

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### THE PROMULGATION OF THEOSOPHY

HUMAN soul, with its inner life, experiences and progress is far more important than all the material glories of our civilization. One great earthquake or cataclysm, could sweep away the so-called glorious achievements of our civilization, leaving behind human experience which no earthquake can destroy. The Egos enriched by right philosophy and experiences return to build still more glorious civilization. The world is full of well-meaning and good people who are ready to do all they can for humanity, and yet, to do the right thing, at the right time and in the right place is possible only with the knowledge of right philosophy, which must be applied.

“If we had five hundred members in the Society loving one another with true hearts, not criticizing, nor condemning, and all bent on one aim with one belief—we could sweep the whole world with our thoughts,” says Mr. Judge. To be successful in our task of taking theosophical ideas to the masses we must share the enthusiasm, optimism and conviction expressed by Mr. Judge in these words. But the crucial condition is the band of workers that love one another with true hearts, and that is often the stumbling block, and the reason why we fail to touch the hearts of men.

An important factor for effective promulgation is practice and assimilation of what we have learnt. Promulgation is the test tube in which our application has to be evaluated. Promulgation draws our attention to what we lack in application. When one preaches unity

and generosity, or patience and calmness, day in and day out, but fails to practice the same, then the need to improve in that direction will soon strike him. “Promulgation reveals gaps in our knowledge and it does not take long for us to infer that unless more application is made, more knowledge cannot come,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. There is a valuable advice regarding developing the right attitude of mind while attending the theosophy meetings. Even when one is not likely to get an opportunity to speak during the meeting, one should bring one’s own contribution to the study class, and one will be amazed to find how much one’s preparation and silent thought helps to keep the others at the meeting, energized. “Let not there be any strain; a quiet, relaxed mind silently brooding on the Self, or better still on the Masters, will bring to the meeting a power from you, of whose strength you yourself will not be cognizant. Be a centre of light and peace and devotion when you are at a meeting....Try to think of H.P.B., our Guru, when your mind wanders. The image built with love and attention will do more than one thing—for you and for the meeting,” advises Shri B. P. Wadia. Our real strength is in our philosophy and in our faith and devotion to the great Holy Ones.

It is true that we do not obtain Self-knowledge from books or from the preaching. But we are at the stage of “listeners,” or *shravakas*, where knowledge of both ethics and metaphysics is essential. Metaphysics nourishes that aspect of the soul which is above the logical and analytical mind. Metaphysics keeps at bay mere emotionalism and helps cultivate true detachment, so that when we are brought face to face with the concrete problems of life, we are able to deal with them in a real spiritual way. Theosophy is for those who want it and for none others. But let us also remember that those who do not want it are in the *need of it*, though they may not be aware of their soul’s need.

The article, “Needless Slavery,” mentions that modern men and women have illusions of being free but are in fact, slaves to religion and social conventions. We are being exploited in the name of

patriotism. We are bound by fetters of modern science, art, of beliefs and pseudo-knowledge, and of a dozen other things. Theosophy is the great emancipator. It gives us the opportunity and the capacity to value things truly. So far, we have slavishly adopted the values which teachers, parents and friends have formulated for our “benefit”! When these values are sometimes found to be false, and we are face to face with disaster, we are compelled to seek new values. But we are unable to radically change our values. We go from one set of values to another equally false. Thus, a conservative in politics, becomes a socialist, and thinks that he has acquired right values. Likewise a church-going Christian may become an idol-worshipping Hindu or *vice versa*. This happens because we lack the courage to examine new values thoroughly before we adopt them. The capacity to judge right values lies within each and every one of us. What is required is the courage to come upon the right values and pursue them. Given these two factors, every soul is bound to come to Theosophy, but when that will happen for a given individual will depend on his courage to consult his own soul. When one is able to go closer and touch the soul within, the places of darkness in one’s own mind and heart are exposed and inner conversion results. (*Theosophy*, May 1925)

Also, those who come to theosophy are of varied temperaments. It is like a buffet supper; twenty dishes are offered. Some eat only tasty dishes and get pain; some sample all twenty dishes and very probably go away hungry, dissatisfied and full of complaints!

Besides assimilating the teachings, each one who aspires to work for Theosophy must also be able to assimilate the other co-workers and co-students. More than half the battle is won when this is accomplished, and we are bound to succeed in spite of any and all difficulties.

We are not working for “success.” Our unrelenting efforts to present the philosophy would build up persistence of effort, so that we are always ready to present the teachings and help others, whenever and wherever required. “Teach him who knows still less

than thou.” We may know little, but there are those who know still less than us. There is always someone who is in the need of the right philosophy of life, but does not know where to knock. When there is suffering for a limited period, say for a year or three years or five years, one has hope. But there are many in the world in the hopeless situation, such as landless labourers in India, who can eat only when they earn for the day. Again their employment is seasonal. It is difficult for them to have hope and faith. These are the people who must have knowledge of the existence of moral and just law; that “I suffer because of my past karma and that finite cause can have finite effect.” We tend to identify happiness with success and comfort. We feel life has meaning only if there is success. The philosophy of Theosophy says that there is meaning even in a miserable life, and hence the emphasis on promulgation and practice of the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth.

It is said that each individual has to pay three kinds of debts: the debt towards the gods; the debt towards the *pitris* or ancestors which include those who gave us the body and the light of mind; and the debt towards our teachers. To pay this last debt we have to pass on what we have learnt, and then we shall have fulfilled our duty towards our teachers. But if we wish to make our *contribution* then we must give something additional by deep thinking and reflection. No one is too small or obscure to make absolutely no contribution. Just like little Venus, in the sky filled with stars, makes its own contribution in lessening darkness, each one who has derived some benefit from the philosophy of theosophy can contribute in lessening the darkness of ignorance. By giving right understanding of Karma and Reincarnation we can lessen the bitterness in some person’s heart or even be able to prevent a person, who might have been on the verge of committing suicide, by giving him reason for hope.

To be effective in our communication we need possess no oratory, but learn to control our speech, indulging in truthful, useful, friendly, precise and accurate speech. Buddhism, however, considers transmission of teachings through spoken or written words to be

the lowest form of communication. The next level of communication is through signs and symbols. For instance, once in an assembly Buddha said nothing but only held up a golden flower. No one understood the meaning except Mahakashyapa. Silent and telepathic communication is the most powerful means of transmission, requiring no medium, and to which distance is no barrier.

Mr. Judge points out that most students think that people around are not receptive. Who cares for Theosophy these days? But this is dangerous, because we are connected with others on the mental plane, and if we think nothing can be done then we impress other minds around us with the same thought, and then, of course, nothing is done. As against this, if we *think* Theosophy and say to ourselves, earnestly and sincerely with the wish that just as I have benefited from Theosophy, let others too, be benefited, then it would be like whispering into the ears of others who are in our vicinity, “Theosophy, help and hope for thee.” Such an attitude combined with sincere efforts at promulgation can have a miraculous effect. To *think Theosophy* means to *constantly aspire* towards it day and night. In other words, each one of us must inquire, where do my thoughts turn *naturally*, when I do not have anything pressing to think or do? Like children having finished their homework run towards their base, *i.e.*, playground, have we made Theosophy our base?

This passing on of the knowledge must be done in total humility. If people show gratitude we must know where the gratitude belongs. We must say, “Do not thank me, thank Theosophy.” It has enabled me, given me the power to help others, it will also enable you. It is the Masters’ work we are carrying on. We are working for the great unseen but actual Brotherhood of Humanity, and if we are sincere in our efforts we will get the necessary help from the Elder Brothers or Masters of Wisdom. Whenever we succeed, it is because of this greater force which is working unseen behind the Movement. Sometimes, we have an illusion of having accomplished something ourselves, whereas the real source of strength may be elsewhere.

There is the story, “The Greater Gift,” by A. J. Cronin, of two friends in Italy, Mario and Anselmo. Mario aspired to be a great preacher and he told his friend that he would do anything to have “gift of the tongues.” Anselmo would reply, “I will pray for you every day.” Mario would just laugh it off because he considered his friend to be not very devout. When Mario became a priest in the neighbouring village, Anselmo went with him and stayed in the same monastery, sweeping, swabbing and cleaning up the place. When Mario mounted the pulpit to give his first sermon, the first person he saw was his friend Anselmo, gazing up at him with ardent, expectant eyes. Mario suddenly felt encouraged, and thus sermon after sermon was given for which Mario was much praised. He thought it was all due to his study of rhetoric. After a few years, one day he mounted the pulpit to give his sermon, but he faltered, and failed to find proper words. When he suddenly looked near the pillar, his friend Anselmo was not there. Someone told him that his friend had died a quarter of an hour ago. They said that he always prayed, saying, “It was for a good intention.” Mario dismissed the incident and began to prepare for his next sermon with double zeal. But once again he failed. He was not willing to accept that his success he owed to a dull, obscure, lay brother. Ultimately, he realized and accepted the fact, saying, “It is true, he was the substance, I am the husk. I do not want the gift of eloquence. Give me a greater gift, of humility.”

Like the “Brook” in Lord Tennyson’s poem, we may well say of theosophy that “Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever.”

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The precept, “Know yourself,” was not solely intended to obviate the pride of mankind; but likewise that we might understand our own worth.

—CICERO

## STORIES FROM THE MAHABHARATA

THE GREAT Epic of India, the *Mahabharata*, is the story of the *maha*, great, Bharata family which flourished some 5,000 years ago in the northern part of India. One of the main characters in the book is Bhishma, a man of great integrity, wisdom and bravery. As he lay dying after being wounded in the battle of Kurukshetra, many went to him for advice. Among them was the newly crowned king, Yudhishtira, for no less than Krishna himself had counselled him: “Approach and ask of that repository of all knowledge whatever is in your heart—the different branches of learning, the duties of man in all stations of life, and the duties of kings; ask everything; after him, there will be a decline of knowledge; hence I urge you.”

Yudhishtira requested the old Kuru chief first to expound the duty of kings. Bhishma began his discourses and eventually covered every imaginable subject, great and small, conducive to the welfare of man. With high principle and illustrative stories, he dealt with polity and kingly duty, the duties of other four classes of men and the four modes of life, duties in abnormal times and under extreme conditions and those to be observed by one intent on spiritual progress.

One of the meaningful stories narrated by Bhishma is given here. Others will follow in succeeding issues of this magazine.

One day King Yudhishtira asked Bhishma how a king should gratify all his servants, friends, ministers, as also his subjects. He said that if he acted in terms of his affections and predilections, likes and dislikes, he might favour evil persons and so bring about dissatisfaction among his good subjects. Therefore he asked how a king should judge which servants, friends and ministers would be suitable for specific positions.

Then Bhishma spoke to him of the duties of a king in this regard and told him a story.

Once upon a time an ascetic dwelt alone in a forest, living on fruits and roots. By great efforts he had attained tranquillity and

self-restraint and had adopted a life of goodness towards all creatures. The animals sensed this goodness and never molested him; even fierce tigers and lions, elephants and leopards came to the hermitage and sat near him with affection. One animal, however—a dog—stayed with him all the time and was exceedingly devoted to the sage in consequent of the affection with which he was treated. He, too, subsisted upon roots and fruits, and was tranquil and of inoffensive disposition.

One day a hungry leopard came by and wanted to kill and eat the dog. The dog, sensing this, became frightened and begged his master to help him. The ascetic understood what the dog wanted, and as he had many wonderful powers he said to him: “Thou shalt have no fear of death from leopards any longer. Let thy natural form disappear and be thou a leopard!” At these words the dog-form changed into that of a leopard, with skin bright as gold and leopard spots all over it. As the leopard now saw before him one of his own kind, he went away.

After some time a fierce tiger came by. He, too, was hungry and went towards the dog-turned-leopard, who was again terrified and begged his master to protect him. This the ascetic did by transforming him into a tiger, and the real tiger seeing a beast of his own species went away. For some time the dog-tiger lived happily as before, but now he ate other animals and was no longer satisfied with roots and fruits.

One day a large and powerful elephant, whose tusks were long and strong, was seen approaching through the trees, and, terrified again, the dog-tiger begged for help. This time his master transformed him into an elephant and seeing him the other elephant went away.

Now, indeed, the dog-elephant lived a happy life, bathing in the nearby lake and roaming in the forest, until, returning to the hermitage one day, he saw a lion standing near his master. It was no ordinary lion, but a wild one whose mane was thick and long and who was strong enough to kill elephants. Terrified again, the dog-elephant

begged for help, and was transformed this time into a similar wild lion. Seeing before him only another animal of his own species, the wild lion went his way.

But now another change came about, for when the animals of the forest saw that a wild lion was with the ascetic they were frightened and stopped coming to the hermitage.

After some time another animal, a terrible-looking sarabha, which had eight legs, and eyes on the forehead, and which was strong enough to kill all other animals, came towards the dog-lion, and again the latter was frightened and asked for help. His master answered his cry and changed him into another sarabha, more powerful even than the real one, which fled in terror.

Seeing now the sarabha with the ascetic, all the animals which lived in the vicinity fled from the forest in fear, and the dog-sarabha began slaying for his food the other animals living in the depths of the forest.

One day the ungrateful beast who had first been a dog but who was now transformed into a sarabha thought he would kill and eat his master. But the ascetic sensed this evil thought and spoke to him. He said that it was because of his affection that he had changed him into various forms unsuitable to his dog-nature. By doing so he had lost his other animal friends. Now that he saw he was to be rewarded by being killed himself, he would turn him back into the dog he really was. Immediately this happened, and the dog once more assumed his proper form. Losing all he had gained, the dog became sad and cheerless and the ascetic had to drive him away.

Bhishma then told Yudhishtira that an intelligent king should be guided by this story. A king should never appoint a person, however attached he might be to him, to an office not suited to him, for if he did so he would ruin the person and disturb the welfare of the country. Character and fitness only, he said, should decide positions. That kingdom in which there are the right men for the right job, ever prospers.

## STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA HAPPINESS—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Sukhavaggo* or “Happiness.” Here, *Sukha* or Happiness does not refer to that state which is opposite to *Dukha* or sorrow. It refers to lasting happiness. During life we swing between pleasure and pain; happiness and sorrow. To be truly happy is to be *continually* happy. Such happiness cannot come from dependence on anything external. Because anything external, be it an object or a person, has a beginning and will also have an end. And hence, the very thing that now gives us happiness will become the cause of our sorrow, when we lose it. True happiness has to be found within and it is indeed attainable. Through various verses, the Buddha shows that true happiness is a state of mind.

1. *Let us, then, free from hate, live happily among those who hate; among men who hate let us dwell free from hate.* (197)

2. *Let us, then, free from the disease of longing, live happily among those who suffer that disease; among men with disease of longing let us dwell free from that disease.* (198)

3. *Let us, then, free from anxiety, live happily among those who are careworn; among the anxious, let us dwell free from anxiety.* (199)

4. *Let us, then, live happily, we who possess nothing. Let us live like the Shining Ones nourished on joy.* (200)

A lot of our unhappiness arises out of our own attitude towards life, our relationship with other people and our fears. We cannot be happy if there is hatred in us. Hatred tends to destroy our good qualities. We also become unhappy if someone hates us. There is a natural desire to be liked or loved. Seeking love in return for our goodness may also become the cause of our unhappiness. To become free from hatred is to cultivate equanimity, neither hate nor seek love, but to feel compassion for all.

To be truly happy, we have to become free from the disease of

longing. It does not refer to ordinary desire but the desire about which we are obsessed. It may start as an innocent desire which can soon get out of hands if it is not controlled. In the *Gita*, Krishna traces the chain of causation, that brings about our ultimate downfall, to our sense indulgence, thus:

He who attendeth to the inclinations of the senses, in them hath a concern; from this concern is created passion, from passion anger, from anger is produced delusion, from delusion a loss of the memory, from the loss of memory loss of discrimination, and from loss of discrimination loss of all! (*Gita*, II)

We feel, “if only this particular desire of mine were fulfilled, I will be happy.” But when that happens, it does not seem to bring us the kind of happiness we expected. And even if it does, our happiness is marred by a nagging worry for its loss. Therefore, true happiness consists in not desiring anything in particular but in being happy with whatever Karma brings to us, whether we, as an individual like it or not. It does not mean becoming indifferent but being able to enjoy without attachment. Such an attitude is difficult to cultivate. But that is exactly what we are expected to learn. Mr. Judge writes:

All that can be gotten out of wealth, or beauty, or art, or pleasure, are merely pools of water found along our path as it wanders through the desert of life. If we are not seeking them their appearance gives us intense pleasure, and we are thus able to use them for our good and that of others just so long as the Law leaves them to us; but when that superior power removes them, we must say: “It is just what I in fact desired.” Any other course is blindness. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 46)

Keeping always in mind the eternal truth that “this too shall pass away,” be it happiness or sorrow, we can rise above them, clinging to nothing. Mr. Judge suggests:

So, lean back [on the great ocean of the Self which is

never moved] and look on at the ebb and flow of life that washes to our feet and away again many things that are not easy to lose nor pleasant to welcome, Yet they all belong to Life, to the Self. The wise man has no personal possessions. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 126)

When we realize that we own nothing, we become free from longing and anxiety. Our mind becomes peaceful and tranquil. It embraces joy which does not depend upon anything external. While we are unable to reach such a high stage at once, we can remember that “lusts are never satisfied, not even by a shower of gold...that enjoyment of passion is short-lived and is the womb of pain.” Having overcome pleasures of the physical world, we also learn to disregard pleasures of the other world; celestial pleasures of heaven or those that belong to the astral world—full of subtle joy and wonderment.

5. *Victory breeds hatred; the vanquished dwell in suffering; but the tranquil man disregarding both victory and defeat lives happily. (201)*

6. *There is no fire like lust; no ill like hatred; there is no sorrow like personal existence; there is no peace higher than tranquility. (202)*

7. *Hunger is the worst of diseases, personal existence the worst of sufferings. To him who has known this truly, Nirvana is the highest bliss. (203)*

By a process of elimination, one by one, we are asked to discard those feelings and tendencies which make us suffer. Like a good teacher having infinite patience the Buddha reiterates that hatred, longing, anxiety, worldly possessions have to be given up if one wants to become happy. In those days kings fought wars to defeat smaller or weaker kingdoms to expand their own kingdoms, causing lot of bloodshed and hatred. Fight for supremacy, whether physical, emotional or intellectual, tends to do the same. The loser suffers inwardly from defeat, and desires to get even with the defeater. “He reviled me, he beat me and conquered and then plundered me,”

who express such thoughts tie their mind with the intention of retaliation. In them hatred will not cease. There can be no calm, no peace when there is hatred in you. Your mind turns to those thoughts again and again, reliving the agony of being wronged, offended, persecuted, and victimized or being defeated. Often, violent reactions are outcome of such long suffering. It is best to forgive and forget. Harbour no ill-feeling towards your enemies and hope that some day realization will come to them that what they are doing is wrong. Lust beclouds discrimination even of the wise man, says Shri Krishna. It is not surprising therefore that in stories the sages get tempted by beautiful *Apsaras* and abandon their spiritual pursuits.

It is lust which instigates him. It is passion, sprung from the quality of rajas; insatiable, and full of sin. Know this to be the enemy of man on earth...Its empire is over the senses and organs, the thinking principle and the discriminating faculty also; by means of these it cloudeth discrimination and deludeth the Lord of the body. Therefore, O best of the descendants of Bharata, at the very outset restraining thy senses, thou shouldst conquer this sin which is the destroyer of knowledge and of spiritual discernment. (*Gita*, III)

Lust and hatred throw our mind into turmoil. It is like a lake disturbed by throwing of stones; its waters splash around and remain in motion for a long time. The mud which had settled down at the bottom gets disturbed and mingles with clear waters above, thereby rendering the lake incapable of forming a clear image of its surrounding. Disturbed mind becomes unreceptive to the words of wisdom of the God within, as well as, of other well-meaning people. To attain peace, one has to be calm. We cannot become calm unless we cultivate detachment. But we are not able to practice detachment because of our thirst for life, hunger for pleasures—physical, emotional and mental, due to ignorance.

*(To be continued)*

## THE “ARABIAN NIGHTS”—FACT OR FICTION?

## I

THE ORIGIN of the Arabian Nights stories is obscure. They are mainly attributed to a Persian king Shahrvar or Schahria, who was shocked to discover infidelity of his brother’s wife, and had her executed. But this incident led him to conclude that all women were unfaithful. Hence, he began to marry a succession of virgins and executed each one of them at night so that she would not have a chance to dishonour him. It was the vizier’s duty to provide the king with a virgin. At one point in time he was unable to provide the king with a virgin woman. Scheherazade, the vizier’s daughter offered herself as the next bride. On the night of her marriage with the king, she began to tell a story to the king, which remained unfinished even by the morning of next day. The king was forced to postpone her execution in order to hear the end of the story. The next night she concluded the story but began another story, which she likewise left unfinished. Once again her execution was postponed. This went on for 1001 nights, and thus we have 1001 tales of the “Arabian Nights.” There are various versions of the “origin” of these tales, but in most of them we are told that in the end, the King pardoned his wife, for one reason or another, and spared her life.

The history of these 1001 stories is complex. Some of the Scholars are of the opinion that the original collection of tales, which were few, was from India and Persia, and were translated in Arabic in the Eighth century. Probably, additions were made to this collection in the Ninth and Tenth century, in Iraq, by adding Arabic stories, which included stories about the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the former Caliph of Baghdad.

Mr. Judge points out that the Arabian Nights stories are considered fiction because people are aware of the ancient tradition in which the King was told a story by some person, either for his amusement or to put him to sleep. Some of these tales pertain to magic, bringing

to life good and evil spirits, genies, snake queens, witches and wizards. They stimulate our fancy, awakening our belief in ghosts and fairies. If there is smoke, there must have been at one time some fire. Never has there been a myth without an underlying truth or idea, whether it is a myth of devil or of serpent.

Our enquiry regarding the truth of the Arabian Nights tales brings us to portions of the world near Red Sea, Persia and Arabia, which are now covered by waters but once formed part of ancient Lemuria, writes Mr. Judge. Lemuria was one of the five Continents. The first continent is “The Imperishable Sacred Land,” which is considered to be the continent on which first race humanity was evolved by the divine progenitors. It will last from the beginning to the end of the *Manvantara*. The second continent is “The Hyperborean” continent which was the cradle of second race humanity, and comprised what is now known as Northern Asia. The third continent called “Lemuria,” was a gigantic land. It was inhabited by the Third Race humanity. It covered the whole area of land from the foot of the Himalayas, from Chittagong westward to eastward Assam, and then to South to what is known as Southern India, Ceylon and Sumatra, embracing on its way Madagascar, Australia and Tasmania, up to a few degrees of Antarctic Circle. This huge island reigned supreme over the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. At some point in time the continent began to break into many pieces, giving rise to many huge islands, which were disappearing gradually. At that time there was neither Africa, nor the Americas, nor Europe, as these were still slumbering on the ocean floors (*S.D.*, II, 324 and 327). “Atlantis” was the fourth continent, on which Fourth Race people evolved. The Fifth Continent was the American Continent.

Mr. Judge writes that the Arabian Nights stories, admirable and amusing tales, are not *all* pure fiction, but they are the faint reverberations of the happenings from the times of Lemuria and Atlantis, the lands of Third and Fourth Race Giants. The Atlanteans dabbled in both Black and White Magic. It is interesting to know what Theosophy has to say about the inhabitants of Lemuria and

Atlantis, in order to understand and appreciate the magical aspect of some of these stories.

*The Secret Doctrine* tells us that the Lemurians of the sixth sub-race built rock-cut cities out of stone and lava. One of Ulysses' adventures comprised blinding of the one-eyed Cyclopean giant, Polyhemus. The Cyclopes belonged to the Third or Lemurian Race while Ulysses belonged to the Fourth or Atlantean Race. H.P.B. explains that the “one-eyed” Cyclopes represent the last three sub-races of the Lemurians, and the one “one-eye” refers to the Wisdom eye, which was gradually lost because of moral degradation.

The Fourth Race Atlanteans of the later period are renown for their magic powers and wickedness, as also their ambition and defiance of gods. It is from the Fourth Race that the early Aryans got their knowledge of wonderful things. “It is from them again that the Aryans inherited their most valuable science of the hidden virtues of precious and other stones, of chemistry, or rather alchemy, of minerology, geology, physics and astronomy.” The Atlanteans perished in the cataclysm brought about by their extreme materiality and sin. (*S.D.*, II, 426)

What has Theosophy to say about Arabs and Arabia? In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 200), H.P.B. points out that the Jews and the Arabs are the later Aryans—degenerate in spirituality and perfected in materiality. The Arabs are the descendants of those Aryans who would not go into India, at the time of dispersion of nations, and remained on the borderlands of Afghanistan and Kabul, and some of them penetrated and invaded Arabia.

Arabia once had great men of science and many of them were magicians. They learned their magic lore either from the Lemurian Adepts or from the Black Magicians of Atlantis. For instance, Alchemy first penetrated into Europe through Geber, the great Arabian sage and philosopher, in the eighth century of our era; but it was known and practiced long ages ago in China and Egypt. Al-Beruni was one of the greatest minds of the Islamic history, who excelled in Astronomy, Mathematics, History, Chronology,

Minerology, Physics and Medicine. He had read the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, *Gita*, and was also well-versed in the teachings of Plato, Pythagoras and others.

Many of the “Arabian Nights” tales mention people having power to change men into animals. Someone would throw a handful of water into the face of a person, saying, “Quit that form of man and assume the form of a dog.” These are not fanciful tales, but can be explained on the basis of glamour. The article, “Glamour, Its Place and Purpose in Magic,” points out that there are stories in which people are made to see a person change into a bird or a dog, and then regaining his previous form. This is not the real change. It is only the glamour affecting the eye. To be able to see an object, not only the light rays reflected from the object must enter our eyes, but also, light from the beholder's eyes must fall on the object. When you completely cut off the light from the eye falling on object, the object disappears. If you change the luminosity of the light falling from the eye on the object, that object can be altered in shape or colour for the perceiver.

The same feat could be achieved through some class of elemental spirits or genii. Some of these are described as wicked genii. In *Isis Unveiled* (I, 495-96) H.P.B. mentions that wicked elemental spirits are known by the generic name of *Madan*. She mentions four classes of these spirits which are used by sorcerers for the purpose of taking revenge. These elemental spirits can strike men and cattle with sudden illness and death. Thus, *Shudala Madan*, which is half-fire, half-water, elemental spirit is supposed to have received permission from Siva to assume any shape he chose, and transform one thing into another. It is with the help of these elemental spirits that a magician can make people see “*that which they do not see.*”

(*To be concluded*)

## THE WAY OF PEACE THROUGH NON-VIOLENCE

CALMNESS of mind, quietude of soul and peacefulness of spirit from which come freedom from stress, anxiety and fear are prized possessions desired by many but attained by few. Those rare few who do attain it are those who have learned to stand apart inwardly from the herd instinct by which great mass of men are moved, and to live free in the silence and solitude of the sanctuary of their own Souls, even while living outwardly among them. Periods of relative peace and calm do come in the life of nations, as much as in the life of individuals, but they are, found by general experience, to be short lived, as one or the other disturbance arises unsought and ends the tranquility of their lives. Thus communities and nations seek peace but fail to attain lasting peace.

Leaders of nations got together at the end of each of the two great world wars and forged an alliance of nations in order to end wars and to co-operate for world peace and for mutual benefit. But they failed to obtain the desired object. The League of Nations, formed after the First World War, was short lived, as, not long thereafter, the second war broke out on a scale still more devastating than the first one. Appalled by the unspeakable carnage the leaders again got together, determined this time to end wars, and formed the now still existing union of nations. But wars continued to be waged even thereafter with weapons of mass destruction deadlier than weaponry used in the previous wars.

Co-operation between nations at the present hour has for its basis essentially commercial, economic and “geo-political strategic interests” of powerful nations to the detriment of weaker ones. There is no gainsaying that with all the much flaunted progress of this civilization in science, technology, communications and ever-growing economic might and material prosperity of a few nations, the world at large is groaning under the weight of iniquity and injustice suffered by the vast millions of poor people as a direct consequence of the program of the kind of progress and prosperity

pursued by dominant nations.

None, whose moral sense and innate feeling of justice is not altogether eclipsed, would ever condone the irreverent attitude of this civilization towards Nature, which has come to be looked upon as no more than a “resource” to be exploited and speculated upon for profit and greed of man; nor can such an one countenance the enormous cruelties inflicted on the beautiful creatures of the natural world, and destruction of their habitat, in the name of development and progress.

Individuals know no peace, caught up as they are in the feverish rush of a civilization in pursuit of a “happy life” which is believed to come from acquisition of material wealth and creature comforts. Nations seek world peace through the deterrence of their military might, balance of economic and military power and diplomacy. But peace ever eludes the world, caught up as it is in the consequential recurrent cycle of violence.

That the leaders of nations should be seeking to establish world peace, and at the same time pursuing policies and programs which are instinct with violence, is one of those paradoxes of human nature which is puzzling to thinkers and psychologists alike. It is not that they are wanting in intelligence, knowledge and capacity to govern; nor is their sense of right and wrong altogether blunted. How then the all-too-plain home-truth that a noble end cannot consummate from ignoble means can escape the framers of national policies? Emile Burnouf, the renowned oriental scholar, in his polemical exchanges with H.P.B. in 1888 on the question of world reform, through diffusion of Theosophical ideas, to which she was devoted, lays his finger on the vexed question with his characteristic clarity of mind. Says he :

The moral stamina of the men of today is very feeble; the ideas of good and evil are not, perhaps, obscured, but the *will* to act rightly lacks energy. What men seek above all is pleasure and that somnolent state of existence called comfort. (*H.P.B. Series No. 34*, p. 11)

It is the indolence of the soul that finds it easier to dwell in familiar ground of pleasure which it is unwilling to sacrifice for the good of others. Lord Gautama Buddha, the Master psychologist of the age, cautions us against the danger of lapsing into the morass of conventional modes of thought and life resting in selfishness, and the hypocrisy which it breeds, and implores us to struggle out of the mire and move on up the road that leads to the soul-nourishing pastures of the Aryas—the Noble Ones—where alone can one find the true Way of Peace.

Easy it is to do evil; deeds which are harmful to oneself come easy. Exceedingly hard it is to do that which is beneficial and good. (*The Dhammapada*, Verse 163)

Giving up selfish intent and motive in action for the sake of general good requires a larger vision of life in its wholeness and an understanding of its purpose, which when known, will weaken the hold of the sense of separateness which is a curse on man, and inspire in him a higher aspiration and a loftier motive in action. Continues Mr. Burnouf with his argument, striking a rather pessimistic note, that such higher ideal cannot be obtained at the present time :

Try to preach the sacrifice of one's possessions and of oneself to men who have entered on this path of selfishness! You will not convert many. Do we not see the doctrine of the "struggle for life" applied to every function of human life? This formula has become for our contemporaries a sort of revelation, whose pontiffs they blindly follow and glorify. One may say to them, but in vain, that one must share one's last morsel of bread with the hungry; they will smile and reply by the formula: "the struggle for life." They will go further: they will say that in advancing a contrary theory, you are yourself struggling for your existence and are not disinterested. How can one escape from this sophism, of which all men are full today? (*H.P.B. Series No. 34*, p.

11)

To this poser of Mr. Burnouf, H.P.B. responds with her characteristic unassailable optimism, born of her practical knowledge of the Divine Science of Theosophy, that this pseudo law can be easily proved to be inoperative, and, therefore, inapplicable, as far as man as a thinking, moral being is concerned; that though it seems to be operative in the life of the purely physical animal economy of man's earthly relations, it is inoperative on the moral plane of being, which, by the compulsion of higher evolution of man as a moral and spiritual being—which he is in truth and reality—must necessarily, in time, override the physical with that higher moral Law—the Law of Self-sacrifice.

This is not a new revelation. It has been taught and exemplified by great Teachers of humanity, enacted at times by whole nations in the past, and is being enacted even at the present time by men and communities inspired by a higher ideal of life. It is a well authenticated historical fact that in the reign of the greatest of Emperors, Ashoka, "the beloved of the Gods," in ancient India, the whole nation practically carried out and lived by the precepts of Lord Buddha. It is also well known that for several centuries perfect peace, happiness, and life of high ideal prevailed in the Tibetan nation under the benign and wise rule of the sacred institution of the Dalai Lama, till the middle of the last century. In the life of Gandhiji and Martin Luther King we have an illustration of the irresistible power of Truth and Non-violence in overcoming brute force by Love.

The wise, far-sighted leadership of South Africa, after winning independence from half a century of racial violence that beggars description under the tyrannical Apartheid rule, chose to abjure the path of vengeance and retaliation against the perpetrators of crime as war criminals, and chose, instead, to rebuild the bleeding nation on the firm foundational principle of Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Restoration of broken relationships. In a post-script to the interim

constitution of the nation, Desmond Tutu says, among other things:

The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the division and strife of the past, which generated gross violation of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *Ubuntu* but not for victimization. (*No Future without Forgiveness*)

*Ubuntu*, explains Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is the foundational principle of traditional African jurisprudence, the central concern of which is not retribution or punishment, but healing of the breaches, redressing of imbalances, restoration of broken relationships; the kind of justice that seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator who should be given an opportunity to be reintegrated into the community. The basic philosophy of *Ubuntu* is that our humanity is so intertwined that humanity of the offender or the oppressor is bound up with that of his victim, such that former is as much dehumanized by his violent act as the latter who suffers the pain and indignity, and that both are required to be rehabilitated. The wisdom of the traditional African Jurisprudence is thus seen to be more in accord with the Moral Order of the Universe or the Law of Karma, and thus is far in advance of the modern one based on retributive justice, which only results in dehumanization and escalation of acts of injustice.

If the implacable law of universal Justice, called Karma, the law of our being, were better understood, and the knowledge of it more widely diffused, people would then see clearly the scientific basis of the ancient ethical injunction, *resist not evil, and render good for evil*. They will then be self-compelled from within to respond to every offence suffered by them with love, charity and forgiveness. No harm or injury would ever come to us, in the first place, if we had not ourselves, by our own actions, created the cause for it, either

in this or in some past life. The hand that smites us is our own. Awareness of the working of this moral law of adjustment of effects to their appropriate causes, working through and upon the Egos who, by their actions, created the disturbance in the universal harmony, would dissuade us from wreaking vengeance against the one who offends. Instead, we would be impelled to assume responsibility and respond with understanding, kindness, charity and forgiveness. By such a responsible, charitable attitude, the parties concerned in mutual offences would be working in accord with the law of universal harmony for the greatest good of both. But if, on the contrary, one seeks to avenge the wrong suffered by him, he would thereby create a cause which will work to his own detriment. Says Reverend Desmond Tutu:

It is ultimately in our own best interest that we become forgiving, repentant, reconciling and reconciled people, because without forgiveness, without reconciliation we have no future. (*Ibid.*)

If the Way of Peace is still a distant cry in the world it is because mankind in general at the present time is as yet oblivious of the fact that on the plane of the Higher Self of man an actual kinship exists—which is the plane of Reality—where absolute Harmony reigns. When an awareness of the truth of Universal Brotherhood grows in men, altruism will then be the ruling impulse instead of selfishness. Basis of international relations will then shift from considerations of narrow national-interest to the well-being of all, including the smallest and meanest, in the recognition of the inescapable fact that only when well-being of all is guaranteed that the well-being of the units composing the whole—of individuals, communities and nations—naturally follows, not otherwise. Retaliatory justice will give place to restorative justice. Irreverent attitude to nature will be transformed into reverence and love for all creation.

## 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:** It is stated that, “The Spiritual Fire burns out all the dross within us.” Does it mean that by invoking and turning to the inner Force—our Higher Self, and seeking its help, the dross of our lower nature will get burnt away? *Light on the Path* also states that there is no cure for Desire, except by the help of the Divine. Can we say that turning to the Divine with great fervour is one more method of getting rid of, say, one or more defects that hinders our work? How does this process of “burning” take place?

**Answer:** “Light of truth” or Spiritual knowledge can dispel the darkness of ignorance. When we turn ardently within for help and guidance, purification begins. While the process of purification begins with ardent aspiration, the process of burning to dross, our lower tendencies, does not take place *automatically*. The effort has to be made by ourselves. We are talking about *Spiritual knowledge* burning to ashes the dross of our lower nature. But that spiritual knowledge is not mere intellectual knowledge or emotions. It is the wisdom acquired by putting into practice what we have accepted to be true. There are three ways in which the burning out of all the dross within us takes place. When one takes a vow or a pledge in real earnest to live the spiritual life, he is invoking the divine Witness within. We are asking the Divine within to shine into and search through all the dark corners of our being. What would have otherwise gone unnoticed is brought to our notice by that radiant light—our good and evil actions and the intentions behind them. The heat of that radiant light also germinates the seeds of both good and evil in us. And when the latent vices come to surface, we will have to fight

a hundred times harder than before until we have succeeded in killing out all such tendencies in ourselves. The more sincere and earnest we are, the more marked and rapid is this process of transformation.

When we turn to the divine nature with great fervour, we consciously invoke the divine justice of Karma to take note of our motive, and to scrutinize our actions. As *Light on the Path* puts it, most human beings act waveringly, sometimes good and sometimes bad. In their case Karma acts in confused manner. But in the case of one who aspires, Karma works in a definite manner. Disciple can no longer be half-hearted; he has to make definite choice in everything he does, and therefore Karmic results increase enormously, because all are acting in the same direction on all the planes. In the section on “Living the Life” in the *Friendly Philosopher*, Mr. Crosbie points out that the hidden activity of the spiritual aspiration manifests most in the increased activity of the lower nature and in the circumstances of life. It is the hastening of Karma—good as well as bad. It is by noticing and working upon every weakness of ours and striving to strengthen the good in us that purification takes place. It is the Alchemical process by which our lower base nature is transformed and transmuted into the higher. High aspirations awaken the spiritual fire, and when this fire is fanned by continued effort in right direction, it brings about refinement of our nature just as constant application of heat to the base metal melts and refines it. One by one, we become aware of our gross tendencies and eliminate them; and later, we also become aware of subtle faults and tendencies. The practice of self-examination in the light of seven *Paramitas* is of immense value in helping us to notice our weaknesses, and resolving to eliminate them.

It is true that we cannot undertake this process on our own strength; we can do it only with the help of our Higher Self. In this work, our past good actions may also come to our aid in counteracting effects from our bad actions. *The Voice of the Silence* tells us, “Restrain by thy Divine thy lower Self. Restrain by the Eternal the Divine.” If we try to restrain our lower self on the strength

of our personal self, we will not go far. We may resolve to be good to others and help them, thinking “we never know when we may need their help.” This is not a higher basis for restraining our lower nature. But with spiritual knowledge when we see identity of all things and creatures and act accordingly, we will be able to “cross over all sins in the bark of spiritual knowledge.” Also, it is not enough to get rid of lower tendencies and vices; we have to rise above our spiritual selfishness also. “Individuality” has to become subservient to the “Eternal.” *Light on the Path* tells us “look for the warrior and let him fight in thee.” It does not mean that we can fold our hands and sit down. We know that Krishna is not going to take up any weapon and fight. But he is sure to guide us, if only we turn to him. And when we listen to him and obey, it will be impossible for us to strike one blow amiss. Help of our Higher Nature is in terms of having the *inner strength* to carry on the fight. It requires *Virya*, the dauntless energy, which can flow only when personal will is surrendered to the divine will.

It requires Karmic stamina. Karmic stamina is described by Mr. Judge as the fruition of past unselfish good Karma that has ripened. He writes that though the occultist might have an immense quantity of past unselfish good Karma stored up, still, if during his crisis if there be not a sufficient number of present unselfish good thoughts to ripen a sufficient portion of that quantity, he finds himself destitute of the necessary stock of stamina. Few are they who have already laid up a good quantity of unselfish good karma; and fewer still are they who have the requisite degree of unselfish and spiritual nature during period of trial. There has to be acceptance of whatever comes to us. If we are constantly complaining, grumbling and grudging; if we feel why *we* have to go through the suffering while others are enjoying their life, etc. we are not providing necessary conditions. Therefore there has to be acceptance and continued effort on our part. When we say “Thy will be done,” and act from that basis, the Spiritual will comes to our aid in overcoming our lower desire nature, obstacles and circumstances. Shri. B. P. Wadia writes that by our

aspiration, we separate ourselves from our weaknesses, which assemble and take shape to become *Papa Purusha* in us, and torment us. But, likewise, our aspiration and higher living also takes shape and becomes *Punya Purusha*. With the strength and help of the latter we eject the former from within ourselves. In a person who is sincerely determined to walk the spiritual path, his good deeds are a hundredfold intensified as a potentiality for good due to his association with the Higher Self.

**Question:** Today, we find suicide rate to be very high as compared to the recent past. Moreover, theosophy teaches that those committing suicide are only half-dead, and they in turn can instill thoughts of suicide in the minds of sensitive people or those who may be contemplating suicide. What is the remedy?

**Answer:** It is true that there has been unprecedented increase in the number of people committing suicide, and some of them for trifling reasons. Children of age ten or twelve committing suicide by hanging themselves, was something unheard of until recently. Many of them choose to commit suicide because parents refuse to give into their demands, which could be permission to participate in some television show, to buy a motorbike or any other expensive gadget, or failure in some examination. Materialism, consumerism and glamour seem to be mainly responsible for suicides. Ten or fifteen years back a child would be satisfied with a few toys and few pairs of clothes. Modern-day children are only too aware of their looks, of the clothes of latest design and fashion, of the latest gadgets and variety of food items to choose from. In every field of life even children are faced with competition. The same applies to the adults. No matter how much a person earns, his income is just not enough because from food to clothes to gadgets there is a wide variety to choose from and we want to try them all. We seem to have forgotten what it is to live within one’s means. “Easy loans,” lure people to borrow money from the banks, which they soon find they are incapable of paying off. There are plenty of examples of parents committing suicide after killing their children, because they were unable to pay the debts.

In some other cases it is loneliness, depression and boredom which lead a person to commit suicide. Often it is exploitation or emotional or psychological torture of one human being by another, which is the cause of committing suicide.

The remedy lies in learning to be content, learning to live a simple life, and setting an example to younger members of the family, as also, for other families, even at the risk of being isolated. True and lasting happiness is not dependent on or does not arise from money, amenities and luxuries of life, is the lesson generally learnt the hard way. Weakening family bonds and deteriorating human relationships wherein we are not sensitive to the needs and sorrows of another human being, are also to be blamed for increasing number of suicides. Modern man is too busy and has no time to listen to the problems of another and give him solace, or to deter someone who may be contemplating suicide.

Ultimately, what we need is the right philosophy which can open our eyes that when we commit suicide, we are actually trying to dodge the law of Karma. By ending our life, we are trying to run away from a person or the situation in which we are placed under Karma, in this life. We may appear to succeed in escaping, but not forever. The fact is that even the most unbearable and painful situation we are placed in has come to us under Karma and only we are responsible for it. All we need to do is to try and learn the necessary lesson, if we are unable to change it. There is no escape from responsibility. In any of our next births we will be once again placed into that same situation from which we tried to escape by committing suicide, till we have learnt to handle that situation and learnt the lesson. Hence the advice is, “Accept the woes of birth.”

Theosophy also teaches that a person committing suicide finds himself in the astral atmosphere only partly dead, only minus the physical body. Such an entity moves around in the astral atmosphere, near the earth, wanting to satisfy certain desires but unable to do so in the absence of the body. If the person committed suicide at the age of thirty and his natural life term was seventy then the astral

entity will remain in the astral atmosphere for next forty years, only after that the final separation of the Ego from the lower principles takes place.

“Suicide is a huge folly, because it places the committer of it in infinitely worse position than he was under the conditions from which he foolishly hoped to escape.” He exists in an astral realm, entirely eaten up by his own thoughts. Continually repeating in vivid thoughts the act by which he took his own life. He sees the people and places he left, but is unable to communicate or do anything to relieve distress of those left behind. Unable to control and guide himself in the unfamiliar and unseen realm, he is swept hither and thither. His whole nature is in distress at the helplessness experienced; because though conscious and aware he is unable to do anything that he desires, because the instrument of action—his body—is no longer available. Once we understand the terrible state of a suicide, we would be able to understand that it is better to face our difficulties, no matter how grave, than to dodge it temporarily, only to face it again in some future life—with added suffering in that bodiless state after death.

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MUCH has been discussed about the necessity of pure nourishment in order to have spiritual development. For me, true nourishment means the assimilation of pure thoughts, and devotion to the Truth or God. In vain you may take the most perfectly sattvic meals each day; what nourishment will your soul derive from this mass of pure food if your mind remains constantly absorbed in material thoughts?...Everything that the senses receive is nourishment. Be careful therefore not to let yourself be encroached upon by your stomach. And try always to remain the master of what you absorb.

—ANANDA MOYI

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

It is okay to fail, and failure could even be instructive. In the school of life failure can help us correct perspectives, come down to ground reality and learn valuable lessons that help us grow, writes Anisha Anilraj. Anilraj was surprised to find that while she could find plenty of books on “success” in a bookstore, she could find only one book on failure. We embrace success and shun failure. Failure can cause people to plunge into depression, become reclusive, negative, angry, and in some cases even suicidal, which are all extreme reactions to something which is unavoidable. The opposite of success is not failure, but “not trying.” Learning occurs through both success and failure. When a child learns to walk, she/he falls down several times, and we do not keep track how many times the child fell down, before learning to walk properly. But somehow as we get on in years, failure becomes more and more shameful. Often there is a fear of failing our loved ones—fear that we will not be able to live up to their expectations.

Perhaps the most powerful force that drives us to failure is the fear of it, which prevents us from doing our best. Someone who was an ace student throughout his school career was gripped with fear on the first day of his junior college that he might fail to score high enough marks for pursuing the study of engineering or medicine. As the date of final examination came near, his fear worsened, and he self-inflicted injuries on his right arm, causing fracture, to avoid writing the exam. When he decided to take the exam the third time he realized that nothing else had changed except his outlook, because then he was no longer afraid, as he had nothing to lose. By not attempting he did not avoid failure, but eliminated all possible chances of success.

Failing remains one of those viscerally painful emotions, but it is also one of life’s most enriching experiences, teaching us humility, patience, and above all—compassion. If we get something right at our first attempt, we know one sure way of doing it. But when we

succeed after several attempts, it might be that the more we have failed, the more we have learned about the process. Thomas Edison said after many failed attempts at finding a filament suitable for an electric incandescent light bulb, “I have not failed. I have successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work.”

“From The Beatles, who were rejected by a record company saying, ‘guitar bands are on their way out,’ to Abraham Lincoln who failed in the elections eight times before being elected President of the United States, countless others have altered the course of history by persisting despite their countless failures. Which brings us to the humbling truth that what distinguishes an ordinary man from an extraordinary one is simply—persistence. Success does not come from avoidance of failure, but is instead a place we get to when we learn from mistakes and move on,” writes Anisha Anilraj. (*Life Positive*, October 2011)

Our universe is governed by the pairs of opposites or dualities of “pleasure and pain,” “light and darkness,” “success and failure.” Each one of us desires “success” and shuns failure because society lauds success and the successful person. The seed of spiritual or true growth lies in failure. Failure makes us realize the limitation of the futile exertion in a temporary situation, the purpose of which is short-lived pleasure of achieving the desired result. It is indeed a short-lived or even elusive pleasure.

The road to inner success, which could never be a final destination, lies through failure. There is ever-growing perfectibility. In spiritual life, the only failure recognized, is the failure to *try*. Mr. Crosbie writes: “Mistakes will occur, perhaps many of them, but, as said, ‘twenty failures are not irremediable if followed by as many undaunted struggles upward.’” Every seemingly abortive attempt at purifying our character has already borne fruits. Even when we fail, let us remember that at every attempt we weaken the enemy (our vices), so that the next attempt makes the task easier. “No efforts, not the smallest—whether in right or wrong direction—can vanish from the world of causes.”

Every failure makes us better navigators. Every failure makes us accept others with their limitations. Every failure brings about humility and humbleness. *The Voice of the Silence* has following encouraging words for those who struggle towards spiritual perfection:

Remember, thou that fightest for man's liberation, each failure is success, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time. The holy germs that sprout and grow unseen in the disciple's soul, their stalks wax strong at each new trial, they bend like reeds but never break, nor can they e'er be lost. But when the hour has struck they blossom forth. (p. 69)

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Joshua Foer travelled to Oxford University in 2005 to report on World Memory Championship for *Discover* magazine. There he watched and learnt how to memorize ridiculously long strings of random digits, the names and faces of hundreds of strangers, and line after line of poetry. Almost all of them relied on the same technique, of building a “memory palace” in their mind's eye. The technique recognizes the fact that human brain is good at remembering visual imagery, but bad at remembering lists of words and numbers. All one has to do is to convert something unmemorable—like a string of numbers, a deck of cards, a shopping list, or *Paradise Lost*—into a series of engrossing visual images and then mentally arrange them within an imagined space, a memory palace. Suddenly those forgettable items become unforgettable, writes Joshua Foer. He spent a year mastering the technique and exploring the meaning of memory for a book, *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, excerpts of which are reproduced in the article, “Master of Memory,” in *Discover* magazine for July-August 2011.

At the next year's U.S.A. Memory Championship, held in New York City, Joshua Foer could memorize the order of a shuffled deck

of cards in 1 minute 40 seconds, then a U.S. record, and went on to win the event. He writes in his book that a few nights after the world championship, when he was returning home by train after taking dinner with friends, he remembered only on reaching home that he had driven a car to dinner! “That was the paradox: For all of the memory stunts I could now perform, I was still stuck with the same old shoddy memory that misplaced car keys and cars. . . . Any kind of information that could not be neatly converted into an image and dropped into a memory palace was just as hard for me to retain as it had always been. I had upgraded my memory's software, but my hardware seemed to have remained fundamentally unchanged,” writes Foer. His experience showed that practice makes for perfection, but only if it is the right kind of concentrated, self-conscious, deliberate practice.

Though occasionally he memorized shopping lists, or directions, or to-do lists, he found that such occasions were rare in the real world in which paper, computers, cell phones, Post-its can handle the task of remembering for him. So why bother investing in one's memory in an age of externalized memories? The answer is: How we perceive the world and how we act in it are products of how and what we remember. We are all bundles of habits shaped by our memories, and we control our lives by gradually altering those habits, *i.e.*, the networks of our memory. Our ability to make connections between previously unconnected notions, to create new ideas, to share in a common culture; all these depend upon memory. “Now more than ever, as the role of memory in our culture erodes at a faster pace than ever before, we need to cultivate the memories in our brains, the ones that make us who we are, that are the seat of our values and source of our character,” writes Joshua Foer.

H.P.B. aptly describes memory as the despair of the materialist, the enigma of the psychologist and the sphinx of science. Scientists and psychologists are unable to understand the nature of memory because of their inability to understand the nature of mind and potentialities of Higher Mind. Brain is the instrument used by mind.

There are three types of memory—*Remembrance*, *Recollection* and *Reminiscence*, and in order to understand soul-memory or reminiscence one must accept the existence of Higher Mind. Broadly speaking, “Memory is an innate power in thinking beings, and even in animals, of reproducing past impressions by an association of ideas principally suggested by objective things or by some action on our external sensory organs.” Remembrance and recollection are dependent on more or less normal and healthy functioning of our *physical* brain. *Reminiscence* is soul-memory; it is the direct perception of what was, and is not dependent upon brain—the brain merely serves as a sort of filter or translator of impressions. Lord Buddha could remember all his past lives.

When it is said that one has lost his memory, or that it is weakened, it is partly because the memory cells have become enfeebled. Besides the enfeebling or degeneration of the brain cells, poor memory may have something to do with careful observation and *notation*. Mr. Crosbie defines memory as the faculty of perceiving the registration. We have many careless habits of letting things impress us without careful notation. Probably, this is the reason why in olden days importance was given to “repetition” in the learning process, so as to create clear and definite impression. Impressions that are deeply imprinted, because of the special attention given to them, when they are formed, can be easily recollected.

Mr. Crosbie says that memory of walking and talking is with us, though we may not remember how and when we learned to walk and talk. It is memory that connects us with body, through all its changes. Without the memory, we would simply live from one impression to the other without any sense of self-identity.

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Are we naturally the way we are, or is it nurtured? Are we all pure in heart but poisoned by the impurities of the world? Are people born good and learn to be nasty, or are they born with badness built in? Most of us intuitively respond that there is goodness in everyone,

it is simply sometimes hard to see, and is often buried by the hardships of life. But many of us find it hard to see good in ourselves and others. We tend to talk about our weaknesses and not our strengths. What is seldom recognized is a simple principle—what you see in others is what you create within yourself in that moment. If you did not have the trait or tendency that you see in others, you would not be able to spot it in “the other.” This of course is also the principle of projection. Partly, movies, newspapers, television, are responsible for inculcating such a tendency, as they tend to focus much more on what is wrong or bad than on what is right and good.

To change the situation, it is important that each one of us tries to find the good, however small, within himself, tends it, nurtures it, nourishes it—just as we would nurture the plants in our garden. By focusing on the good in ourselves we give it life and permission to grow. It is said that “where your attention goes energy flows and where your energy flows things grow.” When we focus on goodness or virtue in others, we tend to empower it and add a little of our life energy to their life energy.

If you would like others to be good, better and great, then be good, better and great yourself. If there is hope “in” the world, if there is hope “for” the world, a hope that it is possible to make a difference, play a part, perhaps it lies in our vision of each other, beginning with the vision we have of ourselves. Practically, “Look back on the last week and notice what you spotted in others and consciously acknowledge it within yourself. During each day this coming month select one person and tell them of something good and virtuous that you see in them,” writes Mike George. (*Purity*, October 2011)

We could get a balanced perspective on the good and bad in others and ourselves when we are able to understand and appreciate unity and non-separateness of humanity. We are all connected on the inner planes of our being. Let us accept that if there is uncharitableness, disloyalty, dishonesty, harshness or unbrotherliness in the race, then germs of them all exist in each individual. Those

germs require only proper personal conditions to make them sprout. It is the duty of each one of us to encourage positive and beneficent feelings in himself.

When we criticize another person, even mentally, the elementals get coalesced with that thought, creating an entity. By condemning, we create a focus in ourselves such that the elementals will carry that very fault to us. After a while, we would find ourselves doing that very thing for which we had criticized another person. For instance, when a person has committed violence, we hear people say that he should be beaten, he should be whipped publicly, etc. In condemning violence, we are ourselves on the edge of becoming violent. Hence Mr. Judge writes:

If you fix your thoughts upon a person in anger, or in critical, uncharitable judgment, you attract to yourself a number of those elementals that belong to, generate, and are generated by this particular fault or failing, and they precipitate themselves upon you. Hence, through the injustice of your merely human condemnation, which cannot know the source and causes of the action of another, you at once become a sharer of his fault or failing by your own act, and the spirit expelled returns “with seven devils worse than himself.”

A person sunk in evil or vices must be regarded as someone whose boots have become heavy with mud, and must be given a helping hand to come out of the situation.

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OH, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away.

—DINAH MARIA MULOCK CRAIK