

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### LANGUAGE OF THE MYSTICS

A LANGUAGE is used by an individual to express his emotions, hopes, ideas, aspirations and experiences. At times language is inadequate to express certain experiences. For instance, how do we convey to another the taste of Alphonso mango? We might say it is sweet like sugar, or sweet like honey, but know that it does not convey the real taste of that mango. Likewise, pain is a physical sensation, which cannot be notionally defined. In fact, no sensation can be accurately defined or described to anyone who has not personally experienced it. We have to use words like stabbing pain, burning pain, drawing pain, or acute and dull pain, etc. How much more difficult it must be to describe spiritual experiences that transcend physical, intellectual and psychic natures?

Each man *is* a soul. The soul or the Ego is both, the one who perceives and his perceptions. Also, both, the one who knows and his experiences. Thus, soul represents the acquired experiences gained through evolution, by passing through mineral, plant, animal and human kingdoms. Hence, one soul differs from the other in the degree of acquired experience. If there is a real language of the soul, it would be such as to be capable of expressing *every experience through which it had ever been*. Our Soul or Ego has a language of its own, and that language is one of colour, sound and symbol. It is the language that may be seen, heard and felt, as both colour and sound are but rates of vibrations. The one who knows the language of the soul can understand the experiences of another, no matter in

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what vocal tongue or spoken language they are expressed. Such a person could know the thoughts, feelings and nature of that person, which lie at the back of the spoken words. That is because, thoughts are combination of colours and sounds, constantly changing their form or appearance. In other words, every kind of thought has its own particular range of vibrations and its own particular colours. The “Language of the Soul” is known to all the Great Beings, the Elder Brothers of humanity, such as, Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, etc. It is only the one who is ready to walk the path shown by these Great Ones, who can gradually unveil his *Spiritual perception* and acquire the Language of the Soul. (*Universal Theosophy*, pp. 130-35)

But very few are ready to undertake this arduous task, and hence those who have advanced on the Spiritual path relate their inner experiences in the language known to the laity. *Through the Gates of Gold* is considered, in some respects, a commentary on *Light on the Path*. Both these books are considered to be mystical works, and they were dictated by an Adept. Both these books speak of the training and discipline required in one’s journey towards Adeptship. The “Gates of Gold” represent the entrance to that realm of the soul unknowable through the physical perceptions.

A “Gate” is a powerful symbol that is used frequently in spiritual writings. “Gates” often symbolize transition from one state to another. In the olden days, in order to reach the centre of the fort the invader had to cross several gates, guarded by soldiers. *The Voice of the Silence* uses the imagery of such a fort to show that to reach the heart of spiritual consciousness one needs to cross seven gates, guarded by cruel, crafty powers—complex, psychological forces such as anxiety, anger, etc. Seven “Keys” that open the gates are seven transcendental virtues needed to reach the centre of the fort.

In the book, passing through the “gates of gold” represents transition from mundane life to spiritual life. These “Gates” make us enter that part of our nature which we are unable to become aware of through physical perception. Man passes through them

when he casts off his limitation.” The idea is very, very old. What has the king who dreams that he is a beggar to do, in order to become a king again? He only has to wake up. This is the process of self-realization. Everything exists within and nothing needs to be added from outside. Michelangelo said, “I saw an angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” There is a dim recognition that behind the phenomenal world (world of effects) is the world of causes, the noumenal world.

Therefore, “the one who has been near the Golden Gates—much more he who has passed through them” chooses to remain silent. But when he does share his experiences near and beyond the golden gates, he is obliged to use the language or words known to ordinary human beings. But he gives these words a meaning unknown to us or detaches them from their accustomed relation. As a result, his words appear to us to be veiled and profound, and sometimes even vague and misleading, writes Mr. Judge (*Vernal Blooms*, pp. 51-52). In order to convey his spiritual experiences, he uses metaphors, allegories, symbols and paradoxes, and hence while reading such works, it is necessary to look for the inner, hidden meaning and avoid dead-letter form of interpretation. Thus, for instance, when the mystic is drunk, he is intoxicated by love. Like a drunken man, a Sufi, in his certain stage of search, may be out of step with reality. The symbolic intoxication of the Sufis may perhaps be compared to “Manticism,” or mantic frenzy or ecstasy. Wine that he drinks may well represent the sacred soma-juice which the initiate drinks sparingly, to enter that state which enables him to experience ecstatic vision, clairvoyance and the gift of prophecy.

Likewise, the twelve labours of Hercules, are symbolic, and in the last of his labours, he goes to Hades, and brings back a fierce, three-headed dog to the earth. We are given similar account in Homer’s *Odyssey*, which speaks of the wanderings of Ulysses and his twelve mythical adventures. These adventures are symbolic of soul’s journey through temptations of earthly life and gradual progress, till the soul reaches its true spiritual home. Ulysses, like Hercules had to visit Hades or underworld. Hades represents sense-

life or earth-life and we need to wake up from its illusions to be born in the world of spirit. Hercules, Ulysses or Jesus touching Hades or Hell also symbolises a stage in the trials of initiation, wherein the candidate is made to look deep into his consciousness and face the whole of his lower nature, without getting disturbed. Candidates are literally made to sit in a dark room, all alone. Descent into lower worlds indicate touching lowest levels of consciousness, facing them, purifying them and then rising with full purified consciousness.

Besides using the language of symbols, paradoxes are used to convey spiritual experiences. Paradoxes are used in spiritual books to describe mystical experiences which transcend logical mind. For instance, we have the Mahayana Buddhist book, named, “The Voice of the Silence.” Could there be any sound produced by silence? But then how else would one describe the Soundless Sound or *Nadabrahmam* or *Aum* that is already within. *Light on the Path* is another mystical book which is a book of paradoxes, and deals with actual experiences of the disciple.

Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, observes that a paradox may be defined as a truth standing on its head to attract attention. It shows that a paradox involves a contradiction and, secondly that it contains an element of truth. The paradoxes of the Buddhist scriptures attempt to express in terms of logical contradiction that which transcends logic. For this reason, do the religious geniuses of all times and ages, attempting to describe the indescribable, speak of the dark light, the dazzling darkness, the nothing which is everything and the voidness which is full. Hence, admonishing the spiritual aspirant, they urge him to lose his life in order to find it. “Man dies and yet, he does not really die,” is a paradox of death at the lower level, which shows that death is not the end. Death of a physical form is a necessity. The permanent spiritual aspect in us—the soul or the essence comes back clothed in a different form. The real paradox of mystical death is, “Give up thy life, if thou would’st live.” We must give up the life of *personality*, to live the life of *spirit*, else we would be tossed like a boat on the stormy ocean, caught in the ceaseless

rounds of birth, death and rebirth. We have to struggle hard to break that heavy obstacle which resists all change. The seed must die to give birth to a tree; the nonessentials must die for the spiritual regeneration.

All the scriptures of the world make use of universal language of symbols. We are asked to study scriptures *intuitively* and not merely intellectually, so as to get “the knowledge of the real meaning of sacred books.” Mr. Judge tells us to study the *Bhagavad-Gita* by the light of that spiritual lamp—be it small or great—which the Supreme Soul will feed and increase within us if we attend to its behests and diligently inquire after it. Jesus said that there will be false prophets and indeed we have many now. Even our scriptures have not remained pure due to interpolations, false interpretations by supposed spiritual leaders. How are we to know the true from the false? By using our intuition. Intuition, in its highest aspect, is “direct cognition of the truth in all things.” Mr. Judge suggests that we have within us a series of wires which will vibrate only when the words and propositions uttered by a person or in the scriptures are true. There is in us an internal voice, a silent monitor, which strikes a bell that corresponds to truth. He explains it by giving the analogy of a piano, whose wires each report the vibrations peculiar to it, but not due to striking of the wire itself. What are these wires in us and what makes them vibrate?

The sound and the notes produced by a piano are when the strings vibrate. These strings vibrate when they are hit by a hammer within the piano. A piano has 88 keys, each of which plays a different note. When you press a key of the piano, it causes a small hammer inside to hit a string or strings. Each key is connected to its own hammer or hammers, which hit a specific string or number of strings. When the hammer hits a string, it vibrates and makes a sound that is tuned to a specific note.

In the article “Psychic and Noetic Action” H.P.B. says that every organ, or rather every cell of the body has a keyboard of its own, just like the piano. The piano emits sound, whereas the cells register and emit sensations. These organs and cells are divided into two types,

mental and *kamic*. Our body is called Aeolian harp. It is chorded by two sets of strings, one made of catgut and the other made of silver. The catgut strings refer to cells of *kamic* organs, such as spleen, liver, stomach, etc. The silver strings refer to cells of heart. We are told that the silver strings vibrate to impulses coming from higher mind, while the animal strings do not feel those impulses. The animal strings vibrate to impulses coming from lower mind. The Heart has been described as seat of spiritual consciousness and it is the organ *par excellence* through which the Spiritual Ego acts. The Upanishads speak of the Lotus of the heart in which sits a small dwarf or subtle ether or Spiritual Ego. This Ego is the silent monitor which strikes a bell when truth is given. That in turn, it appears, sets the heart cells vibrating. In *Letters That Have Helped Me* Mr. Judge points out that when one tries to influence the mind of another, according to the Psychical Society, the influence “emerges into the lower mind” by one or more of the channels. He says that they do not know what those “channels” are. He seems to suggest that the channels are through the heart, and that brain is only a servant of the heart, which is a real centre of life in man (pp. 5-6). Thus, it appears that there are channels running through heart which connect themselves with the brain-mind, where one gets the feeling that the statement made was true. But when we tend to take the false as true, it is the voice of lower nature, which drowns the voice of intuition or conscience. It is based on our likes and dislikes, ignorance, prejudice or preconceptions. Intuition is considered in Theosophy as “Divine Conscience.” The human principle of *Manas*, when freed from Kama or lower desire propensity, turns toward the still more luminous faculty of *Buddhi* for illumination, thereby it becomes increasingly receptive.

Development of the intuitive faculty is a gradual process. We may begin by putting all the moral questions to our inner self and wait for an answer. Initially, we may not get right and definite answer, but when one lives the life of purity and altruism, in thought, word and deed, one is able to purify the sheaths of the soul, and the inner light is able to shine into the brain-mind.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### THE BEGGAR

“THE BEGGAR” is a short story written by a Russian author, Anton Chekhov, in 1887. The story is about a prosperous St. Petersburg lawyer, Skvortsov, and a beggar Lushkov, who appears one day at the door of this lawyer, saying that he is a poor, hungry man, who has not eaten food for three days. He claims to have been a village schoolmaster, but lost his job when a local governing body told lies about him. However, he says, “Now I am offered a post in the Kaluga province, but I have not the means for the journey there... I am ashamed to ask, but... I am compelled by circumstances.” The lawyer finds that the beggar is wearing a tattered dark blue overcoat, has drunken eyes and red patches on his cheeks, and feels that he has seen the man before. He suddenly recalls having met the same beggar, two days back, in another street, when he had claimed to be a student who had been expelled. The beggar emphatically denies having said that and insists that he is a schoolmaster and has got the necessary documents to prove it. The lawyer, threatening to turn the man over to the police says that being poor and hungry does not entitle him to lie. “The ragged fellow’s insolent lying aroused his disgust and aversion, was an offence against what he, Skvortsov, loved and prized in himself: kindness, a feeling heart, sympathy for the unhappy. By his lying, by his treacherous assault upon compassion, the individual had, as it were, defiled the charity which he liked to give to the poor with no misgivings in his heart.”

The beggar remonstrates for a moment, then gives up, hangs his head in shame, and admits that he has been lying, and that actually he had been a member of the Russian choir but was fired for drunkenness. He says, “What you say is true, I understand that, but... what am I to do? I cannot get on without lying—when I tell the truth no one will give me anything.” The lawyer suggests that he must work, and the beggar replies that he knows that but where can he get work? The lawyer offers, “Would you care to chop wood

for me?” The beggar agrees to chop wood.

The lawyer then directs his cook, Olga, to take the man to a shed to chop wood. After the beggar follows her, the lawyer stands at a window to watch as Olga and the beggar cross the yard, through dirty snow, to the woodshed. “It was evident from his demeanour that he had consented to go and chop wood, not because he was hungry and wanted to earn money, but simply from shame...because he had been taken at his word.” He has been under the effect of the drink and feeling unwell, and hence is not inclined to work. On being taken to the shed, the beggar promptly sits on a block of wood, leaning his cheeks upon his fists. The cook throws an axe in front of him and orders him to begin the work. After the beggar pulls a log towards him, the lawyer goes to his study, satisfied that the work would be done. We are told that the beggar again and again draws a log of wood towards him, sets it up between his feet, and the log topples over again and again. Meanwhile the lawyer has calmed down and feels ashamed to have asked a sick and drunk man to work, but justifies it by thinking that it is for his own good.

After an hour, the cook comes in and announces that the wood has been chopped. The lawyer produces half a rouble to give to the man, and tells Olga that he may come to chop wood on the first of every month. The beggar turns up on the first of every month and earns half a rouble, “though he could hardly stand.” He starts coming more frequently to do odd jobs, such as, sweeping snow, clearing up the shed, etc., and earns nearly thirty to forty kopecks, and once even an old pair of trousers.

When Skvortsov is moving to another place, the beggar has been asked to load furniture and other items in a van, but he spends most of his time standing around and shivering. Skvortsov is not watching, but the van drivers laugh at the beggar for his ragged coat and his idleness. Skvortsov sends for the beggar and says, “Well, I see my words had an effect upon you...I see that you are sober and not disinclined to work.” On finding out that the man could write, he puts him on to less strenuous work of copying documents.

He has been asked to take a note to the lawyer’s colleague, who is to give him writing work. “Skvortsov, pleased that he had put a man in the path of rectitude, patted Lushkov genially on the shoulder, and even shook hands with him at parting.”

Two years later, the lawyer comes across Lushkov at the ticket booth of a theatre, and learns from him that he has been now working for a notary, and earning thirty-five roubles. The lawyer is happy for him, saying, “You know, in a way, you are my godson. It was I who shoved you into the right way.” Lushkov thanks him profusely, for his kind words and deeds, but says that he is especially indebted to the cook, Olga, “a noble-hearted woman...who really saved me.” The lawyer wishes to know how she was entitled to such high praise. Lushkov says that whenever he would come to chop wood, she would scold him for drinking and call him a pitiable creature who has no gladness in the world, and would probably end up burning in hell. She would cry for him and his miserable life. “But, what affected me most—she chopped the wood for me! Do you know sir, I never chopped a single log for you—she did it all! How it was she saved me, how it was I changed looking at her, and gave up drinking, I cannot explain. I only know that what she said and the noble way she behaved brought about a change in my soul, and I shall never forget it.” He then enters the theatre to watch the performance.

The story explores the theme of begging, alcoholism, dishonesty, kindness and transformation. Interestingly, the lawyer’s belief that hard work will cure the beggar of his laziness and addiction, does not seem to work. It is kindness and compassion of the cook which makes him see his mistakes, mend his ways and brings about a transformation in him. Some critics have noted that there is not only a difference in the way in which the help is given, but also in the inner attitude of the lawyer and his cook. The lawyer is too aware of himself as being a kind person, who likes to help people. He wants to take credit for helping Lushkov improve his life. He is more impressed with his ability to help someone than the actual act

of helping. He is not sensitive enough to see that the beggar was undernourished and weak to take up any work, and also does not take into consideration his circumstances when he judges him for lying. On the other hand, the cook, Olga, seems to instinctively know the best way to help the beggar.

Altruism is an integral part of self-development. Theosophy has very definite views regarding offering help to relieve the suffering of another. It is always good to help. But helping in the right appropriate way is equally important, and that calls for discrimination. We need to exercise discrimination even in physical charity. We should think twice before giving money to a beggar, if we see him buying cigarettes, tobacco or alcohol. It has been observed time and again that lakhs of rupees are given in charity by sympathizing people toward cyclone or flood relief, but a lot of it is retained by the middlemen—very little actually reaches the needy.

Though it is essential to ascertain that charity is given to the right person, we need not be *overmindful* of the worthiness of the receiver. Let us obey our heart and give spontaneously, instead of too much analysis and rationalizing. “Who are you that men should rend their bosom and unveil their pride, that you may see their worth naked and their pride unabashed? See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving,” says Kahlil Gibran. When asked, give even a little, as the Buddha taught. Also, at a simple level, it is a very valid consideration that when you give a man a fish, you take care of his hunger for a day, but when you teach him how to fish, you take care of his needs of a lifetime.

“The poor ye have always with you.” It is not enough to pour vast amount of wealth but rather deal with the causes that produce poverty, misery, pain and degradation. The physical woes of humanity are only skin-deep, what needs greater help is the mental and moral suffering. We are called upon to become wider philanthropists by ministering to the needs of the inner man, the thinking man, who must be given right philosophy. It is life and its sorrows that destroy our peace, and every human heart wants to

know the reason for it. Why am I here? Why do I suffer? Where may justice be found? The doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation hold answers to these questions, and these must be promulgated and practised. “No greater charity can be bestowed upon suffering humanity than right knowledge that leads to right action. The possessor of this knowledge will be filled with divine sympathy for all sufferers; he will relieve only such distresses as should be relieved in each and every case, while at the same time he will impart as much of his greater knowledge as the sufferer can receive and apply. . . . He will have no thought of reward nor even of gratitude; he will simply do all that he can and the best he knows how to do to raise the sufferer to a higher plane of thought and action, while he affords sufficient physical relief to give a foothold,” writes Robert Crosbie (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 221-22)

Madame Blavatsky puts forward a very important and occult aspect of human psychology saying that to some human beings “misery is not just endurable, but agreeable.” Sometimes, for some people and in some conditions pain and misery are their best teachers, and therefore, showing kindness might produce adverse effect. Thus: “Kindness and gentle treatment will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of a man or woman who has led a fairly presentable life when kept down by pain and despair.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 31*, p. 10). She puts the human suffering in a much wider perspective. Pain has a definite and important place in man’s life. When we learn to see pain in the right perspective, we would not want to shun pain, but regard every unfavourable situation as an opportunity to learn and grow. Hence the need of intuition in helping a person. We, not having such an intuitive power, will do well to follow the advice of Mr. Judge: “If some pathetic story of suffering has moved you, act on the emotion while your cheeks are still wet with tears.” Such spontaneous acts of benevolence will prepare us to receive more light and wisdom from within.

## IDOLATRY

THE TERM idolatry comes from the Greek root, *eidolatria* (*eidolon*—image, *latria*—worship). Another term in popular usage with the same meaning is *fetich* or *fetish*. Both the terms signify an image or any material object which is considered as representing a deity, or regarded with awe as the embodiment or habitation of a spirit with magical potency, and to which religious worship is offered. Worship of tombs of saints, or dead saints who have been conferred sainthood by the pope, are also idolatry. The Idol or the fetish may be a carved image, an ideograph, a sign, a symbol, talisman, a parchment, a book which is considered sacred and revered. It may not be an object but can be even an idea, or an ideology, or a belief—religious or not—when held with unreasoned or blind reverence, respect or devotion is also considered as idolatry or fetishism. Eminent Orientalists who translated ancient texts of India were of the opinion that ancient Aryans worshipped the Elements and such natural phenomena as lightning, thunder, storms, etc., out of primitive wonder, fear and awe, and were, therefore, fetish worshippers. They were called polytheist by scholars, being themselves ignorant of the sublime conceptions of philosophical polytheism of the ancients. We are considering for the purpose of this article, the subject of idolatry in the context of the religions of the world in general.

Going by the foregoing definition it is evident that no religion as is popularly practiced is entirely free from idolatry. Why this is so needs to be inquired into. There seems to be two main reasons for it. Firstly, the human mind, or the thinking principle, is so constituted that the Thinker can only convey his cognitive impressions, feelings, ideas, etc., either in spoken words or sound, gestures, or written script. The latter are the representative visible or audible signs of the former which are concealed. Visible sign then is the embodiment or symbol of concealed thought, feeling or subjective experience. It is an idol, in other words. This is so even in ordinary work-a-day life. It is much more so, in fact, in respect of abstract thoughts, such

as, conception of scientific theories, fine artistic sensibilities, mystical experiences, exposition of ontological principles, etc., which are expressed in various ways to convey to the recipient the subjective idea, perception, feeling, or experience of the author. The scientist, to express his theories, employs mathematical models by which others apprehend them. The artist shares the flavour and the joy of his creation through his artistic production with the connoisseurs of art. The mystic conveys his mystical experiences and associated moral principles by means of parables, metaphors, similes, symbols, allegories or metrical speech more effectively than through plain ordinary language. Use of symbols as said in the foregoing for conveying and receiving ideas which they embody is not idolatry but they do become so when symbols or signs are divorced from the ensouling idea or the verity and clung to as the truth itself.

This is the fundamental problem with all religions. Religious scriptures of the world are the records of great truths of life in all its aspects, conveyed through symbols and myths, originating from the experiences and teachings of countless generations of seers and sages. Those well-grounded in esoteric science of symbology readily apprehend the truths concealed in the symbols. Others, not so qualified, however otherwise learned, can only apprehend the dead-letter meaning, and worship the euhemerised symbols as deity itself, or pass mistaken judgment on them following their own preconceived notions and predilections, as learned antiquarians do. Clinging to, or worshipping the symbol, divorced from its inner meaning, is a form of idolatry. Exuberance of fanciful theories, beliefs and superstitions arise over a time as a result, leading to many abuses and social evils. “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” Periodically, true teachers arise to re-expound the true sense and meaning of ancient systems of religious philosophies in the light of the original spirit and try to disabuse them of idolatrous practices; yet with not complete success. This brings us to the second main reason for the persistency of idolatry.

Prevalence of anthropomorphic idolatry again is traceable to the

dual nature of the human psyche. The Bible, echoing the ancient wisdom, truly states the prehistoric truth that there was a time when the whole earth was of one language and one speech (*Genesis*, 11-1). This has reference to “That ‘faith’ which, being primordial, and revealed directly to human kind by their *progenitors* and informing EGOS....required no ‘grace,’ nor *blind* faith to believe, for it was *knowledge*”(Glossary, pp. 370-1). Man felt himself one with his divine progenitors and with the one Self in all and all in it, and at the same time felt the pull of the animal nature of his terrestrial self and the insinuations of his psychic nature. While those who conquered the animal and the lower psychic, like the mythical Enoch, “joined the gods”; the great majority, on the other hand, succumbing to the temptations of *Mara*, lost their “foothold on the soil of Deva knowledge,” and exiled from “Gan-Eden” (*Isis*, II, 575). It was a fall from abstract spiritual contemplation into gross anthropomorphism. Henceforth he could regain his divine heritage only through Initiation into the sacred Mysteries. One white Ray of Truth passing through the *three-sided prism* of man’s nature broke up into many religions, sects and sub-sects with their many forms of anthropomorphic idolatry. The inevitability of idolatry in religion owing to the cycle of necessity of the evolution of the human soul is conveyed in a charming and profound allegory:

Toward the close of the Pralaya...the great It, the One that rests in infinity and ever *is*, dropped its reflection, which expanded in limitless Space, and felt a desire to make itself cognizable by the creatures evolved from its shadow. The reflection assumed the shape of a Maharaja (great King). Devising means for mankind to learn of his existence, the Maharaja built out of the qualities inherent in him a palace, in which he concealed himself, satisfied that people should perceive the outward form of his dwelling. But when they looked up to the place where stood the palace, whose one corner stretched into the right, and the other into the left infinitude—the little men *saw nothing*; the palace was

mistaken by them for empty space, and being so vast remained invisible to their eyes. Then the Maharaja resorted to another expedient. He determined to manifest himself to the little creatures whom he pitied—not *as a whole but only in his parts*. He destroyed the palace built by him from his manifesting qualities, brick by brick, and began throwing the bricks down upon the earth one after the other. Each brick was transformed into an idol, the red ones becoming Gods and the grey ones Goddesses; into these Devatas and Devatis—the qualities and the attributes of the Unseen—entered and animated them. (*Lucifer*, August 1896)

It is difficult for mortals to comprehend and contemplate the formless Absolute Being which is One. IT could only be intuited indirectly by contemplating its manifold manifesting powers, qualities and attributes. Thus, arose *Pan-theism*. Philosophically trained Pantheist apprehends in the magnificent manifestations of attributes the noumenon—the boundless, omnipresent ever-to-be Unknown Absolute Being; while the philosophically untrained pantheist identifies objective Kosmos—trees, rivers, mountains, etc.—with the abstract Deity and falls into idolatry. (*Theosophical Articles and Notes*, p. 196)

If thou wouldst believe in the Power which acts within the root of a plant, or imagine the root concealed under the soil, thou hast to think of its stalk or trunk and of its leaves and flowers. Thou canst not imagine that Power independently of these objects. Life can be known only by the Tree of Life...(Precepts for Yoga). (*S.D.*, I, 58)

Krishna reveals to Arjuna chief of his divine manifestations—*Vibhutis*—which in the sacred books are presented as personifications and symbols. To the contemplator they are idols no doubt, which are aids to contemplation of the Reality or the Truth they represent. But the moment the worshipper takes the outer symbols themselves as gods and goddesses divorced from the animating spirit concealed within and worships them seeking favours, it becomes Idolatry or

fetish. Numerous are the outgrowth of evils which spring from anthropomorphic idolatry which beset the world.

This is one of the reasons why Masters of Wisdom are against idolatry. Devotees of idol worship justify the practice saying that they do not worship the idol itself but the spirit or the deity which they in their ritual invoke to animate it—*prana pratishthanam*. Is their claim that spirits can be made to animate idols true? Rationalists, so called, and monotheists who denounce idolatry—though themselves are not free from idolatry in many forms—call such animation superstition and fetish. Theosophy teaches that the claim of animation of statues is not false but possible, in which the whole antiquity, including such eminent philosophers as Pythagoras, believed. Instances of prophesying and miracle working images are numerous in historical and contemporary times, symbolizing angelic presence. Though feats of white-magical art of animating statues for beneficial purposes has disappeared from public worship at the present time, its opposite, the black art, the terrible malpractices of Occultism, necromantic practices involving human sacrifice, persists to this day, though rarely heard of and seldom reported, and it was rampant in earlier times. It was for this reason that Moses and earlier prophets before him, and later Prophet Mohammad, strictly prohibited worship of graven images, statues, in the likeness of any so-called gods or of any living or dead men. (“Animated statues,” in *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*)

Gods are not to be worshipped. “To appeal to their protection is as foolish as to believe that their sympathy may be secured by any kind of propitiation; for they are, as much as man himself is, the slaves and creatures of immutable Karmic and Kosmic law.” (*S.D.*, I, 276). Man himself is potentially God Absolute and God manifested, higher than all the gods of the pantheon, which he can realise by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which dispels ignorance. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Sri Krishna warns against worshipping gods and says such are short sighted. “Those who worship the Gods go to the Gods and those who worship me come unto me” (Chapter 7).

Man must not suffer assimilation of his being with one or the other of the manifesting powers of the Supreme, consequences of which are dire, but aim at assimilation of his self with the Supreme Eternal which is his true SELF. But Gods are to be honoured with gratitude as they, out of their essence, furnish the principles, faculties and powers of our inner self, necessary for our existence and evolution.

A Theosophical student, in his study and work for Theosophy, ought to attend to the spirit that giveth life and not fall into the error of clinging to mere ornate forms of expression—the letter that killeth. In other words, it is the Doctrine of the Heart that one needs to attend to. “Theosophy is the vehicle of the spirit that gives life, consequently, nothing *dogmatic* can be truly *theosophical*.” (*Theosophical Articles and Notes*, p. 131). In the *Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. says that one of the reasons why Esoteric Doctrines had been kept secret for long centuries by the custodians of ancient Wisdom-Religion is because of the pronounced tendency of the multitude in this age to revel in dead letter dogma and ritualism, and selfishness, which would materialize sacred truths which may be imparted, anthropomorphise the god-idea and turn it into gross idolatry. Theosophy is against idolatry, such as, worshipping or praying to saints, gods or angels. Praying to ABSOLUTE is *reductio ad absurdum*. “We try to replace fruitless and useless prayer by meritorious and good-producing actions” (p. 70, Indian ed.). Theosophy teaches reliance on true Self which is One, and not many, and on the Absolute, just Law of Karma, the Law of our Being, and Altruism in practice—to try to feel oneself with, and unselfishly work for, Humanity. This is the true Religion.

The ever unknowable and incognizable *Karana* alone, the *Causeless* Cause of all causes, should have its shrine and altar on the holy and ever untrodden ground of our heart—invisible, intangible, unmentioned, save through “the still small voice” of our spiritual consciousness. Those who worship before it, ought to do so in the silence and sanctified solitude of their Souls.... (*S.D.*, I, 280)

## CONSCIOUS LIVING

FROM birth to death we come across various experiences, as life puts us in various situations. Is there a bigger purpose to all of this and are we living a conscious life? Are we able to make the best use of our life, time and resources? This question needs to be asked by each one of us; only then will we start the journey of conscious living. Death can come any moment, so from this context every moment becomes precious.

Every moment of life is an opportunity, to learn and realize, which is carefully guided and crafted by the skillful and compassionate hands of Karma. The choice of making appropriate use of the precious moments of life is in our hands wherein we need to consciously work towards understanding the purpose of every situation we come across and to ascertain the inner meaning of the same. Only then can we fulfil life's purpose and our duty. For, as Robert Crosbie puts it: "*Dharma* means 'the sacred Law,' the fulfilment of our karmic destiny through many incarnations, the working out and elimination of defects which have brought us into earth life under the conditions in which we find ourselves, which conditions we should feel and know to be the very opportunities needed for our further progress." (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 235)

Every moment, situation, people, sensation and experience that we come across is for our learning in this School of Life. Hence conscious living is important. This can be done consciously from moment to moment and then it will become a natural way of life.

But, where do we start?

Nature being sevenfold so is Man, and each being a copy of the other we can easily see that the higher triad—*Atma*, *Buddhi* and *Manas* is present in one and all from the smallest atom to the highest Brahma. Hence the divinity exists in all, the expressions of the One. Thus, the divine witness is operating through all in the manifestation, at various levels of differentiation and gradations, hence everyone

and everything is our teacher, is a potential source of guidance, a messenger, and those who have the eye of wisdom will perceive it. That eye of wisdom needs to be developed with constant effort, practice and vigil. As beginners we can also keep a diary of daily events and make notes. We can review every event in our day before sleeping and preview every activity which we need to perform in the day when we wake up. In this manner with conscious reflection we will be able to organize our mental furniture in a better manner, more conducive to harmonious living. This will further generate appropriate opportunities for us in this and future lives.

The mental attitude which is required to achieve this is to be understood in context of "a lifetime's meditation." What is it? "It means that the immortality of man has first to be assumed, and then rigidly adhered to as the basis for every thought and action, for it is only in this way that a realization of immortality can be obtained by embodied beings. As it is from the Spirit in Man that all law and power proceeds, each human being creates his own limitations on every plane of being; he can transcend those limitations only by reverting to and maintaining his immortality, as the observer and experiencer of all the passing changes, himself unchanged and unchanging." (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 148-49)

In this manner we need to detach ourselves from the paraphernalia of material life, and instead of focusing on the kaleidoscopic changes happening on the surface of life, we need to start looking beyond and within from the standpoint of the unchanging Witness. The more we become conscious of the same the more we can ascertain the real meaning of life on the plane of consciousness on which we are active.

With this attitude that we are "The Witness" and living life from the perspective of the same, we develop conscious Self Awareness. We can observe more clearly our thoughts, speech and actions. With this observation we also realize that the thoughts, emotions and feelings arise, sustain and die out due to their temporary nature. We are no longer governed by them. As we know that the real plane of

action is our Mind, doing so with practice, our thoughts arise from the inner center of calmness and all our actions are performed with focus and attention without the urge to impulsively react to various situations of life. The mind slowly starts working from the higher *Buddhi-Manasic* aspect as its basis rather than the lower *Kama-manasic* aspect.

This helps us to live our life in a conscious mindful manner—recalibrating, aligning moment by moment with the universal harmony and being aware of our attitude, motives and intentions. Thus, enabling us to live a more harmonious, unselfish and altruistic life with full control and not getting swayed by our desires and emotions.

Each activity of life whether we are eating, working, walking, sleeping or doing any chore of life can be performed with this attitude and frame of mind. Thus, we may be doing eating meditation, and then, walking meditation, and so on. In this manner one becomes “The Man of Meditation” not only in this life but life after life. Doing so will also enable us to develop “Self-Reliance” which is reliance on the “Inner Higher Self” the One unchanging reality which is the basis of All and further enable us to become more and more altruistic.

The Light shines in All of us, however we need to make it shine forth, this is only possible with conscious living. This is a lifelong practice and will take many lives to master. Finally, when we are adept in “Conscious Living” we will enter the state of death and birth consciously life after life. Such have been described in *Light on the Path* thus: “The crude wish to live has departed from him. When he takes upon him man’s form in the flesh he does it in the pursuit of a divine object, to accomplish the work of ‘the Masters,’ and for no other end. He looks neither for pleasure nor pain, asks for no heaven, and fears no hell...He lives now not in the world, but with it; his horizon has extended itself to the width of the whole universe.” (p. 82)

## EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

### LETTERS OF PERSONAL COUNSEL—I

IF YOU watch you will perceive that all the time within you is taking place a change. The main thing is to keep ourselves energized by right study and real devotion. The first illumines our intelligence, the second brings peace and power to the heart. Both must go together to be truly effective. Be fair and just to yourself and that is achieved by the spirit of self-sacrifice; the manifestation of this must be looked for in our steady, continuous and *even* attempt to live our best and highest, proceeding from within without. To be sacrificing spasmodically heightens our personality in our eyes, and we fancy we are somebody and say to ourselves, “What a nice fellow I am to do this, or to have done that!” But, if we are evenly and continuously engaged in Work which is Theirs, or in Service which is our fellow men’s, we get little time to ruminate on ourselves; and in comparison to Their effort what is our puny attempt, and in the light of the intense anguish and suffering of millions of minds and hearts what, after all, is the bulk of our petty service? To live, to live, and continue to live the highest within the very core of our being is at once to live in the Eternal and to grow like the flower. All of us have to live and have to grow; if only we would realize that we *are* in the Eternal though we illusion ourselves by past memories and future anticipations, that we *are* growing like the rose albeit we foolishly draw the attention of the world to our thorns and look like a cactus! To be *natural*, to be spontaneous, to hold everything sacred, to see not only the good in all things but also the beautiful—that is performing yoga, with the objects in our environment, with people in our vicinity. Keep on trying therefore, and do not give way to that inner weariness which sometimes comes over you; but do not pay any attention to the fact that you are trying—only try. And as to weariness, why—do you remember those beautiful lines of Herbert’s, what God said of man at the creation of the latter?—

Yet let him keep the rest,  
but keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
may toss him to my breast.

*(To be continued)*

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## ARYANS—WHO ARE THEY?

### II

REGARDING the origin and descent of the Fifth Root-Race humanity we read that “the Aryan race was born and developed in the far north, though after the sinking of the continent of Atlantis its tribes emigrated further south into Asia” (*S.D.*, II, 768). We are further told that the land they fled to was Central Asia. For a period of nearly 700,000 years there was branching off into the most heterogeneous and diversified types, giving birth to new races. “There they lived and died until the separation of the nations. But this ‘separation’ did not take place...in the way the Aryans are shown to have divided and separated by Mr. Max Muller and other *Aryanists*” (*S.D.*, II, 425). Most probably the Masters of Wisdom have a consecutive and full history of our (Fifth) race from its incipient stage down to the present times, but even if they do possess this knowledge it is only for the highest initiates, and not for their disciples, and as a result, H.P.B. says that she can give out only what she herself has been taught in this matter.

The two most ancient peoples of the Fifth Root-Race are the Hindu Aryans and the Egyptians. A Master of Wisdom writes: “The highest people now on earth (spiritually) belong to the first sub-race of the fifth root race, and those are the Aryan Asiatics, the highest race [in] (physical intellectuality) is the last sub-race of the fifth—yourselves, the white conquerors.” Further, the same Master states, “The majority of mankind belongs to the seventh sub-race of the Fourth Root-Race...Chinamen and their off-shoots and branchlets. (Malayans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Hungarians, Finns and even the Esquimaux are all remnants of this last offshoot).” (*S.D.*, II, 178)

The Egyptians, as well as the Greeks and “Romans” some thousands of years ago, were “remnants of the Atlanto-Aryans,” *i.e.*, the Egyptians were of the older or Ruta-Atlanteans, whereas the Greeks and Romans were the descendants of the last race of that island (Poseidonis) whose sudden disappearance was narrated

to Solon by the Egyptian initiates (*S.D.*, II, 436).

“Atlanto-Aryan stock” is as described on page 743 (*S.D.*, II): The secret doctrine teaches that it was the latest, seventh sub-race of the Atlanteans, which was “already swallowed up in one of the early sub-races of the Aryan stock, one that had been gradually spreading over the continents and island of Europe, as soon as they had begun to emerge from the seas. Descending from the high plateaux of Asia, where the two Races had sought refuge in the days of agony of the Atlantis, it had been slowly settling and colonizing the freshly emerged lands. The emigrant sub-race had rapidly increased and multiplied on that virgin soil; had divided into many families, which in their turn divided into nations.”

Science divides the period of our earth’s history, since the beginning of life on earth, into five main divisions or geological periods, namely, Primordial Epoch, Primary period, Secondary period, Tertiary period and Quaternary period. The Quaternary period includes three sub-periods: Palaeolithic (old stone age), Neolithic (new stone age) and Historical Period. We read that the “Historical” Period has begun with the Indian Aryans, with their *Vedas*, for their multitudes (*S.D.*, II, 712-15). Science describes Palaeolithic and Neolithic men as cave-dwellers, lake-dwellers, Stone Age men, etc. Moreover, our attention is drawn to the fact that “The rude workmanship of the Palaeolithic tools prove nothing against the idea that, side by side with their makers, there lived nations highly civilized.” (*S.D.*, II, 717)

What light does esoteric anthropology throw on European origins? We can understand it from the following extracts from the *Secret Doctrine*:

“The earliest Palaeolithic men in Europe—about whose origin Ethnology is silent, and whose very characteristics are but imperfectly known... were of pure Atlantean and ‘Africo’ Atlantean stocks.... Of the great Atlantis, the main bulk of which sank in the Miocene, there remained only Ruta and Daitya and a stray island or so... The *pure* Atlantean stocks—of which the tall quaternary cave-

men were, in part the direct descendants—immigrated into Europe long prior to the Glacial Period; in fact as far back as the Pliocene and Miocene times in the Tertiary.... As to the African tribes—themselves diverging offshoots of Atlanteans modified by climate and conditions—they crossed into Europe over the peninsula which made the Mediterranean an inland sea. Fine races were many of these European cave-men; the Cro-Magnon, for instance. But, as was to be expected, *progress is almost non-existent* through the whole of the vast period allotted by Science to the Chipped Stone-Age. *The cyclic impulse downwards* weighs heavily on the stocks thus transplanted—the incubus of the *Atlantean Karma* is upon them. Finally, Palaeolithic man makes room for his successor—and disappears almost entirely from the scene.” (II, 740-41 and footnote)

“The relic of artistic merit here *re-appearing* in the Chipped-Stone-Age men, is traceable to their *Atlantean* ancestry. Neolithic man was a fore-runner of the great *Aryan* invasion, and immigrated from quite another quarter—Asia, and in a measure Northern Africa. (The tribes peopling the latter towards the North-West, were certainly of an Atlantean origin—dating back hundreds of thousands of years before the Neolithic Period in Europe,—but they had so diverged from the parent type as to present no longer any marked characteristic peculiar to it).” (II, 716 and footnote)

Most, for instance, of the supposed early *neolithic* caves, colossal pyramidal and conical *menhirs* in Brittany, the Danish tumuli and the “giant tombs” of Sardinia are the works of the first settlers on the newly-born continent and isles of Europe, the—“some yellow, some brown and black, and some red”—races that remained after the submersion of the last Atlantean continents and islands (850,000 years ago), with the exception of Plato’s Atlantean island, and before the arrival of the great Aryan races; while others were built by the earliest immigrants from the East.” (II, 352)

*(To be concluded)*

## APHORISMS ON KARMA—SOME REFLECTIONS

## XVI

APHORISM 25: “*Birth into any sort of body and to obtain the fruits of any sort of Karma is due to the preponderance of the line of Karmic tendency.*”

Aphorism 26: “*The sway of Karmic tendency will influence the incarnation of an Ego, or any family of Egos, for three lives at least, when measures of repression, elimination, or counteraction are not adopted.*”

Aphorism 27: “*Measures taken by an Ego to repress tendency, eliminate defects, and to counteract by setting up different causes, will alter the sway of Karmic tendency and shorten its influence in accordance with the strength or weakness of the effort expended in carrying out the measures adopted.*”

The aforesaid aphorisms indicate why and how we have come to be environed as we are in life, and what are the factors that shape and determine the ever-changing circumstances and relationships in life, which at times seem favourable and at other times adverse; and point out that we have the freedom, discriminative knowledge and the will to alter the course of destiny towards a higher end.

The Ego emerging from the Devachanic state, following the exhaustion of the force of the finer thoughts of the life-time that ended previously, seeks rebirth. What propels it into another incarnation is the force of the vast store of the unexpended Karmic energy accumulated by it from previous lives. Several Karmic factors come into play which determine when and where it is going to be reborn, and the conditions and circumstances of the new life which will be unfolding. It may be for enjoyment of reward for its past good deeds by way of a happy and pleasant life, with opportunities; or suffering much pain and sorrow as punishment for past misdeeds, or a combination of both the kinds in different degrees and proportions.

The choice of the nation or race, parentage, and a lineage as the venue for rebirth and the scene of action of the Ego when it incarnates may be because of several Karmic factors. It may be that its own nature and character are similar to the hereditary traits and tendencies of the family, which, in the past, it had taken part in establishing in company with the kindred Egos. Besides similarity, invariable justice may also be a factor which leads the Ego into a family to meet the ill effects of its acts of omission and commission in past lives in company with other Egos, who are drawn together by affinity to be reborn in the same family and nation. Justice implies responsibility and opportunity—realization of individual responsibility for its role in the past in engendering the defects of the family or of the nation, and opportunity to work on them and undo the past mischief, and to acquire and strengthen virtues, refine and improve character.

It must not, however, be supposed that the effects experienced in any one life are the working out of the causes set up by the deeds of the Ego done in the life immediately preceding it alone, but is the result of the *balancing* of Karmic causes created by the Ego, in company with other Egos, in many lives in the past. We expend only a small portion of the vast store of unexhausted past Karma which can come to fructification in the instrument acquired. Coming into incarnation in the same life of the Egos, with whom we acted in the past, and bound to them by bonds of sympathy or antipathy, fashion the environment in which the past Karma operates in our mutual relationships. The field and the instrument in which Karma operates in every life is the *environment*. Therefore, it is folly to find fault with or complain against circumstances of life which seem adverse, or against persons who seem to be ill-disposed towards us. These external factors are not the cause of our discomfiture but only the means and the agency for meting out just deserts for our own actions in the past.

To try to move away from the locale in which Karma has placed us, because it seems unpleasant, is unwise. Because, in the first

place, by doing so, we will be missing the opportunity to neutralise the causes of the troublesome circumstances we ourselves had created in the past, by experiencing them to the last bit with complete resignation, and thereby learn the precious lessons contained there in. Secondly, by changing the location of the body the cause of our troubles is not mitigated since we carry with us the Karmic causes as seeds in our mental nature.

We have seen in earlier articles that the body, mind and intellect are the three distinct avenues through which three classes of Karma independently operate, differing in quality, intensity and duration. We often see this in operation in people's lives. A sound and healthy body, the result of past good Karma, may be the habitation of the inner person but with peevish temperament and endowed with a keen intellect, or in various combinations, which is due to various classes of Karma operating through three kinds of instruments. It is also seen in some cases that events of life are heading towards culmination with little variation and with such force that nothing seems to avert or change the course of life, whether for good or for evil. Many illustrations of this may be seen, such as, people rising to power and glory against odds, scientists or artists rising to eminence and fame, or languishing unrecognized in poverty and obscurity, recognition and appreciation coming after their demise. Instances are also seen of individuals impelled against their better judgment taking a downward course to ignominy, which nothing could prevent, and people say it was destined.

Illustrations of the power of the sway of the Karmic destiny can also be seen in the rise and fall of the fortunes of nations and character of peoples in the contemporary and historical times. For instance, Mr. Judge points out that spiritual darkness is the character of the present age, signs of which are moral, mental and physical unrest which are evident everywhere. There is thus a destiny in the lives of nations and peoples. But it must ever be remembered that there is no destiny which we, individually, and collectively as nations, have not made by our own actions in the past. No nation can resort to

actions hurtful to other nations, or to sections of its own people, on whatever pretext, in the name of "National interest," and escape the backlash of retributive Karma. Disturbance in the harmony of life caused by the unjust and wicked ways of people go on accumulating, and when a point of saturation, so to speak, is reached the cumulative ill-effects will fall upon the whole nation which nothing can avert. Another illustration of the power of the sway of Karmic tendency is seen in the irresistible power of ideas, which from time to time, under the law of cycles, sweeps like a tidal wave over whole nations affecting their thinking, character and ideals. Victor Hugo truly observes that nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come. The powerful influence of Western thought and scientific culture, for instance, which began in the West with the Renaissance has sway over the whole world to this day, is an illustration of it in contemporary history.

Mere material advancement as the index of progress aided by a physical science that is wholly amoral and soul-blind must necessarily be a source of disturbance and cannot but finally end in nullity. The catastrophe to which it leads cannot be averted when gathering clouds of ill-effects of causes generated on the mental and moral plane have matured and begun to precipitate, unless a change in the mind of the race has been wrought, before the culmination of Karmic causes, through general spread of universal ideas and inspiration of nobler ideals. Effort in that direction by the selfless labour of lovers of mankind will have an effect in altering the course of Karmic destiny for the better, in however small a measure, as the Karma of every individual has an effect on the destiny of the human race because of the fact of human solidarity and the law of universal causation.

As world reform can only come about by the efforts of individuals at self-reform, it is the duty of Theosophists, devoted to the higher progress of humanity at heart, to endeavour to live the higher life. Every human being coming into this world has an appointed work in life, the general purpose of which is that each one ought to endeavour to get rid of defects and vices of personal self, and acquire

and strengthen virtues of higher life to fit oneself to become a co-worker with Nature by active application of the truth of universal brotherhood and the law of Absolute Justice—Karma. An understanding of the law of cyclic return of impressions helps us in self-improvement. Practical application of it is taught in the *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*: “In order to exclude from the mind questionable things, the mental calling up of those things that are opposite is efficacious for their removal.” For instance, a feeling of aversion we may have for another person, irrespective of his actions and character, if not overcome and transformed into one of charity and love by deliberate conscious effort, would grow in intensity life after life to the mutual detriment of both. Effort made in the present life to mitigate the inimical feeling towards fellowmen and in cultivating the opposite feeling of love and friendship, depending on the intensity of the effort expended, reduces the sway of Karmic tendency towards enmity in future life. At the same time the Karmic force of the charitable attitude which had been cultivated in the past returns to aid in the effort to counteract the feeling of enmity; till, with persistent effort in this direction life after life, the evil magnetism of ill-will in interpersonal relationship is entirely obliterated and substituted by beneficent one of love and goodwill. However, if these measures are not taken the karmic tendency will have sway over the egos concerned for at least three lives. Humanity and Nature as a whole receive impulse to higher life by individuals performing such transmutational Karma of generating finer spiritual energy out of crude disruptive energies of the baser self.

By an intelligent application of the cyclic law by people who suffer from cycles of mental depression they may entirely overcome it, over a time, by calling up in the mind, every time when the attack comes, the opposite of negative thoughts and feelings which assail, such as, the happy moments one had enjoyed or joy of the act of kindness one had done which benefitted someone, etc.

*(To be continued)*

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

It appears that we are all biased, though not always knowingly, consciously and deliberately. More frequently we come across instances of people who are treated based on their skin colour, and thus we confront the pernicious effects of racism and prejudice. Therefore, it is important to examine these biases and find out how they become etched into the brains. Since there has been a steady decline in the racist views in both United States and United Kingdom, in the last forty years, researchers believe that explicit racism having been driven underground, unconscious bias is playing a critical role. Implicit or unconscious bias could well be related to behaviour shaped by our past experiences and rooted in the unconscious mind which carries on with processes that occur automatically or are not available to introspection. We tend to rely on existing templates while deciding, when we are in a hurry, tired or distracted. Such “cognitive shortcuts” may be problematic if they are formed based on mistakes, misinformation or biased information. Every time we use them, we reinforce the same mistakes and biases that we seek to remove. “It can have far-reaching consequences, from discriminatory hiring practices to poorer healthcare treatment, to prejudice in the legal system,” writes Pragma Agarwal.

In 1995, Anthony Greenwald, a social psychologist at Harvard University, and his colleagues invented the Implicit Association Test (IAT) for studying implicit bias by measuring the link between different concepts and words. For instance, participants would be asked to pair black or white faces with the words angry, clever, good and bad. “Many studies have challenged the idea that the IAT reveals only unconscious processes.” Moreover, it is felt that an individual’s implicit attitude is only weakly linked to biased behaviour in the real world. But IAT results do tell us something about the nature of unconscious bias within societies.

Alternatively, brain scanning techniques also help to reveal the neural underpinning of our biases and show how prejudices about

other groups of people activate brain areas associated with threat and fear. Some of our biases are not innate, but have developed over a period of time, and can change with experience and environmental influences. “We now know that unconscious bias is not as stable as previously believed. Our biases are shaped by how we are brought up, what we see around us and the media we are exposed to. Knowing we can change their influence...even if we cannot precisely measure our biases just yet, we can still overcome them,” writes Pragma Agarwal. (*New Scientist*, August 26, 2020)

Bias is mental inclination or leaning, or any special influence which sways one’s thinking. It is one particular way, or a fixed way of looking at and understanding things. We speak of optimistic and pessimistic outlook on life. Bias and prejudice are formidable enemies of man, and when not innate, they are often the result of the fear of public opinion, and consequent lack of independent thought and judgement. These are defects of the mind, so subtle and elusive, that we are scarcely aware of their presence in us and are constantly deluded and led astray by them.

We must try to give up our own mental bias, and enter into the bias of another’s mind to see his viewpoint. That “another” may be a speaker or a writer. It is extremely difficult to become aware of our own mental leaning, and even more difficult to give it up and adopt mental leaning of another. We have to train ourselves. Even in everyday affairs it would be a good practice to endeavour to see things from another person’s view point. We not only need to listen, carefully and sympathetically, to another person, but if need be, get into another’s shoes.

The way to become aware of and overcome our biases is through regular self-examination. We must undertake self-examination at the end of the day, and review not only the events of every day, but also our thoughts, feelings, words, actions, motives and mental leanings, without trying to explain them away. We must note our good points and weak points, and resolve to strengthen the good and eliminate the weaknesses. Self-examination is a road to self-

knowledge, and if performed regularly, in the light of our Higher nature it can go a long way in making us aware of even our subtle weaknesses and biases, and can show us the way to transformation.

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We are vulnerable to many threats, and the current coronavirus pandemic has heightened our sense of vulnerability, making us aware that our health, jobs, institutions and way of life are all very fragile. And yet, psychological research over last few years has shown that “our default mode under adverse conditions is not vulnerability but resilience,” which means capacity to undergo adversity without suffering debilitating effects, through successful adaptation. Thus, the capacity to maintain poise in an emergency, or heal from trauma, are examples of resilience. We fail to appreciate the truth of our resilience for two main reasons. First, we are continuously bombarded with bad news that activates our negativity bias and inflames our anxieties. The second reason why we fail to appreciate the truth of our resilience is due to cognitive error known as a “propositional fallacy.” Thus for instance, we wrongly conclude that “if most troubled adults have had chaotic childhoods, then most of those who have had chaotic childhoods will end up as troubled adults,” but that is not true, and in fact, most children with dysfunctional homes become functional adults, thereby showing that resilience is not an exception but a rule.

What makes for a resilient individual? People with high intelligence which makes for adaptive problem-solving, having propensity towards positive emotions and low reactivity, and a tendency to be sociable and gregarious and conscientiousness are more likely to thrive under adverse conditions. Psychological flexibility, which refers to mental agility and adaptability makes for robust mental health, leading to resilience. Resilience is also associated with psychological hardiness, which includes the ability to assess stressors, face them with courage, and transform potential calamity into opportunity. However, resilience also depends upon

contextual factors, such as, family, community and cultural circumstances. “We should invest much of our resources in constructing social environments, systems, and institutions that create the conditions under which more people can cope....Better roads make better drivers.” Although external conditions play a big role in helping one to face adversity, some aspects of resilience are to be developed by an individual. For instance, we must practice flexibility, and learn to cope, by zooming out and assessing our situation honestly from a broader perspective. “Rather than avoiding or worrying, which tend to be both self-perpetuating and paralyzing, take problem-solving action,” writes Noam Shpancer. (*Psychology Today*, September 2020)

Resilience is the quality of readily recovering from shock, trauma, depression, etc. Resilience, as applied to a material is, resuming the original shape after bending or stretching. Truly resilient people have similar elasticity, whereby they bend like grass, in adversity, and then not only bounce back to the original state of mind and emotions, but more. They come back with added ability to face similar situations in the future, combined with wisdom and compassion. That means, one learns to recognize them as passing shows of life, and remain detached, knowing full well that “This too shall pass away.” Wisdom consists in bearing adversities, passing through them and even learning from them. We can do so by taking the position of a witness, instead of complaining about them. Every adversity has come to us under Karma. If we pass through them without murmuring, or trying to dodge them by prayers and ceremonies, we can acquire some discipline and experience. We may find ourselves coming out of the adversity, a little more patient, kind, courageous, wise, if we can learn to respond instead of reacting to the situation. When we rebel, we assert personal will instead of surrendering it to divine will and thus clog the channel of communication with the divine.

“The power of any and all circumstances is a fixed, unvarying quality, but as we vary in our reception of these, it appears to us that our difficulties vary in intensity. They do not at all. We are the

variants,” writes Mr. Judge. Some of us are overwhelmed by slight adversities, some others are only moderately affected. But we see that those who have faced bigger troubles, are able to take them all in their stride. Adversities of life, if met with properly, can build the character. “Struggle is needed for gaining strength; buffeting adverse eras is for the gaining of depth; meagre opportunities may be used for acquiring fortitude; poverty should breed generosity,” says Mr. Judge.

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We lead a busy life. The list of important and not-so-important tasks yet to be completed grows daily, leaving us tired and anxious. We tend to become impatient, not wanting to wait, seeking instant gratification and feeling disappointed over small things. Impatience can lead to an aggressive or impulsive behaviour in some, while it may leave some others feeling like a victim. Impatient people tend to make hasty and faulty decisions.

In our fast-moving world, practice of patience seems out of place. In earlier times, or even a few years back, things did not happen at lightning speed, and waiting for something was not seen as something painful or extraordinary. The novel, “Siddhartha,” by Herman Hesse, written during that era, depicts the value of patience. Siddhartha, a monk, wanting to experience worldly life, approaches a courtesan and a wealthy merchant for help. When they ask him what his greatest qualities are, and what he has learnt, the young monk answers that he can think, he can wait and he can fast. These three qualities embody patience, and their cultivation makes life easy. When things do not happen as per our expectation, negative feelings assail us and lead us to act without thinking. We are able to respond to the situation by thoughtful action, which if it is rooted in wisdom can induce a state of calm. The ability to wait helps us choose the right path, overcome obstacles till we have reached the goal. Fasting implies self-control, which in turn means being able to overpower physical, biological and psychological cravings. The Buddha

regarded patience as the foremost austerity. He taught his son Rahula that the art of developing patience consists in transforming the mind like five elements. The way these five elements remain unperturbed by clean and unclean objects, so a patient mind remains equanimous while facing pleasant and unpleasant things, and is enabled to realise highest aspirations, writes Pulkit Sharma, a clinical psychologist. (*The Speaking Tree*, July 13, 2020)

“Great man is he who is strongest in the exercise of patience,” says a Master of Wisdom. Perfect patience which gives birth to a man of unruffled serenity is most difficult to develop, and yet it is one of the most important virtues, because without it nothing lasting can be achieved or learned. You cannot have patience “if you are not calm and ready for the emergency, and as calmness is the one thing necessary for *the spirit to be heard*, it is evident how important patience is,” writes Mr. Judge. Just as the ruffled surface of the pond cannot accurately reflect any image, so also, if the mind is ruffled and made impatient by desires, it will fly from one idea to another, and cannot receive or transmit accurately the ideas which reside in our Divine nature, and as a result the quality of insight and intuition can also not be developed.

The *Dhammapada* says, “Enduring patience is the highest *tapas*.” If we could practise forbearance and patience, in the middle of the trials of everyday life, without complaint, anger or irritation, then that is truly highest asceticism. To attain that supreme state requires extraordinary patience. It is called highest *tapas* or asceticism because the practice of patience in true spirit cannot come about unless one begins to simultaneously cultivate many other virtues and never allowing doubt or despair to deter one from the path under heaviest trials—knowing that the Self is not touched by anything that befalls a man. Some of us get anxious as to our progress in spiritual life. A good gardener does not dig out the plant by the roots to see how it is growing. “What is to learn, is to be content, or, rather, resigned to ourselves and our limitations even while striving to get above them.... We cannot all at once live up to these high ideals as some others live up to theirs.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 162)