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

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"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THE RIDDLE OF LIFE

Give up thy life, if thou would'st live....Give up the life
of physical *personality* if you would live in spirit.

—*The Voice of the Silence*

WHAT is Life? Philosophers and scientists alike have made earnest efforts to get an answer to the mysterious beginnings of life in the universe and to solve the problem of existence. While the true philosophers are reluctant to formulate the answer, the materialistic science puts forward its theories, which make us believe that it has solved the riddle of life and problem of existence. But that is far from true. In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 670), H.P.B. quotes a French preacher who wrote that science has been examining and re-examining, as also, dividing and sub-dividing the grain of sand since four thousand years, and still knows nothing about its secret constitution. He says of the men of science that if they do not know the genesis and the hidden nature of a grain of sand, how could they have the intuition as to the generation of a single living being? Whence in the living being does life come from? Where does it commence?

Our idea of life is confined to the creatures on earth. Scientists have discovered the microbes—described as extremophiles—at the bottom of Utah's Great Salt Lake, in the soil saturated with salt. It was felt that no plant or fish could survive in such "impossible

conditions" of extreme heat, cold, acidity, pressure and salinity. Could these anaerobes—organisms that do not need free air or oxygen—be the *prototypes* of life on earth? What is the origin of life? Could DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) or RNA (ribonucleic acid) be the fundamental building block of life? ask Narayani Ganesh and Jug Suraiya. Further:

If RNA gave birth to DNA, what gave birth to RNA? Despite ongoing laboratory research with RNA and DNA we have yet to answer the question: Where and when does life become life? In the 1970s, Fred Hoyle and Wickremasinghe propounded that life on earth originated from building blocks transported through meteorite showers raining down from outer space. If so, that makes us literally star-stuff. Our ancestral roots might be anywhere in the cosmos and to trace them would be as daunting a task as looking for a needle in a haystack, the size of infinity. (*The Times of India*, May 29, 2004)

H.P.B. points out the absurdity of Haeckel's theory of *Moneron*, which is described as the primitive speck of *protoplasm*, neither animal nor plant but both, and does not have ancestors among either animal or plant, but that these *Monera are their own ancestors*. Later on, it was found that these *Monera* are not organic but a simple precipitate of sulphate and lime. In order to explain the *prototypes* of *Monera*, Sir W. Thompson suggested that they fell in the meteorites from other planets. H.P.B. argues that if the supply of life-germs is from other planets, then where did they come from on *those* planets? Thus science seems to have no clue to the origin of life, even on earth.

What should we contemplate upon to understand life? A very interesting line of thought is offered in the article, "The Science of Life," in which H.P.B. approvingly quotes the views of Count Leo Tolstoy, a Russian philosopher-novelist. The article suggests that the science of life is neither physiology nor biology, which only deal with *appearances of life*. The true philosophers understand the

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paradox of life, namely, every molecule of the living organs contains a germ of death in itself, and begins to die as soon as it is born, in order that its successor molecule should live—only to die in its turn. Life is everywhere, and is a universally pervasive principle, teaches Theosophy. Mr. Judge explains in *The Ocean of Theosophy* that microbes, bacilli and bacteria are not the ultimate units of life, but they in turn are made up of still more minute "lives." Each cell is made up of these infinitesimal "lives." "One of the mysteries of physical life is hidden among these lives. Their action forced forward by the Life Energy—called *Prana* or *Jiva*—will explain active existence and physical death"(p. 39). These lives are of two classes: destroyers and preservers, and in the struggle between them the destroyers win and thus it is life that kills.

Every atom and molecule in the Universe is both *life-giving* and *death-giving* to that form, inasmuch as it builds by aggregation universes and the ephemeral vehicles ready to receive the transmigrating soul, and as eternally destroys and changes the *forms* and expels those souls from their temporary abodes. (*S.D.*, I, 261)

Occultism disposes of the so-called Azoic age of Science, for it shows that there never was a time when the Earth was without life upon it. Wherever there is an atom of matter, a particle or a molecule, even in its most gaseous condition, there is life in it, however latent and unconscious. One homogeneous, absolute and omnipresent Essence or Absolute LIGHT, becomes in manifestation Absolute *Life*.

Leo Tolstoy, on the other hand, suggests that inseparable from the idea of life is, not *whence* life, but *how one should live* that life. It is only in trying to answer this question that we may hope to get some solution to the problem of existence. A simple answer, which each one is likely to give is, we must live the life the best way we can. But when we try to answer that question in the earnest, we find that we cannot study life in terms of Space because life is in every part of the body and yet nowhere. We may look for it in Time. But when any of us says, "I have *lived* fifty-eight years," close analysis

reveals that out of fifty-eight years, we slept for may be twenty years, but then of the remaining thirty-eight years, how many years did we *really* live? We may have *lived* a little and *vegetated* a little, remarks Tolstoy.

When we begin to examine life we do so in terms of people and things which contribute to our welfare. When we take this attitude, we are at the risk of being harmed by others whose interests would come in conflict with ours. It is the lower "I" in us that wants others and the entire universe to be subservient to it, satisfying its wants. Whereas the higher nature knows that the universe exists for the experience and emancipation of the soul, and not for the gratification or happiness of "one" individual at the expense of others. The framework of the universe is built on "compassion" wherein the good and growth of *all* creatures, from the smallest to the highest, is taken into account.

There is consciousness in mineral, plant and animal kingdoms, but man is endowed with self-consciousness, which indicates that the higher triad of divine principles, *Atma-Buddhi-Manas*, is active, which was dormant in lower kingdoms. Mr. Judge writes : When these divine principles are *fully active*, man will become a "God." But self-consciousness in man has two aspects. When looked from the animal plane, self-consciousness opens up the possibility for man to work towards perfection, taking his evolution into his own hands. But looking down from the divine plane, "self-consciousness" is the perfection of selfishness and the curse of separateness. Self-consciousness, which enables us to say "I am I," *or* "I am myself and no other," could easily degenerate into self-centredness. The journey of the soul does not end with acquiring of self-consciousness, but it has to mount higher and flee from the plane of self-consciousness, and realize the identity of all souls, and then the universe grows "I."

As a kind of step towards overcoming self-centredness, we begin to place the goal of life outside of ourselves. But these short-term or ephemeral goals which are not altruistic in nature do not help us in

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understanding life. Tolstoy gives the example of Otto Von Bismarck, the Prussian chancellor, who wanted to unite North and South Germany under Prussian rule. But, trying to build a unified and powerful Germany, instead of working for money or power for one's own self is, in a sense, ambition transferred to another level. He declared that "iron and blood," *i.e.*, industry and war only could bring about the unification. The united Germany was brought about through the strength of the army and war. At the end of it all he said, "I am bored. All the great things are done. The German nation is made." To top it all, in 1888, when King Wilhelm II was made the King of Prussia he changed most of the things that Bismarck had done! Tolstoy remarks that the might of the German Empire does not coincide with the aims and purposes of universal life, but is in flagrant contradiction with them.

Seeing that life of a personality is only part of the whole grand life of the universe, one slowly comes to understand that "my little self is not the beginning and end of all life but reflects the life which *ever is*. That "life" neither begins nor ends with the personality. Says *The Voice of the Silence*: "Out of the furnace of man's life and its black smoke, winged flames arise." Man's life is compared to the furnace from which arises "black smoke," of confusion and despair. Man's higher nature or mind is a flame. Whatever fuel we add to the flame, it gets burnt up, but the flame remains. However, the fuel changes the texture and colour of the flame. So also, our experiences change the texture of our mind. Life is a furnace of temptations and trials. If we have *detached concern* for them and are able to extract the lessons from them then the soul-mind reaches a higher state of consciousness, which is described as "winged flames soaring upward."

We oscillate between personal and impersonal pleasures. To live, in the real sense, is to go from personal to the impersonal. The whole process has been described in *The Voice of the Silence*: "But within thy body—the shrine of thy sensations—seek in the Impersonal for the 'ETERNAL MAN'; and having sought him out, look inward: thou

art Buddha." The pendulum swings between the two extremes, but at the centre it comes to rest for a fraction of a second. The impersonal moments of life are like that, wherein the oscillation between the pain and pleasure, likes and dislikes, stops momentarily. These moments come when we are impersonally admiring a sunrise or sunset, or appreciating a good piece of writing, or helping someone else to learn to appreciate beauty. We must try to increase such moments in life. In *Reader's Digest* for March 2007, is reproduced the poignant account by the American Novelist, Jerome Weidman, of his chance meeting with the great scientist, Albert Einstein, at a dinner party. On discovering that Weidman was unable to appreciate Bach's music, Einstein took him to a room and played songs, first making him appreciate simple songs with words, saying, "This simple, charming little song is like simple addition and subtraction." When he had mastered it, they could go on to something more complicated. Gradually Einstein guided him through more difficult songs and then to music without words, till finally he was "ready for Bach." When they stepped out of the room into the hall to listen to the musical performance, the author writes that for the first time in his life he truly enjoyed listening to Bach. When the hostess expressed her regrets that Einstein had to miss some of the performance, he said that he too was sorry, but that he was engaged in the greatest activity of which man is capable, namely, opening up yet another fragment of the frontier of beauty! Mr. Judge writes:

Remember that life is the outcome of the Ever-Living. If you have come to comprehend a little of the mystery of life, and can value its attractions according to their worth; these are no reasons why you should walk forth with solemn countenance to blight the enjoyments of other men. Life to them is as real, as the mystery is to you. Their time will come as yours has, so hasten it for them, if you can, by making life brighter, more joyous, better. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 36*, p. 4)

ON CORRECTING ERRORS

False learning is rejected by the Wise, and scattered to the winds by the Good Law. Its wheel revolves for all, the humble and the proud.

—*The Voice of the Silence*

WHEREVER there is a departure from the true, there an oscillation is created which disrupts harmony. It is in such cases that correction becomes necessary. The adverse effect of a wrong is not sequent to it but is really wrapped up in the cause that produced it. It is only the ignorant and the foolish who, seeing no immediate adverse effects, rejoice, believing that their divagation will somehow bring no reaction.

Violation of truths may be through ignorance. On the other hand, it may be deliberate. Measures which can be used to correct the first will be totally inadequate for the correction of the second; and this even though in both cases the wrong action may be identical or appear to be so. In any case, correction to be effective must be at the level of the causative aspects of thought and motive. Wrongdoing through ignorance can find its corrective in knowledge and understanding (the latter does not necessarily follow upon the former) of the truth. The culpability of the man who, knowing the Law, goes ahead and breaks it deliberately is greatly enhanced, and the reaction it produces is more severe because of the deliberation that precedes it. This deliberate and often, *planned* wrongdoing implies that either the offender is not convinced of the sanctity and rationale of the Law or he does not believe that each Law carries with it its own sanction. In his case, the knowledge that he is going against the Law is already there. In such case, the remedy has to be sought elsewhere than in the mere preaching of sermons.

Errors and wrongdoings, falls and failures, occur mainly through a wrong twist which may creep into thoughts and feelings, desires and emotions, as well as in the delicate processes of reasoning and intelligence. The political perspective of nations during the last one

hundred years shows that they all have temporized with Truth and the Law. In the retrospect, it can be seen that they did not know where to command, nor whom to respect and obey. After each holocaust they got jolted out of their complacency. For a time they uttered pious platitudes and then sank back again into the less arduous paths of half-truths and a somnolent imbecility. As with nations, so with families and individuals. A wrong and a biased view of life may make one a fanatic and a bigot, a despiser of men and a tyrant, a miser or a profligate. All these states of the mind call for correctives, and the greatest difficulty faced by the altruist and the reformer is that the person who is treading the path of error thinks himself to be right and therefore above correction. So long as the ailing man refuses to acknowledge that he is in need of medicine, just so long will the ailment go unchecked and thus take firmer and deeper roots in a soil made fertile for its growth. It is a dangerous condition this, in as much as wrong modes of thought are contagious. They not only pervert the individual but also the body politic and become the builders of catastrophes. These thoughts are dangerous foci. They are the carriers of desperate diseases and require desperate remedies. But the cures are neither with the quacks nor with doctors of little learning and lesser wisdom.

Curing the habits of false learning and implanting wisdom are difficult and time-consuming jobs. Error is not only fissiparous, it is repetitive; and, as the recurring time-cycle brings it to the fore, it tends to assert itself with surprising strength and often takes him completely unawares. This is so because any thought-seed once planted in his mind grows independently of his further volition. If it finds a soil fertile for its growth, it makes its lodgment in him of which he remains totally unaware. The seeds of thought often not regarded as such—take their roots in the inner and hidden planes of his being. Now, it is these inner and hidden planes which give pith and substance to the outer. They mould his character and fashion his destiny. From the inner planes emerge his thoughts and they may be beneficent or maleficent, beautiful or ugly, potent for

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goodness or for mischief. True corrective measures start at this stratum of thought and motive.

Motive (that which moves or propels) is behind each thought and act and therefore it is motive that has to be tested at every turn. If the testing chart is wrongly calibrated or is allowed to be set up by others who are themselves in need of help and guidance and are not above ambitions of their own, then the results are bound not to conform to expectations. That the norms by which motives are to be judged vary from person to person cannot be disputed because duties vary according to the evolutionary stage to which one may have reached. The motive that seeks to adopt another's duty in preference to one's own becomes a dangerous motive.

As soon as a student enters upon the path of Occultism, he becomes aware that his previously accepted duties can no longer conform to the long-term goal that he now adopts for life and lives. For the person who seeks liberation the duties are of one kind; for him who opts for renunciation they are of another variety altogether. Since the path of Occultism with which Theosophy is concerned is that of renunciation, emphasis is put on those duties that are the concomitants of that path. The aspirant's duties demand that each day he show forth those excellences that pertain to each of the four castes which for this *Kali Yuga* (Iron Age) become mixed and mingled in him. The alchemical processes of precipitation and separation of castes will invariably follow, but only in later *yugas*. So, in turn, the student becomes a *Brahmin* (a man of God)—an invoker of the gods and an adorer of the silent God within. He becomes a *Kshatriya* (warrior) fighting within himself for the establishment of righteousness and for preserving from harm that temple of the living God which he is labouriously erecting brick upon divine brick for himself. He becomes a *Vaishya* (a trader) as he starts shedding unwanted possessions (now become encumbrances) to use whatever benefits he may derive from such disencumbrance to help him in his quest for the divine. And finally he becomes a *Sudra* (a servant) as he lends his mind and heart, his

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eyes and hands and feet in the service of that divine afflatus that he now feels welling up inside of himself.

This inner and therefore hidden exercise carried out within the closet of his own self produces ideas that previously had found no sympathetic chord in the living man. These ideas have now to be taken up as prototypes to be copied out or to be given life to on the physical plane. It is in such manner that the inner energizing force is given opportunity to work itself out on the outer material plane. Theosophy thus becomes gradually a living power in one's life. Resting in the true *Brahmanic* state, the devotee becomes to himself, and later to others, that which the *Bhagavad-Gita* calls "the goal, the Comforter, the Lord, the Witness, the resting-place, the asylum and the Friend." Knowing that from this state will emanate all earthly actions, he still remains as one who sitteth indifferent and unaffected by those works. Initiating the activities of the indomitable warrior, the aspirant fashions and fabricates those divine weapons that will help him keep intruders away from his shrine. He fights his own inner battles thus, and so fighting, realizes that towards the weaknesses of others his only armour is that of charity and love and tender mercy. As an aspirant-trader, he barter his services for right livelihood, and from the benefits accruing from such service he endeavours to support the Theosophical Movement in time, money and work. As a dedicated servant he performs his actions, not being incited to them by the hope of their reward.

The ideal condition to be developed by the aspirant is summed up in these words: "When in every condition he receives each event, whether favourable or unfavourable, with an equal mind which neither likes nor dislikes, his wisdom is established, and, having met good or evil, neither rejoiceth at the one nor is cast down by the other."

These exercises that lead one to work deliberately from within outwards will prove corrective of all misdemeanours. In them lie the seeds of healing and of growth.

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE FOOL—II

A STARTLING advice comes from Emerson in his essay on "Education" which says: "Live no longer to expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, "O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law... I cannot break myself any longer for you....If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions."

One must try to emulate one's better. We should be grateful to those who inspire us and similarly we must inspire others. There are less developed ones who may desire our support and help and we must make every attempt to help and influence them in their progress. No need to brand anyone as "fool." Mr. Judge says: "If the Masters were to judge us exactly as They must know we are, then good-bye at once! We would all be sent packing. But Masters deal kindly with us in the face of greater knowledge of our faults and evil thoughts from which none are yet exempt." We must use skillful means to help. We have to exercise discrimination and not waste too much energy if someone does not respond. "The 'foolish' can be helped to awaken themselves, yet, if we over-estimate their present capacities, we will do little other than increase the weight of their existence." Jesus said, "Cast not thine pearls before the swine."

3. *The fool worries himself thinking— "Sons have I; wealth have I." He himself does not belong to himself. How then sons? How then wealth? (62)*

4. *The fool aware of his folly is to that extent wise; but a fool who takes himself to be wise is a fool indeed. (63)*

These verses help us to understand the nature of a "fool." The appellation is not applied to an uneducated or a dim-witted person.

Here it is applied to someone who is lost in the worldly affair; saying, "Sons have I; wealth have I." Really speaking, we possess nothing. Mr. Judge writes:

Remember this, that you own not one thing in this world. Your wife is but a gift, your children are but loaned to you. All else is given to you only while you use it wisely. Your body is not yours, for Nature claims it as her property. Do you not think, Oh Man, that it is the height of arrogance for you to sit in judgment upon any other created thing, while you, a beggar, are going about in a borrowed robe? (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 36*, p. 5)

Our body is made up of five elements (*panchmahabhutas*), which are borrowed from Mother Nature, and to which they must return at our death. The light of the mind is the gift of the Gods, the Divine beings (*Kumaras*). We pride ourselves for our ideas; little realizing that there is nothing original under the Sun. That is why, Krishna defines "true wisdom" as an "exemption from self-identifying attachment for children, wife, and household, and a constant unwavering steadiness of heart upon the arrival of every event whether favourable or unfavourable.. .it is a resolute continuance in the study of *Adhyatma*, the Superior spirit, and a meditation upon the end of the acquirement of a knowledge of truth—this is called wisdom or spiritual knowledge its opposite is ignorance" (*Gita*, XIII). A person, who knows not this, is a "fool." But the fool, who knows that he is unwise, is to that extent wise indeed. Recognition of one's foolishness is the beginning of wisdom.

5. *A fool associating himself with a wise man all his life sees not the truth, even as the spoon enjoys not the taste of the soup. (64)*

6. *But a thoughtful person associating with a wise man soon perceives the truth, even as the tongue enjoys the taste of the soup. (65)*

A person who is ignorant and close-minded does not derive benefit even from the company of wise. He lacks understanding

and discrimination to appreciate wisdom of the wise. Such a person is like a spoon which knows not the fine taste of soup; but the tongue does. The spoon represents an insensitive person, but the tongue represents a sensitive person who appreciates and derives benefit from the company of the wise.

People have to be receptive and open-minded. There has to be an eagerness to learn. Above all, there has to be a willingness to set aside one's pet theories and ideas or preconceptions to listen to what another has to say. It takes courage to be able to discard untruth—however dear it may be to our heart. There is the story of a young lad who went to a Zen master and said he was eager to learn. After a brief conversation, the Master realized that the lad was swollen-headed and too full of his own ideas, to take in anything. So, to teach him his first lesson, when he served tea to this boy, he went on pouring tea into the cup which was full to the brim. The overflowing cup made the lad ask the Master as to why he was pouring tea into an already full cup? It was a sheer waste. The Master told him that his condition was just the same as the full cup. Nothing that he may have to give would benefit him as there was no room for it. Often, we have to unlearn before we can learn. Sage Narada says, "Never utter these words: 'I do not know this—therefore it is false.' One must study to know, know to understand, understand to judge." We are so full of ourselves that we pass by many a lesson of life, which we can learn, from our own as well as from the experiences of others around.

7. *Fools of little understanding are their own enemies; they do evil deeds which bear bitter fruits. (66)*

8. *Ill done is that deed for which repentance is due; in grief and with tears a man receives its consequences. (67)*

9. *Well done is that deed for which no repentance is due; in delight and happiness a man receives its consequences. (68)*

10. *So long as an evil deed does not bear fruit, the fool thinks that it is sweet as honey; but when it bears fruit, then*

the fool suffers. (69)

A foolish person has little understanding. This person would mindlessly chop off the very branch of the tree on which he is sitting. Classifying acts by their fruits, Shri Krishna says, "That which in the beginning is as poison and in the end as the water of life, and which arises from a purified understanding, is declared to be of the *sattva* quality. That arising from the connection of the senses with their objects which in the beginning is sweet as the waters of life but at the end like poison, is of the quality of *rajas*. That pleasure is of the dark *tamas* quality which both in the beginning and the end arising from sleep, idleness, and carelessness, tendeth both in the beginning and the end to stupefy the soul" (*Gita*, XVIII). Mr. Judge defines good and bad karma as: "Good Karma is that which is pleasing to *Ishwara*, and bad that which is displeasing to *Ishwara*." When we break harmony, we create bad Karma, the fruits of which are bitter. The Karmic seeds may take shorter or longer time to bear fruits. Until then the fool lives under the impression that he has escaped the consequences. But when the law catches up, he has to pay the price and restore the harmony which brings pain and suffering to the individual. Often, suffering brings awakening. The person then realizes the mistakes and follies of the past and repents. However, repentance cannot stop the law from taking its course and bringing to us the evil consequences. True repentance would enable us to avoid such mistakes in future. In *Light of Asia* there is a lucid description to be found of the working of the Law of Karma.

It will not be contemned of any one;
 Who thwarts it loses, and who serves it gains;
 The hidden good it pays with peace and bliss,
 The hidden ill with pains.
 It seeth everywhere and marketh all:
 Do right—it recompenseth! do one wrong—
 The equal retribution must be made,
 Though DHARMA tarry long.

11. *Though a fool may eat his food month after month with the tip of a blade of kusa grass, yet will he not be worth the sixteenth part of those who have truly appraised the doctrine. (70)*

A foolish person concentrates on outward ascetic practices, though painful and requiring tremendous control over one's personal nature it is of little value as compared to true understanding of the doctrine. True understanding brings about change in one's thoughts and actions to be in line with the true doctrines. As against this, the fool concentrates on following ascetic practices as the end in itself. He undertakes the very difficult discipline of eating with the tip of the blade of *kusa* grass. In the chapter "The Downward Course" we are told that "A blade of *kusa* grass wrongly handled cuts the hand; asceticism wrongly practiced leads downward, to hell." Eating with the help of *kusa* grass is a form of asceticism. This grass has sharp edges and can cut. Also, how much can one really eat with the help of the tip of a blade of *kusa* grass? Not much. Instead of realizing that we are asked to exercise control in eating and over sense-delights, he takes the teaching literally and undertakes extreme asceticism. The Buddha who almost died of extreme asceticism taught to us the path of moderation. *The Voice of the Silence* warns us against false ascetic practices, thus:

Believe thou not that sitting in dark forests, in proud seclusion and apart from men; believe thou not that life on roots and plants, that thirst assuaged with snow from the great Range—believe thou not, O Devotee, that this will lead thee to the goal of final liberation.

Think not that breaking bone, that rending flesh and muscle, unites thee to thy "silent Self." Think not, that when the sins of thy gross form are conquered, O Victim of thy Shadows, thy duty is accomplished by nature and by man. (pp. 32-33)

(To be concluded)

ON PERCEIVER AND PERCEPTION

I

The soul is the Perceiver; is assuredly vision itself pure and simple; unmodified; and looks directly upon ideas.

—*The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*

WHAT is perception? Who is the perceiver in man? Though we say eyes see, ears hear, nose smells, the tongue tastes, etc., the organs and senses do not cognize objects. In *The Ocean of Theosophy* Mr. Judge explains that when we "see" an object, the eye receives the picture on the retina, which is first turned into vibrations in the optic nerves, and then transmitted to the brain, where *Manas* (mind) is able to perceive the object as an *idea*. Similarly, when we hear something, the vibrations first reach the ear and then the brain, where *Manas* is able to perceive. Images and sounds are caused by vibrations, and they are preserved in the Astral Light. In case of clairvoyance and clairaudience, these vibrations are first transmitted to the astral senses and then to the brain, from where they reach physical eye or ear. The fact that it is not the *senses* and *organs* which perceive (cognize objects) but *Manas*, is established by the hypnotic and mesmeric experiments. It is demonstrated in these experiments that the object seen or felt by the hypnotized or mesmerized subject is only an idea existing in the operator's brain. For instance, a hypnotizer may put only a piece of paper on the palm of the person but tell him that he has put a burning coal on his palm. Then, the hypnotized person actually sees a burning coal, and may even feel the burning sensation, even though it is only an *idea* existing in the mind of the operator.

In the article, "The Subjective and Objective," Mr. Judge tells us that within the physical man is the astral or emotional man, which enables us to feel the sensations. But within the astral is the logical

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faculty or principle, which tries to trace back the sensation to its cause in the outside world. The logical faculty, *Kama-manas* or lower mind is the faculty that *perceives*, and when it *interprets* the sensation, we call it *perception*. When mind of man was not lighted up, he could not perceive things the way he does now. Aeschylus, graphically depicts the state of early races of nascent, physical mankind, in his "Prometheus Bound," when mankind was still mindless and (physiologically) senseless. Thus:

Seeing they saw in vain, hearing they heard not,
But like shapes in dreams, through the long time,
All things at random mixed. (*S.D.*, II, 411)

Man is a soul who lives on thoughts and perceives only thoughts. Every object or subject comes to him as a thought. The channel or instrument may be the sense organ or another mind, as happens in telepathy. These thoughts may be words, ideas or pictures. The soul cognizes and experiences the things in the outer world through the physical body. But the intermediate or connecting link between the soul and the physical body is the astral body. Thus, corresponding to the physical eye, there is astral eye or astral centre for seeing, and so also, corresponding to the physical ear, there is astral ear, and so on. The *real centres of perception* are in the astral body. The outer, physical organs are mere channels or means of concentrating the physical vibrations so as to transmit them to astral organs and senses. In the mesmeric trance, the outer eye and the ear are paralyzed for some time, and the brain is made to report what is seen by the inner (astral) senses. The physical sense organ would be useless if the corresponding astral sense organ is damaged. The power to see, power to hear, power to taste, etc., flow from the spirit, and the spirit presides over different organs of sense. Whenever the spirit withdraws itself, the organ cannot be used. For instance, the sleepwalker or somnambulant person does not see anything with the physical eye, even though he moves about with open eyes, and even when all the parts of the eye are perfectly normal and uninjured.

When one sees in the astral light through astral senses, the final perceiver or judge of the perceptions is *Manas*, the Self. Hence, if *Manas* is not trained in that direction, to understand and interpret what is seen or heard by the astral senses in the astral realm then it may result in the confusion of the Ego, when strange things are introduced to it before time. Since there is constant inversion of images in the astral light, unless the manas is trained to interpret the data brought by the astral senses, one can never be sure of what one sees in the astral light. Also, for an untrained seer it is very difficult to distinguish between the pictures impressed in the astral light by mere imagination and pictures of the actual events. For instance, if an anxious mother imagines her child in danger and therefore, very vividly sees the picture of the child meeting with the railway accident, she impresses this picture in the astral light. Now this picture of an accident is something that never really happened. It is merely a product of emotion or imagination. Mr. Judge writes about the great Swedenborg—who saw Stockholm burning from a distance—that he was a seer of wonderful power, but his constitution made him see in the astral world, a series of pictures which were solely an extension of his own inherited beliefs.

Every perception involves a hierarchy of instruments. The perception of the lower mind is dependent on the soundness of various organs—eyes, ears, tongue, nose, etc. In *Vernal Blooms*, in the article "Occult Vibrations," H.P.B. explains that in case of a colour blind man, the same amount of vibrations corresponding to red colour, say, reach his physical eyes. But the physical eyes pick up or perceive only certain amount of vibrations, while the astral senses are able to see the true colour—picking up correct number of vibrations. However, the perception of the physical eye overcomes the astral perception, with the result, the astral man reports to the brain whatever is reported by the physical eyes. In every case, the outer stimulus is sent to the inner man, who is forced to accept the message and confirm it as true. But in many cases the inner man is able to overcome this defect and make the brain see the difference. In many

cases of lunacy, the confusion among the vibrations of all kinds is so enormous that there is no correlation between the inner and the outer man and then we have a case of aberration.

"There is consciousness and its perceptions, the latter becoming more and more objective creations on different planes of matter on account of Creative, Preservative and Destructive powers inherent in Consciousness, or Self," writes Mr. Crosbie (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 135). Our perception is not restricted to physical or astral plane alone; the Ego perceives on seven planes of consciousness and matter, using a distinct set of senses for each plane. The perceptions on the lower and material planes are more concrete and objective than on the higher planes of matter and consciousness. From Spirit comes the power to know, to act and to become. Soul is the seeing and knowing. Our senses bring us raw data in the form of sensations. Our lower mind interprets these sensations, which we term as "perception." When we see an object, say a chair, our senses bring to us its details as a raw data. The lower mind synthesizes it or transforms it into an idea of a chair, which may be quite different from the *real* chair. Our perception is affected by our conceptions and imperfections of the instruments that bring the data and hence, we do not see the *thing in itself*. They are the "creations" of our perceptive faculty. In the article, "The Subjective and Objective," (*W.Q.J. Series No. 11*), Mr. Judge points out that the terms "subjective" and "objective" are relative. Compared to the inner astral body, the physical body is objective. But when the *kama* becomes active, it becomes subjective as to the astral and the latter becomes objective. Similarly, when lower *manas* becomes active and subjective, other lower principles become objective to it. As we go higher from the astral man to lower *manas*, and then to the higher *manas* and to Self, we find that the subjective becomes the objective, as compared to still more subtle subjectivity, and which itself becomes objective. In dreams, what is objective and real in that state, becomes subjective to us in the waking state.

Dreams show that the Perceiver and recollector is active when

brain and body are asleep. Dreams show that there is something in man—call it Ego or Soul—that experiences the feelings we note in our dreams and remember afterwards. Sorrow, joy, fear, anger, ambition, love, hate, and all possible emotions are felt and perceived in dreams. As emotion, reasoning, perception and memory are found to be even more active in dreams than in waking life, it must follow that the Hidden Self does all this, writes Mr. Judge. A professor once narrated to Mr. Judge a dream in which he saw that the duck he ate for dinner had grown to the size of an elephant and threatened him by waving his webbed foot, and that this was terrifying. It showed that "someone" within was appalled by this imaginary duck. This imaginary duck gave shock to the perceiver within. The person and faculties that cause our body to shrink from what is real danger in waking life, are the same person and faculties which are terrified by the imaginary duck. It is only on the basis of this Hidden Self that we can explain prophetic and warning dreams. During dreamless sleep the Ego is on its own plane, untrammelled by the personality, and is omniscient and able to see future events. The real man sees many facts of life, of history, of family, of nations. The Hidden Self may see a war that is to come, because it is able to see all the causes that must lead to war; and then impresses on the brain, the pictures of battles and of armies. The real man is able to look on the causes and instantly calculate the results down to exact dates, and throw the picture upon the receptive brain.

Whatever state of consciousness the Perceiver may be in, the things of that plane are for the time being his only realities. In a sense, things on the lower plane are unreal *as compared to* the things on the higher plane. As compared to the Self, all else is unreal. The great *A di Shankaracharya* taught, *Brahm satya, Jagat mithya, i.e.,* Self or the One Absolute alone is real, the entire world is *maya* (illusion). Some people took this teaching too literally, not grasping that his implication was that the world is only *relatively* real. Hence, once when he and his disciples were on their way to bathe in river Ganga, and an elephant came charging towards them, all of them

ran for their lives. A *pandit* (priest) who was watching this, taunted, "O Master, if the entire world is illusion and only Self is real and indestructible, why did you, a self-realized one, run for safety, seeing the elephant of Maya? Shankaracharya is said to have replied, "The elephant was *maya* (illusion), as you say, and so was my running!"

Maya or illusion is defined as the "perceptive faculty of every Ego, which considers itself a Unit separate from, and independent of, the One infinite and eternal SAT, or 'Be-ness'." Being encased in different bodies and personalities, the true light is obscured and we are led to believe that each one of us is separate from others. *Manas* is the real Perceiver, it is the *seer*, pure consciousness, and capable of perceiving *things as they are*. But then, what prevents it?

(To be concluded)

SOMETHINGS are hurrying into existence, and others are hurrying out of it; and of that which is coming into existence part is already extinguished. Motions and changes are continually renewing the world, just as the uninterrupted course of time is always renewing the infinite duration of ages. In this flowing stream then, on which there is no abiding, which is there of the things which hurry by on which a man would set a high price? It would be just as if a man should fall in love with one of the sparrows which fly by, but it has already past out of sight. Something of this kind is the very life of every man, like the exhalation of the blood and the respiration of the air. For such as it is to have once drawn in the air and to have given it back, which we do every moment, just the same is it with the whole respiratory power, which thou didst receive at thy birth yesterday and the day before, to give it back to the element from which thou didst first draw it.

— MARCUS AURELIUS

THE FEELING OF INSECURITY

WHAT IS more destructive of meaningful living than that ubiquitous enemy amongst us today, the sense of insecurity? It attacks under various guises. There is the worldwide fear of nuclear disaster and of the hazards of pollution. Many live in dread of unemployment, or of disrupted family life, either through lack of decent housing or through being moved around like pawns at the dictates of industry. The young know the frustration of fruitless job-hunting and their elders the bleak prospect of redundancy. For the old looms up the prospect of neglect and institutional existence towards the end.

Granted, insecurity is no new thing. Our life as mortals makes it inevitable. But perhaps never before have we been brought to such awareness of it as now, with the constantly given out statistics of nerve disorders, crime and violence, plus the astonishing number of those who, if not precisely drug addicts, cannot get through the day without their regular intake of sedatives.

To turn from such unhappy facts to the writings of Mr. Judge is to drink a deep restorative draught of the elixir of life. Yet he himself knew insecurity, for at an early age he lost his mother, and was only thirteen when his father transported the whole family from Dublin to the city of New York. His marriage, at the outset, had its problems, and his only child, a little daughter, died in infancy. His very work for Theosophy brought down jealousy and hatred upon him as friends became enemies and former co-workers attacked him with false accusations. For much of his life he had poor health, originating in a fever caught in South America, and he died—prematurely, many would say—at the age of forty-five. So he could not be blind to the *fact* of human insecurity, and indeed summed it up feelingly and understandingly when he wrote: "The great problems of life: why we are here, why we suffer, and where may justice be found that will show the reason for the sufferings of the good man, or, indeed, for the sufferings of any one, press upon us." (*The Heart Doctrine*, p. 78)

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But against the *sense* of insecurity he was wholly buttressed by the teachings of Theosophy, and would have all of us be likewise by the same. Granted that "the existence of evil, of suffering, and of sorrow" may be "a hopeless puzzle to the mere philanthropist or theologian" (*An Epitome of Theosophy*, p. 30), they should not be so to the student of Theosophy—"the only system of religion and philosophy which gives satisfactory explanation of such problems as these." (*Ibid.*, p. 29)

Once in contact, it is for students to absorb its supporting teaching so that it "may become an integral part of their constant thought" (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 66), and throughout his life and in all his writings the particular belief that Mr. Judge keeps in the forefront is Karma. Its truth is substantiated for him by the very conditions which, for others, produce the sense of insecurity. "The doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation are provable," he says, "by the facts and necessities of life and the human soul. If we are souls, then Reincarnation is absolutely necessary. Karma is absolutely necessary, or else this world is a vast mass of chance which no one can admit." ("A Letter from W. Q. Judge," reprinted in THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT, March 1969)

Surely anyone who gives thought to this must see the truth of it, even if he does no more than look into history. What is the alternative save to accept the principle of universal meaninglessness running pointlessly throughout all creation? Given such a principle (if one may call it so), we would have good cause to feel insecure and to nourish a sense of bitter resentment—against what, or whom? But Karma, "the just and perfect law of Karma," as Mr. Judge tells us in his *Echoes from the Orient* (p. 17), saves us from having to see all that befalls us as merely "the mysterious workings of an irresponsible providence."

If we accept this law we may begin even here and now, and even if only partially and dimly, to see cause and effect in our own present circumstances. Mr. Judge points this out in one of his letters to his disciple Jasper Niemand. "Often what seem evil and 'pain'

are not absolutely so, but only necessary adjustments in the progress of the soul....What is Evil now? Loss of friends? No; if you are self-centred [*i.e.*, in the *true* self]. Slander? Not if you rely on Karma. There is only evil when you rebel against immutable decrees that must be worked out." (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, pp. 25-26)

That is Karma—adjustment. And since all of it cannot be worked out in the present life, we have the twin doctrine of Reincarnation. "That which men call death is but a change of location for the Ego, a mere transformation, a forsaking for a time of the mortal frame, a short period of rest before one reassumes another human frame in the world of mortals." (*Vernal Blooms*, p. 233)

Here is another way of regarding insecurity. It is an inevitable part of this transitory world. "Nothing in the material world endures absolutely unchanged in itself or its conditions, even for the smallest conceivable portion of time," Mr. Judge reminds us (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 9). Is not this more basic than even the problems we spoke of first—loss of work, loss of home, loss of health? Mr. Judge would not minimize any of these, but would say, as in one of his letters, that with regard to the bad present "the only way we can alter it is by such action now as makes of each one a centre for good, a force that makes 'for righteousness,' and that is guided by wisdom." (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 76)

But, for that profound sense of insecurity arising from the fact, disguise or evade it as we may, that all is transitory, he would ever point us to the great doctrine of Karma, which alone can satisfy that within us which is not the prey of time.

"Karma never errs and will surely repay." (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 46)

Knowing Mr. Judge as we do from his life and writings, we may take it that in saying that he pledges us his solemn word.

"Let us then have great faith and confidence."

This, from a different context (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 78), is the complement of the above. Together, they provide our *vade mecum*.

THE FEELING OF INSECURITY

Dwell on them, fellow students of Theosophy. They may show us the validity of yet another precept voiced by Mr. Judge: "The way gets clearer as we go on, but as *we* get clearer we get less anxious as to the way ahead." (*Ibid.*, p. 140)

The "way ahead" is our Karmic pilgrimage. Strive to see it as that, rather than as the threat of insecure tomorrows.

To a great and devoted Teacher, what return do we owe? Gratitude, of course, but also, surely, a sincere endeavour to practice what he taught.

In our corrupt and sinister age, dark with all the evils of *Kali Yuga*, let us heed the words of this great Theosophist: "I hope no weak souls will be shaken off their base. If they get on their *own* base they will not be shaken off." (*Ibid.*, p. 133)

OCCUPY thyself with few things, says the philosopher, if thou wouldst be tranquil. But consider if it would not be better to say, Do what is necessary, and whatever the reason of the animal which is naturally social requires, and as it requires. For this brings, not only the tranquillity which comes from doing well, but also that which comes from doing few things. For the greatest part of what we say and do being unnecessary, if a man takes this away, he will have more leisure and less uneasiness. Accordingly on every occasion a man should ask himself, Is this one of the unnecessary things? Now a man should take away not only unnecessary acts, but also unnecessary thoughts for thus superfluous acts will not follow after.

—MARCUS AURELIUS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Question: Could love influence the "reaping" aspect of Karma? If yes, how?

Answer: We might say that "love" could influence both the "sowing" and "reaping" aspects of Karma. The extent of influence would depend upon whether it is human love or divine love, *i.e.*, compassion. Human love makes us kindly disposed towards those we love. We might abstain from harsh thoughts, words and actions, and refrain from retaliation even when the loved one says or does something to hurt us. We are able to forgive and forget. At times we are able to expand the circle and abstain from retaliating or even repaying ill-will with kindness. We are told in our philosophy that no man becomes our friend in the present life by reason of our behaviour in the present life alone. If he was our enemy in the previous life he will be now, even if we do him service and be good to him, because these tendencies always last for more than three lives. So, towards those who are hostile to us, if we practise charity and kindness and love, then at least from our side, this tendency of enmity will be one-third lessened in every life. Obviously, the karmic consequences will also not be severe to that extent, and we are paying off at least a portion of our karmic debt. If we continue to show good-will towards the person who is ill-disposed towards us, at the end of three lives, we would have paid off our karmic debt completely, and there will be no longer any karmic link between us and that person. Love and forgiveness help us to overcome karma. Also, a loving and kind person is likely to be vigilant, so as not to hurt another in thought, word or deed. Even a slight irritation, displeasure or indifference in our words or actions could lead another

to speak or act in harsh manner. We then become responsible, to some extent, for his reaction and hence also sharers in his karmic consequences.

Feelings of love and kindness help us in abstaining from sowing bad causes and also in sowing positively good causes. A person who comes to the stage of loving the whole of creation becomes self-effacing. Then, as *Light on the Path* says, he will not desire to sow any seeds (perform actions) for his own harvesting, but seeks to "sow that seed the fruit of which shall feed the world." Perfect love can lead to such heights of self-effacement that even the good works are done without the expectation of reward or without the intention of earning merit or *punya*—they are performed for *lokasangraha* or the welfare of the many. It enables a person to perform actions by abandoning the *kartabhav*, the feeling of doership, so that he ceases to offer individual focus where the Karmic consequences can return. He becomes Karmaless.

The other aspect of love is compassion. It is the kind of love, which wants that all creatures should have experience and should grow. Often, it is this compassion, which makes teachers and parents to be strict and exacting, because they wish that the child or the other person should grow. Karma is action and reaction. However, this reaction is not mechanical but takes into account the motive and the inner state of the person. For instance, when a mother, who wants her child to grow up to be an upright and honest person, is severe with him, the law of Karma takes into account her "good motive" while meting out karmic consequences for her severity, born out of compassion.

The *Voice of the Silence*, says that Compassion is no attribute, it is the Law of Laws, eternal Harmony, law of Love Eternal and fitness of all things. In other words, Compassion is equated with impersonal law. Thus, a man of compassion is able to appreciate that this universe is governed by an impartial and just law, and hence appreciate the "fitness of all things." He is not likely to find faults with or grumble about unfavourable circumstances in his life. More

often than not, when we are faced with the inevitable, when we are unable to change the circumstances for better, we either continue to persevere in vain or grumble and become bitter about life. By such reaction we make our Karma more complex, and create a cause for future reaping. As love matures towards becoming impersonal love or compassion, it brings with it resignation and acceptance. It is not passivity or helplessness. There is an understanding that Karma has placed us where we are, but it does not hold us there. Hence, instead of kicking against the pricks we learn to accept the inevitable and try to learn the lesson from the situation we may be in. With such an attitude we liquidate the karmic debt. For, "when the lesson is learnt, the necessity ceases." At times, with perfect acceptance of the situation, the very process of reaping becomes less burdensome. In fact, with acceptance and resignation, some people are able to turn the apparently unfavourable situation to their advantage. For instance, a newspaper reporter was locked out of the house when he reached home late and his wife who had fallen asleep failed to open the door. Instead of complaining or grumbling he went back to the railway station, and began to interview the urchins playing there, and wrote a prize-winning article!

Question: It is said in our philosophy that our mind is dual—higher and lower. However, the lower mind is common to both the animal and the human being. How is it that the lower mind in man is more developed as compared to animals?

Answer: The function of the lower mind in man and animals depends upon brain. Hence, the quality, capacity and development of brain must play a vital role in determining the extent to which the lower mind is able to manifest its powers and intellect. In fact, we are given some hints in the article, "Psychic and Noetic Action" (*H.P.B. Series No. 31*). In this article, H.P.B. points out that "the lower, *psychic* mind...develops in man—*proportionally* with the perfection of his brain—into *intellect*, and in the animal into *higher* instinct." We must remember that man's *mind* was not lighted up

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until, in the process of evolution, a stage was reached when his *brain* had developed to be of much better and deeper capacity than that of any other animal. In the animals the mind manifests as instinct, but in man as intellect. Brain is the instrument of the lower mind. If the connection between mind and brain is broken the person is not able to cognize, and intelligence will not be manifested. The lower mind in man uses the brain as an instrument to reason from premises to conclusions. The development or manifestation of the intellect depends upon the capacity and development of the brain. Yet, it is mind that affects the quality of the brain and not *vice versa*. Mr. Judge writes: "The depth and variety of the brain convolutions in man are caused by the presence of *Manas*, and are not the cause of mind" (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 62).

In the same article, elsewhere, H.P.B. states that the far higher degree of development of lower mind observed in human beings is because of the "greater perfection and sensitiveness of his cerebral cells," *i.e.*, brain cells or neurons. Science accepts that the quality of brain cells varies from animal to animal. There seems to be an indirect acceptance that neurons in human brain are superior to the neurons in the animal brain; as the research involving grafting of human neural stem cells into the brains of fetal monkeys (or primates) has sparked off controversy among researchers on ethical grounds. What could be the impact of such grafting on the *mind* of the recipient? Researchers expect that Human to Non-Human Primate (NHP) grafting may produce creatures with humanlike cognitive capacities relevant to moral status. They believe that perhaps grafting of human neural stem cells in the brains of monkeys may change mental capacities, such as, the ability to feel pleasure and pain, language, rationality and richness of relationships. (*Science*, July 15, 2005)

The improved quality of *brain* (in terms of brain cells) may not endow an animal with humanlike consciousness and cognitive capacities, but perfection and sensitiveness of brain cells in human beings help in the expression or manifestation of intellect. How do we understand sensitiveness of brain cells? It may be understood in

terms of their receptivity. Our thoughts, feelings and actions, of lower or higher nature, make an impression on the cells of our body. In this connection, H.P.B. writes that the memory of the purely daily-life functions, such as eating, drinking, planning to harm another or gratification of desires, etc., has nothing to do with the higher mind, but is related to lower mind or personal ego. So also, on the physical plane, it has nothing to do with heart and brain, because they are organs of power higher than the personality. These impressions are made on *kamic* organs, such as spleen, liver, stomach, etc. It is only the superconscious mental experiences, which are impressed on the brain and heart cells. She points out that the body of man is an Aeolian harp, chorded with two sets of strings, one made of pure silver and the other of catgut. This seems to refer to the difference in quality of two kinds of cells in the body. By "catgut string" she seems to refer to the cells of *kamic* organs such as, liver, spleen, stomach, etc., which are subservient to and respond to the action of the "personal" or lower mind. These cells do not respond to the activities of the higher mind. The "Pure silver string" seems to refer to the cells of organs such as brain and heart, (and also perhaps the *lives* or "atoms" forming those cells) which respond to and are receptive to the impulses from the Higher nature. Thus:

It is the function of the physical, lower mind to act upon the physical organs and their cells; but, it is the higher mind *alone* which can influence the atoms interacting in those cells, which interaction is alone capable of exciting the brain, *via the spinal "centre" cord*, to a mental representation of spiritual ideas far beyond any objects on this material plane. (H.P.B. *Series No. 31*, p. 25)

The human brain is called the canal between the psycho-spiritual and material planes, "through which every abstract and metaphysical idea filters from the Manasic down to the lower human consciousness." (U.L.T. *Pamphlet No. 25*, p. 5)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Are you a good human being? What defines "goodness"? A book by Gurucharan Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good*, analyzes each character in the epic *Mahabharata* for one predominant characteristic, good or bad. All good characters in the epic seem confused at some point or other. For instance, Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava is convinced that he cannot declare war against his elders and brothers, and yet he does so; Arjuna is against killing his grandfather, his teacher and unarmed Kama, and yet does it. Krishna is no exception to this contrary behaviour. "Goodness, it seems, is confusing," writes Vinita Dwara Nangia (*Sunday Times of India*, October 11, 2009). On asking some of her colleagues if they thought they were good, she got varied responses. She found that for one, "goodness" meant not hurting another and if possible, going out of our way to help someone. For another, it meant following one's "inner voice," or acting with good intentions. Some of us seem to follow a kind of "shifting goodness," when we do right, but our definition of "right" may change from time to time. One of the colleagues seemed to imply that her goodness was relative, because she found that she was "good" as compared to those who performed wicked actions, but "bad" as compared to more humane people. Interestingly, too much goodness is not only unbelievable but also irritating, where people suffer vicissitudes and insults with never a word against those who persecute them, writes Vinita Nangia. People with obsession of self-sacrifice seem like anachronism in today's world and make us feel inadequate. We encounter moments of such "irritating goodness" in the *Mahabharata*, when, for instance, Eklavya cuts off his thumb and gifts it to Drona to ensure that Arjuna has no equal, or when Kama gives away his protective armour and earrings to Lord Indra, who comes dressed as an ascetic. Gurucharan Das points out in his book that through various incidents the *Mahabharata* reminds us about the difficulty of being good. We may say goodness is the struggle against the vice or bad instinct

in us, and in that there is varying degree of success. Is it the evil within us that makes us good? How can you be good if you have no shade of bad within you? asks Vinita Nangia.

All of us are a mixture of good and bad. True goodness involves being good at the level of thought, word and deed. Hence, we say "good" and "evil" are relative terms. It would be a folly to categorize an action and hence a person, as good or bad on *appearances*, without taking into account the motive, the inner state of the person, the degree of his development and knowledge. There are useless sacrifices, which H.P.B. describes as crime of folly. She gives the example of Saint Labro who sacrificed his body for forty years only to benefit the vermin, which it bred. Likewise, one may give out large sums of money to earn merit (*punya*) or with the intention of gaining name and fame, or make a charity to wrong persons at the wrong time. Hence, as the *Gita* teaches, all actions are involved in faults, like fire is surrounded by smoke, so that a perfectly good-intentioned action may end up bringing about harm. Perfect goodness stems from perfect wisdom, so that the person, who is ready to go out of his way to help another, may find to his horror that he has ended up harming instead of helping a person. "It takes a very wise man to do good works without danger of doing incalculable harm." *Light on the Path* says that he who desires to form good Karma will meet with many *confusions*, because even when one works for the good of others, a subtle sense of reward or benefit accruing to oneself, that may underlie the action, would taint the good action.

The *acme* of goodness, which seems "irritating" and "impractical," to a worldly person, may be termed spiritual goodness. If there is a great gulf between good man and a sinner, there is a greater gulf between a good man and a spiritual man, the one who has attained to knowledge. It is immeasurable between the good man and the one who is on the threshold of divinity, says *Light on the Path*. As one acquires right knowledge and hence the right basis of thought and action, one becomes capable of exhibiting higher and higher levels of goodness. We become capable of the most "self-effacing"

and "self-sacrificing" goodness when we overcome the "sense of separateness" and become aware of our common divine origin. Mr. Judge recommends a meditation in which one must identify one's self with the poor, the wicked and the ignorant, so that "when a dear friend deserts me and stabs me deep... I know that he is myself."

Ray Kurzweil, a respected futurist, has recently predicted that in another 20 years, we might reach a stage when we could live forever. If we could reverse ageing, then we could be both ageless and immortal. It would mean one more technological achievement, which aims at dismantling all kinds of constraints. For instance, with the help of technology we have bridged distances, turned night into day with electricity, healed diseases, prevented births, accelerated the growth of food, and so on. "In each case, the intent is to refuse to acknowledge a limitation imposed on us by circumstances, as we conquer nature and overturn the stifling limitations of the physical world we are part of," writes Santosh Desai (*The Times of India*, October 5, 2009). Technological advancement has helped us push back age and death, and we spend billions on cosmetics and surgery in order to keep the youthful look, but mortality continues to be the most definitive constraint that defines our lives.

We are unanimous about the sacredness of life, so that attempting suicide is considered a crime, and there are laws, which consider taking another life to be a crime punishable by death. In a sense we do not own our lives, but are recipients of the gift of life, which we are told to look after with care, by avoiding smoking or taking drugs or alcohol. Hence, now that we are told that immortality might be only a few years away, we will try hard to reach the goal of "ageless immortality." Is this pursuit of immortality worthwhile? Desai writes:

We try to make meaning of our lives because we are the only species that knows that it is going to die. The idea of purpose, that of achievement, the desire to make and leave

a mark, all come from the anxiety that accompanies our imminent departure....We feel the need to pack in more because we have such little time left. Immortality destroys the need for meaning and erases the notion of consequences. Nothing eventually matters because nothing eventually dies....To never age and to never die is like freezing time and living in this moment forever. And forever is a long time to be anybody.

Perhaps it is time to ask how far we should take our pursuit of longevity and how hard we should fight age. The desire to make our stay on this planet painless and comfortable is easy to understand, but it is important to recognize what makes life so precious. If we get everything we want, we will not want anything anymore. To live forever is a little like not living at all.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* advises a meditation on birth, death, decay, sickness and error. Can we not live the life without meditating on death? Life and death, is one of the pairs of opposites in the manifestation. It is difficult to appreciate or understand "good" without "evil," "pleasure" without "pain," and "life" without "death." In Simone de Beauvoir's novel, *All Men Are Mortal*, the Italian ruler, Raymond Fosca, who was afraid of death, found that time on earth was too short for achieving anything great for the glory of his city. He drinks the elixir of life, bought from a Jew, and becomes immortal. In the two centuries that he lived, he waged wars, built new buildings, but did not achieve anything spectacular, nothing which he could not have achieved in few years. He came to the conclusion that those only, who must die, are capable of truly loving life, undertaking great works and running risks. The author suggests that meaningful human existence depends upon the prospect of death and its attendant joys and anguish, without which freedom and action have no value. In fact, a story or a poem must also have a moving and conclusive end. Are we not bored when a television serial drags on endlessly?

A "miracle" baby has brought a kind of mystical hope to people in Kizlyar, a Muslim dominated region situated at the southern fringe of Russia, and suffering from Islamist violence. About 2,000 pilgrims from Russia's 20 million Muslim population come daily to see the nine-month old baby, Ali Yakubov, on whose body the verses from Koran are said to appear and fade every few days. "Pinkish in colour and several centimeters high, the Koranic verse, 'Be thankful or grateful to Allah' was printed on the infant's right leg in clearly legible Arabic script this week, religious leaders said. Visiting foreign journalists later saw a single letter after the rest had vanished." The verses, which first appeared two weeks after the birth of the baby, are looked upon as a sign of protection of God. It is said that miracles such as "Stigmata" are more common in Christianity than in Islam. (*The Times of India*, October 23, 2009, Courtesy Reuters)

There are several teratological phenomena in which children are born with some peculiar birth-marks on the body. For instance, a pregnant mother who intensely desired to eat raspberries just three weeks prior to giving birth and was denied, had clasped her throat with her right hand and expressed her desire that she must have it. When the baby was born, three weeks later, he had perfectly-defined raspberry on the right side of his neck. Every year, when that fruit ripens, his birth-mark becomes of a deep crimson, while, during the winter it is quite pale (*Isis*, I, 391). Theosophy explains that the growing physical form is built on the design body or astral body. This astral body is connected with and could be influenced by the imagination of mother. If the mother makes strong picture from fear, horror, joy or otherwise, the astral model of the child in her womb is then similarly affected.

H.P.B. mentions a curious tale about the sacred tree of Kumbum or "Tree of Thousand Images" (*The Theosophist*, March 1883). There goes a Tibetan legend that when Tsong-Kha-Pa, the renowned Buddhist reformer, devoted himself to religious life, according to custom, his mother cut off his hair and threw it away. A tree sprang up from it, bearing, on every one of its leaves, a Tibetan

character. On each leaf there were well-formed Tibetan characters, all of green colour, some lighter and some darker than the leaf itself. These letters were part of the leaf itself and grew along with the leaves. The bark of the tree and branches were also covered with these characters. When one removes a piece of bark, the young bark under it displays different characters from those on the upper layer of the bark. The characters were more perfect than typeset characters of the best type-foundries in the world. The missionaries visiting the place also noticed "religious sentences" self-printed by nature in chlorophyll. Each lamina (layer), when lifted revealed distinct type. H.P.B. mentions that this is not an uncommon happening in nature. On the shells in the waters of the Red Sea some Hebrew alphabets were found. Upon certain locusts, English alphabets were found. On the wings of certain German butterflies, numerals of the year 1881 were found to be marked. So also, we find animals mimicking vegetable growths and caterpillars looking like tree-barks, mosses, etc. Tiger's stripes are mimicry of the stalks of jungle grass. It is possible for nature herself without miracle to produce vegetable growth in the form of legible characters. H.P.B. states that the letter-tree of Tibet is a fact and the inscriptions in its leaf-cells and fibres are in *Senzar*—a sacred language used by the adepts.

LORD, make me an instrument of peace:
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy.

—St. Francis of Assisi

The United Lodge of Theosophists

DECLARATION

THE policy of this Lodge is independent devotion to the cause of Theosophy, without professing attachment to any Theosophical organization. It is loyal to the great Founders of the Theosophical Movement, but does not concern itself with dissensions or differences of individual opinion.

The work it has on hand and the end it keeps in view are too absorbing and too lofty to leave it the time or inclination to take part in side issues. That work and that end is the dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the Philosophy of Theosophy, and the exemplification in practice of those principles, through a truer realization of the SELF, a profounder conviction of Universal Brotherhood.

It holds that the unassailable *Basis for Union* among Theosophists, wherever and however situated, is "*similarity of aim, purpose and teaching*" and therefore has neither Constitution, By-Laws nor Officers, the sole bond between its Associates being that *basis*. And it aims to disseminate this idea among Theosophists in the furtherance of Unity.

It regards as Theosophists all who are engaged in the true service of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, condition or organization, and

It welcomes to its association all those who are in accord with its declared purposes and who desire to fit themselves, by study and otherwise, to be the better able to help and teach others.

"The true Theosophist belongs to no cult or sect, yet belongs to each and all"

Being in sympathy with the purposes of this Lodge, as set forth in its "Declaration," I hereby record my desire to be enrolled as an Associate, it being understood that such association calls for no obligation on my part, other than that which I, myself, determine.

The foregoing is the form signed by Associates of the United Lodge of Theosophists. Inquiries are invited from all persons to whom this Movement may appeal. Cards for signature will be sent upon request, and every possible assistance furnished Associates in their studies and in efforts to form local Lodges. There are no fees of any kind, and no formalities to be complied with.

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