positive and pure there will come to you the strength and the vitality to live Theosophically and to serve selflessly.

The real panacea and prescription you need will be found in the second half of the second chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita*. There you will find the method advocated of doing work, whether dutiful or sacrificial, without looking for the reward of action; a wonderful picture is given of the steadfast man and there is much practical advice in all that is said therein. There are wonderful things in our Philosophy that, I think, you will not have any great difficulty in finding out. The difficulty comes in doing what needs to be done. All of us possess knowledge, but we lack the will to strike the blow hard and heavy at our own personal self.

The higher awakening does not so much increase the foibles of the lower nature as reveal them. By the aid of the higher we see what we did not see, or even suspect, before. We know generally that we have weaknesses, but we do not know or even name them. It is knowledge which is the true awakener, and, brushing away the

dust of our illusions, it points out with precision our lower possessions. On a higher spiral, when we begin to apply the deeper sides of knowledge to ourselves, the lower is lashed into fury, so to speak. Faith in the Masters is the ingredient which is not only necessary; it is the *only* thing that saves. The higher resignation, true patience, and silent and secret dispassion come to birth through our faith in the Masters, who are not merely our Teachers in theoretical knowledge but open our eyes in a highly practical manner. H.P.B. suffered much through her making public the secret fact about Their existence, about the Path to Them. Why did she do it? She *sacrificed* herself for our sakes, for such as would benefit from the knowledge about Masters and the Way to Them. Sustained faith brings the hidden occult knowledge and both increase and deepen if we maintain the right attitude and sustain that attitude by persistent endeavour. Brahma-like we must create faith by self-knowledge and self-examination—know what is true in us and increase our faith in it. Vishnu-like we must maintain the faith in being and not die. Shiva-like we must change within and make our faith more and more enlightened. Thus we grow within the heart. Because others have done this, it becomes less difficult for us. We see our own links in the *Guruparampara* chain.

(To be continued)

BLESSED is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose....Get your happiness out of your work or you will never know what real happiness is....Even in the meanest sorts of labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony the instant he sets himself to work.

—THOMAS CARLYLE

THOUGHTS ON CURSES AND BLESSINGS

I

AT a simple level, a blessing is a wish or prayer for happiness and prosperity of another. A curse is a wish or prayer for the destruction or harm or evil to fall upon another. A boon is generally defined as an utterance which confers on another benefit, help or blessings. A curse, on the other hand, is an offensive word or phrase used to express anger. We hear of blessings and curses given by *rishis* and sages, gods and goddesses, which change the life of a person for the better or for worse. These are conveyed by thoughts, words or even by a glance. A curse can be inflicted using prayers, *mantrams* or magic spell. There are also evil eye curses. Every nation has mythological stories of blessings and curses of God or gods. Hindu scriptures have many stories of individuals being cursed for transgression of moral law, or for disturbing the meditation of a Rishi, or for his or her arrogance, or for a wrong doing or bad behaviour, and even for a mistake. A boon or *vardan* is a form of blessing given by a god to a devotee as a result of his deep and sincere worship or austerity.

Both curses and blessings are in accordance with the Law of Karma. A curse is the destructive power of speech. Once uttered, a curse becomes like a bullet from a rifle or an arrow shot from a bow. It cannot be recalled. However, when the erring person seeks pardon and repents for his wrong doing, then the one who cursed shows an antidote, a relief from the curse. Relief from a curse shows that while the curse was as a result of the person making a mistake, there is a relief or mitigation of a curse in terms of certain person or god intervening. Probably we can correlate it with the aphorism which says: "The [karmic] effects may be counteracted or mitigated by the thoughts and acts of oneself or another." But when a cursed individual is released from the effect of a curse due to divine intervention, it may be because the period for which that individual was under the influence of a curse, he has repented, and that genuine

repentance helped to restore right relationship with the divine.

In this connection we have the story of two demi-gods, Nalakuvera and Manigriva, who were sons of Kuvera (Kubera), the treasurer of the demi-gods. One day, both these demi-gods were completely intoxicated with heavenly liquor, bathing naked in the company of beautiful heavenly damsels. They had lost their sense of discrimination to such an extent that even when the great sage Narada passed their way, they did not bother to cover their naked bodies or offer respects to him. Narada cursed them to become twin Arjuna trees in the courtyard of Shri Krishna's parents, Nanda and Yashoda, in Vrindavan. According to the curse, they would remain in that condition for one hundred years, till they came face to face with Shri Krishna, and delivered by him of the curse to re-become demi-gods. Here were two demi-gods, who had become two helpless, dull and unconscious trees. It was a transition from life of freedom and movement to life of bondage and stagnation. It is easy to imagine that their situation now was in stark contrast to their previous state, and which, it is said, humbled them. There was a feeling of deep repentance bringing about purification of heart and mind.

Additionally, they had the good fortune of witnessing child-Krishna's pastimes around these two trees. Every day they would hope to be delivered by Krishna and be disappointed. Then one day, when child-Krishna tried to steal butter and created a nuisance in the house, his mother Yashoda, tied him to a grinding mortar, to teach him a lesson. It was then, as he stood being tied to a wooden mortar, that child-Krishna, looking at these two Arjuna trees, could empathize with the two demi-gods, who were sort of trapped in these two trees. The child-Krishna remembered the promise given by Narada to these trees that they would be delivered by him. So, he moved in the direction of the trees, dragging behind him the wooden mortar, and as he tried to come out from the space between these two trees, the mortar got stuck, and when he tried to pull it with some force, the trees came down crashing. This may be

looked upon as a story of transformation, applicable to any person who may be completely engrossed in the illusory pleasures of this world, and then finding him placed in a “helpless” situation by the “curse” of his past karma and thus given an opportunity to turn the corner. The “tree” in the story may well symbolize the situation in which one is placed under karma, from which no escape or relief is possible, till the lesson is learnt.

In the context of mythological stories, a curse is a solemn utterance intended to invoke a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone. Even ordinary people bless and curse. In many cases, these words carry the power to bring about the good and ill that was intended by the speaker. However, it is said about a curse that if the person cursed is protected by his spiritual integrity, it boomerangs and returns to harm the one who uttered it. Blessings as well as curses are creative powers of speech.

Very few, if any, are aware of the “creative power” latent in speech, because this power can manifest only through *right* speech. “Gentle speech which causes no anxiety, which is truthful and friendly, and diligence in the reading of the Scriptures, are said to be the austerities of speech” (*Gita*, XVII). Regular reading of the “Scriptures,” or sacred texts, if possible, aloud, is recommended, as it leads to purification of mind and speech. Our Speech should be deliberate, as then it is likely to be free from anger, lie or unpleasantness.

Aphorism 36, in *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, says that when a Yogi is firmly established in the practice of truth, his words become so potent that whatever he says comes to realization. Like all other powers, speech can be used constructively or destructively. Constructive or Creative speech which ever blesses is that of the sages and seers. How is it that we do not possess this power? It is because the creative power of speech is also dependent upon heart feeling and the quality of thoughts. Mr. Judge observes: “Words are things.... Upon the lower plane of social intercourse they are things, but soulless and dead because that convention in which they have

their birth has made abortions of them. But when we step away from that conventionality, they become alive in proportion to the reality of the thought—and its purity—that is behind them.” In other words, very frequently, if not always, we use words like “thank you,” “sorry,” “all the best,” etc., only as a matter of convention. These words should be spoken meaningfully, backed by intense and pure emotions.

In the mythological stories severe penance is performed precisely to achieve some desired object. Devdutt Pattanaik, an Indian mythologist, is of the view that stories of boons and curses are meant to explain the philosophy of Karma, of merit and demerit. When something good is done, one obtains a boon, or earns merit, while doing wrong or harm invites curse and demerit. Theosophy teaches that all gods and goddesses are agents of Karmic and Cosmic laws and they cannot contravene the Law. Thus, no boon, which is a form of a blessing, can be granted by setting aside the law. A boon is granted on account of the past merit of the devotee or due to mortification undertaken by him in that particular life. Moreover, the one who receives the boon becomes karmically responsible for the misuse of the special skill, faculty or powers endowed on him by the boon. It is interesting to note that never is a boon of immortality granted to any devotee, because it just does not fit in the framework of the universe. All that which is born, must die.

We have as an example, the story of Hiranyakasipu, a Daitya king, who is said to have been slain by Vishnu in his *Narasimha Avatar*. The legend goes that Hiranyakasipu performed severe penance for many years, and Lord Brahma, pleased by his penance, granted a boon that would make him *as good as immortal*. He was granted the boon that he cannot be killed by man or beast, by devil or god; by night or day; with steel or stone or wood; inside or outside the house. This promise was kept. As Vishnu, in the form of half-man and half-lion, laid hold of the Daitya king by the thighs with his teeth and tore him up in the middle, sitting on the threshold of the house, at twilight.

When a sage or a yogi gives a curse, he loses the merit or spiritual energy gained through many years of austerities (*tapasya*). There is no such thing as righteous anger. In the *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, written by Kalidasa, when the maiden Shakuntala failed to welcome *rishi* Durvasa as a guest, because she was daydreaming about her lover, Dushyanta, he cursed her that her lover would forget her. Horrified, Shakuntala's companions managed to mollify Durvasa, who mitigated the curse (*Ushraap*), saying that Dushyanta would remember Shakuntala when he sees the ring he had given her as a token of their love. It was Shakuntala's karma which had brought on her this suffering.

Sometimes a curse proves to be a blessing in disguise. The pain and adversity created due to a curse, may open the eyes of a person, and make him aware of his weakness or vice. He may take the adversity as an opportunity to learn and grow. That was the case of King Parikshit. Once when he was extremely hungry and thirsty, after a long hunting session, he came to a hermitage and asked for water. The sage was in a state of deep meditation, and therefore did not respond. Enraged by the Rishi's silence, the King placed a dead snake on the Rishi's shoulder. The story goes that when this Rishi's son came to know about this episode, he cursed that King Parikshit would die in seven days' time of snake Takshaka's bite. The King, having realized that he had acted unjustly, on returning back to the palace, he imposed expiatory measures on himself, for this unpardonable act. Thus, when the King heard about the curse, he accepted his fate. At that time, Sage Sukadeva visited the King and recited to him *Bhagavat Purana*, for seven days. The story goes that such was the transformative impact that when the King was bitten by the snake on the seventh day, he left his mortal remains behind and attained salvation.

We see in this story that an otherwise good emperor seems to have lacked control over his anger. We all have our weaknesses or "vulnerable points." When calamities come pertaining to that weakness, we find them troublesome and difficult. But if we are able to handle them properly, they enable us to burst through the shell, *i.e.*, overcome that one inhibiting

factor in our character. The efficacy of a curse or a blessing, besides being the creative or destructive power of speech, may also be connected with the concept of "Karmic agents." In the article, "Men, Karmic Agents," Mr. Judge explains the special and technical sense in which the word "karmic agent" is used. He says that there are people who are "concentrators" of the forces, who become instrumental in sudden and quick precipitation of Karma. There are those who are gifted or cursed with this power, by virtue of the kind of life led in the past. Adepts, on the other hand, possess such power, of concentrating the karmic forces, by training. It is a well-known tradition in India that when someone meets and talks with an adept, his Karma begins to precipitate faster than usual. There are accounts of people who had met by chance Yogis in the forest, and telling them about a friend or a dear one at home, who was critically ill, and then on returning home finding that the illness had disappeared at the very time of the conversation. At other times, meeting with the adept would result in exhausting of a lot of unpleasant karma, once for all. We may perhaps apply the same principle to blessings given by a sage.

There are also those ordinary people, who have brought from their past lives, the power of concentrating Karma, and they continually bring to other people *sudden* good or bad effects, which would have otherwise spread over many days or years, surfacing in small events of life rather than in one big event. Mr. Judge points out that this should also explain the power of the evil eye. A person with the evil eye, is a Karmic agent, who brings about destruction or harm to a person or a thing by merely looking at them. Perhaps a curse given by a sage may fall in this category, whereby the person, god or a sage becomes instrumental in quick precipitation of bad karma. From a philosophical point of view, there can be nothing outside of our *karma*, although we may not know the causes. If an individual becomes a victim to an evil-eyed person, could it not be due to some karmic affinity between the victim and the malignant person?

(To be continued)

GOD IDEA IN THEOSOPHY

BELIEF IN the existence of supreme power, popularly called God, is universal. The grandeur of the wild, the aesthetic appeal of the beauty of the diverse kinds of landscape appearing in enchanting vegetal and floral vestures in different seasons, the symmetry, regularity, rhythm, design, and pattern manifest everywhere—in the unfathomable depths of macrocosmic sidereal systems in endless space as in the ultra-microscopic sub-molecular realms—evokes wonder in the human being who intuitively feels that there ought to be a great artificer of the universe, a God in Nature. It is a natural feeling in the human being as he is the highest outcome of the universal manifestation. Formed as he is of the very essence and substance of the universe of Being, he feels his kinship with and an irrepressible yearning for communion with that source and sustainer of existence—the All-Being. Poets have given expression to it in metrical verses, artists in their immortal works of creative art, and the scientist sees mystery at every turn which seems to further deepen the more he probes into the secrets of nature. The masses in general feel the inscrutable hand of destiny in the challenges and paradoxes of life and in their disappointment of unfulfilled aspirations.

The question as to who, what, and where is God, whoever has seen “Him” and how to find “Him” has been asked from the time man first appeared on earth as a thinking being and will continue to be asked till the end of time, though many a mystic and philosopher in all climes and ages have conveyed in their various cryptic sayings the findings of their researches into the mystery Being, and recorded their knowledge in myths, signs, symbols, and allegories, which form the basis of all the great religions and philosophies of the world. In their esoteric meaning concealed within the exterior verbiage and symbols, they all perfectly harmonize revealing the One universal Wisdom-Science, or Theosophy. But they all differ, even mutually conflicting, and liable to be misunderstood and misinterpreted when considered in the garb of their exterior narrative.

This is the cause of disunion and strife among peoples belonging to different religions. Even among the followers of one religion, divisions and differences arise, giving rise to various mutually exclusive sects, sub-sects, castes, and sub-castes. It is, therefore, imperative that attention should be bestowed on the inner meaning concealed within the exotericism of the scriptures of the world, in order to bring about harmonious resolution of the differences and misconceptions. There is a need to enquire into the source of the term God, and the various ideas, conceptions, and beliefs about it. *Idea* is an abstract archetype of a given thing, the latter being an approximate, therefore, imperfect, representation of the former, the pure essence. *Conception*, on the other hand, is an actual act of forming a mental formulation of it. *Belief* is the conviction that one’s conception of the idea is true. Dedication to the thing so conceived and believed in is *devotion*. The very devotion becomes a cause of strife among believers when it is not founded on reason and true perception. All religions are essentially devotional. Therefore, in order to arrive at the true *idea* of God, as distinguished from the many conceptions and beliefs thereof, we must begin with the etymological root of the term, and its archetypal meaning, and trace various conceptions and beliefs which have arisen from it in the human mind. Thus, in the article, “The Roots of Ritualism in Church and Masonry,” H.P.B. writes: “We may begin by the origin of the word God. What is the real and primitive meaning of the term? Its meanings and etymologies are as many as they are various. One of them shows the word derived from an old Persian and mystic term *goda*. It means “itself,” or something self-emanating from the absolute Principle. . . . This *goda*, the emanation, is not, and cannot be, identical with that from which it radiates, and is, therefore, but a periodical finite manifestation.” (*H.P.B. Series No. 23*, p. 8)

Ancient religious philosophies begin their cosmological expositions with the periodical finite manifestation, calling it the First Cause, as being the ultimate intelligible source of the manifold differentiated universe, like the tree that grows out of the seed. But

all of them refrain from speculating on that from which it radiates, and into which it disappears at the end of the term of the manifested universe. This is because that source being absolute, infinite, boundless, immutable, eternal must remain Unknowable even to the highest evolved consciousness. The First Cause is not a creation nor an evolution but something *self-existing*, which is periodically active and passive. The term God (*goda*), as shown in the article cited in the foregoing, refers to the First Cause, and never to the Absolute principle which is ever Unknowable, the Causeless Cause of all that was, is, and ever shall be.

The first manifested Deity is the one indivisible transcendental unity of Spirit-Substance. It is impersonal, omnipresent Reality, containing all and everything, latent in every atom, and is the Universe itself. Incognizable Spirit (or Precosmic Ideation) manifests its various powers and attributes as it reflects itself in the seven grades of differentiation of the primordial substance, from the spiritual to the material.

Spirit is the infinite source of all forces and the guiding intelligence in the vast scheme of cosmic Evolution, forming the subjective aspect of the universe; and the cosmic substance in its various degrees of differentiation constitutes its objective aspect, in and through which the invisible spirit works—God in Nature.

Impersonality and incognizability of the Spirit in Nature is a fundamental idea. It can only be sensed intuitively by those who can do so, by contemplation of its manifold attributes and powers on all planes. Manifested Deity is, therefore, One, indivisible, Supreme Self, manifesting through a vast hierarchy of various classes of intra-cosmic creative intelligent powers and forces who fashion the universe out of their own essence, according to the Ideal plan in the Universal Mind, in conformity with the immutable law of Cosmic Evolution and Karma. It is the One in many, and the many in One: the essential Unity of Self and Nature (Spirit-Substance) being the Real and the everchanging manifested aspects of it being only relatively real—the great illusion, in comparison.

Therefore, the true Self of man is inseparable and indistinguishable portion of the Universal Self, which overshadows him in its trinitarian aspect of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas*, the Higher Self, the only God man may ever know through his own heart in which It indwells, as It does in the hearts of all beings, and is immanent in every atom. It is at the same time impersonal and universal law of absolute justice, called Karma. Deity and Law are synonymous. Hence, Plato shows Deity to be Absolute Justice itself.

The importance of the correct conception of God can never be overemphasized. As human thought and action have for their basis ideas held, and if these are not in accord with universal principles, the self-evident validity of which is found in their consistency, reasonableness, justice, and intuitive asseveration, they would plunge minds into ignorance and regression.

The belief, for instance, in a personal God is a case in point. Personal God means a God with personal attributes ascribed by believers. Belief in a God who is passionate, revengeful, and changeable, who favours some and condemns others, who can be prayed to in order to secure his forgiveness of our transgressions in violation of the law of justice, impedes the progress of man. Such a belief system is the fertile source of immorality, injustice, and crime in society, so much so that it has driven honest and good men to atheism. “It is this theological and dogmatic anthropomorphism which has begotten and is the legitimate parent of materialism.” (*Theosophical Articles and Notes*, p. 197)

Some religionists speak of God’s Law and God’s justice, implying God as an extra-cosmic entity administering justice. The philosophical fallacy of such an idea is evident. The moment we think of God as separate from the universe, an extra-cosmic entity, the harmony and equilibrium of the universe cannot be maintained. It is the formless creative powers, collectively represented in theogony as Logos, or Word, of ever incognizable Universal Ideation, who fashion the universe of manifested being out of their own essence in conformity with the immutable Karmic and Cosmic Laws

of which the Unknown Absolute is the inner and the ultimate Cause. Nor are the creative forces, called gods, *Devas*, and represented in various symbols by polytheists, the proper objects of worship, though all of these are entitled to the grateful reverence of Humanity. Thus:

“Man...being a compound of the essence of all those celestial Hierarchies may succeed in making himself, as such, superior, in one sense, to any hierarchy or class, or even combination of them. ‘Man can neither propitiate nor command the *Devas*,’ it is said. But, by paralyzing his lower personality, and arriving thereby at the full knowledge of the *non-separateness* of his higher SELF from the One absolute SELF, man can, even during his terrestrial life, become as ‘One of Us.’ Thus it is, by eating of the fruit of knowledge which dispels ignorance, that man becomes like one of the Elohim or the Dhyanis; and once on *their* plane the Spirit of Solidarity and perfect Harmony, which reigns in every Hierarchy, must extend over him and protect him in every particular.” (*S.D.*, I, 276)

There is no God apart from man on earth. While his physical form is the highest production of physical evolution, containing in itself the whole mystery of the kingdoms of nature, the reincarnating eternal Ego, which overshadows every personality in its innumerable series of rebirths, is a ray of the Universal Mind, and the Spirit or *Atma* is verily the Supreme Spirit—*Paramatma*. Hence Karma, absolute Justice, subsists in man—the immutable Law of his Being. He thinks and acts, experiences the good and evil results of his own actions, and learns through life experiences the lesson that exercise of individual will subjected to personal desire is the cause of egotism, malice, evil and ignorance. While merging individual will with the universal WILL, thought and action in unison with It, is the source of justice, benevolence, and love. He has to become an active co-worker with Nature in her cyclic evolution of worlds, the end and aim of which is production of man and universal divine perfection of Man.

THE LIGHT OF WISDOM

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE is not a life of somnolence and ease. It demands a virile approach to all problems; and in consequence, the strain of exertion is always present. In such sustained effort, which spreads over vast periods of time, there must come moments of gloom when the individual despairs of making any progress. Yet, the ensouling force of the initial resolve carries him onward and his life bears on the face of it the characteristic marks of his involvement with universal principles. To embrace religion, one has to live it, so that it becomes a part of the animating life, a force that cannot be denied recognition, a thing of beauty and of joy that permeates one’s thoughts and actions and infuses into them the quality of genius.

Man, but toys with religion when he pays lip homage to it while he satisfies his sensual appetites and human emotions. Hunger for possessions, power and love is inimical to the religious life. It destroys the atmosphere in which alone the tree of knowledge can take root and grow. In smaller or in larger measure, the man’s life reflects the religion of his adoption, and whether he likes it or not, the truth or falsity of his beliefs shows through his approach to life and its problems. If his approach to religion is narrow and bigoted, so will be the record of his life. If, on the other hand, he sees in religion the force that binds him back to deity, his actions will reflect his high thoughts and noble endeavour. When a person does come under the influence of the true, the inner force of the transcendent life becomes so powerful that in the ultimate analysis it dominates all actions on any of the several planes on which he is wont to act. Even such mundane actions as are necessitated by the struggle for existence get permeated by the force of the religious impulse so that the life of the person becomes more purposeful and his actions become invested with a benign spontaneity.

Religion has in it the science of all life and therefore comprises all knowledge, which includes the teachings about the dawn of manifestation, the emergence of divine emanations and the rules,

which guide their evolution. It shows that the present is in conformity with all the pasts and it reveals the individual's position in the grand scheme of things, his pedigree, purpose and destiny. Religion has an answer for any problem—physical, psychic, mental, moral or spiritual. Further, it provides the fuels that govern the conversion of this science into art—the application of principles to action. Genius for its outflow makes its own rules for manifestation suited to the instruments that are available to it for expression. The theorems of life exist so that they be taken as aids to action under all circumstances and during all eras.

The one eternal wisdom-religion has always existed and has at all times been handed down by its custodians to the elect among men. For him who hungers for it, it is always available provided he furnishes the requisite conditions. It comes to him in strange ways and sometimes under circumstances bordering on the unbelievable. Unknown to himself, he makes the call for wisdom and that call must be answered. It cannot be denied. A chance meeting, the random selection of a book, the reading of an article, essay or poem may lead the aspirant by imperceptible stages to the source from which he is to reach to his quota of knowledge. It is as though an unseen benign force responds to the nobler urge and moves by strange ways to perform its duty. The instruction is always readily available to one who realizes that to deserve the gift he must earn it through service, search and humility coupled with an unreserved acceptance of universal brotherhood.

Arjuna, the prototype for the Kali Yuga of the devoted disciple, had fulfilled the prerequisites for obtaining wisdom, and having so fulfilled them, he received on the field of Kurukshetra his instructions for the battle of life. They come to him as had previously come the celestial weapons which were to serve him in battle but which were to be surrendered once that their utility had ended. The first chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* had found Arjuna confused and in despair at the conflict of duties. In the second chapter, Krishna as the divine Guru allays his fears and takes his mind off personal involvements

by leading him to a consideration of such principles and verities as bear directly on his problems. Arjuna had been exercised over the sin, which would follow upon killings even though these were forced upon him in an unsought fight. Krishna shows that the immortal aspect in Arjuna as also in those of the Kaurava clan which he was fighting could neither kill nor be killed. He shows that sin attaches itself to any fight and to any action, which is motivated by a personal and interested bias. Sin therefore is not in the act but in the motive that generates the act. Where the mind of the person discriminates between that which is pleasant and that which is unpleasant, there the seeds of sin are laid and nemesis steps in sooner or later to fulfil its duty. Wherever there is the personal and the divisive, there sin arises and darkness prevails. Conversely, where the personal is eschewed and one seeks to lend one self to nature as an impersonal force for good, there harmony prevails and a benign force is generated which cuts across all sin and sorrow. "Make pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, the same to thee," says Krishna, "and then prepare for battle, for thus and thus alone shalt thou in action still be free from sin."

How can one achieve such a dispassionate and detached view of men, matters and things? Can an Arjuna visualizing death by his own hands of sires, brothers, kinsmen, teachers and persons high of soul form a detached, disinterested outlook and then proceed to inflict death, pulverize the caste system, and put an end to an institution of which society itself was raised? The answer seems to be that all these, however valuable, are but the ephemera of a day, that these but exist to subserve the nameless Lord within and that the discarding and even the disintegrating of these can have no validity if they stand opposed to the discharge of a fundamental or spiritual duty. That duty must, however, be to the highest and not to perishable, finite things. Things which are consumable by or which deteriorate at the touch of earth, water, fire and air are transient and perishable. They must, therefore, rate a secondary importance and need have no weightage where the onward march of the soul

demands their relegation or even demolition. But it must be the soul, which makes the demand—that soul which is of a nature other than the perishable and to which the lower desires and worldly ambitions are anathema.

This, in short, is the instruction in the first half of the important second chapter of the *Gita*. It demarcates for the disciple the borderland that separates the realms of *Asat* (the false) from that of *Sat* (The true). As the dialogue proceeds, the disciple is given the rules of the Higher Life. But, though volumes be read, the knowledge so gathered must for the most part remain theoretical unless the disciple begins the task of blending his mind and soul.

In the path of Occultism, it is dangerous to run when the art of walking has yet to be mastered. The initial teachings, the preliminaries about the Supreme, have to be so deeply burnt into the consciousness that the knowledge becomes automatically alive as soon as the need for it arises. In this second chapter a glimpse is given of the pedigree of man, and although this is developed in subsequent chapters, this first revelation is the key without which much of the later instruction would remain meaningless. Arjuna is told that within the perishable man there exists the imperishable, indestructible Spirit. It is *Aja*—the unborn. Things made of the “earth” element are powerless to destroy it; “air” and its denizens have no power over it; “fire” cannot reduce it to ashes, nor can “water” wet or corrupt it. This Supreme Spirit enters and quits its garments of flesh in order that ultimately there can be reproduced on earth its sovereign, its absolute will. This Spirit is indestructible and inexhaustible. It is not swayed by desires, it cannot be aroused by prayers and propitiations, rites and ceremonies. It can have no possessions. It is of the nature of Light. It gives and still is itself without diminution—without change. It is from this wondrous Spirit that man has descended the stairways of emanations. Man has the mission to radiate on earth and in *jagrat* (the waking consciousness) the potency of that beam of immaculate Light, which is his Father, Progenitor and Lord.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Researchers at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte in Natal, Brazil, have found that octopuses change colour when they sleep, and that might be because they are dreaming. In fact, octopuses have been observed to pass through two distinct stages of sleep, active and passive. These conclusions are based on rigorous observations, through day and night periods, covering 180 hours.

They found that octopuses slept for more than half the time during the day, and that it was quiet, passive sleep. This passive sleep was interrupted every 30 to 40 minutes by a brief period of active sleep, lasting 1 to 2 minutes. It was during this active state that the researchers observed changes in body colour and texture. They also noticed movement of their arms and eyes. To ascertain that the animals were truly asleep, the researchers presented them with a video of crabs, and some other vibratory stimuli, to which the animals did not react, as they would in their waking state. A similar sleep pattern occurs in birds and reptiles.

Mammals dream the most during REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. Researchers suggest that the active sleep state in octopuses might be analogous to this REM sleep. Most likely what appears to be a dream in octopuses is a very short behavioural sequence, and that it is not a narrative. Researchers feel that it would be of interest to observe their brains, as they move from waking to passive and then active sleep, writes Donna Lu. (*New Scientist*, April 3, 2021)

Studies have shown that smaller animals like voles, rats and cats, with higher metabolic rates need more sleep than bigger animals. High metabolic rates generate “free radicals,” which are extremely reactive chemicals that damage or even kill brain cells. It is believed that reduced metabolic rate during dreamless sleep or “Non-REM sleep,” may give these damaged brain cells a chance to repair themselves. (*Scientific American*, November 2003)

Explaining the necessity for sleep in human beings, H.P.B. writes that according to occult philosophy, there is “periodical and regulated

exhaustion of the nervous centres, and especially of the sensory ganglia of the brain, which refuse to act any longer on this plane.” Hence, during sleep they get a chance to recuperate their strength, otherwise they would become totally unfit for work during waking state. Further, she observes that the dream state is common to all men as well as animals, from the highest mammalia to the smallest birds, and even insects. (*Transactions*, pp. 70-71)

In human beings, the principles which are active during *ordinary* dreams are *Kama* (desire nature) and mechanical activities of the lower mind. During waking state, we are receiving impressions and sensations, which are stored in appropriate nerve centres. During sleep, memory acts mechanically and reproduces past sensations. Our brain, in falling asleep is like last embers of a dying fire. Any idea or event that impressed itself on the active brain during waking hours can produce dreams.

We know that the psychic element or *Kama-manas* is common to both the animals and human beings. H.P.B. observes that *every being endowed with physical brain or organ approximating there to, must dream*. Every animal has physical senses through which it receives impressions. These senses are dulled during sleep, but memory still acts mechanically, reproducing past sensations. “That dogs and horses and cattle dream we all know, and so also do canaries, but such dreams are, I think, merely physiological” (*Transactions*, p. 70). To some extent, this is proved in an experiment conducted by scientists at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A number of mice which were fitted with electrodes in their brains to record the brain activity when they explored the maze and came out of it, exhibited similar neural activity when they fell asleep later; indicating thereby the re-living of their experience of waking state during sleep.

We should focus on light and not on darkness, said late Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. On waking up in the morning, he recalled how

these days people everywhere are talking of despairing things. But then, as he saw the rising sun, he realized that the universe follows certain order, which brings light after darkness. How then, he wondered, were people talking as if the world was moving toward darkness? The reason, he says, is to be found in the culture prevalent in the world today, and which, is reflected in the statement made by a western student, who said, “We do not need Paradise,” because “We can have everything from our market places,” thus echoing the worldly and materialist outlook. “The Creator has created man as a ‘talib,’ seeker, of Paradise. But he forgets Paradise and becomes a seeker of the world,” writes Maulana Wahiduddin. He reminds us of the verse in Quran: “Your Lord has not abandoned you,” and which may be seen as a promise to all human beings. God says: “O man, do not think that your Creator has forsaken you! Whatever is happening is to give you a shock and to remind you. You need to change your lifestyle and your way of thinking, understand your Creator, understand the creation plan of God, and all of God’s blessings will return to you, just as the sun sets in the evening and rises again in the morning. You need to rediscover that the Creator has made this world in such a way that it cannot go from light to darkness, rather it is going from darkness to light.”

We can change the present situation by returning to the Creator, by replacing despair by hope, and by learning our lessons, advises Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, who passed away on April 21, 2021. (*The Speaking Tree*, April 22, 2021)

Paradise may be thought of as a state of unconditional peace and bliss. One experiences it in the state of nearness to, and then union with the divine, and that results when we have learnt to give up separative existence and recognized the unity of all that lives and breathes. The feelings of despair, depression or loneliness are, in the ultimate analysis, indicators that we have moved away from the “source.” The one who has complete faith and devotion to his Higher Self can never despair, because Shri Krishna says in the *Gita*, “Even if the man of most evil ways worships me with exclusive devotion,

he is to be considered as righteous, for he hath judged aright. Such a man soon becometh of righteous soul and obtaineth perpetual happiness.” The lower, animal self can get corrupted but it can regain its pure state, by re-connecting itself with the Spiritual Self.

Hope being a theological virtue, it is not to be looked upon as a mere human emotion. It is a virtue with divine origin. In a deeper sense it is the hope of becoming a better human being. True hope has its foundation in knowledge—*knowledge* of an ultimate objective, possible of attainment by every human being. It is also hope for spiritual progress of humanity. It is the well-spring of life, which brings hidden energies and powers to the surface. It is the kind of hope which cannot be dashed or extinguished completely. It rises, phoenix-like, from its ashes. Life on earth is full of fruitless strivings and disappointments, full of challenges and adversities, but the knowledge that there is that immortal soul in man which is superior to all obstacles, helps in persevering. That is why even when, seemingly, there is nothing to live for, human beings continue, intuitively, as expressed in *Prometheus Unbound*, “To love, and bear; to hope, till hope creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates.”

How do we find out what really matters in life? Do deathbed regrets give us a special insight into it? Somehow there is a feeling that when death is nearing, people may have a better perspective of what is trivial and what is truly significant and worthwhile. According to Bronnie Ware, an Australian former nurse, who has recorded bedside conversations, people seem to wish for a more meaningful life, by giving more priority to friends and relationships than work. Some are skeptical saying that it is not necessary that the perspective of the dying gives one a clearer view on what really matters. The American philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel points out that the dying person might be subject to hindsight bias. Thus, for instance, the dying person who regrets that money should not be

given priority, may be financially in a much better state at that time than he was, say, during the middle of his life.

In her book, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, the top regrets listed by Ware, seem very familiar, “because it turns out that the dying value exactly the things that our culture tells us all to value....Perhaps her reports are accurate and representative, but they were expressed because these are the kinds of things that one is supposed to say in this kind of situation. The dying person knows full well that if they say they regret not making money or not spending more time at office, they will be seen as shallow,” argues Neil Levy, a professor of philosophy at Macquarie University in Sydney, in an article in *Aeon* magazine. Thus, it turns out that because we give special weight to the values emphasized by our culture, that we attribute them to the dying. But in case, some of these values were genuinely expressed by a dying person, who is unencumbered by the everyday concerns, and is able to hear his inner voice, then that person is better able to see what really matters for *him* or *her*, but that may not indicate what matters the most for others. When we look at life and its concerns from the outside, we are not able to grasp their true significance, which can be done only from within. For instance, when we pursue activities that have a goal, it is our commitment to this goal that makes them meaningful to us. Once the goal is achieved they seem absurd to us. This is a midlife crisis, which we can ward off by finding value in activities that do not have a goal beyond themselves, such as, going for a walk for the sake of it, rather than to go somewhere. We must try to find value in the moment. Thus, for the dying, mainly activities which do not have a goal beyond themselves remain available, and are therefore valuable, but other activities in which others are able to engage, are not valuable for them, because their value can be fully grasped only from the inside, writes Neil Levy, expressing the views of the American philosopher, Kieran Setiya.

Theosophy teaches that each one of us has a *line of life's meditation*—a single thread of intention or desire running all through

the life. It is that on which the heart is set. For those of us who have no spiritual inclination and are given only to low plane gratification, the *line of life's meditation* could be acquiring money, comfort, luxury, name, fame, etc. Then all the activities and thinking that is done is ultimately subservient to and guided by the single motive, which is determined by one's *line of life's meditation*. However, in the case of those who have even a little inclination towards spirituality, we may say there are two lines of life's meditation—one guided by the lower, animal nature and the other guided by spiritual nature. It is our duty to make the line of life's meditation guided by the lower nature, subservient to that, which is guided by the higher nature. The thoughts, desires, inclinations and regrets, at the dying moment, are likely to be in line with whatever was that person's "line of life's meditation." However, it is also true that often, at the time of death, especially, after prolonged suffering, one's perspective on life may undergo a radical change.

The Buddha warns us of the consequences of not making good use of the young age. Living of spiritual life must not be postponed to the old age. In old age, we are like worn out bows which have lost tension and are useless to the warrior. In the same way, one who has not lived the disciplined life in young age will have nothing to reflect upon, and can but sigh for the lost opportunity.

Ultimately, a lot depends on one's views regarding afterlife, in deciding what is worthwhile and significant. For those who believe that death comes as an end, are usually of the opinion that "eat, drink and be merry" for tomorrow we shall die. But those who believe in soul-survival and know that from all the pursuits of life, the Ego carries with it the aroma of the last personality, or good character, built as a result of living a morally pure life, as also, pursuit of the abstract knowledge such as arts, mathematics, metaphysics, etc., will naturally give less importance to worldly pursuits. A good moral character with traits of sympathy, sacrifice, integrity, are carried by the Ego from one life to another, so that we are born with those tendencies strengthened in the next life.