

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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ON SENSITIVITY

SENSITIVITY is the state or quality of being sensitive. Sensitivity is variously described as the quality of being easily influenced or changed by a physical activity or effect. It is an ability to understand other people's feelings and needs and be helpful and kind to them. Thus, sensitivity can be of many kinds. One can be physically, emotionally, psychically and spiritually sensitive.

Physical sensitivity can be understood in relation to our five senses. In all of us the senses are not acutely developed. A sensitive instrument records even the subtlest changes in temperature or pressure. So also there are “Highly Sensitive Persons,” or “Hypersensitive” persons who have heightened sensitivity to their environment. They may be sensitive to changes in temperature, environmental pollution or environmental noise. Psychologists and Psychotherapists try to make it clear that hypersensitivity is not a disorder. A gourmet of food or connoisseur of wine is an expert judge in matters of taste. Such an individual has a highly *refined* discerning palate, and can distinguish one flavour from the other. Then there is Hans Christian Andersen's story, “The Princess and the Pea.” It is the story about a prince who wanted to marry a *real* princess. One evening a young girl stood at the palace door drenched in rains and claiming to be a princess. To test if she was a real princess, the queen removed all the bedding off the bedstead and laid a pea on the bottom; then she took twenty mattresses and laid

them on the pea, and then twenty eiderdown beds (quilts) on top of the mattresses. In the morning, the young girl reported that she could not sleep all through the night because she was uncomfortable, lying on something hard! We are told that nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that.

In contrast, an incident in Ramakrishna Paramhansa's life illustrates spiritual sensitivity. One day Vivekananda put a coin beneath Ramakrishna's bed-sheet and waited. Ramakrishna twisted and turned in discomfort, until the coin was removed. The reason was that Ramakrishna never touched money and any contact with it made him uncomfortable. What he experienced was spiritual discomfort.

The Kashmiri girls making shawls can show three hundred distinct colours, which the dyer of Lyons is unable to make and which *he cannot even distinguish*. H.P.B. remarks that the eye of the Kashmiri girl is able to see a colour which actually exists objectively, but which is imperceptible to the eye of the European person, and hence it does not exist for him. (*Isis*, II, 211)

Highly sensitive persons whose perceptions range beyond the five senses are psychically "sensitive." They are said to have Extra Sensory Perception (ESP), which includes ability to see auras of people, becoming aware of vibrations of anger, depression or cheerfulness, with which the room may be charged. They have developed astral senses. The powers of seeing, tasting, smelling, hearing and the sense of touch are all in the astral body, which is the model body on which physical body is built. Aborigines have acute sense of smell and hearing, which is a kind of extension of the physical senses. They can put their ears to the ground and catch the vibrations of approaching footsteps, and be able to tell how far away the person or animal was.

The inner sense of sight and touch come into play in psychometry. H.P.B. explains in *Isis Unveiled* (I, 182) that psychometry is the faculty which enables a certain class of sensitive persons to receive from any object held in the hand or against the forehead, impressions

of the characters or appearance of the individual. H.P.B. gives a trivial example of psychometry in her article, "Transmigration of the Life Atoms," thus: Let any man give vent to intense feelings of anger, grief or disappointment, under or near a tree, or in direct contact with a stone. Many thousands of years later any tolerable Psychometer will see the man and sense his feelings, from one single fragment of that tree or stone that he had touched. H.P.B. describes a "medium" as a "sick sensitive," born with a peculiar organization. A psychically or passively sensitive person is sensitive to every passing sensation, while a Mahatma is sensitive to the thoughts and feelings and needs of every living creature.

Hypersensitive people have a high level of sensitivity to physical and/or emotional stimuli. Emotional sensitivity is defined as the ease or difficulty with which one responds emotionally to various situations. Some of us are highly sensitive emotionally to our own feelings. We often describe such people as "touchy." Such people are quickly and deeply hurt by insult or criticism, and are overly influenced by what others think about them. Excessive heat or cold hurts bodily sensitiveness. Similarly, feelings which do not suit our temperament hurt us. Some are able to receive personal criticism from friends, while others fly into a rage at a slight phrase which sounds critical. Hurt feelings mean a disturbance in the *Kamic* or desire nature. Hurt feelings are related to the personality whose nature is egotistic. There is self-identifying attachment to one's personality, which includes one's looks, ideas, possessions, skills, etc. Continued emotional upsets made by hurt feelings produce a reaction on the physical body, resulting in neurosis, hysteria, leading to melancholia, and so on. Psychotherapists say that emotionally sensitive people are more vulnerable to anxiety and depression. Some of them tend to be impulsive and reactive, acting on the feeling without thinking. There are those who tend to avoid uncomfortable emotions and/or situations. The way out is to learn to cultivate detached-attachment and impersonality. "All our troubles in life arise from ourselves... we are all parts of the one great whole, and if you try to centre your

mind upon that fact and to remember that those things that trouble you are really due to your own way of looking at the world and life, you will probably grow more contented in mind,” advises Mr. Judge.

Then there are those few who are sensitive to *other people's* feelings and emotions. They are often tuned in to the emotional experiences of other people, so much so that they may experience the emotion that someone else is having. In its positive aspect, we call it empathy, which must be properly understood. Empathy is often described as being in another's shoes, and then keeping it on for some time to get the feel of another's misery, understand the cause, while retaining one's equanimity. *The Voice of the Silence* suggests developing such sensitivity of heart that it carries with it the pain of another till the solution is found: “Let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain; nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed.”

But today, greater number of people are becoming “insensitive” to pain and problems of others. We seem to lack sensitivity to how others feel, or ignore what is happening to others. The psychiatric term for this lack of empathy is, “Empathy Deficit Disorder (E.D.D.).” In our fast-paced, ambitious society, we are so absorbed and pre-occupied with our own interests, emotions, problems or goals, that we never stop to think, what it is to suffer from lung cancer, to be raped, to be cheated, to live in the constant fear of being killed, to be depressed or oppressed so as to be driven to commit suicide, and so on. Dr. Douglas Labier, a psychotherapist says that “E.D.D. develops when people focus too much on acquiring power status and money for themselves at the expense of developing healthy relationships.... They have become alienated from their own hearts and equate what they have with who they are.... The net result is that we do not recognize that we are all one, bound together. We only see ourselves.” Healthy relationship with friends and loved ones is the essential part of mental health, and lack of these essentials of healthy living results sometimes in cruelty and criminality.

The sensitivity of one who desires to walk the spiritual path is

very different. The perception of an emotionally sensitive person is coloured by his emotions and he is unable to “see” clearly or to judge impartially. In *Light on the Path* eyes are called the windows of the soul and ears its gateways or doors; and through them comes the knowledge of the confusion of the world. The disciple is told that “before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears. Before the ear can hear, it must have lost its sensitiveness.” The book explains that “to be incapable of tears is to have faced and conquered simple human nature, and to have attained an equilibrium which cannot be shaken by personal emotions.” Sensitivity is not destroyed, but in fact, becomes acute as we progress. To be incapable of tears does not refer to physical tears, but it refers rather to the stage we reach when we can forget ourselves and our personal reactions in any situation. We are thus able to feel more keenly the enjoyment and suffering of others, because we are not personally involved. A mother suffers with the child but is sufficiently detached to be able to help the child. When one thus learns to be sensitive to pain and pleasure, without being swayed inwardly, he begins to “see” or develop *real insight*.

Along with insight, or “inner seeing,” comes “inner hearing,” and this enables the aspirant to become a real listener, a *Shravaka*. The disciple must begin by training his ears to lose their sensitiveness to earthly sounds and to become more sensitive to the spiritual sounds which will arise from his inner nature; this is the first step towards becoming a *Shravaka*. One has to cease to hear the many. It does not apply only to the useless din of the world but all sensations, pleasant and unpleasant. Hence he is asked to become as deaf not only to the “cries of bellowing elephants,” *i.e.*, to harsh criticism, condemnation which tend to depress or disturb him inwardly, but also to the “silvery buzzing of the golden fire-fly,” *i.e.*, to accolade, praise, approval of others which is pleasant to his ears, and which is likely to make him proud or complacent. *Light on the Path* says that the faculty of intuition can be developed only by one who has learnt to interpret “many” voices and suggestions of the outside world, in

the light of the voice within. When the sounds of the outer, the disharmonious and jarring sounds of the world around, sicken him, only then will he begin to seek for the centre of peace and harmony within himself. The rules laid down in *Light on the Path* enable one to become spiritually sensitive, which purifies and transforms the vehicle into a fit shrine of the god within.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT SHOOTING STAR

SWEET mother, it is said that if one sees a shooting star and at that moment one aspires for something, that aspiration is fulfilled within the year. Is this true?

Do you know what that means? The aspiration must be formulated during the time the star is visible; and that does not last long enough, does it? Well, if an aspiration can be formulated while the star is visible, this means that it is all the time there, present, in the forefront of the consciousness—this does not apply to ordinary things, it has nothing to do with that, it concerns a spiritual aspiration. But the point is that if you are able to articulate your spiritual aspiration just at that moment, it means that it is right in front of your consciousness, that it dominates your consciousness. And, necessarily, what dominates your consciousness can be realized swiftly.

I had the opportunity to make this experiment. Exactly this. The moment that star was passing, at that very moment there sprang up from the consciousness: "To realize the divine union, for my body." That very moment.

And before the end of the year it was done.

But it was not because of the star! It was because that dominated my whole consciousness and I was thinking of nothing but that, I wanted only that, thought only of that, acted only for that. So, this thing which generally takes a whole of lifetime—it is said the minimum time is thirty five years!—before twelve months had passed, it was done.

But that was because I thought only of that.

And it was because I was thinking only of that, that just when the star flashed by I could formulate it—not merely vague impression—formulate it in precise words like this: "To realize union with the Divine," the inner Divine, the thing we speak of, the very thing we speak of.

Therefore, what is important is not the star but the aspiration. The star is only like an outer demonstration, nothing else. But it is not necessary to have shooting star in order to realize swiftly! What is necessary is that the whole will of the being should be concentrated on one point.

[Taken from *Stories told by the Mother*, Part I, and published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.]

* * * * *

Many beliefs and superstitions have arisen by accidental luck or misfortune. If a cat crosses your path, your work will never be done. It is good luck to find four-clover leaf. If an eye lash falls out, put it on the back of the hand, make a wish and throw it over your shoulder. If it flies off, then your wish will be granted. What works in all this is firm faith.

Sometimes superstition arises out of chance connection. B. F. Skinner, a behavioural psychologist, placed a series of hungry pigeons in a cage which had automatic mechanism to deliver food to the pigeons, at regular intervals without any reference to bird's behaviour. He discovered that the pigeons associated delivery of food with whatever action they had been performing at that time, such as, moving the head up and down, thrusting the head between the bars, etc. This experiment seemed to demonstrate a kind of causal connection between the behaviour and the delivery of food. Likewise, we human beings also tend to make causal connections, where none exist. It is quite possible that someone formulated an aspiration while seeing a shooting star, which was fulfilled, and he or she might communicate this fact to others, and then even without first-hand experience, at times, such things are accepted on faith.

Superstition is also associated with folk-lore, fairy tales and myths. For instance, Polish peasants believe a shooting star to be a "latawiec" (pronounced lah-tah-vyets)—the flying one. This was an ethereal spirit which came down from the sky in an endeavour to experience human love.

In the first decades of the Nineteenth century, people in the vicinity of Gora Swietokrzyska (Saint Cross Mount) still believed and recounted the old story of "latawiec." It is as follows:

When a "latawiec" caught sight of a beautiful female he broke the golden thread linking him with the sky and began his journey earthwards. On the way he shone like a beautiful star. As he approached the earth he gradually lost his brightness. An old tale from Mazovia, the district in which Warsaw is situated, says that in his flight through the sky the "latawiec" unbound his golden tresses, and no girl could fail to be dazzled by his brightness; no woman could resist the charm of a "latawiec." The first look at him, the first touch of his hand, paralyzed her will. No longer did she belong to the earth and to her family. She shunned all amusements and eschewed all contacts with her fellow beings. Every day she ran to the spot of the first meeting with the "latawiec," lifting up her eyes in the hope of catching a glimpse of the beloved.

But a female chosen and loved by the "latawiec" never lived long. Her love was vivid, so intense and violent, that bit by bit it drained away all her life force, and she died a lonely death, deserted at the last moment by the "latawiec."

Sometimes a "latawiec" overstayed the time allowed for his earthly visits. If he forgot to return to his heavenly dwelling before the dawn, he lost his divine brightness, and after seven days and three hours died the death of an ordinary mortal. His soul flew back to heaven and never returned to earth; he could never become a "latawiec" again. His soul wept in heaven, grieving after his beloved, and the tears fell on earth as a sign of his love. She was so unhappy after his departure that she died from yearning for him in the place where she had first met him.

Theosophically interpreted, this folklore seems to depict a version of the "descent" into incarnation of the self-conscious Higher Ego, the *Manasaputra*, the Shining Son of the Universal Mind. Its starry brightness is indeed dimmed on earth, but when the mortal personality responds to it, as does the girl to her beloved "latawiec,"

then its mortal life is drained into that of the Higher Ego, and it dies, *i.e.*, it ceases to have any separate self-centred existence.

But when the “latawiec” “overstayed time allowed,” then we have the tragedy of the final “loss of the soul.” When the attraction of the material world is too great, and even the *Manasic* soul becomes so clogged and weighted that it can no longer rise, it sinks to annihilation—a process that is of long duration, as indicated by the seven “days” and three “hours.” The personality too, is lost, lacking the higher principles.

The Divine Soul, the Monad, *Atma-Buddhi*, “grieving” that it has no vehicle through which to express itself, is then, in the next period of manifestation, “cast into the stream of life at the source,” to evolve again through the whole cycle of necessity. Folklore, thus, can be seen to enshrine the most profound truths. (*The Theosophical Movement*, June 1956)

The shooting star may well represent Lucifer, the fallen angel. It is said that Lucifer did not fall alone from Heaven, he brought down with him one-third of angels from heaven, as suggested by *St. John’s Revelation* (12:4). The “fallen angels” are the *manasaputras*, who fall into generation and matter, endowing man with mind and self-consciousness. As H.P.B. points out in the *Secret Doctrine*, Satan, Lucifer or “light-bearer,” is our Mind. It is our Tempter and Redeemer. Hugo’s Lucifer fights a fearful battle with *his own terrible passions* and again becomes an Archangel of Light, after the awful agonies ever conceived by mortal mind.

“Lucifer was once a prince of light, admitted to the councils of the Most High. He fell through pride, and dragged downward in his fall all who worshipped the demon of pride. This is no foolish fable, but a terrible tragedy, enacted at the gates of paradise, in the face of the assembled universe, and re-enacted in the heart of man,” writes Mr. Judge. Pride and ambition are the worst foes of a spiritual aspirant. There are stories of Rishis and sages falling from great height of spiritual advance due to pride.

ENVIRONMENT—INNER AND OUTER

ALL SCHOOLS of thought today recognize the influence, as deep as it is universal, of the environment. For children in schools and for youths in colleges, for clerks in offices and for labourers in factories, for every man and every woman, at work as in recreation, a suitable, congenial environment is of great help in bringing forth that which is the best from within the individual himself.

Each one has an outer environment. Necessary as it is to try to make that external environment as clean, beautiful, peaceful and cheerful as possible, it is much more important to understand that it is possible for us to improve our inner environment. What is more, no change of external environment without a corresponding appropriate transformation in the mind and the attitude of the individual himself or herself will be of lasting benefit. This intimate environment goes with us wherever we go, as the shadow follows the body wherever the body moves.

It is important to recognize that a change of outer environment will not by itself bring about a change in the inner environment. We carry the latter in our brain, in the active cerebrum or passive cerebellum, in our very blood. We ourselves are responsible for the quality of the grooves in our brain as well as for the quality of our blood, because as we think and feel we are impressing our brain and making it more pure or less pure, more sensitive to spiritual truths or less responsive to universal principles. And the same is true of the quality of blood; it is the way we feel that determines that quality. We need to get rid of the wrong notion that it is our birth that determines the quality of our blood, that because we are born in a certain community or in a certain family therefore our blood carries certain inherent tendencies. What is the birth of the body compared to the reality of the Soul within the body? The body is but the instrument of the Soul, the *Dehi*, the Dweller in the body.

Theosophy speaks of two kinds of environment: Besides the external environment that is made up of one’s family, society,

circumstances, etc., there is the Ego and its environment. There is the Self and that is surrounded by various *Kosams* or sheaths—from the most subtle and intangible down to the grossest which is the physical body. Thus, from the occult point of view, “environment” is all that is other than the Self. There are seven sheaths of the soul, which include physical and astral bodies. Depending upon the course of action; thoughts and feelings indulged in by the person, one or the other of the sheaths is trained and developed. The atoms forming the sheaths in one incarnation are attracted back to the Ego in the next life to form the new environment or personality.

Therefore, it is necessary that we recognize ourselves, not as the body, not even as the moral character, not even as the mind or the intellect; first and foremost, let us ask ourselves, “What are we?” We have bodies, characters, minds; but we are not the body, not the character, not the mind; we are above and beyond these tools through which we are working, and as we work through them we improve them or cause them to deteriorate.

Do we not know of people who live in beautiful surroundings, who have everything that the world can give in terms of comfort and possessions, but who themselves are imprisoned by fear or anxiety, by the wants of their body, by their thoughts, their prejudices, so that in spite of the beauty and the harmony of their outer surroundings, within themselves they live in a mean, narrow, petty environment? And do we not know that in the slums of the city a beautiful flower can grow, that diamonds lie buried in the dark depths of the earth, just as sometimes Diamond Souls live buried in the underworld of the cities? That is recognized more and more by our social reformers. A look at the statistics will reveal that slum-clearance enthusiasts often do succeed in removing the slums, but that if there still exist slum minds and characters they will build other slums with their own innate and peculiar difficulties.

So the inner environment has to be changed. Men and women have to become sufficiently self-reliant—reliant on themselves as spiritual Souls—and have to see for themselves that they can change

the contents of their own minds and the quality of their own moral characters. And then the external environment can be permanently changed, improved, purified, harmonized. But the beginning must be made from within, for all things in nature move from within, without. All have had problems, difficulties, pricks of conscience; a change of external environment will not help us to forget or evade these. The only way in which a particular difficulty or a particular pang of conscience can be overcome is by facing it and trying to learn the lesson that it contains. For the most part, when we say that we know that the inner is more important than the outer, that misery and happiness are states of consciousness and that we ourselves make them, it is a superficial recognition. When the dark hours really descend we begin to blame external conditions, other people and circumstances, instead of turning within to ask ourselves whether perchance we ourselves are responsible for the darkness of the hour and if we cannot do anything for the quieting and tranquillizing of the inner turmoil.

Recognition that the inner environment is more important than the outer, must be followed by attempts to improve that which is closest to us, namely, the quality of our own thoughts and feelings. Shall we not do anything about the outer environment? We shall, we must, but since it is more important to change the inner, let us see a few simple facts in reference to that inner change. We all know that we have certain limitations, that there are certain weaknesses and blemishes within our own natures. But we have the power to remove them. Until we test that power we shall never know whether it exists in us or not. The reality of a thing becomes clear only to the one who has tested the power of that reality within himself, in his own consciousness. So what shall we do with our mind, our likes and our dislikes?

The first thing to be noted is that there is something in us that can direct our mind and transform our character. What shall we do in order to improve the mental air that we breathe? When our body is ailing we are ordered to take the body away to some hill-station

where the air is pure and will give the body an opportunity to regain health and vitality. When our mind is suffering from psychic or from mental fever, let us raise the mind from the plane of petty, mundane thoughts, above the clash and turmoil of personal problems, and let that mind breathe in the pure air of universal and fundamental ideas. What is more, let us not wait till our mind is in a feverish state before taking it to the plane of universality. It is recognized that to preserve health is better than to cure a disease after it has already precipitated. Let us train the mind to detach itself from that which is petty and narrow, taking the help of such great spiritual truths as are contained in the scriptures of the ages. Daily reading from sacred and devotional books will help the mind to dwell on a high plane and absorb something of the purity of the ideas upon which it reflects.

Is it too much to give a little time each day to devotional reading? Many will say that they have no time, that there are too many duties! It is a sham excuse. Do we not find time to feed our bodies three times a day or more? And is it not more important from the inner point of view to feed the mind? Let us feed the mind on the spiritual currents of truth itself, and elevate the heart. Let us give a little time to feeding that which is above and beyond the mind, and we shall then find that the Soul is a reality. It sounds like a very simple exercise, but it has to be put into practice regularly, and lack of time is no excuse. It will bring greater understanding, greater compassion for others, and greater strength to be strict with the weaknesses that manifest within ourselves. Our horizon will widen, our point of view will become more impersonal, and that will enable us to have a better inner environment. And if this is being done, we shall know what to do with the outer surroundings.

The outer environment should be used as a mirror to see how to adjust ourselves mentally, morally and emotionally. The external ever reflects the inner, and if we understand that fundamental principle we shall know how to learn not only through unhappiness, but also through happiness. Dependence on external things is not desirable. Material things come and go, and if we cling to the external

we shall find ourselves lacking in self-reliance. Let us learn from that which is beautiful, without allowing ourselves to become so attached to outward beauty that we forget to seek refuge in the Inner Centre which will enable us to appreciate beauty and pleasure, ugliness and pain, at their true value. In every pain and in every pleasure there is a lesson. To adapt oneself to one's environment is to learn the lesson that that environment has to teach, remembering that the important thing, that which is of the nature of reality, is our inner environment.

As one advances on the spiritual path it is very important to learn to adapt oneself to the environment. Adaptability implies detachment, the capacity to be where one is required, and to grapple with the new environment. While Karma gradually unfolds the quality of adaptability in ordinary people, a disciple or a chela hastens the process of mastering his environment. A chela may be and often is, called upon to go anywhere and do whatever is required of him. New physical surroundings raise obstacles, and without the virtue of adaptability failure and frustration result. In developing adaptability, we acquire some knowledge of practical occultism as well as Higher Indifference or *Viraga*.

For an aspirant, adapting to the environment implies learning to work in harmony with co-workers and co-disciples, without allowing the likes and dislikes to influence his behaviour. We should be willing to serve wherever work calls us. Mr. Judge writes:

No matter where we are, the same spirit pervades all and is accessible. What need, then, to change places? We do not change ourselves by moving the body to another *locus*. We only put it under a different influence. And in order to change we must have got to dislike the place we moved from. This is *attachment by opposites*, and that will produce detriment, as does all that disturbs the equilibrium of the soul. (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 10)

Just as we create positive attachment when we like a person or a place, so also we create negative attachment through our dislike.

What we need to cultivate is equanimity towards people, places and circumstances that come to us under Karma. Our likes and dislikes disturb the equilibrium of the soul and prevent it from seeing things as they are.

Mr. Crosbie points out that at times students feel that getting away alone somewhere, regularly, would help to keep one's psychic balance. If we give in to this desire and habit of depending upon the *externals*, our personality demands periodical changes, producing nervous tension that is corrosive and destructive. Our mind is occupied with fancied needs and that in turn reacts injuriously on the body. Further:

True strength lies *within* and can only be aroused and used by ceasing to think that anything in particular of an external nature is *necessary* for us, in the ordinary acceptance of the word. We have our place and our duty to fulfil and perform; externals are our temporary opportunities, and we shall be wise to use these rightly. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 125)

Let us resolve to find that in us which can control both the inner and the outer environments. Let us seek inspiration in the compassion of the Great Ones, and guidance in the knowledge that They exist and give their spiritual knowledge for the benefit of the whole of humanity. All of us as Souls can drink the waters of life which They draw from the Source of pure wisdom and pure compassion. Then we shall be in a position to live at peace in a world full of strife, live purely in a world full of impurities, live with love in our hearts and radiate that love in a world which is so full of hatred. For, "In this world never is enmity appeased by hatred; enmity is ever appeased by Love. This is the Law Eternal." We can overcome strife by peace; that too, is an eternal law. And that peace and that love we can bring forth from within ourselves if we remember ourselves as spiritual Souls, immortal and divine.

SKANDHAS AND VASANAS—SOME REFLECTIONS

II

TO UNDERSTAND *skandhas* and *vasanas*, it is worthwhile understanding the states after death. Immediately following the death of the physical body, the Ego takes the review of the life just ended. As soon as Real Man's task, of "reviewing" the past life is over, the five constituents, minus the physical body and the life energy, pass on to the astral region called *Kama loka*. *Kama loka* is the purgatory of the Christians, the slag-pit of life, where the Ego sheds off the unwanted elements of the last personality, and where there is separation of the lower principles from the Higher. The astral body coalesced with passions and desires, and the record of unwholesome and purely personal thoughts and actions, is left behind in *kama loka*, in the form of *Kamarupic* shell or desire body or *vasana sarira*. The Ego departs to *Devachan* or *Swarga* or Paradise, taking with it the spiritual aroma or noble qualities of the last personality. As the body is destroyed and the five elements (*panchamahabhutas*) from which it is made return to their original form after death, so the *kama rupa* in the *kama loka* dissolves.

After the disintegration of *kama-rupic* shell in *Kama loka*, "the remainder consists of the essence of these *skandhas*, connected, of course, with the being that evolved and had them. . . . Hence they are said to remain until the being comes out of *devachan*, and then at once by the law of attraction they are drawn to the being, who from them as germ or basis builds up a new set of *skandhas* for the new life," explains Mr. Judge (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 109). What we call the essence of the *skandhas* may be regarded as the aroma. If we understand how the *skandhas* are created, then we get a hint as to the meaning of the "essence" of the *skandhas*. Mr. Judge explains that the *skandhas* "are being made from day to day." Every thought that is engendered coalesces itself with an elemental and becomes an entity.

We are continually impressing elementals or "lives," with good

or bad thoughts and creating, what are called *skandhas* or *samskaras* or attributes, from day to day. They are a collection or congeries of “lives” impressed with various thoughts. “The *Skandhas* are the lives *plus* the impulsions that have been given to those lives.... So the *Skandhas* are our tendencies, the quality of force which we have imparted to the various lives in the various planes or departments of nature, physical, mental and psychical.... As they have been impelled by us, they are connected to us by magnetic or electrical attraction, and when we return to earth we draw them back to us again.” (*Answers to Questions on the Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 167)

These *skandhas* keep a magnetic link with the person that generated them. Through our thoughts and actions, personal and impersonal, we generate material as well as spiritual *skandhas* or attributes. H.P.B. explains that after death, Spirit or reflection of those *Skandhas* which are the most ennobling attach themselves to the incarnating Ego and are added to the stock of its angelic experiences. But all those attributes connected with material *Skandhas*, with selfish and personal motive disappear between two incarnations, only to reappear at the subsequent incarnation as the Karmic result to be atoned for.

After a period of rest and absolute bliss in *Devachan*, the Ego is ready to take next birth. The essence of the lower or material *skandhas* waits at the threshold of *Devachan* as *Karmic effects*, and when the Ego emerges from *Devachan* these *skandhas* are irresistibly attracted to Ego like iron filings to a magnet. These *skandhas* are of five types—pertaining to physical form, mental and emotional nature, etc.—and they combine to form a new personality with healthy or diseased body; with kind or cruel nature; with sharp or dull intellect, etc. However, the *skandhas* or attributes which pertain to desire nature or *Kama* control the rebirth and also determine various affinities and therefore the circumstances and relations of the next life, explains Mr. Judge (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 108-09). “The thirst for life expressed by the word *Tanha* is the pulling or magnetic force lodged in the *skandhas* inherent in all beings,” and

the Ego is pulled out of *devachan* by this magnetic force.

Thus, at the end of every life what survives is the essence or “germ” of the *skandhas*. The Ego after awakening from the dream of *devachan* chooses from among these “germs” of previous lifetimes, and constitutes new combination of *skandhas* for a new personality. A Master of Wisdom writes, “The ‘old being’ is the sole parent—father and mother at once—of the ‘new being.’ It is the former who is the creator and fashioner, of the latter, in reality; and far more so in plain truth, than any father in flesh. And once that you have well mastered the meaning of *Skandhas* you will see what I mean.” He says that “the *Skandhas* represent not only a material but also a set of mental and moral qualities” and in the given life “they are ceaselessly at work in preparing the abstract mould, the ‘privation’ of the future *new being*.”

The mystery of the building up of the body and the personality is locked up in the *skandhas*. When their function is grasped, one is able to see why in one the body is weak and in another strong. How often we deplore our lack of strength and the congenital disorders of our organs and attributes! We can trace these back to our *skandhaic* lineage, and learn not to shrink from Karma. What we see in reference to the limitations of the body, applies also to the limitations of mental and moral traits, capacities and peculiarities. Our anger, passion, greed or selfishness, are rooted in *skandhas* from the past, and these tendencies are activated or atrophied with the changing of the *skandhas*.

We may try to understand the meaning of the “essence” or “germ” of the *skandhas*. A person who has spent effort in learning a language and mastering it, or in learning piano, or in learning mathematics, does not take with himself the knowledge of mathematics, or knowledge and memory of the language or languages he may have learnt, or likewise, the knowledge and skill of playing piano. But during the process of acquiring a skill or knowledge, the *skandhas* are being formed. However, ultimately what survives is the “essence” of these *skandhas*. Thus, for instance, in the next life, the person

who mastered several languages will not bring the knowledge of these languages he had learnt, but he brings with him the aptitude or ability to learn a language. Likewise, when a person learns to play piano, it is not the knowledge of playing piano, but the skill or the ability to play similar musical instrument which survives. The average stay of the Ego in *devachan* is said to be 1000 to 1500 years. Hence, when the Ego takes birth again, there may be new musical instruments and new languages. In case of a person who has become an expert in repairing and handling cars, refrigerators, motor-cycles, computers, calculators or air-condition machines, what survives is the “mechanical” and technical aptitude, which would enable him to understand and repair whatever may be the new machines being used after the gap of 1,000 to 1,500 years in a new culture and environment.

The new personality in each succeeding re-birth is the aggregate of the “*skandhas*” or the attributes of the *old* personality. During life, the *skandhas* are continually changing through continual waste and reparation of body, through change of mind and character, and hence even though the man of forty is identical with the youth of eighteen he is not exactly the same being. And yet, as the man in his old age justly reaps the reward or suffering as a result of his thoughts and actions of every previous stage of his life, so the new being of the re-birth, being the *same individuality* as before, but not the same *personality*—a new aggregation of *skandhas*—justly reaps the consequences of his actions and thoughts in the previous existence. In that sense, our sorrow stems from the “personal existence,” or *skandhas* generated in past incarnations.

Patanjali says, “The manifestation, in any incarnation, of the effects of mental deposits made in previous lives, is declared to ensue upon the obtaining of just the kind of bodily and mental frame, constitution and environment as will bring them out.” The bodily and mental constitution seems to refer to the personality or inner environment created by the *skandhas* brought from previous lives. Thus, it appears that the Ego chooses only certain kind of *skandhas*

from the storehouse of the *skandhas* of all the past lives. Could it be that a person who does not have addictive tendency for alcohol or drugs in this life, may have it stored up as a “germ” in his storehouse of *skandhas*, and which the Ego may choose in some subsequent incarnation? Probably that is one of the meanings of the statement in *Light on the Path*: “...Remember that the soiled garment [vice or weakness in others] you shrink from touching may have been yours yesterday, may be yours tomorrow.”

We can strengthen the mental, moral and physical tendencies or *skandhas* in a given life, or we may acquire new attributes or *skandhas*. A person may, for instance, gradually develop taste for classical music, or by continued effort develop better understanding for a subject he or she found difficult. Thus, someone dull in mathematics can create *skandhas* for mathematics, by grappling with that subject in a given life. If, say, the pursuit of music, literature or computer science is kept up for many lives, then we have a computer wizard, a mathematical genius, a great musician. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart were all child prodigies and geniuses. This bringing back of knowledge is recollection, divisible into physical and mental memory. Memory, says H.P.B., is included within the *skandhas*. Our body is made up of atoms, and atoms are made up of “lives.” When “lives” in the body are repeatedly given certain kind of impressions, day after day, we can train the “lives” of the body to perform certain tasks—for instance, typing, playing musical instruments, etc. The “lives” in the fingertips retain the memory, are habituated, so that after several attempts we are able to perform the task effortlessly.

(To be concluded)

WHY should we be born in a particular nation and in a particular family? Because of the effect of a particular set of our Karmic attractions, which assert themselves in that manner.

—W. Q. JUDGE

THE DOCTRINE OF THE UNITY OF NATURE

IN CONSIDERING the subject of the unity of nature, we have to view it from two standpoints. One is the commonplace idea of nature, or the world, which we experience with our physical senses. This is also the viewpoint of modern science, the idea of nature as *physical reality*, as they call it. Therefore, its method of investigation of the mysteries of nature is based solely on empirical evidence and *a priori* reasoning. The other standpoint of viewing the subject is from the standpoint of metaphysics, on ontological principles.

From both these perspectives we can discern an unmistakable unitary principle which underlies, and holds together in one harmonious whole, the infinite diversity of nature. The ancient doctrine of the unity of nature seems to be valid from both the perspectives. The only difference between the two is that the old metaphysical view goes beyond empirical evidence and apprehends both the visible and the invisible universe as one whole, and clearly discerns impersonal intelligent purpose in the wondrous manifestations of life; whereas, the modern method, as already said, is confined to the visible alone, which the philosophers of old hold to be a deceptive appearance which veils Truth, and recognises neither intelligent design nor purpose in natural phenomena. It must necessarily be so, for the whole cannot be comprehended by a part, or even by a combination of a number of disparate parts, because of the limitation of our cognitive faculties on this plane of gross matter. Yet, even with this limitation of sense perception, natural phenomena display to the thoughtful observer overwhelming indirect evidence of the principle of unity of nature.

Human body—as much as that of every other species—itsself is a marvel of marvels. Diverse organs, each performing specific function, not only in its own domain with numerous other entities subordinate to it, but also with all other organs and systems, in perfect coordination, all working synchronously together displaying remarkable intelligence, and all tending to a common purpose; that

purpose evidently is to furnish to the indwelling soul in the body a living instrument for its experience and evolution. As the body is, so is the universe.

Modern science has furnished indirect evidence of unity of the stuff of which the world is made and of the uniformity of laws which govern it. It views nature in the dual aspect of non-living and living, or inorganic and organic. It shows that both these kinds of matter are made of one hundred and fifteen chemical elements, so far discovered. Spectroscopy reveals that the sun and the distant stars, planets, planetoids, comets are also made of the same elements which compose the matter of our earth and its denizens. The so-called biotic nature exhibits vital activity, or life, which is similar in all forms of life, though the degree of vital and cognitive activity varies. It shows that even primitive unicellular organisms exhibit instinctively a certain degree of discrimination and free-will, which are more developed in higher species.

Molecular evolutionary biology postulates unity of original simple basic cell or group of cells, which through laws of cell division evolved into complex organisms. It demonstrates that the fundamental genetic structure of organisms, from the most primitive to the most complex of all, man, and the genetic laws of birth, growth, hereditary transmission of traits, health, disease and death, are common to all species. Science of genetics has shown that the human kind is one, having identical genetic make-up, thus demonstrating along physical lines, universal brotherhood of humanity to be a scientific fact. The uniformity of natural laws and unity of the stuff of the universe are so striking that scientists are trying to conceptualize unity of nature in an all-encompassing coherent theoretical framework of physics that fully explains and links together all physical aspects of the universe in one seamless whole. Thus we see that the modern science attempts to arrive at universal unitary principle—which they call *Grand unification theory* or the *theory of everything*—by which the whole of the natural phenomena can be interpreted and explained in one coherent theoretical frame

work. But scientists are profoundly aware of the implausibility of evolving such a theory of Unity of nature in view of the limitation of inductive method of science.

But the ancient epistemology is the reverse of the modern. It postulates one Absolute Life, which cannot be comprehended by finite intellect, but sensed by the highest all-seeing, all-knowing spiritual faculty—divine intellect—latent in man, when fully developed and perfected. It demonstrates that in IT periodically universes arise and into which they are reabsorbed again in regular succession, like the ebb and flow of the tide, in conformity with the immutable Law, which is an aspect of IT, Law and Deity being One. When the hour strikes for the appearance of the universe from the Unknown in obedience to the Cyclic Law, it is Spirit which appears first, and also Matter, as primordial Substance, which is coeval with it. Spirit, or Consciousness, and Matter, not being two independent realities, but two aspects of the Absolute, what appears as a diverse universe is in reality One. It is the Spirit which is the source of all individual consciousnesses and the guiding intelligence in the vast scheme of Cosmic Evolution. Matter, or Pre-cosmic Root Substance, in its various degrees of differentiation in seven stages, from the spiritual to the material, provides the basis, or several *upadhis*, for one Spirit to reflect itself as embodied consciousnesses, or Souls, and as self-consciousness, or human Soul, in a specialized differentiated matter. Souls, impartible portions of the Supreme Soul, conditioned by investment of differentiated substance, consisting of three qualities, of quiescence, activity and rest, evolve, in a linked scale of evolution, the subtle and gross elements, and the senses and organs, through which to experience the world, in order to arrive at Self-knowledge and perfection.

“The Universe, including the visible and the invisible, the essential nature of which is compounded of purity, action, and rest, and which consists of the elements and the organs of action, exists for the sake of soul’s experience and emancipation.” (*Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, Book II, 18)

Nature, therefore, in the conception of ancient wisdom, is an aggregate of hierarchies of intelligent forces at work on seven cosmic planes from divine and spiritual to the material, the most progressed beings taking part in spirit in the governance of the universe and evolution of beings according to cosmic and Karmic laws.

One Life is mirrored in every being, down to the humblest creature and in every cell in our body. Evolution of beings is a gradual unfoldment of that infinite potentiality of One Life inherent in them. Man stands at the apex of this evolution. As a physical being, he is the acme of perfection of the animal below him, and as *Manasa*, the Thinker, an impartible portion of the Supreme Soul. He has in him the potentiality of absolute divine perfection of the Supreme which is One, which he has to evolve and develop. He thus touches the sevenfold Universe at every point through his corresponding seven Principles, he being the very epitome of the Cosmos. As man looks up to his macrocosm, the archetypal Heavenly Man, so the lower kingdoms of nature tend towards their macrocosm, Man, whose *Dharma*-duty it is to aid this upward evolution of kingdoms of nature, just as perfected beings in supra-human stages of evolution, aid his higher evolution. Thus the ancient Wisdom-Religion comprehends the unity of Nature which the Man, the Eternal Thinker, epitomizes in himself as a sevenfold being. “The human monad or Ego is therefore akin to all below it and heir to all above it, linked by indissoluble bonds to spirit and matter, ‘God’ and ‘Nature.’” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 36*, p. 16)

THE RADICAL unity of the ultimate essence of each constituent part of compounds in Nature—from Star to mineral Atom, from the highest Dhyān Chohan to the smallest infusoria, in the fullest acceptance of the term, and whether applied to the spiritual, intellectual, or physical worlds—this is the one fundamental law in Occult Science.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

OUR GOD AND OTHER GODS

II

THERE ARE thirty-three crores of gods and goddesses in the Hindu Pantheon. Theosophy affirms it by saying that “The whole Cosmos is animated, guided and controlled by an endless series of hierarchies of sentient beings.” Some of these celestial beings that are especially connected with our earth and humanity are, Manus and Pitris. Quoting Shakespeare, H.P.B. writes, “Karma and evolution have ‘...centred in our make such strange extremes! From different Natures marvellously mixed...’” (*S.D.*, I, 89). It implies different “Natures” of “the seven hierarchies or classes of *Pitris* and *Dhyān Chohans* which compose our nature and Bodies.”

The Theosophical Glossary points out that in Evolution there is supposed to be in all matter an impulse to take on a higher form. Theosophy teaches the Doctrine of Emanation, according to which the universe was not *created* but is an emanation of powers and potentialities locked up in the Divine Spirit or God. We cannot unfold what is not first enfolded. We can unwomb only that which is already present potentially. All that we see in the manifestation is the emanation of that which is potentially present in the Divine Spirit. For instance, the power in the fire to burn, the power in the water to wet, the power in the human beings to think, the power in the bird to fly, etc. are the powers unfolded from within. The process of unfolding, or the potentiality becoming an actuality does not take place blindly, but requires an aid of intelligent powers and forces, at various stages of progress.

This becomes clear when we consider evolution of human frame. The history of evolution on our earth shows that in the process of evolving a human form, “Nature unaided failed.” A graphic description has been given in the *Secret Doctrine* of the early attempt of the forces of nature to produce physical man. For 300 million years, man and earth were astral in nature. Earth or Nature created forms from her own materials, without calling for the help of “Sons

of Wisdom” or “Sons of Heaven.” The monstrous forms were created from the mineral, animal and vegetable remains, from the First, Second and Third Rounds. In her first attempt to create man, monsters, half-animal and half-man were generated. These are described as hideous beings—men with wings, four and two-faced men, human beings with two heads, with the legs and horns of a goat or “goat-men,” bulls with the heads of men, etc. (*S.D.*, II, 52-56). Hence, help and intervention of Lunar and Solar pitris was sought for creating the form of man and to activate his mind.

The account goes on to say that these forms were destroyed. In other words, intervention of intelligent Divine Beings was necessary. Theosophy teaches that physical form of man is built on the astral model. The acquirement of physical form by man is referred to in the Bible as Adam and Eve acquiring “coats of skin.” Only when the astral model was perfected did we get material bodies. This astral model or *chhaya* is the gift of Lunar Pitris. The lunar pitris, also known as *Barhishad Pitris*, or *Pitar-Devata*, evolved their shadows or *chhayas* to form the First Root Race on our Earth.

The First Race is described as the shadows of the shadows of the Lords, *i.e.*, “*Self-born*,” being the (astral) shadows of their Progenitors. The Lunar Pitris created men out of their own divine essence, *i.e.*, they became the First Race. 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 *Devas* symbolized by Prometheus, also known as *Kumaras*, *Manasaputras*, *Agnishwatta* pitris or Solar deities. Theosophy teaches that there was a point in the course of evolution, when man in form was devoid of mind. However, he had developed a brain that was of much *better* and *deeper* capacity than that of any other animal. Man was given the light of mind by Divine Beings—*Manasaputras*—in a manner comparable to one candle lighting many. As a result, man was endowed with self-consciousness and the power to think and choose.

Manu, says H.P.B., “is a generic name for the Pitris, the

Progenitors of mankind. Manu seems to represent both the lunar and solar pitris, because coming from the Lunar or Moon Chain of globes, they gave birth to humanity by evolving their shadows or astral selves. But “*Manu*” is derived from *Man*, to think. “Vaivaswata Manu (the Manu of our own fifth race and Humanity in general) is the chief personified representative of the thinking Humanity of the fifth Root-race; and therefore he is represented as the eldest Son of the Sun and an *Agnishwatta* Ancestor.... Thus Manu is, and contains the potentiality of all the thinking forms which will be developed on earth from this particular source,” writes H.P.B. (*Transactions* pp. 99-100). According to the story in the *Mahabharata*, it was Vaivaswata Manu, when warned of a forthcoming deluge, built a ship and saved our Fifth Root-race from being destroyed along with the remnants of the Fourth or Atlantean Race. (*S.D.*, I, 139-40)

These celestial beings are called *devas*, generically, by the Hindus. The term *deva* literally means the Shining Ones, and they cover spiritual beings of various degrees. All these celestial beings are not superior to man. H.P.B. points out that some of these *devas* are superior and some inferior to man. Each of these beings was either man in prior periods of evolution and thus is a perfected being, or he is preparing to become a man. Thus, Beings above men who are perfected are the *gods*, and those below him are the non-intelligent and semi-intelligent Elementals. There are four types of elementals pertaining to four elements, also known as, “nature-spirits.” The elementals of fire are called “spirits of fire,” or Salamanders; of the air are called “spirits of air,” or sylphs; of the water are called “spirits of water,” or undines (also known as nymphs), and of the earth are called “spirits of earth,” or gnomes or elves. In the earlier times, most people believed in the existence of elementals. In the myths and fables of almost all nations, they appeared under various names, such as, fairies, dwarfs, djins, peris, goblins, pixies, *gandharvas*, *yakshas*, *kinnaras* and *apsaras*. The nature-spirits, or, gnomes, sylphs, fairies, etc. are termed *Deva Yonis*, which are elementals of the lower kind and belong to the three lower kingdoms. After a

very long period, these beings will be evolved into men. They are *future men* or *incipient men*, because their purity is automatic, like the innocence of a child. They will have to pass through human stage and acquire purity through merit by exercising moral choice.

In the article, “Kosmic Mind,” H.P.B. quotes a physiologist who explains how the *epithelium cells* prevent a large number of poisons from penetrating lymphatic spaces, and if these poisons are injected directly into blood, then *lymphatic cells* play a role in separating and making them reappear through the intestinal walls. Interestingly, the Latin word, “*lymph*,” is derived from the Greek “*nymph*,” which means “a nymph or *inferior Goddess*.” Therefore, the ancient Greeks, Latins and the Hindus maintain that every atom of matter in the five Elements is an emanation from an inferior God or Goddess, and that god or goddess is himself or herself an emanation from still superior deity. Each of these atoms is *Brahma*, because one of the names of *Brahma* is *Anu* or atom, so that each atom becomes endowed with consciousness, intelligence and free will of its kind. Moreover, the trinity of *Brahma*, Vishnu and Siva is the symbol of material Universe and its gradual evolution; as *Brahma* comes from the root *brih*, “to expand,” and Vishnu from the root *vis*, “to enter into,” or “to pervade.” All these go to show why the ancient Hindus endowed every atom with a mind and consciousness, and gave it a distinct name of a God or a Goddess. Hence, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the thirty-three crores or 330 millions of gods and goddesses of Hindu Pantheon are contained, not only in the macrocosm or the Universe, but also in the microcosm or man, writes H.P.B.

Often, what we term angels are celestial beings on the lowest plane, also called elemental spirits. H.P.B. writes that there has always been a belief in the guardian angel, or tutelary spirit. This doctrine has not originated with the Christians but with Pagan world. It was represented in the tutelary *daimon* of Socrates (*The Theosophist*, September 1881). There was belief in the existence of genii, so that every city had its protecting genius, to whom people made sacrifices.

The word *Daimon* was used by the ancients for all kinds of spirits, *whether good or bad*, human or otherwise, and it was often synonymous with that of Gods or angels. Some of these *daimons* are elemental spirits. Socrates had his own *daimon*. He was frequently warned by a *daimon*. He maintained that a god (*daimon*) gave him secret warnings; and he warned his disciples to do or not to do certain things, according to the dictates of his genius, writes Xenophon, disciple of Socrates. While the angels or *daimon* may guide us, consulting of these elementary spirits may easily lead one to mediumship and consequently, in time, one may completely come under their sway, something undesirable for one who wants to walk the spiritual path. We are given the example of Socrates. Thus:

The old Grecian philosopher was a “medium”; hence, he had never been initiated into the Mysteries; for such was the rigorous law. But he had his “familiar spirit” as they call it, his *daimonion*; and this invisible counsellor became the cause of his death....There was a law against the admission not only of such as were convicted of deliberate *witchcraft* but even of those who were known to have “a familiar spirit.” The law was just and logical, because a genuine medium is more or less irresponsible; and the eccentricities of Socrates are thus accounted for in some degree....A *medium* of olden times, like the modern “medium” was subject to be *entranced* at the will and pleasure of the “power” which *controlled* him; therefore, he could not well have been entrusted with the awful secrets of the final initiation, “never to be revealed under the penalty of death.” The old sage, in unguarded moments of “spiritual inspiration,” revealed that which he had never learned; and was therefore put to death as an atheist. (*Isis*, II, 117-18)

The occultists believe most firmly in the personal, *divine* spirit in man, the source of his inspiration, and which is both his “angel” and “guardian.”

(*To be concluded*)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Gossiping, or the habit of talking behind people’s back, has always been regarded as a vice rather than a virtue. It is described as “the faceless demon that breaks hearts and ruins careers,” by Ann Landers, in her advice column. The Talmud describes it as a “three pronged tongue” that kills three people: the teller, the listener and the person being gossiped about. Convincing as these indictments seem, a significant body of research suggests that gossip may in fact be healthy, writes Ben Healy.

Thus, for instance, gossip, which is taken to be a talk between at least two people about absent others, accounts for about two-thirds of conversation. A study suggests that only a small share of gossip, around three to four per cent, is actually malicious. “And even that portion can bring people together. Researchers at the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma found that if two people share negative feelings about a third person, they are likely to feel closer to each other than they would if they both felt positively about him or her.”

A team of Dutch researchers reported that hearing gossip about others made research subjects more reflective. Positive gossip inspired people to exert themselves towards self-improvement, while negative gossip made people prouder of themselves. According to another study, a piece of negative gossip which produced a marked negative impact, can lead a listener to learn a lesson from it. Researchers at Stanford and UC Berkeley found that negative gossip could have positive impact on those who are gossiped about. They found that those people, who were ostracized from a group due to reputed selfishness, reformed their ways to once again regain the approval of the people that condemned them. According to anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist, Robin Dunbar, our primate ancestors bonded through grooming, but as hominids grew more intelligent and more social, their groups became too large to unite by grooming alone. He argues that “idle chatter with and about

others gave early humans a sense of shared identity and helped them grow more aware of their environment.”

Thus, you may actually be promoting co-operation and boosting others’ self-esteem when you gossip, writes Ben Healy. (*The Atlantic*, July-August 2018)

From the occult point of view, the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages when one indulges in gossip. One of the evils by which modern society is debased is constant misuse of the power of speech. When two or more people come together, they indulge in idle talk, small talk, or crack jokes often, at the expense of another. Idle talk easily degenerates into gossip and backbiting. It is quite a challenge to be part of a group and yet not be party to gossip and slander. Very few of us are aware of the “creative power” latent in speech because this power can manifest only through *right* speech. Creative power of speech cannot be developed so long as we engage in idle talk and gossip.

Theosophical principle is very clear. “Never backbite or slander another person. Always to say openly and direct to his face anything you have against him. Never to make yourself the echo of anything you may hear against another, nor harbour revenge against those who happen to injure you,” writes H.P.B. When there is no demand, there will also be no supply. Someone has pertinently remarked that we feed on each other’s weaknesses like birds feed on the insects attracted by shrubs. H.P.B. says that one has no right to believe in evil, until one gets undeniable proof of the correctness of the statement, and even if the statement is found to be true, one must be charitable and forgiving, hoping and helping the person to turn the corner, always keeping in mind the shortcomings and infirmities of human nature.

Gossip may produce strong bonding between two or more people, but ultimately it proves to be divisive, leading at best, to formation of *partial brotherhood*. As Professor C. S. Lewis remarks, depending upon the kind of things held in common, there can be partial brotherhood of extremely fanatic and despotic people. Alone

among unsympathetic companions, we may hold certain views and standards timidly, not too sure if we are right. But when a group of people holds certain views, right or wrong, they tend to be assertive. *True* brotherhood is not forming such an exclusive body.

A new study explores why less religious nations tend to be more prosperous. This is most true of advanced democracies, but one is also able to see how officially atheistic China outperforms more pious India. Also, it has been observed that the most irreligious states within United States are better off than the most theistic. The big debate is not whether mass non-theism is better for societies than belief in the gods, but why the connection exists.

According to the new study, one possibility is that when people feel that they are doing better, they feel less need to seek the aid and comfort of deities. And then consumerism also converts many from frugal, pious, churchgoers into irreligious materialists. The study finds that in most nations secularization, or concern with the affairs of the world and not with the spiritual or sacred, preceded and drove socioeconomic gains.

Ultimately, the analysis suggests that the rise in personal and societal freedom hits dogmatic, spiritualistic religion, and at the same time promotes capitalism, which tends to make life better. “The analysis is yet another science-based blow to the idea that religion is inherent and vital to individuals and societies. Instead, a world afflicted with religious strife needs to know that there is not a single modern democracy that is highly religious and highly successful,” writes Gregory Paul. (2018 Tribune Content Agency, *Mumbai Mirror*, July 28, 2018)

Once we understand true meaning and function of religion, it becomes clear that religion and prosperity, material or otherwise, need not be two mutually exclusive things. “A Religion in the true and only correct sense is a bond uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Now Religion, *per se*, in its widest meaning is that which binds not only *all* MEN, but also *all*

BEINGS and *all* things in the entire universe into one grand whole.” Theosophy teaches that it is precisely this feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood, the feeling of human solidarity, in which each shall live for all, and all for each, that lies at the root of the elevation of the race. Then there would be both material and spiritual prosperity *for all*. Even in the so-called prosperous nations, we have the “have”s and the “have-not”s. On the one hand there are those suffering from misery and poverty, and there are others, at the opposite end of the scale, leading lives of careless indifference, mindless affluence, and selfish indulgence.

Is religion necessary? Humanity needs some faith to guide its steps, and if one religion is destroyed, another comes to take its place. But we must distinguish between religion and religiosity. One of the reasons why religion continues to play an important role in the world is because in human beings there is will to meaning, and many of us turn to religion to find the meaning of existence. For some others, religious ceremonies and rituals provide the crutch we need to lean on in times of trouble and despair. Karen Armstrong, the British ex-nun and author, is of the view that good religion is in the danger of being engulfed by bad religion. There seems to be suffocation of the sacred by man-made dogmas and rules.

What is the origin of human morality? If evolution is about the survival of the fittest, how did humans ever become moral creatures? If evolution is about each individual maximizing their own fitness, how did humans come to feel that they should help others and be fair to them? Traditionally, according to one view, it makes sense for individuals to help their kin, with whom they share genes, a process known as inclusive fitness. The other answer is reciprocity, which can benefit both in the long run. But these traditional explanations fail to explain the essence of human morality, namely, the sense of obligation that human beings feel toward one another.

Recently there has been a new approach to the problem of morality, which focuses on the logic of interdependence, namely, if I depend

on you, then it is in my interest to help ensure your well-being. More generally, if we all depend on one another, then we must all take care of one another. It appears that seeds of human morality were planted 400,000 years ago, when individuals began to collaborate in hunting-and-gathering exploits. From the need to stay in good co-operative standing, a “we is greater than me” morality emerged. During a collaboration, the joint “we” operated beyond the selfish individual level to regulate the actions of the collaborative partners. Co-operative interaction cultivated respect and fairness for other group members.

The second critical step in the evolution of morality came about due to competition among human groups. Each of these groups developed internal divisions of labour, all of which led to a collective group identity. The group identity was marked by a number of assumptions, such as, people who talk like me, prepare food like me, or share my cultural practices, are very likely members of my cultural group. From these suppositions arose modern humans’ tendency toward conformity to the group’s cultural practices. Some social norms were more than conformity and group identity, and they touched on a sense of sympathy and fairness, which became moral norms. Some norms codified right and wrong way of doing things in hunting or making tools, and moral norms categorized the proper way of treating other people. Thus, growing population sizes cemented a sense of collective group identity that fostered a set of cultural practices and social norms.

However, since the rise of agriculture, human societies have consisted of individuals from diverse political, ethnic and religious lines. As a result, it is not very clear who constitutes a “we” and who is the out-group, leading to both internal and social tensions within a society, and at the level of nations. The solution to this problem and challenge is that we should learn to think of all of humanity as a “we,” writes Michael Tomasello, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University and emeritus director of the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology

in Leipzig, Germany. (*Scientific American*, September 2018)

We may define morality as the practice of ethics. True morality is different from conventional morality. We are all familiar with conventional morality which is a result of consensus of opinion of the people of the society of a particular time. It may have had some basis of true morality at its beginning, but in the passage of time the original meaning and intention may have got lost and a very corrupt custom may have come to prevail as “moral” in that society. A continuous questioning of such customs and traditions in the light of universal truths is therefore a must for everyone.

“A clear perception of one’s own spiritual nature, and the motive to benefit mankind in every direction and in every case, without self-interest, are the two essentials for true morality. True morality is, in fact, a *universal existence*, and the beginning of it is in the desire to live to benefit mankind without self-interest or hope of any reward whatever,” writes Mr. Crosbie.

Even science seems to agree that human beings have an innate moral faculty. Harvard evolutionary biologist and cognitive neuroscientist Marc Hauser believes that there are a set of innate, universal, moral principles that every human being is born with, because millions of years of natural selection have moulded a “universal *moral* grammar” within our brains, and we seem to unconsciously draw upon these principles while making moral choices, instead of sitting down to rationalize when faced with moral problems. Theosophy views it a little differently. We are told that the Divine Instructors who endowed infant humanity with the light of mind, impressed on the imperishable centre of man’s consciousness, first notions of arts and sciences, spiritual knowledge and moral ideas, and we may term these as “innate ideas,” which reside in *Buddhi-Manasic* or Divine consciousness. Hence, each one of us receives moral guidance from this divine consciousness in terms of “voice of conscience.”