

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 75, No. 1

November 17, 2004

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT TIMELESS AND PRESENT

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA) PRIVATE LTD.

40 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020, India

THE Theosophical Movement has been described as ethical, moral, universal, invisible and continuous. It is invisible, but its presence is felt through the effects produced. It is continuous. The present Movement, for our era and generation, was launched in 1875 in the city of New York by H. P. Blavatsky. But in its timeless aspect we can trace it back century by century to find that it began far back in the night of time.

In the third century A.D. Ammonius Saccas, who made an effort to bring together various conflicting religions and sects by showing that they were in possession of the same truth, used the word "Theosophy." Jacob Boehme's work in Germany, Count St. Martin and St. Germain's efforts in France, as also Luther's reformation of the church and the work done by Thomas Paine in influencing the great American Revolution, form part of this Movement. It is neither Eastern nor Western, but was started in the Spiritual World above. Hence, we say that the Masters or Adepts are behind this Movement. But is it only with U.L.T. [United Lodge of Theosophists] that the Masters are concerned? Mr. Judge writes:

The Theosophical Movement being continuous, it is to be found in all times and in all nations. Wherever thought has struggled to be free, wherever spiritual ideas, as opposed to forms and dogmatism, have been promulgated, there the great movement is to be discerned. (*W.Q. Judge Series No. 3, p. 1*)

The Theosophical Movement of our era was launched at a very critical juncture in human history, when scientific materialism and religious dogmatism had made truth unwelcome. The Master writes: “It is time that Theosophy should enter the arena.” This is a trumpet-call and makes one visualize the wrestler entering the wrestling ring. Theosophy entered the arena and challenged, not just Science and Religion, but its challenge was and is to the whole of humanity. H.P.B. describes the Movement in *The Key to Theosophy*:

If the Theosophical movement were one of those numerous modern crazes, as harmless at the end as they are evanescent, it would be simply laughed at...and left severely alone. But it is nothing of the kind. Intrinsically, Theosophy is the most serious movement of this age; and one, moreover, which threatens the very life of most of the time-honoured humbugs, prejudices, and social evils of the day—those evils which fatten and make happy the upper ten and their imitators and sycophants, the wealthy dozens of the middle classes, while they positively crush and starve out of existence the millions of the poor. (p. 269)

The Theosophical Movement is the movement of ideas. It challenges scientific materialism to face the facts. Theosophy gives out facts and seems to tell science not to dodge them. It has been the rule of science to fit the theories to facts. So, if the theories do not fit these facts then science must be prepared to discard those theories. But on the other hand, Masters are very appreciative of science. Science rejects miracles and so does Theosophy. However, *Light on the Path* points out the inadequacy of scientific knowledge and scientific methods:

The laboratory is not the only ground for experiment; *science*, we must remember, is derived from *sciens*, present participle of *scire*, “to know,”—its origin is similar to that of the word “discern,” “to ken.”...Science is a word which covers all forms of knowledge....To obtain knowledge by experiment is too tedious a method for those who aspire to accomplish real

work; he who gets it by certain intuition, lays hands on its various forms with supreme rapidity, by fierce effort of will. (pp. 32 and 34)

Its challenge to Theology has been that if theory is not backed by explanation, then religion would lose hold over the people. Our era is marked by freedom of thought and investigation. It points to the need to go back from mere rituals and ceremonies to the actual experience of those who are spiritually developed. The very study of Theosophy is challenging, requiring the reader to lay aside prejudice and preconception.

In the Preface to *Isis Unveiled* H.P.B. writes:

The work now submitted to public judgment is the fruit of a somewhat intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science. It is offered to such as are willing to accept truth wherever it may be found, and to defend it, even looking popular prejudice straight in the face....

The book is written in all sincerity. It is meant to do even justice, and to speak the truth alike without malice or prejudice. But it shows neither mercy for enthroned error, nor reverence for usurped authority. It demands for a spoliated past, that credit for its achievements which has been too long withheld. It calls for a restitution of borrowed robes, and the vindication of calumniated but glorious reputations. Toward no form of worship, no religious faith, no scientific hypothesis has its criticism been directed in any other spirit. Men and parties, sects and schools are but the mere ephemera of the world's day. TRUTH, high seated upon its rock of adamant, is alone eternal and supreme.

The challenge is not to Darwin or Huxley or a particular individual but to erroneous modes of thought into which the human mind falls. There are people, organizations and institutions, which force people to think in one particular way. We are asked to settle for Truth alone and nothing less than the Truth.

The challenge to the whole of humanity is that the Theosophical doctrines of Universal Brotherhood, Karma and Reincarnation are not mere Utopia or theory but are practicable. Each one of us is

challenged to put them into practice and see if the outcome is as claimed by Theosophy. The outcome claimed is that our earth will be a heaven in the 21st century as compared to what it was in the 19th century.

The challenge is especially to students of Theosophy. In order to realize Universal Brotherhood we must first succeed in forming a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood. How do we go about it? A Master of Wisdom writes:

Theosophy, therefore, expects and demands from the Fellows of the Society a great mutual toleration and charity for each other's shortcomings, ungrudging mutual help in the search for truths in every department of nature—moral and physical. And this ethical standard must be unflinchingly applied to daily life. Theosophy must be made practical....Forget SELF in working for others—and the task will become an easy and a light one for you.

“Unflinchingly” is a strong word. It not only means “without hesitation,” but it implies “to do something even if it makes us feel absurd in the eyes of others,” or even if it causes us physical and mental inconvenience. In forming the nucleus of Universal Brotherhood, we are challenged to cease to identify ourselves with our caste or religion and overcome the sense of being a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, etc. It is possible that even after long acquaintance with Theosophy, the fact that a student belongs to a particular religion or caste can play strange tricks on his consciousness. As Jesus said: “Come ye out from among them and be ye separate.” We are invited to live life differently.

We must remember that the Theosophical Movement was launched with a certain purpose. In the middle of the Fourth Round, *Manas* was lighted up, and in this Fourth Round *Kama* (desire nature) is predominant. However, *Manas* will be fully developed only in the Fifth Round, and at that point, the whole of humanity will be faced with the “Moment of Choice”—choice between taking the Left or Right Path. Since *Manas* is not fully developed at present, allowances are made for our choices, as we make for a

child's wrong choice. But with full development of *Manas*, we will be fully responsible. So, it is by way of preparation for that crisis, that each one has to take his evolution in his own hands. Those who will do so will be helping in the safety of the entire human race in the future. For this, Masters are guiding humanity. But the law is that to become a disciple, one has to become a servant.

Two most important ideas that Theosophy strives to convey are: (1) Mahatmas exist and they are Ideals and facts in Nature. We can reach their state, as each one of us is inherently perfect. (2) The highest goal of Spiritual life is not *Moksha* or liberation. As the Master says, “It is not the individual and determined purpose of attaining Nirvana—the culmination of knowledge and absolute wisdom, which is after all only an exalted and glorious selfishness,” but the path of Renunciation taught by the Mahayana School. Therefore, each individual is inseparable from other individuals. No man can sin and suffer its consequences alone. So also, no man can progress alone, without lifting or sinking the whole of humanity ever so little.

Light on the Path says: “Give your aid to the few strong hands that hold back the powers of darkness from obtaining complete victory.” Those who have joined the U.L.T. have accepted this challenge to become servants. They have accepted the challenge of dealing with the “snake of self”—the lower nature. It means being able to firmly say that it does not matter what I like or dislike, whether it hurts me or not, but I will establish a centre of consciousness within me, which will respond to my spiritual obligation. This may make us experience some conflict within, but as Jesus said: “I do not bring peace, I bring the sword”; so also says Theosophy. Each student of Theosophy has a role to play in this Movement. In *Light on the Path* we are told about Masters describing themselves as servants of humanity. “Part of their [Masters'] service is to let their knowledge touch him; his first act of service is to give some of that knowledge to those who are not yet fit to stand where he stands.”

This is the archetypal way of expressing our participation in

the Theosophical Movement. Just as Masters have given the knowledge to us, while we are not yet fit to stand in their place, so also we must help those who know still less than us. “Let the darkness within help you to understand the helplessness of those who have seen no light, whose souls are in profound gloom.” Those of us who have benefited by Theosophy, have accepted the service of the Masters.

The challenge of Theosophy is not *how much* we have learnt, but how willing we are to take up this obligation. Each one of us has to decide what role he or she will play in the progress of the whole race. We are afforded this opportunity to participate in the Theosophical Movement, by virtue of being associates of U.L.T. It is up to us to keep this body, instrument or form as pure as possible so that the light within can radiate in the outside world and people outside can get Theosophy pure and simple—uncontaminated by our opinions and biases.

How long, O radiant gods of truth, how much longer are they to be told that Theosophy is no national property, no religion, but only the Universal code of Science and the most transcendental ethics that was ever known; that it lies at the root of every moral philosophy and religion, and that neither Theosophy *per se*, nor yet its humble, unworthy vehicle, the Theosophical Society, has anything whatever to do with personality or personalities.

To the believer the door of salvation opens and he becomes the source of his kin’s benediction. He himself swims across the ocean of the world and those that seek his door, wander in search of alms no more.

—GURU NANAK

PRAYER—MECHANICAL AND TRUE

PRAYER is a much misunderstood word and usually conveys the idea of some favour or boon sought from a God outside of ourselves. Even the dictionary defines it as a “supplication to God or persons.” But who is God? With the exception of the materialists, all believe in God, either as a person, however high, or as a power, however divine, but outside of the human heart and of the universe. Theosophy teaches God to be the Supreme Spirit, omnipresent and omnipotent, the root and the source of all beings; and man is its crystal ray, a beam of immaculate light within the form of material clay. It is the highest privilege of man to commune with God because he is a self-conscious being. The kingdoms below man move in terms of natural impulse in accordance with the law of their own being, and that is their harmonious evolution. The human consciousness is a link between the divine and the personal, so man can choose to move in one direction or another, either to unite with the Supreme Self within or get victimized by his lower and personal self.

Prayer is the outpouring of the human heart in utmost humility and reverential gratitude for all the blessings of life. There is no thought of personal gain, no petition for personal favours, because God, from the Theosophical point of view, is also Law, universal and impersonal, which cannot be deviated from its own course by human petitions. As Lord Buddha advises us in *The Light of Asia*:

Pray not! the Darkness will not brighten! Ask
 Nought from the Silence, for it cannot speak!
 Vex not your mournful minds with pious pains!
 Ah! Brothers, Sisters! seek
 Nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn,
 Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruits and cakes;
 Within yourselves deliverance must be sought;
 Each man his prison makes.

It is this wrong type of prayer that kills self-reliance and makes one dependent on priests and ceremonies, temples and churches.

The right understanding of God and prayer enables one to become self-dependent on the basis of interdependence. As there is unity of life, so human solidarity is a fact, and each one is his brother's keeper and therefore responsible for his own thoughts, words and deeds.

True prayer is a yearning of the human heart, its ardent wish to be united with its Divine Parent, to seek its guidance, and reflect its light in the daily affairs of life. This is the real significance of prayer.

Leaving aside the selfish ones who pray for their own gain and benefit, there are evil minds who wish harm to others. Fanatics of one orthodox religion look down upon their brothers of another religion and show enmity towards them without understanding the true meaning of religion as a binding force, a bond of unity between man and man. Wars have been fought in the name of religion! Opposing creeds express hatred towards one another and even wish for the downfall of their opponents. During the two World Wars, opposing Christian nations, the so-called followers of Jesus, the teacher of the Sermon on the Mount, prayed to the same God to bring them victory and defeat their enemies! This sort of prayer is really dangerous and can ultimately lead to black magic.

We have a very good story in *The Light of Asia* where the great Master taught the householder Singala the true kind of prayer. Singala was seen bowing to the earth and looking up to the heaven and in all four quarters, and while doing so, he scattered rice with both his hands. When Lord Buddha questioned him, he replied that this was the custom followed by his ancestors at every dawn to ward off evil from all quarters. This is a mechanical sort of a prayer condemned by all the great teachers, and so the great Lord advised him: "Scatter not rice, but offer loving thoughts and acts to all." And he told him to think of parents and teachers when he turned to the east and the south; of wife and children when he faced the west; of friends and kinsmen and all men when he turned towards the north; looking heavenwards he should think of the great saints, and with his head turned down towards the earth he

should remember the lower kingdoms. And this was the correct way of shutting out evil. So it is really the thought and the devotion behind the uttered prayer that is more important. Thinking of all with a pure heart and wishing them well in the true spirit of harmony can alone establish peace and good-will on earth, and that is the correct way of praying or becoming worthy of relationship with the divine and the eternal.

In the Tenth Discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, mentioning his divine excellences Sri Krishna states: "Of words I am the monosyllable OM." Even one word rightly uttered with full understanding of its meaning and importance is better than a thousand words muttered without understanding. "Better than reciting a hundred verses of empty words is the repeating of a single stanza hearing which one feels peace" (*The Dhammapada*, Verse 102). And Sri Krishna says that "the silent repetition of sacred texts" is the best form of worship. We have a similar statement in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." All the other great teachers have taught likewise and have indicated the futility of churches and priests. Madame Blavatsky, in her first monumental book, *Isis Unveiled* (II, 635) states: "The world needs no sectarian church, whether of Buddha, Jesus, Mahomet, Swedenborg, Calvin, or any other. There being but ONE Truth, man requires but one church—the Temple of God within us, walled in by matter but penetrable by anyone who can find the way; *the pure in heart see God*."

It is purity that is of the utmost importance, purity of mind and heart, purity in thought, word and deed stressed by Lord Zoroaster. It is through supreme purity that one becomes worthy of relationship with the God within. God is truth, and the more an individual aspires after truth and lives up to the true and immortal ideas, the closer he comes to the realization of the SELF and the more firmly he is convinced of the fact of Universal Brotherhood. God is love, and the more we open our minds and hearts to the sufferings of others, the greater will be the expression of unity and

harmony. “The more thou dost become at one with it, thy being melted in its BEING, the more thy Soul unites with that which Is, the more thou wilt become COMPASSION ABSOLUTE.” (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 76)

Three definitions of Yoga are given in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In the first place, it is called “equal-mindedness.” Passing through the joys and sorrows of life, through success or failure, elation or depression, one has ever to preserve calmness and equipoise in the daily affairs of life. The second definition is: “Yoga is skill in the performance of actions.” Some people are indifferent to their work; they work for money and do not have full interest in or love for their work. Skill comes only through the power of the Higher Self, the God within, and this requires the union of mind and heart. Each act then becomes a prayer. The poet Wordsworth calls duty the “stern Daughter of the Voice of God.” It is stern only in the sense that it demands from each one his due, however unpleasant it may seem many a time. “Theosophy is the quintessence of duty,” says H.P.B. in *The Key to Theosophy*. One of the great Masters has stated: “Duty... is for us stronger than any friendship or even love; as without this abiding principle which is the indestructible cement that has held together for so many millenniums the scattered custodians of nature’s grand secrets—our Brotherhood, nay, our doctrine itself—would have crumbled long ago into unrecognizable atoms.” This shows how the great teachers have valued duty as something sacred and holy, which, when performed with skill, unites one to his silent and supreme Self—and that, indeed, is true prayer.

There is a third definition of yoga given by Sri Krishna: “Know that...disconnection from union with pain is distinguished as yoga, spiritual union or devotion, which is to be striven after by a man with faith and steadfastly.” Disconnection from union with pain is difficult. Whether the pain is physical or mental, whether it is heart-anguish or soul-starvation, it has to be calmly endured and patiently cured. And that is still another form of prayer bringing us closer and nearer to the God within.

The highest type of prayer is will-prayer. “The intensity of our ardent aspirations changes prayer into the ‘philosopher’s stone’, or that which transmutes lead into pure gold. The only homogeneous essence, our ‘will-prayer’ becomes the active or creative force, producing effects according to our desire” (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 68). But this has to be done with the purest of motives, realizing one’s own responsibility to oneself and to humanity and dedicating oneself to the service of others. Mr. Crosbie explains in his *Answers to Questions on The Ocean of Theosophy* (p. 109): “Spiritual Will...is developed by true unselfishness, a sincere and full desire to be guided, ruled and assisted by the Higher Self, and to do that which, and suffer or enjoy whatever, the Higher Self has in store for one by way of discipline or experience.” To command and perfect the Will is one’s duty, and it leads to White Magic or true Wisdom. As H.P.B. states in summing up the ten Propositions of Psychology (*Isis Unveiled*, I, 590), “One common vital principle pervades all things, and this is controllable by the perfected human will.”

THE child who is decked with prince’s robes and who has jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step.

In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.

Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth, if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND POWERS

I

SPIRITUAL powers are the result of application of spiritual knowledge. “*Lead the life necessary for the acquisition of such knowledge and powers, and Wisdom will come to you naturally*” (S.D., I, 167). H.P.B. mentions two kinds of powers—Spiritual and psychic—in a footnote in *The Voice of the Silence*:

The Pali word *Iddhi* is the synonym of the Sanskrit *Siddhis*, or psychic faculties, the abnormal powers in man. There are two kinds of *Siddhis*. One group embraces the lower, coarse, psychic and mental energies; the other is one which exacts the highest training of Spiritual powers. Says Krishna in *Shrimad Bhagavat*:

“He who is engaged in the performance of Yoga, who has subdued his senses and who has concentrated his mind in me (Krishna) such Yogis all the *Siddhis* stand ready to serve.”

The Voice of the Silence, being chosen fragments from the *Book of the Golden Precepts*, is meant for the daily use of Lanoos (disciples). At the outset, H.P.B. warns us of the dangers of the lower *Iddhis*, i.e., psychic powers. Spiritual powers, described as *Rajavidya* or Kingly Knowledge, are acquired only by Raja Yogis. The Ninth Chapter of the *Gita* is entitled “Devotion by Means of the Kingly Knowledge and the Kingly Mystery.” In this chapter, Sri Krishna talks about a certain stage in the development of the disciple’s life and mentions a necessary condition to be fulfilled for the acquirement of this knowledge. Thus:

Unto thee who findeth no fault I will now make known this most mysterious knowledge, coupled with a realization of it, which having known thou shalt be delivered from evil. (*Gita*, IX)

The condition is “*Anusuyave*” which has been translated by Mr. Judge as “one who findeth no fault.” It refers to the definite stage in the disciple’s life, when he ceases to doubt the teachings and the

Teacher. One cannot be a doubting Thomas or a carping critic, if one wants to gain spiritual wisdom, which has been described as “the royal knowledge, the royal mystery, the most excellent purifier, clearly comprehensible, not opposed to sacred law, easy to perform, and inexhaustible.” Doubt in one’s own ability, or in the Guru, or in the teaching, can be a hindrance to the acquirement of knowledge. Doubt hinders spiritual progress. Some commentators have translated the Sankrit “*Anusuyave*” as “one who is not jealous,” i.e., not jealous of others, especially those who have perfected themselves. If doubt lurks in the mind, one cannot be attentive. A disciple should not doubt the unerring nature of the law of Karma, as suggested in one of the qualifications for chelaship:

Truthfulness and unswerving faith in the law of Karma, independent of any power in nature that could interfere: a law whose course is not to be obstructed by any agency, not to be caused to deviate by prayer or propitiatory exoteric ceremonies. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 2)

“Accept the woes of birth.” In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. advises: “Our duty is to drink without a murmur to the last drop, whatever contents the cup of life may have in store for us.” (p. 227)

An aspirant for spiritual wisdom must have undeviating devotion and faith in his Guru. The word “Guru” is the compound of “*Gu*” and “*ru*.” “*Gu*” is derived from *Guhya*, *Gupta*, i.e., secret, hidden, darkness or ignorance. “*Ru*” comes from “*Ra*,” meaning Sun or Light. Thus, Guru is one who throws light on secrets, one who dispels the darkness of ignorance and illuminates the mind. In Arjuna’s case, the Guru is none other than *Yogeshwara*—Master of devotion, the very Logoic Consciousness, or Krishna. Hence, doubt can have no place when one reaches a certain stage in spiritual evolution. The first condition to become a disciple is to be a *shravaka*—a listener.

In *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Sage Yajnavalkya in his instructions to his wife, tells her that the Vedanta system recognizes three stages in the path of self-realization—*Shravana*, *Manana*,

and *Nidhiyasana*. *Shravana* means listening or studying the scriptures under a qualified Guru, *Manana* means constant reflection upon what is learnt, and *Nidhiyasana* implies meditation that helps to bring about a direct realization of the unity of all things.

The same idea is reflected in the Declaration of the United Lodge of Theosophists, in terms of study, application and promulgation of the assimilated teachings. Krishna says: “Unto thee who findeth no fault I will now make known this most mysterious knowledge, coupled with a realization of it, which having known thou shalt be delivered from evil” (*Gita*, IX). Krishna’s emphasis is on “becoming” by the application of knowledge gained.

Throughout the *Gita*, from the very first chapter, Arjuna asks several questions to Krishna. Having entered the field of battle he requests Krishna, his charioteer, to place his chariot between the two armies. On seeing all his kith and kin—grandsires, preceptors, etc., as his opponents, he is overcome by despondency and throws down his bow and arrows, refusing to fight. He asks Krishna: “I ask thee which is it better to do? Tell me that distinctly! I am thy disciple; wherefore instruct in my duty me who am under thy tuition; for my understanding is confounded...” (*Gita*, II). Then again he asks: “If...knowledge is superior to the practice of deeds, why then dost thou urge me to engage in an undertaking so dreadful as this? Thou, as it were with doubtful speech, confusest my reason...” (*Gita*, III). In chapter V, Arjuna asks: “At one time, O Krishna, thou praisest the renunciation of action, and yet again its right performance. Tell me with certainty which of the two is better.” Krishna’s reply is that children only and not the wise speak of them as being different. In Chapter VIII, Arjuna asks metaphysical questions, such as: “What is *Brahman*, what is *Adhyatma*, what is *Karma* and who is *Adhiyajna*?” Krishna answers these questions and advises Arjuna to give up all doubts, as only then can he be fit enough to receive the Kingly Knowledge and Kingly Mystery. In Chapters X, XI and XII, Arjuna is desirous of knowing Krishna’s divine manifestations and which of the two it is better to worship—

the formless or the manifested aspect. Krishna explains that the difficulty in worshipping the formless and the unmanifested is caused by the personality, with which we identify ourselves, and hence see the Supreme as different and separate from ourselves.

Arjuna’s questioning ceases only in chapter XVIII, when he realizes the unity of all and that Krishna is not separate from him. Then he says: “My delusion is destroyed, I am collected once more; I am free from doubt, firm, and will act according to thy bidding.”

As long as we function from the plane of duality, we shall not arrive at the truth that we have a common divine origin and we are sustained by THAT and will return to THAT, after a great cycle. We shall continue to be “Cains and Abels.” The greatest impediment to acquiring Spiritual knowledge is the great heresy of separateness, *i.e.*, selfishness. H.P.B. states: “In reality, there is no such thing as ‘Separateness’.” The culprit is our lower mind caught in the webs of Kama or personal desires. As we are preoccupied with our personality and its sensual desires, we are unable to see clearly, *i.e.*, unable to grasp the real nature of things. The first step is to become aware of our ignorance. The second step is to see the evanescent aspect of the personality with which we identify ourselves. Self-knowledge can be obtained not through mere intellect but only by a conviction that knowledge exists and can be had only through the Higher *Manas*, which unfortunately cannot function on this plane, except through its *alter ego*—the lower *Manas*.

(To be concluded)

I HAVE, in common with yourself, a desire to leave the world a little more human than if I had not lived; for a true humanity is, I believe, our nearest approach to Divinity.

—OLIVER HOLMES

MEANING AND LESSONS OF SORROWS OF LIFE

ONE undeniable fact is that pain, sorrow and suffering are concomitants of life. It is the common observation and experience of everyone. If we look around in the natural world, countless myriads of diverse life forms, which swarm the land, air and the waters, are all moved by the instinct of self-preservation. They seek only such conditions as would give them sustenance, pleasure, comfort, and avoid those that endanger their lives. Everywhere in the natural world we witness the struggle for survival, one species preying upon another and in turn preyed upon by others. There is a struggle to live and progress in what appear to be adverse conditions. The great truth taught by all the Teachers of humanity is that conditioned existence is full of pain. Our coming to birth in a body is painful. The growing process from infancy to maturity and adulthood is attended by much painful struggle interspersed with periods of relative happiness.

We, too, like all other creatures in the natural world, continuously seek to preserve ourselves, relentlessly pursuing objects, conditions and relationships that we think will give us happiness and pleasure, and carefully avoiding those that are likely to give us pain. The objects of happiness that people pursue include not just material things but also emotional comfort, mental peace, intellectual attainments, good education, career, honours, recognition and rewards. Finely tuned natures care much for clearness of conscience. Often, we either fail altogether to attain the objects our heart is set upon, or we obtain them partially. This gives us pain in the form of disappointment and discontent. When we succeed in obtaining the objects of our pursuits, initially we experience intense happiness. But the same eludes our firm grasp when doubt, anxiety and fear begin to take shape in our minds. We set about taking measures to safeguard and secure them, lest we lose that happy feeling. In the progress of time the very objects of our enjoyment and happiness begin to grow commonplace and stale. Then we begin to extend and enlarge the field of happiness

to newer things and novel pursuits, of which, too, in time, we begin to grow weary. Repeated indulgence in objects of pleasure ends in addiction and slavery to our passions. Such attachment gives rise to a brood of negative emotional and mental states, producing much physical, mental and moral suffering. Old age and decrepitude set in, followed by death, which is painful. The more man lives on the plane of personal desires, the more his spiritual perceptions and moral sense become blunted, and he enters on a cycle of retrogression in his inner life.

Why is there pain and suffering in the world? This question is asked not only by those who suffer, but especially by those who realize that neither in the mundane things nor in the promises of religious formulae is to be found certain and permanent relief. It is only when we understand the purpose of life and the cause and cure of pain that we may seek that knowledge which enables us to help all sentient beings towards emancipation and to reach higher ends of life.

Pain is unavoidable, do what we may, because conditioned life is characterized by the pairs of opposites, such as heat and cold, pain and pleasure, virtue and vice, good and evil, subject and object, spirit and matter. "Light and darkness are the world's eternal ways"; one cannot be known without the other. We know the value and worth of goodness and virtue only by the contrast of their opposites, vice and wickedness; one stands out in clearer relief against the contrasting background of its opposite. It is only through experiencing the contrasting qualities of the pairs of opposites that the inner self, the Soul, learns to discriminate between right and wrong, good and evil, and thus grows in intelligence and wisdom.

Life is a ceaseless motion, implying constant change and progression. The whole universe evinces a progressive march towards a higher life. Nothing ever remains the same even for one moment, and therefore we feel pain when the conditions and relationships we are accustomed and attached to inevitably change. The seed has to die in order to become a tree. The child in the womb is compelled by the demands of further progress to quit the

cozy comfort of its uterine life and be born in this world. Decay, decrepitude and death are the necessary changes the Soul has to go through, in its evolutionary journey. Similarly races and nations die out in great cataclysms of nature, to be reborn for higher progress and make greater civilizations. Each of these changes involves pain, as pain is necessary for growth.

Pain, sorrow and suffering are unpleasant, but they are also great teachers in the school of life. It is through pain and suffering that we grow in strength, develop the virtues of patience, kindness, charity and compassion. It is only when we have experienced suffering that we are capable of understanding and sympathizing with the sufferings of others and feel the impulse to help them. Pleasures seldom teach us anything. Luxury, comforts and pleasures, if not put to higher use, lead to attachment and addiction which are obstacles in the path of progress. Hence, H.P.B. writes: "Woe to those who live without suffering." After the Mahabharata war, when Krishna bade farewell to his friends and devotees, before leaving for Dwarka, the mother of the Pandavas prayed to him to let trials, dangers and difficulties be her lot in life. Why? So that through them she might feel Krishna's presence and glimpse the truth of the Higher Life beyond the cycles of birth and death. It is pain that makes us question the purpose of life.

Pain and sorrow that come to us are symptoms of imbalance or the diseased condition of our psyche, brought on by our negative and unwholesome thoughts, feelings and actions, which in turn spring from wrong ideas and beliefs regarding Man and Universe. All evils proceed from egotism and that is born of ignorance of the true Self. Of such it is said: "They are of vain hopes, deluded in action, in reason and in knowledge, inclining to demoniac and deceitful principles" (*Gita*, XI). This egotism formed of desire is the prolific source of all sin, sorrow and suffering, endlessly reproducing itself in interminable cycles of births and deaths fuelled by the power of its own undying desires. It is the mask of false personality hiding the true Self. The only remedy for endless sorrows of conditioned life is Spiritual Knowledge—Knowledge

of the true nature of Self—that frees us at once from Egotism which is the product of ignorance.

If only we trust in the infallible justice of the law of our being, called Karma, and place our entire reliance on the Higher Self, which is that Law itself, then we shall find all our worries and anxieties melting away. This is what life teaches us. When the knowledge of the true Self grows in us—with it the profounder conviction of Universal Brotherhood—our desires and aspirations undergo expansion and transformation into selfless love and devotion to the interests of our fellow-men and fellow-creatures. Pain and sorrow will still come to such an one, but, instead of lamenting its visitation or trying to escape from it, he will experience them without fear with the same indifference as he would happiness and pleasures—neither elated by the one nor cast down by the other. Such a person quickly learns the lessons implicit in both pain and pleasure and moves on to greater vistas of the higher life.

Personal sorrows and adversities of life are to be recognized as just deserts for the past wrong actions that must be accepted without complaint and welcomed as opportunities to settle the Karmic accounts, once and for all. Once the lesson is learnt, the necessity for the trial ceases. Other lessons to be learnt rise to be met and overcome. This is the position assumed by the man of right knowledge and right attitude. Though he experiences the duality of life in the body, inwardly he is free from their influence and experiences eternal bliss of real Self and solidarity with all. He is free. His base nature will have been purified and transmuted into the godlike nature of his Immortal Self. One who is thus freed from the illusions of personal self, lives, so as to help emancipate others from the miseries of conditioned existence. The pains and sorrows of such a Great Soul are not personal—for illusion of personality has been dispersed by knowledge—but those of the Great Orphan Humanity, to save which he has vowed never to cease labouring—for *Kalpas* without number—till the last soul is emancipated.

FOUNDATION FOR A CHANGED CIVILIZATION

Where shall we find the true foundation for a changed civilization that all men and women can see and stand on? It is not philosophies nor religions nor political panaceas that are needed; but Knowledge, and a wider scope of vision than the vicissitudes of one short physical life. The knowledge that is greater than all the forms of religion ever invented is the knowledge of the very nature of man himself, for himself and in himself.

—ROBERT CROSBIE

THERE are certain psychological diseases from which we in India are suffering today. Parochialism, creedalism, communalism and social conflicts are causing disturbances throughout the country, though their particular expressions differ in different areas. The remedy lies only in a proper observance of the Law of Brotherhood.

Whether man likes it or not, the impersonal Law of Karma restores broken harmony and in the process pain and sorrow are produced. No kingdom in Nature, save the human, can practise the Law of Brotherhood, for man alone is self-conscious and has the power to choose. He can devise ways and means to participate in the evolutionary process and thus become an intelligent co-operator with Nature, working with the Law and not against it—labouring to restore broken harmony everywhere and desisting from breaking harmony anywhere. This he can do by a proper observance of the Law of Brotherhood.

All good-hearted people, all well-meaning men and women, believe in and speak about brotherhood. Their knowledge of the Law of Brotherhood as an important aspect of the Law of Karma is almost nil; their concept of brotherliness is surrounded by clouds of kindness, charity, tolerance. But clouds, though capable of producing showers, are not life-giving waters for the parched soil. Therefore even these praiseworthy virtues fail to create a harmonious atmosphere and the Law of Brotherhood is broken every hour of every day.

It is generally believed that if outer problems are resolved, people will be more brotherly; that, for instance, if boundary disputes between one State and another are settled, harmonious relations will be established. In short, it is thought that changes in outer conditions will change our inner character and attitude. This is putting the cart before the horse. Outer conditions do affect a person, but not if there is not within him the power to respond. On the other hand, help him to acquire knowledge that will enable him to change his attitude to his own problems, and soon he will not only improve his own environment but also become brotherly in his attitude to others. Self-reform through Soul-education is the first requisite.

Are students of Theosophy, with the knowledge they have of the teachings about the Law of Karma and of Brotherhood, using the virtues of kindness, charity and tolerance correctly, so as to express real brotherliness in their own ranks? While knowledge is essential, and most of the students have a fair grasp of the truth that they have a responsibility to the Law of Karma and that they must practise the Law of Brotherhood, do they go far enough in their endeavour to apply in a practical fashion what they know with and in their own minds? Have the evil spirits of parochialism, communalism and social distinctions been dislodged, or do they exert a subtle influence over the students, unknown to themselves?

To free himself from creedalism the earnest student may give up the actual performance of rites and ceremonies belonging to the religion of his birth. That is a good step to take, but, unless the mental tendency which gave birth to the performance of ceremonies is transformed, the student is apt to exchange old rites for new. Similarly, communalism is a mental tendency with different expressions; the student of Theosophy has to guard against this persisting inner tendency and must not fall into the error of believing that right reform is achieved merely by outer change.

The influence of the Theosophical Movement on Indian thought has been great. During the years 1879-1885, when H.P.B. lived and laboured in India, she sowed seeds which yielded a wonderful

crop even after her departure. The work started by her was not, however, properly implemented by those who came after her. The promulgation of Theosophy, the *source* of all religions, was weak; in the name of Theosophy sectarianism and creedalism were pushed forward and, instead of fighting class and caste brotherhoods, these were encouraged, albeit indirectly. The sin against the first object of *Universal Brotherhood* corrupted the work undertaken to promote the second and especially the third object of the Movement. The grand Theosophical Movement deteriorated and was wrecked.

We are not writing this to cast any stone at the workers of an earlier generation. We are writing for associates and aspirants of the U.L.T. They have a laudable and powerful contribution to make by distinguishing between the spiritual and the religious, between ethics rooted in universal principles and morality associated with conventions. The first duty of the student of Theosophy is to rise above the pride of race or of religion, to throw off the feeling of exclusiveness which caste and community engender and to breathe the pure air of universality, of cosmopolitanism, of internationalism. Religion may be good, but Theosophy is better. To love one's community may be good, but to allow that love to tarnish the fair name of India is degrading. To be partial to one's own family or State may be right for the unphilosophical, but is positively wrong in one who is a practitioner of Theosophy. "The true Theosophist belongs to no cult or sect, yet belongs to each and all." We cannot possibly belong to each and all until we refuse to belong exclusively to a particular cult or sect.

The student of Occultism must belong to no special creed or sect, yet he is bound to show outward respect to every creed and faith, if he would become an Adept of the Good Law. He must not be bound by the prejudged and sectarian opinions of anyone; he has to form his own opinions and to come to his own conclusions in accordance with the rules of evidence furnished him by the science to which he is devoted. To attain to this position the student of Theosophy must divest himself of religious ritualism, of communal bias, of national pride, and become a seeker of Truth,

i.e., a philosopher whose quest is pure knowledge and whose duty is the earnest and continuous application of what he has ascertained to be true. He must never act without a basis of wisdom-teaching. We cannot fight the bigotry of a priest-ridden populace without real rational living, *i.e.*, living according to laws, rules and principles whose truth we have determined. To live the life of Universal Brotherhood each has to cease to be a sectarian and become a Man. The Hindu, the Muslim or the Christian, the Maharashtrian, the Gujarati or the Bengali is less than Man.

The sorest need of India today is a group of Theosophists who hold firmly to the principles of *Universal Brotherhood*, not in theory but in actual practice; who are pure thinkers, rationalistic philosophers, applying the noble ethics which flow from pure philosophical abstractions. Sacrificial action is great, but an act in which the sacrifice of wisdom is present is greater. Politicians, social reformers, educationists, cannot save India without the inspiration of practical mystics who live by the Eternal Light as brothers to all men.

Let the student reflect upon the following words of a Master in the light of what is said above. But more—let him ascertain if he himself is living up to what is implicit in them:

Ignorance created Gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. Look at India and look at Christendom and Islam, at Judaism and Fetishism. It is priestly imposture that rendered these Gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and Gods that makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretence of saving them. Is not man ever ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his God or Gods demand the crime—voluntary victim of an illusionary God, the abject slave of his crafty ministers? The Irish, Italian and Slavonian peasant will starve himself and see his family starving and naked to feed and clothe his padre and pope. For two thousand years India groaned under the weight of caste, Brahmins alone feeding on

the fat of the land, and today the followers of Christ and those of Mahomet are cutting each other's throats in the names of and for the greater glory of their respective myths. Remember, the sum of human misery will never be diminished unto that day when the better portion of humanity destroys in the name of Truth, morality, and universal charity, the altars of their false gods....

If it be permissible to symbolize things subjective by phenomena objective, I should say that to the psychic sight India seems covered with a stifling grey fog—a moral meteor—the odic emanation from her vicious social state. Here and there twinkles a point of light which marks a nature still somewhat spiritual, a person who aspires and struggles after the higher knowledge. If the beacon of Aryan occultism shall ever be kindled again, these scattered sparks must be combined to make its flame....

Imagine, then, that since we are all convinced that the degradation of India is largely due to the suffocation of her ancient spirituality, and that whatever helps to restore that higher standard of thought and morals, must be regenerating in national force, every one of us would naturally and without urging, be disposed to push forward a society whose proposed formation is under debate, especially if it really is meant to become a society untainted by selfish motive, and whose object is the revival of ancient science, and tendency, to rehabilitate our country in the world's estimation.

MANKIND has become so much one family that we cannot insure our own prosperity except by insuring that of everyone else. If you wish to be happy yourself, you must resign yourself to seeing others also happy...Contempt for happiness is usually contempt for other people's happiness, and is an elegant disguise for hatred of the human race.

—BERTRAND RUSSELL

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: What is the Theosophical view regarding abortion? Is it right to abort when the child is diagnosed at the embryo stage to have a defect which is sure to lead to lifelong suffering for both the child and parents? Again, is abortion justified in case the woman gets pregnant as a result of rape?

Answer: The esoteric principle is that “as long as we cannot give life, we cannot take life.” There is no denying that there is life right from the point of conception, else how does the foetus grow? We find the current scientific view in the section “In the Light of Theosophy” (*The Theosophical Movement*, Vol. 69, p. 67, December 1998):

A wave of new research is making scientists veer round to the view that life begins not at birth, but much earlier in embryonic development—according to some, at the moment of conception. *Psychology Today* (September/October 1998) reports:

Even a premature baby is aware, feels, responds, and adapts to its environment...The roots of human behaviour, researchers now know, begin to develop early—just weeks after conception, in fact. Well before a woman typically knows she is pregnant, her embryo's brain has already begun to bulge. By five weeks, the organ that looks like a lumpy inchworm has already embarked on the most spectacular feat of human development: the creation of the deeply creased and convoluted cerebral cortex, the part of the brain that will eventually allow the growing person to move, think, speak, plan, and create in a human way. By nine weeks, a developing foetus can hiccup and react to loud noises. By the end of the second trimester it

can hear.

But Theosophy does not demand of anyone blind adherence. *There are no “dos” and “don’ts” in Theosophy.* Each must decide for oneself what should be done in a given circumstance. Nowadays, there is a tremendous advance in the field of medical science, which enables us to know, quite early, whether the foetus is defective or not. If the child is going to be born with serious defects, then the parents should decide what is the best course of action, *i.e.*, to abort or not. In either case it is their responsibility. Even when the *unborn* child is aborted, it is tantamount to killing, and karmic responsibility ensues. The same principle will apply in other cases such as, (1) the child is born with a defect which will affect it throughout life and also give immense mental suffering to the parents; or (2) the child’s birth is going to be fatal to the mother; or (3) Pregnancy as a result of rape.

H.P.B. answers this question in the article, “Is Foeticide a Crime?": “At no age and under no circumstance whatever is a murder justifiable!...When even successful and the mother does not die just then, *it still shortens her life on earth to prolong it with dreary percentage in Kamaloka.*” [In H.P.B.’s time, an artificially induced abortion was more prone to be fatal causing severe damage.] Foeticide is a crime against nature and amounts to interference with the operations of nature—with Karma.

There are other factors to be considered. All actions are estimated by the karmic law, by taking into account and especially allowing for the motive and the contingency or circumstances. These may include social fabric, culture and norms. A society, too, is responsible for and bears the consequences of an individual action.

In fictions and real life incidences rape victims are seen to terminate the pregnancy, well aware of being socially stigmatized, traumatized and isolated than being pitied. However, in some cases—extremely rare—of pregnancy resulting from rape, the victim decides to give birth to the child, defying the society. Karma is not blind and mechanical law and the motive especially is of great consequence. For instance, in case of killing a foetus to save

a mother’s life, the motive comes to the rescue but each act must bear its fruits on their appropriate plane.

We have to remember that the rules of behaviour or norms or even value system become increasingly severe for the individual as he advances morally and spiritually. The moral responsibility of an advanced student-seeker, who has enough discrimination and knowledge, is far greater than a lay person who lacks moral stamina and discrimination. Also a wrong social practice has to be addressed harshly, as H.P.B. did in the quotation given above, in order to arouse social conscience and to guide social reform in right direction. But while applying the Principle, each case has to be reckoned on its own merits/demerits.

W. Q. Judge points out, quoting Patanjali, that each ego brings only certain “mental deposits” (out of the accumulated *karma*) which can come to fruition in the environment provided. This includes the family, the ego’s physical, psychic, mental and moral nature. There is a definite *karmic* affinity between the child and its parents. Through this connection both the parents and the child pass through certain experiences and fulfil their karmic debt towards each other. If it is denied, perhaps the egos involved will have to learn from similar experience in a future life.

Question: What has Theosophy to say about Euthanasia or “mercy-killing”? Is it not justified, in the case of a person suffering from terminal illness or in irreversible coma, since it helps put an end to his suffering?

Answer: There are two distinct aspects of what goes by the name of Euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide—active and passive. *Active euthanasia* involves killing by administration of some lethal drug, which is positively bad. *Passive euthanasia* is removal of life supports and leaving things to nature. Prolonging the life of the body by objectionable life supports is not desirable. Then again, it could be that (a) the patient himself/herself decides to end his/her life and in that the physician assists; (b) the doctor decides to end the patient’s life without his/her consent.

The second case, where the patient's life is ended without his or her consent, amounts to "murder"—glorified or sophisticated murder at best—against which the human heart spontaneously revolts. Nor would such an act find sanction in the *ethics* of any religion. Lord Buddha says: "Kill not—for Pity's sake—and lest ye slay the meanest thing upon its upward way." Neither a physician nor the relatives of the patient have any right to decide to end the patient's life.

The situation becomes very tricky when euthanasia is carried out by the patient's consent. A little reflection shows that this amounts to "suicide." Were we to take a limited view of human life, *i.e.*, that death of the body is the end, and the individual ceases to be, then perhaps it matters little as to how and when he decides to end his life. But there is more to man than meets the eye. The physical body is only one aspect. There is that in man which is permanent, called the "reincarnating ego," which goes from life to life gathering experiences by taking on various personalities. Death of the physical body, then, is not the end; the ego takes on a new body to gain experiences in a new personality and in a different surrounding, continuing the learning process from where it had left off in the previous life. Life is made up of learning, and the progress of the individual depends upon his ability to extract the lessons from the experiences of life. Even in a state of coma, the soul is learning the lesson, probably, of having the body and yet not being able to use it.

The point to note then is that by ending the life or rather getting rid of the physical form, the suffering patient merely succeeds in putting his soul in another state of consciousness where it has to wait till the normal completion of the life term. By doing this, the soul is deprived of its opportunity to go through the experience of coping with the illness and learning its lesson—what it is to work through an extremely sickly body. Since birth in a particular body, as also in a given family and nation and race, takes place in accordance with actions or *Karma* engendered in past lives, so for the patient as well as the near and dear ones, it is the *karmic*

opportunity to learn the lesson and set a shining example. If the person tries to end his life, he is leaving the *karma* unexhausted, which is like leaving a debt unpaid, so that in some future life he will be placed in a similar situation by the unerring law of *Karma*, till the lesson is learnt. It is perhaps an opportunity for the family members also to learn something in attending to a terminally ill patient, and be willing to suffer along with him, helping him to bear his suffering. It may sound harsh, but if we take the attitude that the suffering that has come our way is the result of our own actions in some past life, then it may help lessen the agony and the bitterness. Experience shows that pain and suffering do soften the person, help build fortitude, and in certain cases, make him humble to accept help from others.

The human body must be regarded with reverence, as an instrument for the experience of the soul—an instrument that the soul obtains after a gap of some 1000 to 1500 years. H. P. Blavatsky writes in the article, "Is Suicide a Crime?":

No man, we repeat, has a right to put an end to his existence simply because it is useless. As well argue the necessity of inciting to suicide all the incurable invalids and cripples who are a constant source of misery to their families; and preach the moral beauty of that law among some of the savage tribes of the South Sea Islanders, in obedience to which they put to death, with war-like honours, their old men and women. . . . There is a vast difference between the man who parts with his life in sheer disgust at constant failure to do good, out of despair of ever being useful, or even out of dread to do injury to his fellow-men by remaining alive; and one who gives it up voluntarily to save the lives either committed to his charge or dear to him. One is a half-insane misanthrope—the other, a hero and a martyr. One *takes* away his life, the other *offers* it in sacrifice to philanthropy and to his duty. (*H.P.B. Series No. 15*, p. 34)

Mr. Judge writes: "Life is better than death, for death again disappoints the Self."

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Are giants a fiction? Ancient Greeks believed in giants—Pelops, Atlas, the Cyclops and the Titans are some of the mythic heroes, supposed to be of gigantic stature. “Greek writers, from the fifth-century B.C. historian Herodotus to the second-century A.D. travel writer Pausanias, chronicled sightings of...bizarre remains of giants,” writes Joshua Korenblat (*National Geographic*, August 2004). Modern paleontologists have discovered bones of giant extinct mammals at the same place where the ancient Greeks reported finding the bones of heroes and giants. Most scholars are skeptical about the existence of giants and giant bones. However, Adrienne Mayor, a folklorist and historian of early science, suggests that perhaps the Greeks found the fossil bones of creatures like the southern mammoth, which then were explained as skeletal remains of giants. Could finds of such enormous fossil bones have inspired the mythic characters? Or did the myths come first and the bones later?

Giants are not a fiction. H.P.B. cites several examples of men, in Russia, America and Europe, who were between 7 and 9.5 feet tall. She observes that Darwin’s statement that species of animals, which result from cross breeding, “always betray a *tendency to revert to the original type*,” must apply to man, also. “Had there been no giants as a rule in ancient days, there would be none now” (*S.D.*, II, 277). She explains that traditions about the race of giants in the days of old are universal. India had her *Danavas* and *Daityas*; Ceylon had her *Rakshasas*, and Greece had her Titans. (*S.D.*, II, 336)

It was the belief of entire antiquity, Pagan and Christian, that the earliest mankind was a race of giants. Certain excavations in America in mounds and in caves, have already yielded in isolated cases groups of skeletons of nine and twelve feet high. These belong to the tribes of the early Fifth Race, now degenerated to an average size of between five and six feet. But we can easily believe that the Titans and Cyclopes of old really belonged to the Fourth (Atlantean) Race, and that all

the subsequent legends and allegories found in the Hindu Puranas and the Greek Hesiod and Homer, were based on the hazy reminiscences of real Titans—men of a superhuman tremendous physical power, which enabled them to defend themselves, and hold at bay the gigantic monsters of the Mesozoic and early Cenozoic times—and of actual Cyclopes—three eyed mortals. (*S.D.*, II, 293)

H.P.B. writes: “Over and over again, the skeletons of hypothetical giants have been identified with those of elephants and mastodons....We may safely reject the modern theory that would make of the Titans mere symbols standing for cosmic forces. They were real living men, whether twenty or only twelve feet high.” (*S.D.*, II, 755)

How does one escape the curse of selfhood? Researchers have shown that excessive involvement with self can produce disastrous effects. It appears that self-reflection and self-analysis, if not done carefully, result in more harm than good. *We* are our worst enemy. “The inherently egocentric and egotistical manner in which the self processes information can blind people to their own shortcomings and undermine their relationships with others,” writes Mark R. Leary. (*Psychology Today*, July-August 2004)

Research in this direction has shown that most people overestimate their positive qualities. Most think that they are less prejudiced than others, and that they understand other people better than others understand them. “Self-preoccupation interferes with memory.” When we are captivated by our own thoughts, we miss out on what others are saying and are quite oblivious to our surroundings. Similarly, people often go blank while answering test questions because instead of concentrating on the test—the mind is clouded with anxious thoughts. Research confirms that people who are worrying, planning or making decisions at bedtime are unable to fall asleep easily.

Some of the remedial steps suggested to overcome undue self-

indulgence are:

1. **Reduce self-chatter.** Learn how to quiet your mind....The techniques of meditation can minimize self-thought. As unnecessary self-chatter subsides, you will feel more calm, attentive and content.

2. **Resist the urge to defend your ego.** Unnecessarily defending your ego against failure and criticism drains energy and creates conflict with other people. Don't waste time or energy protecting the mental image of yourself....Turn your attention to dealing with events that have tangible outcomes.

3. **Practise self-compassion.** When failures, setbacks and losses occur, be gentle with yourself. If you treat yourself with kindness and respect when things go wrong, your ego will not be battered by life's circumstances and, thus, will have no need to defend itself.

4. **Don't overfeed the self.** It's OK to try to figure out what you want out of life and make reasonable strategic decisions towards that end....Chronically setting and pursuing goals can lead to seeing the purpose of life today as the achievement of some goal tomorrow, causing you to forget that the only life you really have is the one going on right now.

5. **Don't believe everything you think.** Your perceptions of yourself and the world are biased in egotistical ways. Develop a healthy sense of ego-skepticism—recognize that you do not always have an accurate view of yourself and of the world.

Most of us lead a very self-centred life that revolves around “me” and “mine.” We must learn to think away from ourselves. Every now and then, the “snake of self” hisses out, drowning the voice of the divine within. So long as we are preoccupied with the little self—exaggerating its importance—calmness eludes us forever and we suffer from anxiety, depression, anger, jealousy, etc. Mr. Judge cautions against the feeling of vanity by reminding us, “Try to recollect that you are a very small affair in the world, and that the people around do not value you at all and grieve not when you are absent. Your only true greatness lies in your inner true self and it is not desirous of obtaining the applause of others.”

The most effective antidote to self-centredness lies in practice of self-examination and true prayer.

Every earnest student owes it to himself to examine his deeds and words, his thoughts and feelings; therefore genuine concentration and meditation, *conscious and cautious*, upon one's lower self in the light of the inner divine man is an excellent thing. But vanity often makes its own voice pass for that of the spiritual soul; and therefore to the light of inner divine man must be added the other light—that of Divine Wisdom, of that infallible philosophy which teaches what the Paramitas or Virtues are. Self-examination is the examination of the lower and personal self by the Higher and Impersonal Self. To learn to judge our daily actions from an impersonal standpoint is to progress towards the Supreme Self....

The second practice is to attempt to raise the mind from the mundane plane of petty thoughts to heavenly heights. To cease to attend to the personal and ahankaric “I,” to quiet its talk, and to free our minds in order that we may dwell on the Nature of Deity which is the Higher Self of every human being; on the Character of Those who have found what we are seeking; on the Compassion and Sacrifice of the Mahatmas and Rishis, who are the Elder Brothers and the Fathers of the human race—this is true prayer. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 12*, Foreword)

Robert Martin, an anthropologist and curator of biological anthropology at the Field Museum in Chicago, believes that humans, as well as other mammals and birds, evolved far earlier than previously thought (*Discover*, July 2004). “The classical story is that all modern mammal groups started to develop no more than 65 million years ago, after the end of the Cretaceous Period, when a probable meteorite impact led to a major extinction in which all the dinosaurs died.” Did humans and primates coexist with dinosaurs? Anthropologists suggest that they probably existed at the same time but not necessarily in the same areas. What about the “missing link” between humans and apes? The commonly

accepted “missing link” seems to be *Australopithecus*, going back some 5 million years. However, Robert Martin suggests that the divergence from the common ancestor may have occurred around 8 million years ago, considering that a lot of fossils remain yet to be found. An old skull—6 to 7 million years old—discovered by a French team, could possibly be the missing link, or the member of the lineage leading to us.

How old is humanity? Prior to physical humanity there was “boneless” and purely ethereal man. These earlier Races may have lived 300 million years ago. “*The whole issue of the quarrel between the profane and the esoteric sciences depends upon the belief in, and demonstration of, the existence of an astral body within the physical, the former independent of the latter*” (*S.D.*, II, 149). Occultism teaches that the *physical man* existed before the first bed of the Cretaceous rocks was deposited. *The Secret Doctrine* describes the Secondary Age—covering Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods—as the age of the Reptiles, such as, gigantic Megalosauri, Ichthyosauri, Plesiosauri, etc. Unless man existed in that period, how could he describe them? The old records of China, India, Egypt and Judea mention these monsters. (*S.D.*, II, 713)

Earth, man and all the kingdoms of nature were in the ethereal or astral stage, for a vast period of 300 million years. At the end of this period began the process of solidification. The form of man was the first to solidify, followed by solidification of some of the astral prototypes from preceding Rounds, when everything was astral. When the fossils were discovered, it was argued that those creatures must have coexisted with the gross physical body of man. “Science has not been able to find the missing links between the root-types of the astral period and the present fossils or the living species....For all of them [missing links] exist in the astral plane and therefore are invisible to the physical eye,” explains Mr. Judge. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 141-142)

H.P.B. argues that if the anthropoid and man had a common ancestor, how did the two groups diverge so widely from one another as regards mental capacity? (*S.D.*, II, 189). The chasm

between the mind of animal and man can be explained on the basis of esoteric teachings:

The bestiality of the primeval mindless races resulted in the production of huge man-like monsters—the offspring of human and animal parents. As time rolled on, and the still semi-astral forms consolidated into the physical, the descendants of these creatures were modified by external conditions, until the breed, dwindling in size, culminated in the lower apes of the Miocene period. With these the later Atlanteans renewed the sin of the “Mindless”—this time with full responsibility. The resultants of their crime were the species of apes now known as Anthropoid. (*S.D.*, II, 689)

We seem to live life, carrying with us a heavy load of past baggage. We seldom appreciate situations and people as they present themselves from moment to moment. Our reactions are predominantly based on a storehouse of memory, impressions and preconceived notions. We must differentiate between functional knowledge—that helps us deal with the objective world—and wisdom. Unfortunately, our choices are not based on evaluation of the situation itself but are tinged by past data. For instance, when a person greets us, our reaction—consciously or unconsciously—is based on the image of him stored in our memory, writes Satyendra Kaushik (*The Times of India*, July 23). Thus:

Should memory, based as it is on experience, have such an overriding influence on our response as to render ineffective our capacity to meet life afresh, moment to moment? Why do we persistently deny ourselves the capacity to act in the moment and then be done with it?

We should allow life to touch us in its entirety, offering it no value judgement and no fixed notions. We can try to be like a mirror, in matters of life and the relationships it offers us, capable of truly reflecting the present without any reference to the past and any expectation for the future.

We seldom live in the present. We live the life, oscillating between past and future. We begin a day, a month, a year, with hope, looking forward to pleasures and happiness. Often these hopes are frustrated. These hopes, fears and memories keep the human consciousness in a non-integrated state. We must learn to make the past event non-existent and obliterate it from our memory.

The Voice of the Silence advises:

Long and weary is the way before thee, O Disciple. One single thought about the past that thou hast left behind, will drag thee down and thou wilt have to start the climb anew.

Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost. (p. 18)

The suggestion is, to forget the emotional experiences attached to the past events that tend to take control of our mind and colour the present and the future. Once we have extracted the lesson from an event we must let it pass without brooding over it. When we worry about the by-gones, we harm ourselves. Every time we think of the harm done to us by another, we lend power to those unwholesome thoughts. Our capacity to do good in the present is adversely affected, when we dwell over the past, which drags us down from our present level of consciousness.

Memory is one of the greatest hindrances to successful meditation.

The moment the mind is restrained in concentration for the purpose of meditation, that moment the images, the impressions, the sensations of the past begin to troop through the brain and tend to instantly and constantly disturb the concentration. Hence the need for less selfishness, less personality, less dwelling on objects and desiring them—or sensation. If the mind be full of impressions, there is also a self-productive power in it which takes hold of these seeds of thought and enlivens them. Recollection is the collecting together of impressions, and so it constitutes the first and the greatest obstruction to meditation. (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 12*, Foreword)
