

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

CREATIVITY is the ability to make new things or think of new ideas. Creativity includes exploring new ways of doing things as also realizing dreams. The created thing may be intangible such as an idea, a scientific theory, a musical composition or it may be a physical object such as an invention, a literary work or a painting.

Some have felt that creativity need not be restricted to any particular activity, such as, music, painting, writing, poetry or dancing. Creativity may be regarded as a quality. It is not a mysterious quality possessed only by a few. This quality, one can bring to bear upon any activity. Anyone who is ready to go beyond the routine, ready to explore new possibilities, or ready to adopt a new approach to a familiar problem may be regarded as creative. Our first step is to learn to do the task perfectly, but then some of us have the urge to go beyond tried and tested methods. For instance, having learnt to cook perfectly, a housewife may decide to cook her routine meals a little differently. One can be creative or innovative while cooking or else we would not have so many recipes! In India, in various fields of life, an improvised arrangement called *jugaad* is resorted to because of lack of resources. In rural India there are *jugaad* vehicles, such as a diesel engine fitted to a cart or rickshaw. India has invented several low cost implements, which have inspired management gurus across the world.

The ability to see things in a fresh way is vital to the creative

process. A creative person is willing to try many different approaches, even if they prove to be futile. Thomas Alva Edison made 1000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. When a reporter asked, “How did it feel to fail 1000 times?” Edison replied, “I did not fail 1000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1000 steps.”

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* a creative person relies strongly on intuition instead of adopting rational approach while solving the problems of life. Above a certain level, intelligence seems to have little correlation with creativity, *i.e.*, a highly intelligent person may not be as highly creative. Convergent thinking involves analytical reasoning, and divergent thinking is marked by richness of ideas and originality of thinking. It is felt that both are necessary for the creative process—the former being emphasized in the field of mathematics, and the latter in arts, such as music, painting, poetry, etc. The artist places more importance on feeling and individual expression, while the scientist relies more on disciplined, logical thinking to lead him in new directions.

Our mind is capable of functioning in two ways and depending upon the mode of functioning it can be called creative or reactive mind. Creativity flows from a creative mind. Our ordinary, everyday mind is reactive. The reactive mind does not really *act*, but it *reacts*. That is, it does not act *spontaneously*, but requires some stimulus to set it in motion. When we see an advertisement, where a beautiful girl in a silk gown recommends buying soap or toothpaste of a particular brand, we are induced to buy it. Aldous Huxley observes that while watching such advertisements, children should be taught that there is no earthly connection between the merits of the toothpaste and the beautiful girl in the silk gown advertising it. So also when someone speaks angrily we hit back without a moment’s thought. Thus, we have fixed responses to given stimuli. It is as if we are programmed. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, describes reactive mind as “penny-in-the-slot” type of mind. That is to say, you insert the coin in the slot of the machine, and out comes the package of peanuts or cigarettes, or whatever it may be. Most of

our thinking is of this type.

In a reactive mind, there are fixed moulds of thinking, feeling and action. We have fixed ideas about people: a *Gujarati* person is always money-minded, a *Marwari* is always stingy, etc. The human mind is generally a “one-track” mind. For instance, only those who share our views and opinions become our friends. We need to learn to adjust our mind to other minds. Instead of *reacting* angrily to criticism, bad behaviour or selfishness, we could always pause and reflect, “Why does he behave the way he does?” When criticized for being proud or stingy, we can always do some soul-searching. If the criticism applies, we must take steps to improve; if not, we may ignore it. Similarly, when we are up against a difficult situation or difficult persons, instead of our usual reaction of frustration and despair we could always ask, “Why is it that no one else but *I* am put into this situation? Do I perhaps have to learn something from this?” This is the mark of a creative mind. We must learn to *act* from within and not just *react* to stimuli from without.

The creative mind *responds*, instead of reacting. The motive power, the drive, the inspiration of the creative mind comes from the depths within the mind itself, and not just from external stimuli. The creative mind loves *unconditionally*. The creative mind is always willing to see the brighter side of life, which enables a person to say, “With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams it is still a beautiful world.” The creative mind makes for an emotionally positive person. As Hugh Downs observes, “A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.” Thus, a creative mind has the ability to create heaven in hell’s despair. Sangharakshita mentions that transition or passing over from reactive to creative mind constitutes the beginning of the spiritual life. The first step in this process consists in becoming *aware* of how conditioned we are and that how we behave like puppets without exercising the freedom of choice.

The most important element in the creative process is believed to be *originality* or *uniqueness*. Humans were not considered to have

the ability to create something new except as an expression of God's work. The ancient Greeks believed that creativity came from the gods, and in particular from the Muses. Muses are the nine daughters of Zeus, regarded as the mythical personification of the arts and sciences. Greeks and Romans believed that it was a *daemon* or a *genius*, a guiding spirit, which enabled a person to create or produce.

Most ancient cultures saw art as a form of discovery and not creation. Plato is asked in *The Republic*, "Will we say of the painter, that he makes something?" He answers, "Certainly not, he merely *imitates*."

In Book X of Plato's *The Republic*, Plato uses Socrates' metaphor of three beds to explain the concept of *imitation*. One bed is that which exists in nature, and is the work of God. In other words, it is a Platonic ideal. Plato's theory of Forms or Ideas points out that non-physical forms or ideas represent the most accurate reality. The object was essentially or really the Form, and that the objects we see in the world, were mere shadows mimicking the Form. Thus, one bed is the archetypal Form or Idea of a bed. The other bed is that made by the carpenter, in imitation of the archetypal idea. The third bed is that made by the artist in imitation of the carpenter's bed. Thus, the artist's bed is twice removed from the truth. The imitators can only touch on a small part of things as they really are, and not attain the truth of God's creation or "things-in-themselves."

Originality does not merely mean producing something *new*, because in one sense, as the wise Solomon said, "There is nothing new under the sun." Originality does not mean being different from other people. Originality could also mean producing something out of one's own inner resources. "It does not matter whether it coincides with what somebody else produced fifty or a hundred or a thousand years ago....If we produce it from our own inner resources...it is spontaneous and it is original," writes Sanghrakshita.

Although the creative mind is inspired and motivated from within, this can happen in two ways. Motivation and inspiration may be from the psychic or *kama-manasic* nature. Many books, ideas, forms

of dance, paintings, poetry, though original, are mediocre in nature. The higher impulse or inspiration which enables an artist to create a masterpiece or a scientist to make a discovery, comes when our every-day mind temporarily disconnects itself from *kama*. A poet, a scientist or an artist gets flashes of intuition, when his mind becomes receptive and porous to the influences from his higher nature. There is a temporary conjunction of *manas* with *buddhi*. Such creativity is rare, as expressed in *Light on the Path*: "The days of literature and of art, when poets and sculptors saw the divine light, and put it into their own great language—these days lie buried in the long past with the ante-phidian sculptors and the pre-Homeric poets."

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the Nineteenth-century British scientist Sir Francis Galton, used the term "genius" to designate creative ability of an exceptionally high order. Talent refers to a native aptitude for some special kind of work and implies a relatively quick and easy acquisition of a particular skill. Genius involves originality, creativeness, and the ability to think and work in areas not previously explored and thus to give the world something of value it would not otherwise possess.

The seeds of spiritual knowledge, art, science, agriculture and architecture exist in the divine nature of man, burnt into imperishable centre of his consciousness, by the divine Instructors, 18 million years ago. These exist as *innate* ideas. Just as for the light to shine forth we need to clean the soot on the glass covering by which it is surrounded, so also, for the manifestation of these ideas, we need to purify the layers or sheaths or vehicles of the soul.

H.P.B. sums up the idea in the article, "Genius." What is the difference between the ordinary man, an idiot and a genius? The Ego in each of these cases is of the same essence and substance. No Ego differs from another Ego, in its essential nature. That, which makes one person a great individual and another a silly person is the capability of the brain and body to transmit and give expression to the light of the *Inner man* within, writes H.P.B. The physical body is an instrument, while the Ego is the performing artist. She

points out that even the great Violinist Paganini cannot bring out the melody if the violin is broken or if the strings are strung too loose or, too tight. The instruments of the Ego are the body and the brain.

H.P.B. writes that there are people who never think with the higher faculties of their mind at all and there are those who think even upon ordinary matters from that higher plane. “The person who is endowed with this faculty of thinking about even the most trifling things from the higher plane of thought has, by virtue of that gift which he possesses, a plastic power of formation, so to say, in his very imagination.” Whatever he thinks about, his thoughts will be more intense than the thoughts of an ordinary person, and by this very intensity, it obtains the *power of creation*. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

To achieve the desired result, we need to *picturise*, i.e., form a clear mental picture of what we want. Mr. Judge says that trained Imagination can produce an actual image or form in the Astral substance which works as a mould. “It is therefore the King faculty, inasmuch as the Will cannot do its work if the Imagination be at all weak or untrained.” (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 148)

Creativity is the manifestation or expression of latent skills, potentialities or ideas from within, without. “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free,” said Michelangelo. The true Self is hidden and covered over by “wall upon wall of gross flesh,” the sheaths of the soul. We must each become an artist and using our power of choice, will and imagination, carve or cut away, all that which is out of sync with the contours of this Real Self, the Divine Angel. Creativity may be regarded as an impulse towards self-transformation and spiritual progress. This creative process stretches over several lifetimes. In each life as we grow, keeping the ideal before us, we carve ourselves. A spiritually regenerated sage may be considered as a true genius, who has created or transformed himself anew in the image of the Divine.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT SHEDDING OF EGOISM

A COWHERD while returning home with his cows found a saint sitting under the roadside tree plunged in meditation. Something in the face and attitude of the saint made a deep impression on him, and he decided to ask the saint for being initiated into spiritual practice. When he made his prayer to the saint, the latter looked at him and asked whether he could come next day with something which was inferior to himself. The cowherd agreed and on reaching home decided to take one of his cows with him the next day. With this object he selected a cow and as he was going to tie it in a separate place from the rest of the cows in order that it might not be, through mistake, taken away to the field for grazing the next morning, the cow asked him why she was being segregated. The cowherd thereupon told her of his decision and the reason why she would be wanted the next morning, she being an animal inferior to man. The cow was greatly incensed and said, “What do you mean by saying that a cow is inferior to man? The cow is the mother of mankind and is revered by every human being. Is it possible for man to live without cow’s milk? How then do you call me inferior to yourself?”

The cowherd could not answer this argument and he thereupon decided to take something else to the saint next day. He went to a field and thought that he would take a tuft of grass which must surely be inferior to man. As he was going to cut off a tuft of grass, the grass asked, “Why are you cutting me at night when nobody cuts grass?” The cowherd again explained the object with which he was cutting the grass. The grass then said, “You know, I am the food of all cows and they will give milk only when they are fed on me and you derive your nourishment from the cow’s milk. How is it then, that I am considered inferior?” The cowherd again, could not reply to his line of argument. So he gave up the idea of taking grass.

He made several attempts to find something inferior to himself and gradually began to consider himself as the most humble being

on earth; and he thought that he would after taking a bath in the river inform the saint that he had been unable to find anything inferior to himself. The next morning as he was taking his bath in the river he found lumps of night soil floating in the water. Then he thought this thing must be inferior to himself in every respect. Accordingly he tried to remove a part of a lump of night soil with the help of a leaf but as he was trying to do so, the lump suddenly exclaimed, “Do not touch me. I do not wish to be touched by you.” When the cowherd asked why, it replied, “You know that I was originally the best of fruits and other kinds of food, and the best of sweets and other offerings made to deities in temples, and it is only after these offerings were eaten by human beings that they have been reduced to my present condition. Mankind alone is responsible for so much humiliation inflicted on me and I do not want your contact for a second time lest worse fate befall me.”

This confirmed the cowherd’s belief that nothing was inferior to himself. He, therefore, finished his bath, went to the saint and said, “Revered Sir, I am convinced that I am the lowliest being on earth and I have not, therefore, been able to bring anything inferior to myself.” The saint found that the cowherd had realized that egoism must be got rid of before spiritual initiation could begin. He, therefore, initiated the cowherd into spiritual practices. He passed for a great saint in later age.

[Taken from *Vedanta Through Stories* by Swami Sambuddhananda, July 1950]

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It is said that the two most potent enemies to fight in the spiritual battle and last to get conquered are sexual desire and egotism. Between these two, egotism, pride or the sense of separateness is the most difficult to surmount. One who aspires to acquire spiritual knowledge must cultivate humility. “Be humble, if thou would’st attain to Wisdom, Be humbler still, when Wisdom thou hast mastered,” says *The Voice of the Silence*.

Egotism or pride has many strongholds. If it is conquered in its gross aspect, it reappears in its subtle aspect. There are many stories of sages and spiritually advanced beings who, even after making great progress, display pride or egotism. It may surface as “holier than thou” attitude or as pride for one’s intellectual, psychic or spiritual achievements. Thus, a person who does not eat meat, lives simply and studies scriptures and philosophies but shows contempt for those who eat meat and do not read scriptures, who feels pride in accepting things only after careful analysis while others accept them blindly, and who does not have patience with those who are not quick to understand recondite matters, is uncharitable. His nature is cold and astringent. This is spiritual darkness. The identification with one’s knowledge or ability is certainly not the sensual or sensuous desire but there is attachment to a particular mode of thinking and living. He considers himself superior to those others who do not analyze things as he does. This identification with one’s abilities is difficult to overcome. It is far easier to overcome fleshly appetites than overcoming subtle desires of mind.

We justify vivisection and animal experiments, saying that they are for the benefit of humanity. Prof. C. S. Lewis argues that it is not right that one species should suffer for the happiness or comfort of another. If human beings claim their right to torment animals, just because they are higher than animals, by that very superiority they should be better than the beasts and abstain from inflicting pain. If we must torture them in order to improve human life or relieve human pain, it is our grave responsibility to live a life of such superior order as to justify the sacrifice of those animals. Such a justification based on “superiority” could be dangerous, as tomorrow we may feel no qualms in torturing and killing human beings whom we consider inferior! It has happened in the past. Some Germans thought they were the only true Aryans and superior to the Jews. The White race considered itself superior to the Black. The civilized man thinks himself superior to a savage. In India, a Brahmin felt justified in ill-treating a Harijan and called him “untouchable.”

The “Inferior people” or “little people” is a term of several connotations. The phrase is often used for petty-minded folk, who hinder humanity’s advance. They do not cry “Heresy!” when encountered with free thinkers and the non-conformists, as in dark centuries. But in politics and in exclusiveness in caste or creed, the assumption that our views are the right views and all others wrong seems only a little less strong than the stand taken by those who burnt at stake the heretics. The “little people” in this sense are very many and the broad-minded and the tolerant are very few. We should not feel confident that we belong to this nobler minority. Though contacting broad and tolerant teachings of Theosophy helps us towards becoming non-parochial, we may not be sure that we are free from prejudice.

To be broad-minded, understanding and tolerant, should be the goal of all who call themselves Theosophists. To the extent that we fall short of that goal, are we not among the “little people”? For, inevitably, the philosophy of Theosophy is judged by its exponents. A friend of one student of Theosophy, when he was told by a third person, of this student’s interest in Theosophy, spontaneously remarked: “Well, I know nothing about Theosophy, but if that is what he believes in, I respect it.” Could such spontaneous tribute be paid to all of us who are students and even exponents, according to our ability, zeal and understanding, of the Teachings? If it could not, should we not ask ourselves, “Are we, perhaps, some of the ‘little people’?” And if the answer is in the affirmative, must we not make an earnest effort to widen our sympathies, to deepen our understanding, and to become living exemplars of the philosophy we study and try to promulgate? (*The Theosophical Movement*, September 1964)

In his story, “Her Lover,” writing about the prostitute who had been isolated by the people who lived around her, out of a false sense of superiority, Maxim Gorky ironically remarks:

And who are the fallen classes, I should like to know?
They are, first of all, people with the same bones, flesh and

blood and nerves as ourselves. We have been told this day after day for ages. And we actually listen....Or are we completely depraved by the loud sermonizing of humanism? In reality, we also are fallen folks, and so far as I can see, very deeply fallen into the abyss of self-sufficiency and the conviction of our own superiority. But enough of this. It is all as old as the hills—so old that it is a shame to speak of it.

Once we *realize* that God shines in all but he does not shine forth equally in all, the egotism melts into nothingness.

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STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA OCCULTISM OF GOOD COMPANY—I

[Adapted from the Lectures on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, delivered at One West Sixty Seventh Street, New York City, 1927-28.]

THE TITLE of the Tenth Discourse of the *Gita* is “Yoga through the Universal Divine Perfections.” In Sanskrit, it is called *Vibhuti Yoga*. *Vibhutis* are the glories or splendours of a nature that has perfected itself from the spiritual point of view. While the Fourth Discourse deals with the Teaching, the Tenth Discourse deals with the Great Teachers. In the Tenth Discourse we are told how we can offer sacrifices of all our activities in every-day life to the Great Teachers or the Great Masters. Thus, from the Teachings we naturally come to the Teachers. In the Ninth Discourse we were told specifically to dedicate and consecrate our whole existence to the highest of all ideals, the great Masters. How this is to be done has been dealt with in the Tenth Discourse.

Through Divine Perfections or *Vibhutis*, we come to the understanding of the great Masters, and also come into the company of those Holy Ones. The Eleventh Discourse of the *Gita* will illustrate to us further this great concept of the Living Masters, by showing to us what the Universal Form of the Lord, or Logos, really is. The seven aspects of the Great Lodge are described. All things in Nature are based on a three-fold principle and then out of this three-fold principle arises the seven fold differentiation. Just as out of three primary colours we get seven colours, so also, out of the three-fold nature of the Lodge of the Great Masters we get seven phases or aspects of this same Lodge. At our own stage of evolution it is not possible to get a conception of the whole of the Great Lodge, with all its seven aspects. Hence, at this stage we try to pursue that aspect which is nearer to us, because it gives us the practical basis to apply in our own life, as we try to tread that spiritual Path leading to the Masters. However, there are also other keys or clues to this discourse which are not being considered.

It can be seen that verses 8 and 9 of this discourse form the very basis of our study, and they are as follows:

I am the origin of all; all things proceed from me; believing me to be thus, the wise gifted with spiritual wisdom worship me, their very hearts and minds are in me; enlightening one another and constantly speaking of me, they are full of enjoyment and satisfaction.

Who are the wise men, spoken of here? The original in the Sanskrit is the *Buddhas*. Krishna lived 5000 years ago, and since Gautama the Buddha lived only 600 years before Jesus, naturally, the reference is not made here to that great teacher. The word Buddha means the Enlightened One. It shows that always there have been in existence in the world, wise men, men who have become enlightened through their own Divine Spiritual Principle, the principle of *Buddhi*, thereby earning for themselves the title of “Buddha.” And this is important for us to consider. Before being born as human beings on this earth, there is a great change in the consciousness of these beings which makes them self-conscious beings. In Theosophical terminology it is called the *lighting up of Manas*, and that is unfolding of the faculty of reason and of true human perception. In the same way, before men become Buddhas or Wise Ones, there is a further change which takes place and which is described as the *second birth*. When the principle of *Buddhi* becomes active in us, there is, so to speak, a further lighting up. Just as great beings, known as the Mind-born Sons of Brahma, or the *Manasa-Putras*, helped us to unfold the principle of *Manas*, so too, those who have developed in themselves spiritual discernment or the quality of *Buddhi*, the great Buddhas, light up in our hearts the quality of *Buddhi*, thus bringing about the second birth, or the spiritual birth.

But first let us consider the idea of those Wise Ones who are full of enjoyment and satisfaction. It was seen in the Ninth discourse that Arjuna had earned for himself the title of “He who findeth no fault” and that was because he had come to the spiritual understanding which enables him never to find fault with the world,

himself, and the laws. Krishna could then reveal to him the supreme mystery and the greatest knowledge. At the beginning of this discourse, Krishna says:

Hear again, O thou of mighty arms, my supreme words,
which unto thee who art well pleased I will declare because
I am anxious for thy welfare.

This expression, “well pleased,” shows us the further step in the ladder of evolution. After having come to the position of finding no fault, we must become actively joyful beings, and the quality of joy is a very important one in the spiritual life. We know it in the Sanskrit as *Ananda* or Bliss, or Supreme Happiness. People sometimes think that to tread the spiritual path, would-be aspirants must become very severe and serious, and that the quality of joy or merriment is excluded from their lives because of their great resolve, but this is a mistake. On the contrary, as we unfold our spiritual perception, we are able to have in our own mind and heart this true quality of permanent joy or permanent blissful peace, and so after having attempted to qualify for the first step, we must now cultivate in ourselves this real pleasure.

Then Krishna says that because Arjuna is “well pleased” he will declare this knowledge, because “I am anxious for thy welfare.” And this also is to be noted. In the last discourse, Krishna has already given the supreme promise that Arjuna will never perish, since he has devoted himself with true love to the service of Krishna. How do these Buddhas or Wise Ones keep up that permanent attitude of real philosophical joy? Krishna says, they do this by constantly speaking of him, and thereby they enlighten one another. This “constantly speaking” of him refers to the promulgation by these Wise Ones, of all races and all times, of the knowledge or existence of that Great Lodge of Masters. It also refers to the describing of those Buddhas, as to the qualities and real natures of these Masters, and it is by thus promulgating the knowledge, they require, that they further unfold the spiritual quality of *Buddhi* in Themselves. What happens to these Wise Ones who keep up that constant

promulgation and effort to enlighten the minds of their people? Krishna proceeds to give the method by which he really unites Himself to them. He says:

To them thus always devoted to me, who whorship me
with love, I give that mental devotion [*Buddhi Yoga*] by
which they come to me. For them do I out of my compassion,
standing within their hearts, destroy the darkness which
springs from ignorance by the brilliant lamp of spiritual
discernment.

In verse 29 of the Ninth Discourse, we read the words of Krishna:

I am the same to all creatures; I know not hatred nor
favour; but those who serve me with love dwell in me and
I in them.

And here he repeats the same promise, putting it a little differently, for he says, “those who worship me with love.” Both the cases, the service and worship with love, involves real love, which simply means true devotion, or real love for the Masters, to whom we have dedicated our lives. There cannot be true progress and growth in the spiritual path without it. It is only when that flame of devotion is kept alive in our own hearts that Krishna can come within the heart, and stand within it, as the living figure and Teacher, and because of that union which is made in the heart of the disciple himself, is it possible for all darkness to be dispelled, and for the lamp of spiritual discernment to be kindled forever and ever, enabling the disciple to show the same light to other human beings, along the road.

This is the exact corresponding promise to that mentioned in the Ninth Discourse. This is true companionship, the idea of this union through mental devotion, or *Buddhi-Yoga*. This union is the conjunction, in each one of us, of the principle of *Manas*, or reason, with the principle of *Buddhi* or Spiritual Discernment—for *Buddhi*, without being united to the higher faculties of *Manas*, is in a state of passivity in human beings. To become active, self-conscious, it needs the help of the Higher *Manas*, or the higher faculties of *Manas* to unfold. On the other hand, *Manas* alone, without union with *Buddhi*,

is also not able to unfold, but becomes selfish, and has no real power of true enlightenment, of intuition and discernment. This change in consciousness once gained, is the second birth, and because of this union in our own hearts, between *Buddhi* and *Manas*, it is then possible to achieve the other union between our own heart and the heart of the Living Teacher. Thus, there are two great classes of companionship referred to here, and each of these is in its turn dual, and manifests in a two-fold way. We have the companionship between the disciple and his Master, and because of this great companionship immediately arises that other companionship of the same type, which is the relationship between that disciple and all other co-students and co-disciples. Then there is the second class of companionship, the union within ourselves between the principles of *Manas* and *Buddhi*, and because of that union and companionship arises another companionship that makes of our own personality the friend and the companion of the real Self, so that the personality no longer interferes with the activities of the Spiritual Self, but has become its close intimate friend and co-worker.

The highest possible attainment for human beings, is this two-fold companionship with the Master and with our co-students, because it has been established within our own hearts, between *Buddhi* and *Manas*, between the personality and the Self. But how is this companionship to be achieved? The last discourse mentioned that the first step on the spiritual path is to make the supreme resolution, of finding the Masters, and of the service of Humanity. It simply means that in us has sprung up the desire for the company of the Holy Ones, and from that point on, all our efforts must be bent on keeping alive that one desire in our own hearts. This desire, this supreme resolve, cannot be kept alive throughout numberless incarnations and experiences of all kinds, unless we understand the doctrine of good company—the occultism of true companionship, and endeavour to apply this great doctrine in our own lives.

(To be concluded)

ON SACRED PLANTS

III

MOST SACRED plants have mythological and religious associations. They are mentioned in the Vedas and *Puranas*. For instance, according to the *Puranas*, once a battle broke between Lord Siva and demon Jalandhara. It was the battle between the two equally matched warriors. In fact, it was the battle between chastity of two chaste women—Parvati, the wife of Siva, and Vrinda, the wife of demon Jalandhara, because each warrior was protected by the chastity of his wife. Victory was possible only by spoiling the chastity of either of the women by the opposing warrior. The gods would not commit the heinous crime of spoiling the chastity of Jalandhara's wife. However, thinking that by spoiling the chastity of Parvati he could defeat Lord Siva, Jalandhara approached Parvati in the guise of Siva. But Parvati recognized him and ended his guise. She signalled Lord Vishnu that it was now possible to spoil the chastity of Jalandhara's wife and so Vishnu approached Vrinda in the guise of demon Jalandhara, who could not recognize him and thus lost her chastity. However, when she realized what had happened, she cursed Lord Vishnu to turn into stone, grass, tree and plant. Since then, *Salagram stone*, *Kusa-grass*, *Tulsi* (basil) *plant* and *Pipala tree* are worshipped as incarnations of Lord Vishnu. In another version of this story, Vrinda immolated herself in her husband's pyre, but Vishnu ensured that she got incarnated in the form of Tulsi plant on the earth. She is supposed to have gained the status of a goddess, while her earthly form is the Tulsi plant.

According to the story in the *Ramayana*, at the end of the battle between Rama and Ravana, Sita had to undergo the fire ordeal to prove her innocence and chastity. But even then Rama refused to accept her. Sita felt humiliated and angry. She, being the daughter of Earth prayed to the Earth to receive her back, and so it is said that the earth opened up where Sita was standing and she was buried beneath. Her son Kusha ran to save her but he could only catch her

hair, and while Sita was buried, her hair remained on the surface, which later turned into grass, and has been named after Sita's son, Kusha.

The Kusha (or Kusa) grass, regarded as personification of Lord Vishnu, is used in all religious ceremonies and is considered to possess purifying properties. The Sanskrit word *kusha* means sacred, and is called the *grass of lucky augury*, possessing great occult properties. It is also known as *Darbha*, often a name given to dry Kusha grass.

The Kusa grass (*Poa Cynosuroides*) is the grass which grows in brackish salty water near river estuaries. The grass has long leaves, which grow in pairs and have sharp edges. Hence, Kusa signifies sharpness or acuteness, and is the root for the Sanskrit word for "expert," *i.e.*, *kusala*. It symbolizes discernment. It is considered to be good conductor of phonetic vibrations, so that while performing rituals, the priest holds a bunch of grass in his hand with the tip pointing down to the jar of water below, so that vibrations of the chanted mantras carried by the grass penetrate into the jar and make the water pure and holy. Water is sprinkled with the tip of Kusa grass where ritual is to be performed, to clean the place. A seat of Kusa grass covered with skin or cloth is the proper seat for meditation. During an eclipse, *Darbha* is used to cover food articles to protect them from the harmful ultraviolet radiation. Since it possesses special properties and is used in holy functions, it is plucked only on the day next to full moon, with chanting of a special *mantra*. (*Bhavan's Journal* November 15, 2008)

In the Sixth Chapter of the *Gita* a person who wants to meditate is advised to make the seat of Kusa grass. Some commentators have said that this is a description of a magnetically arranged seat and that Kusa grass is laid on the ground, the skin on the grass and the cloth on the skin. Probably, Kusa grass retains the good magnetism generated during meditation. The Kusa grass possesses several medicinal properties. It is used in Yunnan as a drug for treating snakebites. It is recommended by Sushruta as a cure for urinary disorders.

Among Hindus, a form of Basil, called Tulsi is worshipped as an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi. Tulsi is Sanskrit for "the incomparable one." This plant is believed to sanctify and guide to heaven, all those who grow and worship it. Tulsi is used as a purifier during rituals and also to ward off evil. The devotees of Vishnu use rosaries (or *japamalas*) made from Tulsi stems or roots. Tulsi is regarded as an environment purifier. Tulsi petals mixed with water are given to the dying, so that their souls may reach heaven.

Many Hindus have a Tulsi plant in front of their houses. Tulsi has amazing medicinal properties. It can cure insect bites, gout, muscular aches and pains, rheumatism, bronchitis, coughs, sinusitis, flatulence, nausea, colds, fever, and other infectious diseases. Holy basil is said to relieve anxiety, depression, fatigue, insomnia, and nervous tension. Tulsi has been used in Ayurvedic medicine, and regarded as an "elixir of life," that promotes longevity.

Every nation had its sacred tree, with its peculiar characteristics and occult properties. One such tree of importance is the Oak tree, associated with the highest God of the particular pantheon—with Greeks it was Zeus, with Italians Jupiter, with the Norse Thor, etc. The Druids held Oak and mistletoe in high esteem. They performed none of their sacred rites without Oak leaves.

One such mythical figure or god in relation to mistletoe was the Norse god Baldur, the son of the great God Odin in the Scandinavian myth. Baldur, states H.P.B., is the well-beloved God of goodness, who alone is without sin. He is killed by the crafty Loki. Frigg, the mother of the gods, entreated all the animate and inanimate creatures not to kill the well-beloved. But, of course, she forgot to mention it to "the weak mistletoe bough," and so Loki made a dart of this mistletoe and put it in the hands of blind Hodur who killed Baldur with that dart.

James Frazer mentions in *The Golden Bough* that the mistletoe is worshipped by the Celtic Druids, who believe that anything that comes from Oak is sent from heaven. The mistletoe is not found easily, but when found they gather it with solemn ceremony, on the

sixth day of the waxing moon, which is supposed to be the day when the moon is full of vigour. A priest clad in white climbs the tree and cuts with golden sickle the mistletoe that is gathered in a white cloth. It is used as a remedy against all poisons. It was a cure for epilepsy, sterility in women, ulcers, etc. The mistletoe was a mystic plant in several ancient religions and mythologies. According to the myth, Baldur could not be killed by anything in heaven or earth, save the mistletoe. As long as mistletoe remained on the Oak tree, Baldur was not only immortal, but also invulnerable. Now if we suppose Baldur was the Oak then we understand the meaning. The mistletoe was believed to be the seat of life of the oak, and as long as the mistletoe was intact, so was the Oak. The Oak is deciduous and in winter, when divine life has ceased to animate the branches, it survives in the mistletoe. So, when the sacred tree had to be burned, they began by breaking off the mistletoe. If the Oak is taken to represent the human being, then the mistletoe would be his heart. The invulnerable Baldur is the personification of the Oak, bearing mistletoe, explains Frazer.

Rudolf Steiner perceived the striking similarity and parallel between cancer growth and the life cycle of the mistletoe, and introduced the latter in cancer therapy in the 1920s. Unlike other plants and trees, the mistletoe does not obey the normal biological rhythm in nature and asserts its autonomy. It has an inherent tendency of indefinite growth and proliferation in its leaves, flowers, berries, and also has the capacity to overcome this tendency through regulated growth. It eats up tumour-like protuberances on the host-tree. This intuitive perception led to scientific research and mistletoe extracts are now used in cancer therapy.

The book, *Flowers: Their Spiritual Significance*, published by Sri Aurobindo Society, mentions several flowers with their botanical names and their spiritual significance. The book points out that very rarely the common names or botanical names given to flowers represent their true meaning. The Mother has given spiritual names to nearly eight hundred flowers. In several cases, the name given

by the Mother is very much in harmony with the common name given traditionally, or the use to which a flower is put, especially in worship. The lotus, the flower of the Gods, is named by the Mother the “Avatar or the Divine Consciousness.” *The Theosophical Glossary* mentions that it is believed that a “blue lotus” burst forth just before the birth of Gautama Buddha and another before the birth of Tsong-kha-pa. *Nila Udumbara* or “blue lotus” is a lotus of gigantic size, and is regarded as a supernatural omen whenever it blossoms, for it flowers once every three thousand years. Thus, Arhans and sages are rare and are born at midnight hour just like the blossom of the Udumbara tree.

The name given by the Mother to Tulsi is “Devotion.” Siva, the eternal ascetic, is offered the wild Dhatura flower which the Mother called “Tapasya.” The Sunflower, forever facing the sun, is named “Consciousness turned towards the Divine.” The Mother says that every flower has its special significance. Every flower carries with it a very special vibration, and that through those vibrations she has been able to perceive the quality that the flower represents, and which enables her to say something about the significance of a particular flower.

“I give you flowers,” the Mother once told a *sadhak* (aspirant), “so that you may develop the Divine qualities they symbolize.” For the devotees in the Ashram, flowers are the language of their inner communication with the Mother. If flowers given are supposed to symbolize silence, they would help the receiver in realizing silence, in proportion to his receptivity.

The book contains an excerpt from Gerald Durrell’s book, *My Family and Other Animals*, which suggests that flowers speak and communicate but we can hear them only if we are attuned to them. Flowers have personality, and they are different from each other, just as people are. The excerpt seems to suggest that keeping certain kind of flowers with certain others could be fatal. For instance, roses would begin to wither if kept in the same vase as daisies. H.P.B. mentions (*Isis*, I, 210) that there exists a mysterious sympathy

between the bodies of plants, animals, and humans. For instance, Vine feels natural antipathy towards cabbage but sympathy towards the olive-tree.

Certain flowers can play a very useful role in supporting physical health. A powerful remedy for fatigue or lack of energy is the flower named “Life Energy” (Florist’s Chrysanthemum). Just holding these flowers can revive one’s energies, while meditation or concentration on them can relieve even a prolonged condition of exhaustion due to physical or psychological stress.

Symbolically and allegorically, lotus flower occupies a place of prominence in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religion, art and literature. In the Vedas, lotus was regarded as the divine flower and symbolized purity and immortality, untainted by sin. Like the lotus leaf and flower, though floating on the waters, remain untainted by water, a spiritual aspirant must be *in* the world, doing his obligatory duties, but not be *of* the world.

This mysterious and sacred plant has been considered from time immemorial a symbol of the Universe, in Egypt as well as in India. In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 58) H.P.B. mentions that the lotus symbolizes Kosmos and also man. Lotus typifies the life of man and the Kosmos, because the roots of the Lotus plant are in the mud, while its stalk passes through the water, spreading its flower in the air above. The root of Lotus sunk in the mud represents material life, the stalk passing through the water represents astral, psychic or mental world, and the flower floating on the water and opening to the sky is an emblem of spiritual being.

It is found that the seeds of lotus contain in them miniature of the future plant, which means that spiritual prototypes of all things exist in the immaterial world before these become materialized on Earth. The seeds of all phanerogamous plants, such as Lotus and Oak, contain the plant in the embryo form. The idea underlying this symbol is the emanation of the objective from the subjective.

(To be concluded)

THE POWER OF PEACE

“BLESSED are the Peacemakers,” it was said in the Sermon on the Mount. Who are the true peacemakers? Not only or chiefly those who may offer their good offices as go-between to find a basis of agreement between conflicting parties, though these do have their place in tangled world affairs. Is not he a true peacemaker who has established peace in himself and radiates it, however, obscure and unknown he is, in a harassed and troubled world? Does not such an individual, patient and modest, harmonious in thought, calm in action, quiet in speech, fill his current with influences potent for healing enmities and encouraging good will?

It is recorded in the *Gospel according to Mark* that when the ship on which Jesus lay sleeping was threatened by a great storm his followers awakened him,

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was great calm....

And they...said one to another, what manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? (*Mark*, IV.39, 41)

This calming of the tempest is called a miracle—a miracle only to those who can conceive the possibility of transgressing the eternal laws of nature. It proves to others, if the incident is correctly reported—and it is given also in another Gospel—that the Christian Teacher possessed knowledge of those laws and the power which such knowledge gives.

Such knowledge and such power are not yet ours, each of us can calm the tempest that arises ever and anon within ourselves. Do not our anxious and rebellious thoughts, our selfish, turbulent, emotions and desires, sometimes rise to tempest strength, to threaten us with nervous, if not mental shipwreck, or with loss of discrimination from which comes “loss of all”?

The uncontrolled heart, following the dictates of the moving passions, snatcheth away...spiritual knowledge, as the storm the bark upon the raging ocean. (*Gita*, II)

“He that can compose himself,” said Benjamin Franklin, “is wiser than he that composes books.” If we find ourselves tossing at the mercy of agitated thoughts, tempestuous passions, should we not realize the need to calm ourselves and recall and use words of power to quell the turbulence within: “Peace, be still”?

Only with thoughts and emotions quieted can we hear the still small voice of our spiritual consciousness, hear too the cry which inner turmoil silences, that of the sad world’s woe. Then, seeing for what they are and in their due proportions our petty grievances, resentment, even spite perhaps, we can rise above them, calmed, and comforted though shamed in retrospect, remembering how we let a small cloud overspread our sky until it hid the sun. Well has Mr. Judge written:

The great struggle must be to open up my outer self, that my higher being may shine through, for I know that in my heart the God sits patient, and that his pure rays are merely veiled from me by the many strivings and illusions that I bring on outwardly. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, pp. 90-91)

If we find within us the power to quell the inner tempest when it rises—and we can prove that we possess it the next time a mood of wounded pride or dark suspicion or an impulse to take revenge blows up an inner storm—can we not also try to spread around us an atmosphere of calm, peace and good will? The disturbance may be a local one, the state of tension, one to which we may have contributed, if only by withholding from another or from others true philosophic love, the living brotherliness which should evoke a response in kind. Come what may, no sincere aspirant can afford to neglect Mr. Judge’s warning, “*Cast no one out of your heart.*”

We should also remember always that when we meet irritation with irritation we are lending aid and comfort to the enemies of our great Movement, doing those enemies’ work for them. And let us not forget that the hands that smite us are our own. If we have a grievance, then let us ignore it and forget it as fast as we can, meanwhile resisting the temptation to fan the fire and spread it by

seeking the salve of others’ sympathy for our own wounded self-esteem. We are warned in “Musings on the True Theosophist’s Path”:

Do your sighing and crying within you. If you cannot receive the small events of life and their meanings without crying them out to all the world, think you that you are fitted to be trusted with the mysteries? (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No 36*, p. 4)

Burying each offence against ourselves in peace, neither retaliating provocation nor provoking retaliation but “rendering for offence nothing but grace and good”—that is the true spirit of *Satyagraha*, making its appeal, if our own attitude is right, to the better nature of another. Even if the response is slow in coming or is not manifest to outward seeming, shall we conclude that it has no effect? In practising it we shall have poured the oil of patience upon troubled waters.

When we find ourselves thinking harshly about others, it may help us to remember the reply of President Lincoln during the Civil War in U.S.A. to a critic who objected to his speaking kindly about the Confederates, his enemies, when he should rather destroy them. He exclaimed, “What Madam, do I not destroy them when I make them my friends?” It is not enemies but enmity that has to be destroyed and by each in himself first of all.

It is helpful also to remember under provocation that Karmic reactions are in terms of the “actual consequences” of our actions, as mentioned in the *Key to Theosophy* (pp. 204-5). The Karma of a wrong action, this appears to imply, will be proportionate to the suffering it causes, or the Karmic consequences of a good one, proportionate to the happiness and harmony which our action may have helped to bring about. If, therefore, refusing to nurse a grievance or even to feel “hurt,” we let the wrongful acts or words of another fall on us—as far as our emotional reactions are concerned—as harmlessly as sparks upon a rock, shall we not thereby be protecting our brother from a worse reaction than he might otherwise receive?

Shri B. P. Wadia advises: “Living the life implies quiet study and reflection....So it seems to me your very first task is not to allow yourself to be disturbed within yourself, whatever others say and do. Do not answer, and then you will not retaliate. Listen—it entails only a loss of time—and then go on the Right Way which is self-chosen. Inner living is your most pressing need. Without that you will be caught in the maze of irritation, depression and defeatism; you will be lost. So, it is imperative that you deepen your present effort at living the Life. Go to the Inner Ruler more and more; even a few minutes of repeated inner retirements will prove a source of strength.”

An important concept in Lao Tzu’s philosophy is that of *wu-wei* which means “absence of action.” The doctrine of inaction advocates “resist without resisting,” which is the plan of quiet passive resistance. Retreat within your own heart and there keep firmly still. Says Lao Tzu: “The best soldiers are not warlike; the best fighters do not lose their temper.” There is a Chinese story told by Dr. Lin Yutang. There was a man who used to raise fighting cocks for the king. After ten days had passed, the king asked if his cock was ready for a fight. “Not yet,” replied the man, “the cock is still very impulsive and haughty.” After another ten days the king asked again and the reply was, “Not yet. He still reacts to noises and shadows.”

After another ten days had passed, the king asked again and this time the reply was, “Not yet. His eyes still have an angry look, and he is full of fight.” After another ten days, the man said, “He is about ready. When he hears other cocks crow, he does not even react. You look at him and he appears to be a wooden cock. His character is whole now. No other cock will dare to fight him but will run away at first sight.”

When a person develops inner strength, inner integrity, total harmlessness, and therefore, total absence of provocation, he is able to subdue his opponent without effort. Henry David Thoreau and Gandhiji followed “non-violent non-cooperation” and were largely successful.

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: In the *Key to Theosophy*, one of the reasons given for opposition to Theosophical teachings is: “Selfishness is essentially conservative, and hates being disturbed.” What does it mean?

Answer: 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.” Theosophy entered the arena and challenged, not just Science and Religion, but its challenge was and is to the whole of humanity. Theosophy has been described as the philosophy of rational explanation of things. Some of the religious dogmas, rituals and ceremonies have been accepted because people want easy and quick solution to their problems. Selfishness in the abovementioned statement means seeking and accepting the teachings which are advantageous to one’s self. It denotes utilitarian approach to religion, philosophy and spirituality. The attitude has been summed up very well by Prof. C. S. Lewis when he writes, “We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it is there for emergencies but he hopes he will never have to use it.” Human tendency is to explore all the worldly and other-worldly means to escape from the troubles and suffering and only as a last resort turn to rational explanation of things—the “why” and “how” of existence.

The priest class of every religion encourages the gullible devotees to perform austerities, sacrifices and ceremonies, to go on pilgrimages or to undertake fasts, promising in exchange the heavenly or other-worldly rewards. It suits people because it is easier to practice rituals, penances and offerings than to understand and apply the deep moral,

social and philosophical tenets of religion.

People prefer to believe in a personal God with whom one can have a relationship, and who can be prayed to and propitiated. People prefer to believe in deathbed repentance, wherein the person confesses his sin to a priest and the mere act of confession wipes away the sin and its consequences. Likewise, it is advantageous to believe in the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement, in which the sinner repents and believes that Christ the Savior died on the Cross for humanity, and therefore, one who believes in the blood of Christ can be absolved of all future punishment. Thus, selfishness and weakness of human nature prefers to believe and accept religious tenets of vicarious atonement, intercession, forgiveness of God and death-bed conversion. The alternative to these tenets is the Theosophical doctrine of Karma—doctrine of responsibility, which offers no shelter for culpable actions. For the evil-doer, the results of his evil deeds continue to exist and the suffering caused to others by his wickedness is not blotted out. A Hindu prefers to have a Pandit interpret for him the *Shastras* and suggest an antidote for his mistake, crime or evil deed. Instead of facing the consequences in pain for having killed a cat, is it not easy to believe that by making a cat of gold or silver and offering it to the deity the sin is wiped away?

The philosophy of Theosophy is iconoclastic, and necessitates coming out of one's comfort zone. Iconoclasm relates not only to breaking of images, but also to attacking cherished beliefs, which include dogmatic and narrow concepts of God, life, heaven and hell. One may desist from giving right ideas in place of dogmas and false beliefs, out of fear of causing pain. But "the day of man's childhood as an immortal being has passed away. He is now grown up, his mind has arrived at the point where it must know, and when, if knowledge be refused, this violation of our being will result in the grossest and vilest superstition or the most appalling materialism. . . . Tell the truth, but do not force it. If even a pious soul should lose the historical Jesus Christ and see instead the glorious image of the Self in every man, that were a gain worth all the pain

the first rude shock might give. . . . The change from dogma or creed to a belief in law and justice impartial will bring perhaps some tears to the soul, but the end thereof is peace and freedom," writes Mr. Judge.

Question: How can I bring a loved one to Theosophy? She cannot be made to understand the philosophy, yet she is sweet and virtuous.

Answer: "No one was ever converted into Theosophy." Also, Mr. Crosbie says, "Theosophy is for those who want it." Each comes to Theosophy through inner conversion, and remains faithful to it, for a short or long time, by sustaining himself with the energy of self-conversion. Next, it is merely one's assumption that this loved one or for that matter any one, cannot be made to understand Theosophy. Theosophy is for all. It teaches children to grow and mothers to rear them and fathers to provide for them; it teaches labourers to work and merchants to trade and teachers to educate and rulers to reign and every one to live out his own life. Consider the Image of the Ocean: in it divers go deep to find the pearl of great price; fishermen catch fish, big and small; swimmers enjoy, some buffeting waves and others not venturing far from the shore; and there are those, children and the like who only paddle standing on the shore. There is only one kind of entity whom the ocean will not shelter—the corpses.

Therefore, the loved one can be made to understand Theosophy—that aspect of it for which she is ready. Do not tell her about the rounds and races, *pitris* and *Ah-his* or even about the three fundamentals. Observe and take the line of least resistance: how? Do not fancy that by pointing out her weaknesses to her you will arouse her to an apperception of Theosophy, any more than by praising her goodness and virtues. Seek for her *problems*. If you succeed in finding out do not say—this is your problem and this is its solution. Aid her to formulate the problem, and then to seek the solution. Meanwhile put in her way such Theosophical truths as will arouse her. No student is perfected in his knowledge, so it is well for us all to remember that it is safer, better, and in the long run quicker to memorize and quote Theosophical aphorisms, sayings

and statements. There are some awakening sentences, almost *mantramic* in their effects; and further their constant right use by loyal and devoted workers has given them added power. It would be helpful to use such awakening sentences in one's conversation, though not thrusting them down her throat; she like all human souls, is a free willed being, whose freedom of will must be respected.

What is applicable to the "loved one," is also applicable to any enquirer or new-comer to Theosophy. It has been found useful to initially make a reference to the literature available, in which a Theosophical doctrine has been alluded to, indirectly, in the form of a parable, etc. There are many, who dislike "preaching." Later, once the person learns to appreciate the philosophy of Theosophy, it can be expanded, and deeper aspects of philosophy can be presented.

But often, in the case of loved ones, which may include children and grown-ups, the first step is to inculcate in them the habit of reading good books. Gradually, without forcing, one can help by arousing in them mental hunger. "There are playful minds which never seek knowledge. There are minds so absorbed in their own avocations that they care not about the events of the world or about the woes and worries of mankind. There are sick minds in whom the very sight of a book produces nausea....A truly healthy mind desires and relishes mental food and makes up its menu with even a greater care than the gourmand. He studies regularly and methodically, and derives help from it in discharging his life-duties." (*The Theosophical Movement*, July 1932)

It goes without saying that the force that can hold any enquirer and draw him to the teachings is the inner development of the student himself and that in turn is determined by the extent to which the student has been striving to apply the teachings in his or her own life, combined with sound knowledge of the doctrines and ability to present them in a simple form. Inevitably, people judge Theosophy by its students and exponents, and our actions and our attitudes speak louder than our words.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Can there be Rama without Ravana? Ravana complements Rama. With his *tamasik* and/or *rajasik* features, Ravana stands in contrast to Rama, the epitome of *sattvik* virtues. But Ramayana tradition, which is a collection of numerous Ramayanas, recognizes Ravana as a rounded personality, worthy of respect and recognition as a complex figure. But beyond the universe of the populist narration, there exists a Ravana, a complex personality, who defies the stereotype of the demon. There are as many Ravana's as *Ramayanas*, each one telling a different story, offering a unique perspective. Popular culture has over time reduced the complex renderings of the *Ramayana* to turn Rama and Ravana into mere representations of good and evil.

The earliest "revisionist" reading of the Rama story, perhaps, were the Jain *Ramayanas* like Vimalsuri's *Paumacariya*. In *Paumacariya*, Ravana has been depicted as a noble, learned *Jaina*, who has earned all his magical powers and weapons through austerities and is a devotee of *Jaina* masters. A. K. Ramanujan, the author of the celebrated essay, *Three Hundred Ramayanas*, says, "This Ravana is a tragic figure; we are moved to admiration and pity for Ravana when the *Jainas* tell the story." Many other retellings of the Rama story also take liberties with the story line of Valmiki's *Ramayana*.

As Rama began to be projected as the ideal king of the ideal republic, those in disagreement with the idea would have explored the character of Ravana for a counter-politics. For instance, Periyar EV Ramasami, the modern political ideologue of the Dravidian movement, reads *Ramayana* as a tale of subjugation of the *Dravidians* by *Aryans*. In his polemic interpretation of *Ramayana* he justifies actions of Ravana, giving reasons, and portrays Ravana as a great scholar, a just and brave ruler of character, and protector of his followers. "He is a scholar, a musician, a *Shiva* devotee, who refuses to submit to the rules and hierarchies imposed by the society.

It is, perhaps, this rebellious streak that has attracted non-conformists...to him,” writes Amrith Lal. (*Eye, The Sunday Express Magazine*, August 21, 2016)

Was Ravana, the opponent of Rama in the epic *Ramayana*, good or evil? Ravan is said to have been taught the *Vedas* by his father, Sage Vishrava. He is credited to have written books on medicine and science and possessed an army of aeroplanes such as the “Pushpak Vimana.” According to Theosophy, *Ramayana* is the mystic narrative in epic form, which allegorizes the history of the struggle between the adepts of the Fifth or Aryan Race with the sorcerers of the Fourth or Atlantean Race. Rama is the first king of the divine dynasty of the early Aryans, while Ravana is the symbolical personification of the Atlantean or Lanka race, writes H.P.B. It was a battle of divine forces over lower terrestrial forces. She points out that every line of this epic must be read esoterically and one must have seven keys to understand seven aspects of *Ramayana*. The Aryans were the Solar Gods; while the Atlanteans were the lunar Devas. It is very suggestive that *Manas* (Mind) in man is dual—*lunar* in the lower and *solar* in its higher aspect.

Mr. Judge explains that when the bad Karma of the world goes on increasing with the lapse of ages, it at last produces a creature who is, so to say, the very flower of all the wickedness of the past, counting from the last *Avatar*. He is not only wicked but is also wise, with magic powers of awful scope, and such was Ravana, equally matched in power and knowledge, to the *Avatar*, but the latter wins because he has on his side the *general will of nature*.

Hence, it is not surprising that Ravana was a combination of wickedness, power and knowledge. H.P.B. points out that no one can fail to recognize the Atlanteans of *The Secret Doctrine* in Ravana and the *Rakshasas* of Lanka. It is from the Fourth Race that the early Aryans got their knowledge of wonderful things. One of them is the Mayasabha mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, which was built by Mayasur, an Atlantean, for the Pandavas. The chronology and computations of Brahmin Initiates are based on the works of that

great astronomer and magician, Asurmaya, who was also an Atlantean. The Aryans learnt from the Atlanteans the aeronautics or *Viman Vidya*, and so also their great arts of meteorography and meteorology. “It is from them again that the Aryans inherited their most valuable science of the hidden virtues of precious and other stones, of chemistry, or rather alchemy, of minerology, geology, physics and astronomy.” They were adept in *Ashtra Vidya* (highest magical knowledge).

The Times of India in partnership with a certain hospital in Mumbai observed August 13 as Organ Donation Day to create public awareness and inspire people to pledge their organs. Misplaced religious belief is probably the single biggest hurdle faced by medical social workers in convincing families to donate the organs of their dear ones. The reason for refusing to donate is that their religions do not sanction such an act. To dispel such myths heads of all prominent religions came together on August 1, 2016. Their message was loud and clear: almost no faith in the world speaks against the act of donating organs or entire bodies when it involves saving life.

The founder of the Vedanta Vision, Jaya Row, felt that the reason why organ donation has not picked up in India is because most people do not cultivate the attitude of giving during their lifetime. “From the Vedantic standpoint, the physical body is merely a container that houses us or our personality during the lifetime. At the time of death, it has to be given up.” Elsewhere she mentions that “in organ donation you are donating something that is of no use to you, yet could be a precious life-saver for another.” Talking about myths, Yogacharya Surakshit Goswami said people believe in baseless things, such as, if someone has donated eyes, he or she will be blind in their next birth. “So what about those who donate heart and kidneys? They cannot be born without vital organs,” he said, urging people to think logically.

Irfan Engineer, director of Centre for Study of Society and

Secularism said that Islam has been an ardent believer in organ donation provided three conditions are met. He said, “Organ donation is permitted as long as the gesture saves somebody’s life and is an absolute necessity. There should not be any financial aspect to the noble act, and most importantly, it should ensure the well-being of the donor (in case of live donations).”

According to the nephrologist Dr. Sharad Seth, greater awareness of what families of organ failure patients endure could help the organ movement. The founder of the Gift Your Organ Foundation made an appeal that organ donation must be made mandatory. He argued that no religion comes in the way while accepting the organ, then why should it be so when it comes to donating? (*The Times of India*, August 3, 2016)

We must always strive to relieve misery, but every such attempt can be more effective when it is based on discrimination. Organ transplant requires “live” donors as well as organs retrieved from fresh cadavers. Unchecked, illegal and clandestine financial arrangements often take place in many cases since there is the ever-present possibility of vested interests of the “middle-men,” the private clinics and the so-called “authorization committees.” A startling exposure of “Kidney Trade” in Chennai, a city of India, was published, as a reprint from the Journal of the American Medical Association, in JAMA-India (February 2005).

The moral question of survival in a desperately sick person often comes up for consideration. But survival at what expense? Is it right to keep on prolonging one’s physical existence, at any cost, even if it results in lowering of the quality and life-span of another being—be it man or animal? We, as moral beings, have to answer this question individually, for ourselves and have to accept the personal responsibility of and the consequences to the donor as well as the recipient of another’s organ.

Modern surgeons and physicians, who are apt to view bodily organs purely anatomically, would do well to consider their interrelationships. The modern system of medicine loses much by

not recognizing the astral counterpart of man’s body. In the larger perspective, *how* a person lives is of far greater consequence than *how long* he lives.

Another important aspect is that if science persists in organ transplantation, the transplanted “organs” should be those of a “good” man, and willingly given. We are continuously imparting good and bad psychic impulses to our bodily organs through our thoughts and feelings. So also, “every organ in our body has its own memory...every cell must of necessity have also a memory of its own kind” (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*). The engrafted organs can affect their new owner with thoughts and feelings he had never before experienced. There have been cases where the recipient’s body rejects the transplanted organ. As mentioned in *The Theosophical Movement*, November 1969:

According to a Stanford University psychiatric team, some heart transplant patients become psychotic. They suggest that an anti-rejection drug called “prednisone” may cause psychotic behaviour such as delusions, insomnia accompanied by fear of a murder plot and a belief that the patients had received not only a new heart but also a new personality. Psychiatrists report, too, that there is in general a higher incidence of emotional problems in heart patients than in any other group of surgical patients. (*Science Digest*, July 1969)

Raksha Bandhan is the festival which celebrates love between brother and sister. It is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of Shravan when sisters tie colourful *rakhis* [cotton bracelets] around the wrists of their brothers. *Raksha Bandhan* literally means “knot of protection.” Nowadays, *rakhis* are tied around the wrists of soldiers as well. It is felt that if women and children visit prisons and homes for the elderly and the disabled to forge a bond of sisterly love with the inmates, they can bring a little cheer into their lives. There are legends about enemy kings turning protectors after they

had a change of heart on receiving a *rakhi* sent by the queen of a rival kingdom.

“The noble sentiments of love and care that this festival evokes in men towards women need not be confined to their family or close friends. These feelings must extend to womankind in general, for every woman is a sister or daughter to someone, who cares about their safety. This safety has come under increased threat lately, with horrific cases of sexual assault against women, and even minors... In this context, *Raksha Bandhan* can be harnessed for changing men’s attitude towards women.” More than a century ago, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore organized public celebrations of *Raksha Bandhan* to promote inter-communal harmony in Bengal. We may follow his initiative to help create a caring society where everyone feels secure. (*Purity*, August 2016)

Perhaps in no other country there is a possibility of drawing the minds of the people to soul-life and of establishing social order and amity, through festivals, as in India. Those who understand the inner significance of the festivals can use the form side of festivals by their proper observation to keep alive noble ideas in the minds of the laity. *Raksha Bandhan* is one such festival which can be effectively used to enhance the feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood.

In the recent past, there has been unprecedented increase in the violence against women, especially in India. There are sexual crimes, domestic abuse and harassment of women. There are plenty of practical suggestions to deter sexual crimes, but very few have felt the need to change the mind-set of modern man. The important issue that needs to be addressed is the need to sensitize men. Boys must be taught to respect both girls and women. Parents must not discriminate between sons and daughters but treat them equally. It would indeed be worthwhile to ponder over and popularize the attitude and views of the ancients towards women.