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The Living of the Higher Life**

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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DEEPAVALI—FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

DEEPAVALI has been called the “Festival of Lights.” It means a “row of lights.” Significantly, this festival is celebrated during the period of *Dakshinayana*, when the sun begins to move away from the Northern Hemisphere, denoting a period of physical and even spiritual darkness. It reminds us of the presence of the light of divinity within each one of us, and also of the struggle that is going on between good and evil, within us and outside us. If we pay heed to the divine voice within us, we would gradually be able to overcome the evil within and get the power to triumph over the evil without.

The festival extends over five or even seven days, commencing on the eleventh day in the dark fortnight, in the lunar month of *Ashwin* and ending with the second day in the lunar month of *Kartika*. The second day of Deepavali is called “*Bachvaras*” or *Vasubaras*, the day on which cows are worshipped. Animals in India are considered sacred and worshipped for various reasons. Some of them were the vehicles of gods or goddesses and therefore became sacred by association with a particular deity. All the gods are believed to reside in the body of a cow. Her four legs are the scriptural Vedas; her horns are the triune gods—Brahma (tip of the horn), Vishnu (middle) and Siva (base); her eyes are the sun and moon gods, etc. Worshipping a cow then becomes equal to worshipping all the Hindu gods. This makes the cow sacred. In the Vedas, the cow is associated with Aditi, the mother of all gods.

A cow is associated with abundance, and we have in the Hindu

philosophy *Kamaduk* or *Kamadhenu*, “the cow of plenty,” the source of all prosperity, which is more a metaphysical than a material concept. “Kamadhenu,” is a wish-fulfilling mythological cow of sage Vasishta, with divine qualities, and the ability to grant any wish asked of it. Devdutt Pattanaik, a mythologist remarks that “all those people who tried to steal this cow from Vasishta, ended up being cursed. What people did not realize was that while *Kamadhenu* could give anything that a person wanted, her keeper, Rishi Vasishta, did not desire anything. That is why *Kamadhenu* enjoyed his company.”

Cow-worship becomes a reminder to us to perform sacrificial action. In the Third Chapter of the *Gita*, *Kamaduk* represents sacrifice and sacrificial deeds. It refers to an element of sacrifice inherent in the cosmos from the very beginning. For instance, the very descent of Spirit into matter is an act of sacrifice. The Indo-Iranians of old believed that the world was created and sustained by many gods and goddesses and that these divinities must be propitiated by sacrifices and offerings. In other words, human beings have to emulate them by performing sacrificial actions. Only human beings have the capacity to sacrifice their self-interest for the purpose of a higher cause. Sacrifice means cooperation, keeping in mind the claims of others beings—plants, animals, human beings and even gods—on us, making our contribution to meet their requirements. Such sacrificial actions will prove to be for us “Kamadhenu,” a wish-fulfilling cow.

The third day of Deepavali is *Dhanateras* or *Dhanatrayodashi*. On this day *Dhana* or Wealth is worshipped. Whatever may be our possessions—money, ideas, knowledge or powers, love and affection—our attitude towards them must be of *trusteeship* and not that of ownership. We should share our knowledge without expectation of praise or trying to play “a little guru,” and thus poison the minds of receivers. We learn to love unconditionally and impersonally, gradually expanding the circle of love to embrace the whole of humanity. Our attitude to money must be that of *trusteeship*.

The trustees are constrained to use the funds only for the purposes or objects for which the trust was set up. So also, we must use our possessions for higher purposes. Kubera is a minor deva who presides over money, silver, gold, diamonds, or the physical wealth. He is supposed to have obtained that boon after performing austerities for a thousand years. Interestingly, this deva is extremely ugly, with a deformed body, suffering from leukoderma, having only eight teeth, etc. The ugly appearance is to show that he is the chief of evil spirits and is the king or leader of elemental beings, such as *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas* and *Kinnaras* which are powers inimical to men. How different are these characteristics from those of the benign Laxmi, the goddess of Prosperity!

No wonder Mr. Judge says that there is a curse attendant upon money. That is because although money could be and has been used by some to benefit humanity, very few have the attitude of “trusteeship” towards their wealth. In fact, whenever one has an attachment for money, the *kama-manas* predominates and obscures the higher values, culminating in greediness. Often, a wealthy person is tempted to exercise power on the beneficiary or ask for something in return for a monetary favour. Unless a person has developed sufficient detachment, very strong and peculiar feelings get attached to wealth. More often than not, wealth or money is at the base of family feuds and is also the cause of ruining human relationships. “Poverty has no natural tendency to engender selfishness, but wealth requires it,” says Mr. Judge. B. P. Wadia expresses it thus: “Our materialistic outlook ignores the psychic influences which surround money. Buying and selling, hoarding and spending, borrowing and lending have not only economic consequences. Money also brings curses, not only blessings; the motives and the methods involved in creating wealth and in enhancing it, produce blessings or curses as the case may be.” We know that if money has been earned by unfair means, by exploitation of people or by cheating, then it does bring unhappiness or disaster. “Ill-gotten is ill spent.” Our attachment and preoccupation with money prove a hindrance to spiritual progress.

Money has a moral counterpart in the world of Spirit. Ancient texts refer to the wealth of mind as superior to silver and gold; and again, refer to soul wealth as the highest type of riches.

The fourth day, known as *Narak Chaturdashi*, celebrates the destruction of the demon Narkasura—the demon of filth and darkness or evil—by Krishna, releasing sixteen thousand princesses who were held captive by him. On being released they told Krishna to marry them, which he did. The princesses represent higher potentialities and faculties that are trapped by the demoniacal or lower aspect in man and that need to be extricated and linked back to the Lord. Evil is good gone astray. In other words, a lot of energy is trapped within the evil, which, when released, can be put to higher use.

Hence, Deepavali celebration begins with house-cleaning and the removal of filth. At the time of Deepavali when we undertake *rigorous* cleaning up, we may notice cobwebs and encounter lizards and cockroaches, which suddenly leap up from behind the cupboards and tables. So also, it is only when we decide to reform ourselves in dead earnest that we become aware of many ugly, horrible and fearsome things that were lying hidden in our mind and heart. We are not aware of our subtle vices and weaknesses. We can become aware of them through thorough self-examination. The process of “cleaning” involves determining to overcome them, so that we can transform ourselves from “nice” people to “spiritual” men.

The fifth day of Deepavali is *Laxmi Poojan* when Laxmi, the Goddess of Prosperity and Wealth, is worshipped. She is said to enter the house only if it is clean and free from quarrels. “Prosperity” implies peace of mind and happiness that flows from our moral nature, from our outlook on life. “Contentment is the greatest wealth,” says the Buddha.

The sixth day of Deepavali is known as *Maha Bali Pratipada*, which is celebrated in some parts of India as New Year's Day. As the legend goes there was a mighty demon king called Bali who took care of the well-being and prosperity of his people. It is said

that he was trying to trap Laxmi and get her to his kingdom from Vaikuntha, in order to bring prosperity to *his kingdom exclusively*. Vishnu then decided to teach him a lesson and took the form of a dwarf and went to Bali, who was conducting a great sacrifice. Now Bali welcomed this dwarf wholeheartedly and requested him to have anything as a sacrificial gift. Vishnu asked him to give him the land which he could cover in three strides. When Bali consented, Vishnu assumed a huge form and with his first step he covered the earth, with the second he covered the heavens, and for the third step, Bali had to allow Vishnu to put his foot on his head. Thereupon, Vishnu, who is also called *Trivikrama*—the Lord of three strides—became extremely pleased with Bali and he put his foot on Bali’s head and pushed him beneath to *Patala*, the nether region, where Vishnu gave Bali a kingdom exclusively for himself, protected by Vishnu himself. In other words, once you put yourself in the correct relationship with the Divine and bow down to it, you are protected. Or, as *The Voice of the Silence* says: “Help Nature and work on with her, and Nature will regard thee as one of her creators and make obeisance.” In the *Rig Veda*, Vishnu says that he is the dwarf seated in the centre of all beings. However, “The three strides relate metaphysically to the descent of Spirit into matter, of the Logos falling as a ray into the Spirit, then into the Soul, and finally into the human physical form of man, in which it becomes LIFE.” (*S.D.*, I, 113)

The seventh day is called *Bhaubij* or *Yama-dwitiya*. It celebrates the love between brother and sister. Yama is supposed to be the twin brother of Yami. Yama presides over the sacred relationship between brother and sister. Traditionally a sister ties a thread on the wrist of the brother, as a symbol of a bond of pure affection. H.P.B. explains that Yama and Yami represent two minds—the higher and the lower mind. The higher mind works through its ray, which is what we call the everyday mind or incarnated mind. The incarnated mind can either gravitate and listen to the desire nature, or it can levitate and listen to the advice of the higher mind. Our lower or everyday mind is the child of the Higher Mind, connected with it

through a silver thread or *Antahkarana*. The silver thread is that consciousness which binds or links the lower personal self with the Higher. It serves as a medium of communication between the two, which allows us to receive guidance from the Divine parent. The link between the two remains unbroken so long as the lower mind continues to look for guidance and aspiration towards the Higher Mind. The right relation between the higher and lower mind is necessary till the lower mind is so completely purified that it merges with the Higher trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Mans*, as in the highest state of *Samadhi*.

The symbol of light is a profound symbol. There is (1) light of the eyes and the physical light, (2) light of the mind and (3) light of the heart and soul.

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. We observe that light travels in a straight line and if we keep anything in the path of light, it casts a shadow, and the shadow never gives us a correct picture of the object. Likewise, our personality tends to obscure the truth. But personality is not useless. We see that matter is essential in order that we can see the light. A bulb becomes incandescent because the filament offers a certain amount of resistance. It offers just enough resistance for the bulb to be lighted up. Similarly, the personality must be so moulded that it becomes a useful instrument for the Soul within and not an obstruction or "dead weight"—like the total resistance of the filament which altogether stops the current from flowing. Soul and body must work in harmony.

In Deepavali, from one lighted lamp, all other lamps are lighted and yet the quantity or quality of the first light is not diminished. It is a reminder of that stage in man's evolution when the *Manasaputras* or *Solar Pitris* lighted up the *Manas* in man—that was lying dormant, like an unlit candle—and endowed man with self-consciousness, and also the power to think and choose.

Light of the mind is the light of intellect, which is necessary,

though not sufficient. *The Voice of the Silence* says that ignorance is like a closed and airless vessel. And yet, *Head learning* or worldly knowledge is not enough, as even very knowledgeable people are often enveloped in darkness—blissfully unaware of the real nature of man. It is only in the *light of Spiritual knowledge* that one realizes the follies of the past and the darkness that surrounds the inner man. *In the light of wisdom*, he realizes that what he considered all-important in life, what he valued and struggled to achieve and keep for himself all the time, were transitory, illusory things. Underlying most of them was selfishness. Then again, one needs a guru—one who dispels darkness. It could be the light thrown by a scripture, a book or the light of the Higher Self.

The highest light is the light of *Atman*—that spark of divinity which is present in us, and is described thus in the *Gita* (XIII): “It is within and without all creatures animate and inanimate; it is inconceivable because of its subtlety, and although near it is afar off. Although undivided it appeareth as divided among creatures, and while it sustains existing things, it is also to be known as their destroyer and creator. It is the light of all lights, and is declared to be beyond all darkness.”

But our mind is unable to reflect the *Atmic* light properly when the dust of attachment—thinking guided by emotions—gathers over it. We have to make our mind *Buddhi-tending* and extricate it from involvement in passions and desires. We find ourselves closer to the One Reality, in those rare moments when we forget ourselves in working for others. When we are able to look beyond the personality and love *unconditionally*, it is then that the “Tathagata” light burns within us and is noticed by the Great Ones. A Master of Wisdom writes: “Like the light in the sombre valley seen by the mountaineer from his peaks, every bright thought in your mind...will sparkle and attract the attention of your distant friend...and it is our law to approach every such an one if even there be but the feeblest glimmer of the true ‘Tathagata’ light within him.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE MURDERER

THE MURDERER is a short story by Ray Bradbury, first published in his 1953 collection, *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. The story emphasises the unnecessary and extreme use of technology in society. The story begins with a psychiatrist arriving at a mental hospital, to see a patient named Albert Brock, who is considered crazy because he questions the unnecessary use of electronic devices in everyday life. As he walks towards the interrogation room there is noise coming from every direction; each person, it seems, is listening to music, talking on a phone, using an intercom or communicating constantly in some other way. Most people seem to be engaged in several of these activities at the same time. He walks past a secretary at her desk and “she does not see him,” because she is entranced by the technology around her.

The psychiatrist exits the noisy environment to enter the interrogation room. He notes that this patient has ripped the radio out of the wall to silence it. The room seems unusually quiet and yet the patient is perfectly at ease, even happy. The patient, Albert Brock, calls himself “The Murderer.” During his first encounter with the psychiatrist, he “kicked the radio to death,” and took the psychiatrist’s watch and “tucked it in his teeth like a walnut, gritted and heard it crack.”

Questioning reveals that Brock is not imprisoned because he has murdered any human being, but his crime has been wanton destruction of all the information, entertainment, and communication devices in his life. Thus, he shoved his phone into the Insinkerator (a garbage disposal-like device), shot his television set, poured water into his office intercommunication system, stomped his wrist radio on the sidewalk and bought French chocolate ice cream which he spooned into the car radio transmitter. The psychiatrist enquires when Brock first began to hate the telephone.

He says that one day he had been driven mad by the constant

expectations of communication inflicted upon him by society. His wife and children could speak with him whenever they wished, wherever they were; any person could call on him, and many did, simply to make use of their communication devices. He gives a striking image of a world in which humans are constantly bombarded by music, advertisement, propaganda and communication. He discovers that if he shut off his phone, he could not be bothered by it. When he arrived home on that day, he discovered his wife was frantic at being out of touch with him for so long. This drives home to him how terribly addicted they were to the technology of communication. It is then that he begins to destroy things. He elaborates how he had become fed up with constant communication distraction, thus:

“It is easy to say the wrong thing on telephones; the telephone changes your meaning on you. First thing you know, you have made an enemy. Then, of course, the telephone is such a convenient thing; it just sits there and demands you call someone who does not want to be called. Friends were always calling, calling, calling, me. Hell, I had not any time of my own. When it was not the telephone it was the television, the radio, the phonograph.... When it was not music, it was interoffice communications, and my horror chamber of a radio wristwatch on which my friends and my wife phoned every five minutes.”

Brock narrates the incident of carrying the portable diathermy machine—a machine that produces high-frequency electric current—while travelling in a bus, full of tired commuters talking to their wives, telling them where exactly they had reached, and wives complaining about their children, and the transit-system radio playing a song. He switches on the diathermy, as a result, all communication is cut off, music stops, producing absolute silence. The commuters were faced with having to converse with each other. There is panic, the police arrive and take away his diathermy machine. He is fined. The psychiatrist suggests that Mr. Brock should have tried to start petitions and get legal and constitutional rulings. Brock answers that

he joined fraternities, pass petitions, take it to court protesting year after year, but to no avail. “I am that thing best called a minority.” He had to protest because others who liked it, “went too far.”

That day, after the bus incident, when he reaches home, he finds his wife hysterical because she had been completely out of touch with him for half a day. He then decides to “murder” his house, because it is “a house that screams opera to you in the shower and teaches you Spanish in your sleep....With beds that rock you to sleep and shake you awake. A house that barely tolerates humans.” He narrates how systematically he went on destroying various gadgets and was ultimately arrested by the police and brought to the mental hospital.

The only thing that he regrets destroying is the Insinkerator, which he used to mangle another piece of equipment. The Insinkerator was a machine with a good solid purpose which did not disturb him with its functions, did not demand his attention, which only functioned when asked to.

He admits that in the beginning these innovations were useful but later there were unexpected cultural side effects of innovations. “It was all so enchanting at first. The very idea of these things, the practical uses, was wonderful. They were almost toys, to be played with, but the people got too involved, went too far, and got wrapped up in a pattern of social behaviour and could not get out, could not admit they were in, even.” In the end, Brock is eager to go back to his private cell, where he can be alone and quiet for six months. The psychiatrist while giving information on Brock’s condition says, “Seems completely disoriented, but convivial,” and that his condition will continue indefinitely. He “refuses to accept the simplest realities of this environment and work with them.” The psychiatrist steps back into the world of music and talk, and re-immerses himself into the glare of technology’s power.

The story was written in the year 1953 when technology was developing rapidly, and yet all that is written is equally applicable to our twenty-first century world with far greater technological

developments. We are surrounded by electronic gadgets and are overly dependent on them. We are at a loss if any one or more of these devices go out of order because we depend on them for both our work and recreation. A young boy was thoroughly distressed when his computer was completely out of order. It could not even be switched on, and yet he kept on typing something using the keyboard! We might describe it as an addiction to electronic devices. In this context, “The Murderer” in the story, represents the minority of people who believe that there is an overdependence on technology. The psychiatrist represents the “majority” of people who are either unaware of, or refuse to see anything wrong in the overuse and overdependence on technology.

Technology is a double-edged sword that could be used as well as misused. In itself it is neither good nor bad. Many are the advantages of electronic gadgets and machines. Technology helps us improve our lives and saves time and energy, but it is left to the individual to put them to good use, and utilize the time saved in doing something worthwhile. During the recent pandemic, technology was very useful in the form of online classes and work. Ironically, though, mobiles, telephones and the Internet have shrunk the world, it has contributed to a rise in loneliness and depression, because we have made the mistake of thinking that they are substitutes for direct human contact. In fact, at times, by their overuse, the person tends to isolate himself. For instance, we prefer to send a text message or email instead of *talking* or meeting the person, and thus miss out on an opportunity for human contact. When the family members are too engrossed with their mobiles, even at home, it leads to the weakening of family bonds; to avoid that the new-age gurus advise that family members should come together at dinner time, and talk to each other, keeping their mobiles switched off.

Are we not adversely affecting our mathematical ability by using a calculator even for simple additions and multiplications? Some of us may be facing difficulty in writing because we have got used to

typing with computer keyboards. Also, continual use of these gadgets has known to cause serious physical and mental problems.

From the spiritual point of view, overuse of gadgets results in overindulgence of the senses. In the Third Chapter of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna shows Arjuna the method of overcoming desire. “In the first place, restrain thy sense.” If we neglect the senses and begin by controlling mind and heart, we gain nothing, because the foe remains undisturbed in the senses. “The tumultuous senses and organs hurry away by force the heart even of the wise man who striveth after perfection.” It is by means of outward senses and their inner counterparts that a great turmoil is set up first in the heart, and “the restless heart snatches away the mind from its steady place.” In other words, we are asked to *begin* with the control of the senses, but not stop there. The “Middle Way” of the Buddha applies also to the use of gadgets—neither too much, nor too little, so that we are masters and not slaves to technology.

The technology writer for *The Atlantic*, Nicholas Carr, expressed his concern, a few years back, about the impact of the Internet on us. Are we fast losing the capacity to think deeply, calmly and seriously? Have we all succumbed to Internet attention deficit disorder? It appears that Internet has subtly changed the way in which one thinks and writes and has accelerated information processing. There seems to be mental multitasking, where one simultaneously absorbs information from multiple sources. Yet, with all that, we seem to have lost the ability for real reading, as the mind looks for quick ways of collecting information. What we may be losing is quietness and depth in our literary, intellectual and spiritual lives.

To derive maximum benefit from the spiritual teachings, we must give up the *superficial* and *inattentive* methods of reading, concentrating the mind on every statement. There is a need to cultivate the habit of a careful and constant concentration of mind even in performance of every duty and act in life.

The central idea of the story is how electrical gadgets make us

less social, and evermore dependent on them for our happiness. If the television set is out of order for a day, we feel that we have ceased to exist. We should be able to enjoy the pleasures and yet not become *dependent* on them. “We must be able to use things when we need them and then relinquish them without regret when they have outlived their usefulness. We must be able to appreciate and enjoy the places where we tarry, and yet pass on without anguish when we are called elsewhere,” writes Peace Pilgrim.

The story does not highlight the possible misuse of electronic devices to bring harm to others. We are aware of cybercrime, a criminal activity that either targets or uses a computer as a weapon or instrument to secure something deemed illegal. It involves stealing intellectual property, committing fraud or violating privacy laws. For instance, *Phishing scams* are designed to trick people into giving up personal information or clicking on a malicious link that downloads malware, a “malicious software” specifically designed to gain access to or damage a computer.

Technological advancement is not an indicator of moral or spiritual advance. The wise use of technology depends greatly on the ethical awareness of people. “From the days of the *Mahabharata* down to our own times we come upon the phenomenon of unbalance between mental capacity and moral responsibility, competition leading to war and wars, then destruction,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. In the article “The Case Against Machinery,” (*The Theosophical Movement*, October 1938) we read that education, machinery and “civilisation” itself are *sadhanas* (spiritual practices). Their efficacy will be judged by their usefulness to mankind and to what extent they possess the potentiality of moral results, in a “civilisation in which the lower personal animal self is the be-all and end-all of life.” That is the indicator of real “progress.” The article quotes John Middleton Murry who says that the ethos of self-renunciation can help to “renounce the machine completely or to use it in ways consistent with the spiritual well-being of the community.” Truly, technology, if used judiciously, is a boon, else a bane.

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EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS THE QUIET WITHIN WHICH IS COMPASSION

IF it is the teaching that Kama is hard like iron it is not difficult for you to see where the hardness of the streak comes from. It is a well-known fact that feelings, *i.e.*, Kamic expressions, are very changeable; but throughout the changes the hardness remains. It is the separative quality of Kama, the begetter and sustainer of the “I” notion or *Ahankara*. It is the “I” of Kama which separates—itsself from others, as also one thing from another. It is the hardening quality that is separative, the maker of heavenly bodies and the rest. All *feelings* are separative; therefore Compassion cannot be placed in the hierarchy of Kama. If it is not a “feeling” what is it? It is a Power, a *Shakti* born of *Buddhi*, which, when active, uses *Manas*: it is *Buddhi* using Knowledge, which means understanding expressing itself as helpfulness. When a mother loves her child, or a friend his friend, often there is no true Compassion, but the instinct of Kama, very often beautiful and even noble, on the way to Compassion, but not Compassion.

Knowledge and good works are called purifiers, and they are truly so, for these soften Kama and the feeling-Kama seeks its mate, the feeling-*Buddhi*, and thus love transforms itself into Compassion. The personal “I” notion is not annihilated but transmuted; it remains, but it is different.

That is the principle: now to application. In our line of work and in our life of occultism, solidarity among fellow students is the greatest of essentials. That fellowship, please note, has to rest on Wisdom and the Service of Wisdom. That is why, in this connection, we have to practise “an exemption from self-identifying attachment for children, wife, and household,” and “a want of pleasure in congregations of men.” False attachments not only are injurious in themselves but, further, vitiate our efforts towards true fellowship. Herein you will find the rationale of “Come out from among them, and be ye separate”; it also explains why the Buddha left his palace

and his wife, and why Jesus is said to have spoken what he did about his mother.

This is a *silent* and *inner process*. It will be evident to you that real adjustment between true Fellows is dual: (1) a casting-out process and (2) assimilation. Both should be on the basis of Compassion, *i.e.*, *not* of feelings. Understanding-feeling grows as feeling-feeling decreases. Get knowledge, do works, begin to assimilate the right people, reject the wrong ones and in doing the last two encounter a further test—*viz*, when those whom we thought right go wrong and *vice versa*, *i.e.*, weak people come up to rightness.

Develop Compassion then, *i.e.*, understanding helpfulness. Do not rush to render help before you understand; do not try to explain before you understand; do not try to sacrifice before you understand; do not attach yourself before you understand or repel before you understand. Do not be guided by feelings, however noble they may appear, but try to *understand* them. Repose and Bliss are conjoint and born of true understanding. Wherever and whenever restlessness, inner or outer, of body or mind, exists, there Compassion cannot be, because understanding is absent. Equipoise of mind, non-agitation of brain and senses, are a reflection of the Quiet within which is Compassion, understanding and helping all. Don't think this is beyond you, slowly and gradually it will come.

OUR bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners; so that if we plant nettles, or sow lettuce...supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.

—*Othello*, 1.3

SWEET are the uses of adversity; which like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head.

—*As You Like It*, IV.1

MODES OF PROCREATION

IV

MARY SHELLEY'S novel *Frankenstein* alludes to the dangers of scientific knowledge and how the reckless pursuit of knowledge without wisdom could prove disastrous. The most important theme is the desire to play God. The hero of the novel was inspired by the power produced by a bolt of lightning, to construct a new human being from body parts of dead persons. The author, Mary Shelley was inspired by the concept of galvanism, *i.e.*, electricity could be used to stimulate or restart life. In the preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, she wrote, "Perhaps a corpse would be reanimated; galvanism had given token of such things."

In his book, *Life of Paracelsus*, Franz Hartmann defines *homunculi* as "artificially made human beings, generated from the sperm without the assistance of the female organism." *Homunculus* means a little man. We are given a complete method of creating a homunculus. Thus: "If the sperma, enclosed in a hermetically sealed glass, is buried in horse manure for forty days, and properly magnetized, it begins to live and move. After such a time it bears the form and resemblance of a human being, but it will be transparent and without a body. If it is now artificially fed with the *Arcanum sanguinis hominis* until it is about forty weeks old, and if allowed to remain during that time in horse manure in a continually equal temperature, it will grow into a human child, with all its members developed like any other child, such as could be borne by a woman; only it will be much smaller. We call such a being a homunculus, and it may be raised and educated like any other child, until it grows older and obtains reason and intellect, and is able to take care of itself. This is one of the greatest secrets, and it ought to remain a secret until the days approach when all secrets will be known." Hartmann observes that it is quite likely that Paracelsus does not suggest that such things should be taken literally, but rather great spiritual truths were hidden behind allegories that could be

understood by those who possessed the key.

There is an illuminating passage in the *Secret Doctrine* which throws more light on homunculi and Frankenstein. Thus: “The *Homunculi* of Paracelsus are a fact in Alchemy, and will become one in Chemistry very likely, and then Mrs. Shelley’s Frankenstein will have to be regarded as a prophecy. But no chemist, or Alchemist either, will ever endow such a ‘Frankenstein’s Monster’ with more than animal instinct, unless indeed he does that which the “Progenitors” are credited with, namely, if he leaves his own physical body, and incarnates in the ‘empty form.’ But even this would be an *artificial*, not a natural man, for our ‘Progenitors’ had, in the course of eternal evolution, to become *gods* before they became men.” (II, 349)

In other words, physical nature, when left to herself, can produce minerals, vegetables and lower animals, but for producing man, the help of independent, spiritual and intelligent powers is necessary, because something more than physical material is necessary for building human personality, else, he would remain even below any “Frankenstein” animal. The history of evolution on our earth shows that when the time came to evolve human form, “Nature unaided failed.” In her first attempt to create man, monsters, half-animal and half-man were generated. The account goes on to say that these forms were destroyed. Only when the astral model was perfected did we get material bodies. This astral model or *Chhaya* is the gift of Lunar Pitris, but they could not give man the sacred spark (light of mind), or self-reflective consciousness that distinguishes man from animals, and this was left to the class of divine beings symbolized by Prometheus, also known as *Kumaras*, *Manasputras* or *Agnishwatta pitris*. (*S.D.*, II, 52-56)

An article that appeared in *The Atlantic* (April 20, 2017) seems to suggest that *Frankenstein* reflects the hopes and fears of every scientific era. “It is too often suggested...that *Frankenstein* is a warning about a hubristic, overreaching science that unleashes forces it cannot control.” Could the reproductive and biomedical

technologies of our age, such as assisted conception, tissue engineering, stem-cell research, cloning, and genetic manipulation, be included in that category?

Never Let Me Go, a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro was published in 2005 and it deals with the cloning of individuals solely for the purpose of organ donation. The organs are harvested from cloned donors, one at a time, till they die. The novel also raises questions related to the ethics of human cloning that have been raised and debated in real life. It was in the 1960s and 1970s when stem-cell research was in its incipient stage that cloning also seemed possible. There are two types of cloning—*therapeutic cloning*, which is the cloning of cells and tissues, which could be used in curing diseases; *reproductive cloning* which involves creating whole individuals. The novel shows how reproductive cloning could be pursued for therapeutic purposes.

Cloning is asexual reproduction where instead of coupling the genes of both parents, there is a genetic copy of only one parent. In simple terms, cloning is the process of creating multiple identical copies of an organism from a single “somatic” cell without sexual reproduction. It opens the possibility for scientists to be able to create man whose physical and mental attributes will be highly controlled. This knowledge can be abused to produce a race of robot-like beings. A few years ago, James Watson, a Nobel laureate, cautioned that when people realized how far scientists were able to control procreation, there would be public outrage.

An essay that appeared in *Time* magazine (March 16, 1998) commented on the ultimate cloning horror—human organ farms. The essay mentions the manufacturing of headless, but fully formed creatures, such as headless mice and headless tadpoles, in certain laboratories, for the purpose of harvesting their organs. It should certainly be a cause for concern because according to Princeton biologist Lee Silver it would almost certainly be possible to produce human bodies without a forebrain. “These human bodies without any semblance of consciousness would not be considered persons,

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and thus it would be perfectly legal to keep them ‘alive’ as a future source of organs.” Such creation of a human mutant and disembowelling it at our pleasure for spare parts must be looked upon as the grossest corruption of biotechnology. The deliberate creation of headless humans must be made a crime without any delay or hesitation.

In 1890 a newspaper reported the grafting of a portion of a living dog’s foreleg in a boy’s leg, and described it as a surgical “horror.” What was stated in *Lucifer*, December 1890, at that time is even more relevant to the experiments being conducted today. Thus, “We sometimes hear it said of communities that they have ‘no backs to be thrashed and no souls to be damned’; but *they have*, and when the rock descends it breaks them to powder. The proofs are only too abundant. The rock is already swaying: let us not shout too loud or we may bring it on our heads!”

“The Rights and Wrongs of Cloning Humans,” was the title of one of the sessions at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held in Philadelphia in the year 1998. One of the speakers was Ian Wilmut, the leader of the research team that cloned the famous lamb Dolly at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, in April 1996, who said that he was “appalled” at the prospect of colleagues racing to bring forth a cloned human infant. He observed that to get one cloned human baby, many babies would have to die in failed procedures, which is “an absolutely unacceptable price.” He questioned the need for cloning humans, whether we wished to get an exact duplicate of our loved one, or a scientific or an artistic genius, as “the plain truth is that we will not get it.” Commenting on this, in the editorial of *Discover* magazine (May 1998), we read: “We are more than our genes. We are our genes in a particular place and time, whole people, interacting with others in an infinitely variable world. Only through that experience do we become who we are. A cloned Einstein reared in twenty-first-century Los Angeles will not become a tousled professor of new physics. A cloned Mozart will not re-elevate our souls...”

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Such alternative methods of procreation have been and should be questioned from an ethical angle. Is birth only a biological matter, or are there other levels also at which fusion must take place for the full integration of a human being? A study of the principles of the human constitution, given in Theosophical teachings, provides an answer. Man is more than his body. Will a cloned baby have a soul, or will it be a soulless creature, a Frankenstein monster? In all the controversy that is raging over human cloning the fact that every baby born is a returning soul has been completely ignored.

When a sheep called Dolly had been cloned for the first time, it gave rise to a scientific, legal and ethical debate around the globe. Unlike animals, human beings have a unique sense of self and therefore should not and could not be cloned like animals. Cloning can produce a physically identical twin of the original, it can never recreate the individual. Theosophy would argue that there are profound ethical problems involved in manipulating human or even animal reproduction and in interfering with the natural process of evolution. What does science know about the real nature of man and what it is to be an individual? For the materialistic science, man is a more highly developed animal. When geneticists are proposing to clone human beings along the lines of cloning of animals, such as, the sheep Dolly, we may compare it with the suggestion made by Grant Allen for the reproduction of the human race using “the method we pursue in the reproduction of those other animals, whose purity of blood, strength, and excellence has become of importance to us,” which in other words means using prize bull or high breed horse, reproduce a like offspring. He explains that “it is not merely a question of prize sheep and a fat oxen, but a question of begetting the highest, finest, purest, strongest, sanest, healthiest, handsomest, and *morally noblest citizens*.” Commenting on this suggestion, H.P.B. wrote that this scientist seems unable to distinguish between man and animal. (*Lucifer*, July 1890)

Can human life ever be cloned? What after all is it to be human? Is it only related to the physical cell and the physical body? What

about the “spiritual potency in the physical cell” and other non-physical forces at work in the formation of the embryo? Theosophy teaches that heredity is the mode used by nature to transmit physical and psychical traits through parents to provide a proper tenement to the Ego. But the traits are brought under karma by the Ego. According to a German Embryologist-Philosopher, Prof. Weismann, there is one cell among millions of cells of the body, which divides and multiplies, and is responsible for determining the image of a future man or animal in its physical, mental and psychic characteristics. In short it is this cell which is responsible for the transmission of hereditary traits. This cell or plasm is an immortal portion of our bodies. Prof. Weismann seems to suggest that these germinal cells are immortal, and do not have their birth or origin in the body of the individual, but proceed directly, from ancestral germinal cells, passed from the father to the son through long generations. H.P.B. adds: “Complete the physical plasm....the ‘Germinal Cell’ of man with all its material potentialities, with the ‘spiritual plasm,’ so to say, or the fluid that contains the five lower principles of the six-principled Dhyān—and you have the secret, if you are spiritual enough to understand it.” (*S.D.*, I, 223 fn. and 224)

The physical evolves from the spiritual, the mental and the psychic. Heredity is but a mode of the evolutionary process by which the conscious Force within matter strives for fuller self-expression and self-realization. Moreover, we need to take into account the astral prototype, an indispensable factor in heredity, which in the plants, animals and human beings, forms the substratum and the model for the development of the physical form. Heredity is determined by the arrangement of genes within the chromosomes, but that arrangement is not mechanical. It is instrumental rather than causal. Human heredity is enormously more complicated as compared to heredity in lower kingdoms because human evolution is not by natural impulse but by self-conscious choices. The human germ plasm is dominated by the spiritual plasm, which is a spiritual potency in the Ego itself. In the case of human beings, heredity is subservient

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to individual and racial Karma. Really speaking, inborn mental and moral characteristics are not inherited from parents and ancestors but are brought over by the individual from his own past lives.

The Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, adopted by UNESCO in 1997, clearly outlaws the reproductive cloning of human beings (Article 11). However, it is not binding on nation-states. It has also set down an ethical framework for such research. Hence, even if reproductive cloning and the use of clones to supply organs for transplantation may not take place, it is likely that the scientific research in the direction of therapeutic cloning of human cells may be continued. For instance, in the year 2002 an American firm announced that it had cloned a human embryo, saying that its intention was not to produce a cloned baby, but to devise a way of obtaining embryonic stem cells which can provide a ready supply of replacement tissue that would help in the treatment of degenerative diseases like diabetes, strokes and Parkinson's. But it is likely that experiments may not stop there.

“The core issue concerning embryonic stem cell research is: When does life begin in the human embryo? Even many scientists now believe that life begins right from the moment of fertilization. The fact that the single fertilized egg has the full roadmap of the form to be morphed within the short-time-interval between conception and delivery, itself proves that it does possess both consciousness and life. Depriving the embryos of their potential life or altering the course of their destiny to be used as stem cells violates the natural moral law and destroys the dignity of human life by treating the human being as a material commodity, to be manipulated according to our whims and fancies.” (*The Theosophical Movement*, March 2002)

(Concluded)

FAME is the scentless sunflower, with gaudy crown of gold;
But friendship is the breathing rose, with sweets in every
fold.

—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

ENDURING PRINCIPLES

EARNEST students of the immemorial truths of the ageless Wisdom have learnt that in the records of the thoughts of Sages and Seers certain definite principles of fundamental value are to be found. Principles are enduring; their applications change with time and circumstance. Human evolution is but an aspect of cosmic processes, and true human history ought to be a record of the changes wrought by man's intelligence to adapt himself to outer conditions, while at the same time he, being a self-conscious thinker, helps living Nature to move onward to ever ascending altitudes. Men today have a very poor idea of the Ancients. Those who have given long years to the study and understanding of this Universal Wisdom—spaceless and timeless—are lovers of the great Ancients and pupils of their modern heirs. The knowledge acquired, however meagre, has brought us an attitude of life so very different from that generally held that we feel constrained to stand aloof from many movements which offer panaceas while they take masses of men but round and round the circle of frustration. Seeking pleasure, they get pain; knowledge gained proves to be ignorance; efforts at alleviating suffering reveal themselves as mere palliatives.

Because history accepted as authentic covers a very short period, men of modern knowledge have but meagre information of what it is possible for nations to achieve when those ever-enduring principles are put into practice even in a practical manner. What Lycurgus achieved in Greece, or what Asoka achieved in India; what Plato visualized 500 years before our era, or what Gandhiji visualized in our age—may all seem impractical ideation, mere fancy. And yet, such visions and dreams are potent and pass from the plane of rare ether to that of the concrete and actual.

Ideas rule the world, and they emanate primarily from poets and philosophers, from mystics and occultists. These great ideas make most suitable foundations and once their efficacy is experienced in application by an individual, he leaves behind the world of chaos

and strife and begins to glimpse a world of order, understanding and peace. In the spirit of fraternity and brotherhood, men and women must learn to live in freedom and liberty. It is communion of minds that we must aspire to encourage, for, that alone will teach people to forget the accidents of birth, such as race and religion, and enable them to realize their manhood. Savants and scholars will always be in a minority; the number of those who gain from the noble tasks of the learned must increase.

The *first* enduring idea is that the individual is the centre of evolution. The world cannot be redeemed save by individual self-redemption. Personal effort, self-induced endeavour, adoption of self-devised ways and means by the individual, is the pivot of human evolution. Not his outer environment but his inner energization is the ruling factor. While we fully recognize the value and importance of the environment, we prize higher the self-effort of the individual at his own psycho-physiological transformation. We hold that man is the maker of his destiny, and that therefore by right exertion can change, improve and beautify his environment. Man is the thinker environed by his thoughts, his emotions, his body, and unless he, the thinker, begins to transmute that first and basic environment, he will not succeed in transforming the larger environment of house, city, country, world. Spiritual alchemy—transmuting the iron of lust and the lead of passivity and irresoluteness into the shining gold of pure love and intellectual integrity—has to come first. The transformation of slums into gardens will follow naturally, and the outer environment will be enriched. Put monkeys into an orchard—where will the orchard be? Mere improvement in the environment does not succeed in really and permanently raising the status of man.

The *second* principle emerging from the first is that human evolution, though an individual venture and leading at long last to liberation from evil and ignorance, is indissolubly linked with the betterment of corporate humanity. Man, by supreme Buddha-like endeavour, may reach the *summum bonum* of enlightenment and

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experience the peace, bliss and silence of Liberation; but even then, is heard the cry of suffering humanity, even then is felt the touch of anguish and ignorance which permeates and envelops the entire human race. And if Buddha-like endeavour brings enlightenment and bliss, Buddha-like compassion compels its renunciation. For, at the Heart of Nirvana arises the voice, “Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?”

If we turn from this to our puny selves, there naturally follows the idea that Life is a School. This is the *third* principle. In the school called Life, man, the thinker, must learn to absorb the knowledge necessary for his own recognition of himself as a spiritual potency; but something more—he must learn to live in a brotherly fashion with all who surround him. In our civilization, rights are claimed and worked for; duties are generally only talked about. The ideals of Duty, of Sacrifice, of Service have been upheld, age after age, and their exercise taught. Not only the philosophical *why* of the Ideals has been fully answered but the pragmatistical *how* of their practice has been detailed. The mighty art has been lost for the multitudes; the few, “fortune’s favoured soldiers,” find the Path and try to promulgate the knowledge. We need to learn that sacrifice of and with Spiritual Wisdom is the highest of sacrifices, benefiting learner and teacher alike, and that life without Wisdom is like moving in darkness without light—we stumble and fall, hurt ourselves, and going on, come to new griefs and new sorrows. The nobler aim of self-education, self-improvement and betterment of others is not earnestly considered. When ardent hearts and eager minds need proper guidance to better their own souls and to serve other souls, they find difficulties. Pertinent attention needs to be drawn to those particular nuggets of knowledge which make men more healthy in body, more wealthy in mind, more noble in heart, more self-sacrificing in spirit. The new World Order so much talked about, depends for its success on men and women whose self-education has enabled them to regard themselves as citizens of the world.

The *fourth* principle, flowering from the previous ones is that unless knowledge is applied and absorbed man cannot be. The philosopher who writes learnedly on endurance but quails at a toothache, the scholar who expounds the psychology of emotions but finds it difficult to remain calm when death strikes a loved one, or to control passions when they surge up within himself—all such allow the power and beneficence of knowledge to go waste. We need the teaching that Virtue and Knowledge are to be exercised and applied, for the same reason that food eaten needs to be digested and assimilated. Hence the aspiration on the part of some to bring within the reach of the many the Way of Life that makes for what the Chinese called the Superior Man. The lore of that ancient land mentions three classes of human: First, the Inferior Man who is constantly agitated and worried. Second, the Moral Man who practices calmness and serenity, wishes to stand firm amid tottering and falling mortals; lending firmness to them and wishing to be illuminated, he illumines others. But higher than this morally superior man is the Divine Man—the Seer-Sage. To become better individuals we not only need to convince ourselves that our Human Universe is governed by Law; we must also learn that environment and events are effects flowing from causes, that our bodily health, control of senses, development of mental faculties and capacities, and the unfoldment of moral character have all a dual aspect—they are effects from past causes, but these present effects have a potential and causal aspect, colouring the future.

In the ancient doctrine of Karma we have the principles and details of that knowledge of moral universe of man. One of the sayings of Muhammed, the Prophet of Arabia, brings out the practical aspect of the much-misunderstood word Kismet: “Verily that person is wise and sensible who subdueth his carnal desires and hopeth for rewards; and he is an ignorant man who followeth his lustful appetites and with all this asketh Allah’s forgiveness.” There can be no forgiveness from the Law which compensates, but there is self-effort, rooted in knowledge and practice, which overcomes obstacles and

limitations and secures freedom and enlightenment. We are masters of our own destiny.

Karma as the Law of human progression works through the process of Interdependence. Not only does the individual evolve, acquiring knowledge of the Law of Karma and adequately applying it to himself, but each is dependent on the whole. Each is intimately and indissolubly linked to every other member of the human kingdom, to every other kingdom in Nature. If a single hurt to a single bodily organ affects the whole body, so a single hurtful action of an individual affects the whole of Nature. If this particular teaching is so impressed on our consciousness that it warns us not to hurt, not to be violent, not to destroy, and further energizes us to respect and reverence others, however lowly, and to sacrifice and serve the whole of Nature, we shall have passed out of the species of the inferior animal man to that of the moral humane man.

A New World must arise, a Virgin World where effete ideas and theories which have been tried and found wanting will be abandoned. This knowledge that Moral Law functions—whether we like it or not, recognize it or not—and that it is wise to work with that Moral Law, must impress the minds of a growing number if that New Order is to enjoy peace and achieve progress. To popularize the great truth of the Moral law in which are implicit several important doctrines and ideas, men, however few, must become at least partial embodiments and exemplars of that Law, and must live with the faith that individuals as also communities and nations reap from their sowings. But as the sowing is a process continuing every hour, we can prepare for a magnificent harvest in the years to come.

THE SUN has imaged himself in the centre of each of these flowers, as the Sun of Righteousness will image Himself in each of your hearts. From this sun in the daisy, white rays of purity and goodness spread around you, reflected from the light of heaven within you.

—ST. AUGUSTINE

THE FIRE-PLACE OF THE HEART

SOMETIMES one word says wonderful things as a gate opens to reveal a beautiful vista. Such a word is *chidagnikundam*. It means “the Fire-place of the Heart.”

There is in nearly every home a centre around which the family gathers. There is in every individual a centre around which his powers gather. That is the real meaning of concentration—coming to a centre.

In the heart of the full-blown devotee the Fire blazes. Only those in whom the force of devotion is stirring can feel the warmth and the light of that Fire. And devotion stirs in those only who have begun to turn within themselves, having sought in vain for the comfort of the Spirit and the warmth of the Soul in temples of religions, schools of philosophies and academies of arts.

Sometimes Theosophy has been called “cold” by those who have missed a Personal God, a loving Saviour, an interceding Mother. Theosophy’s teaching of sterner realities of a universal, impersonal Deity, which cannot be propitiated by any saviour but oneself, nor interceded with, but by the performance of deeds according to the Good Law, does not at once appeal to natures nursed on softer foods. But, when Humanity’s milk teeth are shed, it is able to digest the stronger food of reason, of justice, of unwavering dispassion in the working out of the law. Then one turns for warmth and for protection to those very beings who, through their apparent “coldness” have been able to pass by the gleaming shows of life and to press on to unrewarded moral peaks. They have been able to forgo the “warmth” of false religions based on comforting hopes which drag the soul into forgetfulness of its true destiny, and that by the very fervour of their love for humanity, by the light in their own souls and the longing to share it and so to save “the great orphan humanity.” Is this cold?

Before the Fire can blaze it has to be kindled; and ere the kindling is attempted the hearth on which the Fire is to be laid has to be built. All of that work brings the devotee to birth and helps in his growth.

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His thoughts design the hearth, his efforts build it, his sorrows and his tears cement it, his past Karma will constitute the offerings for its altar. When the Fire is burning, there gather round the hearth his thought-children, his feeling-progeny, his fancy-pictures and his day-dreams, hopes as well as fears. Thither come problems and sins and follies and failures. He has to let them. He may not judge them, nor censure, nor punish. He has to look at them, to let the light of the Fire shine upon them. After a while one by one they fall in the Fire and are consumed, and silence and peace shine forth. Then the devotee becomes a holy of holies, a sanctuary for young strivers after perfection.

To that Living Fire of Peace come people shivering from the cold-blooded sins of the world, seeking refuge. Those that are not worthy of a place there slink away. Those who feel unworthy but who still long to come creep nearer. The fire burns steadily. Let them come. Presently, they, too, will be transfigured by the Light.

YOUR life and my life flow into each other as wave flows into wave, and unless there is peace, joy, and freedom for you, there can be no real peace or joy or freedom for me. To see reality—not as we expect it to be, but as it is—is to see that unless we live for each other and in and through each other, we do not really live very satisfactorily, that there can really be life only where there really is, in just this sense, love.

—FREDERICK BUECHNER

FINISH every day and be done with it. You have done, what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This day is all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on yesterdays.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

In India numerous festivals are celebrated throughout the year. During each festival devotees worship a particular deity with utmost devotion. Have we ever wondered why there are so many deities, and why we worship symbols and photos? In fact, why do we worship God in the first place? The origin of idol worship may be traced back to ancestral worship (*pitri puja*) and nature worship (*prakriti puja*). In the absence of the knowledge of states after death, prayers were offered for the well-being of the dead, assuming that the person was still around somewhere.

Likewise, human beings observing different qualities of the earth, the Sun, the trees, the ocean, etc., such as the “selfless giving” quality in the trees, started worshipping these qualities of nature. Thus, to begin with, they worshipped nature out of utmost respect and love, and made offerings to express their gratitude to nature. However, it was evident that they could not worship the Sun at night or visit the sea every day, and that is what gave birth to the concept of idols and symbols.

In order to help human beings, who had never seen God and who did not know much about Him, to take their first step of devotion towards God, our God-realised saints developed these forms or idols which symbolise every quality and power that God possesses. Thus, the infinite and formless (*Nirakar*) God was represented through the finite (*Sakar*) form. Each one of us treats the flag of our country with the utmost respect, though that flag itself is a mere piece of cloth with some design. The reason being, it symbolises one’s nation and one’s emotions of patriotism are attached to it. Similarly, one may always carry the photograph of one’s mother because though the photograph itself is not one’s mother, it symbolises her, to whom one is emotionally attached.

“Similarly, the idols, photos, *yantras*, symbols, etc. are a symbolic form of the multiple qualities that the formless God possesses, to which your emotions, faith and devotion are attached,” writes

Upendra Ji. Since humans themselves are with form, they need some form for worship, as it would be difficult for them to understand the formless, infinite God, who is present everywhere but cannot be seen. The human mind needs some finite form to focus on. Every time we see an idol or a symbol, we are reminded of the divine qualities that we need to develop to lead a spiritual life, writes Acharya Upendra Ji, a spiritual leader and the founder of the Antar Yog foundation. (*Sunday Free Press Journal*, August 28, 2022)

Idolatry or idol worship involves worship of an image of the deity, or even images of saints, prophets, animals and other religious symbols. Hindus worship idols (*murtis*) of various gods and goddesses as representatives of One God or *Parabrahmam*. Idol worship may be seen as part of *saguna* (with attributes) *bhakti*, where the devotee ascribes various attributes to the deity, which are depicted by various idols. To Arjuna's question as to which is better, the worship of the unmanifested or that of the manifested, Shri Krishna says that worship and devotion to the unmanifested is difficult, so we being in physical bodies always try to give form to the Supreme and see it separate from us. Swami Vivekananda seems to suggest that the worship of images is a stepping stone to self-realization, and which must be discarded as one progresses in the spiritual journey. He says, "Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his [man's] spiritual childhood; but on and on he must progress.... 'External worship, material worship' say the scriptures, 'is the lowest stage,' struggling to rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realized."

We might say that idol is concrete form of an image, while the image is a subtle form of an idol. Whether we take idol or image, so long as we do not limit God to that particular idol or image, but use it as a means to establish faith and devotion, we are at an intermediate stage. Even to say that "my idea of god is the only true idea," becomes a form of idolatry.

Iconoclasm relates not only to breaking of the images, but also

to attacking cherished beliefs, which include dogmatic and narrow concepts of God. The moment the worshipper takes the outer symbols themselves as gods and goddesses divorced from the animating spirit concealed within and worships them seeking favours, it becomes Idolatry.

Many religions have emphasized the value of silence. Silence has mental and physical health benefits. Neuroscientists and health professionals are gradually discovering exactly what kind of silence and how much silence is necessary for that purpose. We live in a noisy world. In search of peace, people join monasteries for a silent retreat or go to the hills or resort to floatation tanks, which are sensory deprivation tanks. A person entering the tank experiences minimal sensory stimulation and feels relaxed. In his book *Silence: In the age of noise*, Norwegian explorer Erling Kagge calls silence “the new luxury.”

“From an evolutionary perspective, sounds give us vital information, helping us to better navigate the world and avoid danger,” writes Kayt Sukel. However, when we are exposed to excessive noise over a long period of time, “it can lead to health problems, from anxiety and depression to cardiovascular disease.” Researchers have discovered that it is very quiet inside the floatation tank, and yet the person inside it is aware of the sound of his breathing. When people are able to focus on their breath or heartbeat, it becomes easier for them to reach a relaxed or meditative state, which in turn has many health benefits. Research has shown that people who remained inside the float for an hour experienced a short-term reduction in stress, muscle tension, pain, and felt more relaxed.

A complete silence could be unsettling. It is known that the average person would feel extremely uncomfortable if kept in an “anechoic chamber” which locks out all sound from the outside world, for more than 15 minutes. Such a person would look for

some stimulation even if that stimulation is negative. However, when such experiments were repeated in 2019 it was found that the participants enjoyed being alone in a room without a mobile phone or laptop.

Those who have studied different types of silence and their potential benefits found that all types of silence led to improved mood and increased relaxation in the majority of participants. It is possible to attain silence in one's everyday life and that complete silence is not necessary. It has been observed that people feel more relaxed and less bored while quietly sitting in a garden than sitting in a completely silent room. Also, it is not necessary to observe silence for many hours but even a few minutes of silence could prove beneficial. Studies suggest that observing a few minutes of silence more frequently is more beneficial than a longer period of silence observed only once a week, writes Kayt Sukel. (*New Scientist*, August 13, 2022)

The article focuses on "silence" achieved by depriving the senses, especially the ears, of external stimulations, from the point of view of improving physical and mental health. And yet, even that taken to an extreme could be unsettling. *Through the Gates of Gold* says that whether we are aware of it or not, we desire sensation. We are not enjoined to kill out sensation, but to kill out the *desire* for sensation. "The utter silence which can only come by closing the ears to all transitory sounds comes as a more appalling horror than even the formless emptiness of space," says *Light on the Path*. The Buddha says, "Delightful are the forests to the Arhat; they charm not the worldly. There the passionless find delight, for they are not allured by sense-life."

In addition to this, there is a silence that results when we abstain from speech. However, from the spiritual point of view, real silence is not merely abstaining from verbal activity; it results when sensuous enjoyment and indulgence in fancy are not allowed to go on within. Real silence is the controlling of the ebullitions of our mind and the feelings of the lower psychic nature. Theosophy warns against the

hypocrisy of observing silence outwardly and allowing the mind to be noisy and turbulent. Silence is silencing the chatter of the lower mind. The mind must be made silent, by bringing it to dwell on some great and noble idea. One of the requirements of spiritual life is to learn the value of silence. Silence is needed to conserve spiritual energy, as one of the main avenues through which it goes to waste is through empty sounds and vain speech.

Observance of silence for a few minutes every day *at the same time* is better than an hour of silence observed at different times day after day. By observance of silence at regular hours memory and attention get their training. Ultimately, observance of silence is a soul-exercise. In the process of spiritual development, help and guidance come from the inner planes of being and to avail of it we must stop inner and outer chatter. Every day we must observe silence for a few minutes and set apart half-an-hour for meditation.

We witness today a conflict between traditional values and modernity. The age-old values have not only been devalued and eroded, but also destroyed. The erosion of higher values and fine virtues has taken place in individual life, especially in the case of the younger generation, as well as in national life. Family bonds are weakening and family relations are based on economic factors. Practitioners of truth, love and morality are often ridiculed and treated as misfits in society. Mutual help, fellow-feeling, honesty and loyalty have become rarer values. Instead, one faces corruption, lack of faith and lethargy in public governance. Sadly, in the land of Mahatma Gandhi, violence rules. Konrad Lorenz, a Nobel laureate, very aptly describes present-day humanity, when he says, “I believe I have found the missing link between animals and civilised man—it is us.” We, in India, are facing spiritual and moral erosion, and seem to be negating the words of Sri Aurobindo, who said that “spirituality and spiritual life, and moulding the whole life on the basis of spiritual values have been characteristic of our country.”

Instead, we witness absolute cynicism, as also the lack of self-control and sense-control, which form the very basis of a virtuous life. There are a few moral men and women who are helplessly watching the decline, writes Kelath Gopakumar Menon. (*Bhavan's Journal*, August 31, 2022)

A Master of Wisdom has gone on record saying, “India has been going down for thousands of years. She must take equally long for her regeneration.” However, the erosion of ethical values and predominance of materialism is to be witnessed in the entire human race. Making a connection between physical and moral health, Mr. Judge writes, “A sound body is not expected, because our race is unsound everywhere. It is Karma. Of course, a correct mental and moral position will, at last, bring a sound body.”

Cynicism is disregard for normal standards, as well as having little faith in human sincerity and goodness. “Selfishness, indifference, and brutality can never be the normal state of the race—to believe so would be to despair of humanity—and that no Theosophist can do,” writes H.P.B. What is needed is an inner conversion, change in people’s minds and hearts. The few moral men and women can be the means of awakening at least a few, by setting an example of their own lives. Not a single example of righteous living is unimportant. By our indifference or negative attitude, such as, “a single individual can make no difference,” we may allow the evil to swell.

Since we are all interconnected on the invisible plane, we are continually helping or hindering others in building their character, not only by our actions, but also by our thoughts—for good or ill. By not resisting the temptation to take bribes or tell a lie, or by allowing a material or sensual thought to enter the mind, we are giving an impulse to some weak person with similar tendency to indulge in sin. The converse is also true. Every attempt to overcome vices in us sends out an impulse for good that strengthens another individual who may be fighting similar weaknesses.

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