

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 4, No. 9

January 17, 2013

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

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SOME THOUGHTS ON DISCIPLINE

DISCIPLINE means moulding ourselves in accordance with certain rules or principles laid down by family, society or religion for guiding us on the right path. When we break any of those laws we invite punishment, which in turn could help us learn better discipline, though not always. Discipline is necessary in all walks of life. Home is the base where we could inculcate in a child respect for discipline, which could be carried further in schools and colleges.

A child is an old soul in a new body. It is only at the age of seven that the *manasic* Ego makes connection with the personality, when the child becomes responsible for all its actions. Before that age is reached, the elders should guide the child. Every child needs the discipline in order to curb the tendencies it has brought over from the past lives, which are not conducive for soul's progress. Children are great imitators. If parents, teachers and elders are tolerant and free from prejudice, then a child is likely to imbibe that attitude. Besides providing conducive atmosphere, in which the innate good qualities of the child can unfold, as naturally as a flower, it is necessary to discipline the child until the child gradually learns to understand its own nature and the working of the law, thereby gradually taking over the disciplining of himself. The parent or teacher should stand as the representative of the moral law. Hence, the same action must not be punished at one time, and condoned at the other. A child should be warned of the consequences of breaking

certain rules, and when he is found to break those rules deliberately, he should receive the penalty.

A child should be made self-reliant and therefore, should be encouraged to make his own choices. However, in matters of music, reading books, food, movies, etc., it becomes the responsibility of the parents to discipline the child in the formative years. Reading trash books or even regularly reading comic books and watching cartoon serials and movies on the television tend to blunt finer sensibilities. As part of the discipline, good reading habit should be cultivated in the child, who may be averse to reading. Some don'ts are necessary, but the emphasis should be upon the do's. Gradually the child should be trained to co-operate in the household duties, and the training could start from the day when the child is able to carry a plate safely from shelf to table. As the child grows, instead of threats or punishments, an appeal to his better nature proves to be effective. As soon as the child is able to connect the cause with the effect, he should be made aware of the working of the law of Karma.

During childhood and at the very young age, we discipline the child by several inhibitions, such as regular time for sleeping, eating, playing, and also what to read, what to eat, what music to hear, and so on. Then, as the child grows and begins to show his personality more strongly; with marked impulses and desires, we tend to give him almost complete control, and so there are blunders. Let us realize that the child is only *beginning* to take charge of himself, and is still in the need of help. At this stage, restrictions and inhibitions should be increasingly replaced by constructive advice and education. But there must be a balance between freedom and inhibitions. Learning to adapt himself to his environment, inner and outer, is a crucial step. He must be made to feel that he is wanted and loved, that he is an integral part of the family. The law of Karma restricts and inhibits us, by putting us in the same situation over and over again, till we have learned the lesson, so also, necessary restrictions and inhibitions must be imposed, else unrestrained freedom may lead to misery and chaos. By drawing his attention to the consequences, the child may

be educated to be co-operative, to be self-reliant, not to be obstinate and callous, to revere others, and so on. Our aim is to bring about self-government or self-discipline *of the child by the child*, and that cannot be brought about without providing the basis of moral principles, and the logic of why certain behaviour is desirable.

It is interesting to note that the two words "disciple" and "discipline" come from the same Latin root, *discipulus* (from *discere*, to learn). We see that the need for discipline is stressed in every sphere of learning, as it is indispensable to success. But the type of discipline that is demanded for living the higher life is quite different in kind. The discipline practised by an ordinary student at school or college, or by a worker at office, cannot form the basis for living the spiritual life, which requires disciplining of the physical, mental and moral nature of the aspirant, and bringing it in attunement with soul-life. Oftentimes what shatters peace and happiness is the conflict of ideologies. For peace in the society or nation there should be tolerance. When a person or a group of persons are unable to tolerate or appreciate the point of view other than their own, there are conflicts. It is only by self-discipline and tolerance that we are able to adapt ourselves to viewpoints other than our own, learning to see something of value in the views and suggestions contrary to our own.

In the absence of self-discipline, it becomes necessary to impose discipline from the outside, and then sooner or later, it arouses rebellion. A docile person might readily submit to the stringent norms, some others might reason out and accept the discipline, knowing that it is for the smooth functioning of the office, home or whatever be the institution. However, there will always be those in the family, workplace or society, who look upon such imposed discipline as interference with their freedom. At present, humanity does not seem to be at a stage where it is ready for self-discipline or self-governance. Hence, absence of every kind of external rules could but result in chaos and anarchy. And yet, unquestioning obedience is not necessary in most walks of life, except may be for

the soldiers in the army, especially in the battlefield, when they are expected to have implicit obedience to rules and commands without questioning or reasoning. For which Tennyson says of the soldiers who blindly charged into the “Valley of Death”: “Theirs not to make reply; Theirs not to reason why; Theirs but to do and die.”

Wherever possible, emphasis must be on self-discipline. From within his own consciousness a person must evolve his own code of discipline. When people are obedient out of fear of authority or some divine power, growth of human conscience and moral insight does not take place. In the beginning, when we turn within for guidance, for a long time it is our *lower* nature, full of self-regard and ulterior motives, which takes the position of a disciplinarian. But the all-seeing law of Karma begins to bring to the surface, hidden motive, pride and selfishness, making us aware of the need to discipline the personal self by the Higher Self. *The Voice of the Silence* cautions: “Restrain by the Divine thy lower Self. Restrain by the Eternal the Divine.” When the lower self is the disciplinarian we might keep cordial relations with all, but with the ulterior motive, “Who knows, I might need him tomorrow!” When the restraint comes from the divine nature, it arises from the appreciation of oneness of all. So long as pride and self-regard remain intact, no true self-discipline results. “When one aspect of our lower personal self tries to discipline another, it is a contest between the Devil and his disciple,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. He points out that when Divine Kings and Raja-rishis ruled, and when such wise Emperors as Asoka or Marcus Aurelius reigned, their guidance and instruction engendered Self-discipline.

True and lasting discipline can result only when man’s higher nature purifies, controls and elevates the lower nature. Shri Wadia says that the Divine Discipline called Yoga offers useful instructions regarding (1) subduing of animal psyche, (2) the raising of human psyche to a nobler attitude, (3) creating a channel through which the Divine psyche can speak and act. For the purpose of self-discipline we need to have right knowledge, practice regular

meditation and self-examination, and work for humanity, which will give an opportunity for the application of knowledge. The most important tool for self-discipline is training of the will, which in turn helps in training and controlling the mind. Disciplining the mind is a primary step.

Every educated person aspires to discipline himself. In building his home, in earning his livelihood, in understanding the world around him, in polishing his own character, in training his mind, in formulating his speech, and in numerous other ways he seeks guidance. The *Gita*, if understood correctly, can prove to be an excellent guide, not only on some trying occasions, but a consistent and constant instructor, from moment to moment. Our success in the spiritual life depends upon observance of the divine discipline from moment to moment. The Buddha says: “Bhikkhus, even a finger-size of dung has an evil smell. I do not favour becoming evil for the lasting of a finger-snap,” *i.e.*, we must not be lax in our discipline even for a moment.

The *Gita* has been rightly called the Book of Discipline. It is often overlooked that the *Gita* offers a discipline of daily living without insisting on the *pranayama* (breathing exercises) or *asanas* (postures), which are but means to meditation. The *Gita* advises exercise of moderation as a preliminary preparation for one who wants to practice *Dhyana* or meditation. It is stated that the divine discipline of trying to achieve union with the divine, through meditation, is not to be attained by one who eats too much or too little; or by a person who sleeps too much or too little. “The meditation which destroyeth pain is produced in him who is moderate in eating and in recreation, of moderate exertion in his actions, and regulated in sleeping and waking....He should...place his seat, firm, neither too high nor too low.”

In the early stages of one’s spiritual endeavour there is expectation and even false belief that Masters do and should guide and direct one as to what to do and what not to do. In the *Book of Confidences*, in the dialogue between the Master and the disciple, the pupil tells

the Master that if only he would instruct him to “go here,” “stay there,” etc., then he would be happy to follow the Master’s advice and would perhaps be able to make progress without making mistakes. Many of us wish for such sure guidance. But the reply of the Master is worth paying heed to. He says that if He were to ask the pupil to “do this,” or “do that,” then the pupil would never be able to strengthen the muscles of his “will.” Perhaps under the guidance of the guru he will never make mistakes, but he will also never learn *how not to make mistakes*, and by doing so, says the Teacher, he would steal from the disciple the sovereign power of choice which can make of him a god. Till a complete mastery over simple human emotions is achieved no Master can accept the aspirant as a chela. A lot has to be accomplished by chela’s *unhelped exertions*.

The disciple has to put the “bit” into his own mouth. A *bit* is the restraining instrument put into the mouth of the horse, for controlling the horse, and it is very painful for the horse. The *Gita* recommends that impersonalization of all emotions, charity for the weaknesses of others, the practice of non-violence in the daily affairs of life, are all rules of life which the aspirant must strive to adopt—with the object of benefiting others, and not for self-development. The voluntary imposition of these and other rules will so purify the magnetism of the aspirant that no one can be afraid of him, and he is so centred in the “True” that he has no fear of man. The aspirant attains to Divine Discipline by working in harmony with Nature, and Nature in her turn reveals herself in all her glory to one who has learnt the lesson of true discipline, and leads him to the goal.

How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world! How lovely that everyone, great and small, can make their contribution toward introducing justice straightaway....And you can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness!

—ANNE FRANK

FOOD FOR THOUGHT A MODERN ROBIN HOOD

“NED, what are we going to do to break Tracy of stealing any money he can get his hands on? He never used to do such a thing and we cannot let it go on. I don’t believe in applying the rod any more than you do, but ordinary punishments don’t seem to do a bit of good. I have talked to him till I am tired, about being honest and that we have no right to take anything that isn’t given to us; he just looks down and rubs one shoe against the other and I can’t get a word out of him. I can’t lay my purse down and find a bit of change in it when I come back for it. What does he *do* with it?”

“Treats the boys he plays with to candy, probably. I wouldn’t take it too hard, Meg. He will outgrow it.”

“I find my objections to sparing the rod weakening. I think perhaps a good spanking might do him more good than anything.”

“No, my dear. We will have to stick to our own principles if we want to improve Tracy. But of course we can’t let Tracy grow up with no respect for property rights. I wish he had enough confidence in one of us to tell us what is on his mind. I will take him to the zoo next Sunday and try to get a little chummier with him.”

Tracy enjoyed the outing until his father tried to bring the talk around the misappropriation of funds. But Tracy was determined not to discuss the matter.

One morning Meg’s wedding ring was nowhere to be found. Tracy, on his return from school, met inquiries with a stubborn silence. It was then that the parents decided to take Tracy to his grandmother’s house, whom he loved dearly. Tracy needed no questioning to pour out to her the whole story, when after dinner he curled up on the rug at her feet.

“You know Robin Hood, Granny?” he began.

“Well, not personally,” answered Granny, smiling, “but I have read about him.”

“Do you think he was a bad man, Granny?”

“No, dear, because he was probably doing what he thought was right. But you and I might not think it was right to steal, even to do good. We might say his ‘why’ was good, but his ‘how’ was wrong.”

“But, Granny, the people he stole from were rich and wore silk and satins; it says so in my book. And he gave what he took to the people who were so poor they had not enough to eat or proper clothes to wear.”

“It was good, surely, to be sorry for the poor, but why didn’t he give them money of his own?”

“I am sure he would have given all he had, but he didn’t have enough.”

“Why couldn’t he work hard and earn more money to give to them?”

“How could a little boy earn money, Granny?”

“Oh, was Robin Hood a little boy?” Granny asked innocently. “I thought he was a big, strong man.”

“Granny, they told you on me!” And Tracy burst into tears. He allowed himself to be gathered up in Granny’s lap to be patted and comforted and it was such a relief to tell her all about it that it all came out in a rush.

“There is such a nice boy in my school, Granny, but so poor! His coat is too small and his arms come way out of his sleeves and he has a big patch of different cloth on his trousers. Some boys laugh at him and call him ‘Raggedy Man’ and he pretends not to hear, but his face gets so red it almost make me cry. I feel so sorry for him. It’s not *fair*, Granny,” he wailed, “it’s not *fair*.”

“Well, Tracy, I agree it doesn’t look fair for Eddie now but you know we talked last summer about sowing seeds in one life and may be reaping the flowers and fruits in another. What sort of flowers and fruits are the boys sowing seeds for when they make fun of Eddie?”

“Bad ones, no, Granny?”

Granny nodded, with a sad look on her kind face. “Perhaps just such flowers and fruits are growing in poor Eddie’s garden now.

We can’t say just what they will be, but never can we sow bad seeds and get a pleasant crop!”

“But if Eddie doesn’t shout at them and hit them, isn’t he sowing better seeds this time?”

“Yes, if his thoughts and feelings about those boys are not angry or unkind.”

“I don’t think they are, Granny. He never talks that way.”

“Good boy!” said Granny. “But, Tracy, we have come a long way from Robin Hood, haven’t we? How did he come into the picture?”

“Because of *me*, Granny! I thought they must have told you. After Eddie came to our school and I saw how poor he was I used to hide my allowance to save enough for a new suit for him. But I saw suit in a window one day that looked just fine; only when I went inside and asked the price it was more than I could save in weeks and weeks. And all the time Eddie would have to wear those worn-out clothes and be made fun of; I couldn’t stand that! I asked Eddie whether his father and mother couldn’t get him a new suit, but he said he doesn’t know where his father is, and his mother is very poor. She takes in sewing but she hasn’t been here long and can’t get much to do. He lives in a poor little house.

I took out what I had saved and gave it to him for paying the rent, and then I remembered Robin Hood, and so I took some more money when I found it around the house. Granny promised to collect some clothes for Eddie from her friends and also promised to find some sewing work for Eddie’s mother, so that she could earn some money.

“But do you see, Tracy, where you made a mistake? It is very good indeed to feel sorry for people and to want to help them; but there are right and wrong ways of helping. We can only give what is rightfully our own without harming some people while we are trying to help others. The thing we have to do is to keep that feeling of sympathy with others strong in us and to help wisely with what is ours to give. You remember that verse I used to read you so often

from *The Voice of the Silence*: ‘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’? So your ‘why’ was right, like Robin Hood’s. But let’s see if your ‘how’ was right too. Suppose I found a little boy who had no books and was hungry for something to read, and I felt very sorry for him and remembered that you had many books, and I decided you would not begrudge him one.’

“Of course not, Granny! I would be glad to give you more than one for him.”

“But suppose I did not ask you but instead, the next time I was at your house, I picked up your *Robinson Crusoe* and carried it off to him. Would you like that?”

“Well, I would think you might have asked me, Granny. I would rather you took lots of other books than that one!”

“But if you take something of your mother’s without asking, to give to Eddie, what is the difference, Tracy? I am sure your mother would have been glad to give you something for him if you had asked her. Would you like to know a rule that I have found very helpful, Tracy?”

“Yes, please, Granny,” said Tracy in a small voice.

“If a thing is right to do, do it openly and boldly, and if it is wrong, never touch it at all. Well, let’s memorize it together now, so that it will come up when you need it, to make your ‘how’ as good as your ‘why.’”

The end does not justify the means. We are only justified when the means that we use to reach our goals are just as good as the end result. It would be worthwhile waiting till we find right means to reach the desired end. Because otherwise, in doing one good we are sowing seeds of a bad action. The Law of Karma takes into account the motive, but it also takes into account the means used for achieving a good end. We need to use discrimination and patience even in achieving a good end.

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

THE PATH—III

8. *He who does not rouse himself when it is time to rise and though young and strong is full of sloth, whose will and thought are weak, that lazy man will not find the Path of Wisdom. (280)*

FOR THE one who is lazy and does not exert, there is no hope for finding the path of wisdom. “Difficult it is to get to hear the True Law,” says the Buddha. The difficulty is further increased by prevailing false ideas, superstitions, blind beliefs and credulity which mislead the seeker from the true path. In the preface to *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. writes: “To the mentally lazy or obtuse, Theosophy must remain a riddle; for in the world mental as in the world spiritual each man must progress by his own efforts.” To know the truth, one has to become a seeker. There has to be an ardent desire to know the truth. Krishna tells Arjuna: “Seek this wisdom by doing service, by strong search, by questions, and by humility; the wise who see the truth will communicate it unto thee.” It calls for determination, courage and strength—mental and moral.

“Voice of the Masters is always there in the world,” says *Light on the Path*. The teachings of the Great Ones are there for anyone who cares to inquire. But modern man has no time for them. They prefer to pursue pleasures of life. They are too busy with their career and personal goals to spend time on “spiritual matters” which must wait till retirement. They postpone this all too important inquiry to their old age, forgetting that then they might be too weak, physically or mentally, to undertake the quest. “Men who have not lived the disciplined life of a chaste mind, who have not gathered soul wealth in young age, pine away like old cranes in a lake without fish,” says the Buddha.

9. *Guarding speech, controlling mind, not doing wrong with the body, a man keeps the three avenues to action clear and thus finds the Path shown by the Wise. (281)*

10. *From discipline of yoga springs Wisdom; from lack of it there is loss of Wisdom. Knowing this twofold path of progress and decline let a man bend his way to the Path of Progress. (282)*

Spirit in the body is said to be the source of limitless power and energy. We use this power and energy to think, feel and act. When we use this power for gratification of personal desires and selfish pursuits, we are wasting it instead of using it for higher purpose. Mind, body and speech are three avenues of action through which we can use them wisely and judiciously. Since every action is preceded by thought, one has to be vigilant at thought level to avoid doing wrong things. By purifying one's thoughts, feelings and actions, man becomes receptive to higher thoughts and spiritual possibilities of life. Such a man finds the Path to wisdom.

“Yoga” means to achieve union with the Spirit within. It is also defined as contemplation and meditation. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, yoga is defined in many ways. It says: Skill in performance of action is called yoga; equal-mindedness is called yoga; disconnection from union with pain is distinguished as yoga. It begins with control of mind and practice of detachment. This will purify our mind and emotions so that at first we learn to become less selfish, less self-centered and start paying attention to the needs of other people and gradually achieve selflessness. The success in practice of yoga can be achieved when we devote ourselves to the service of humanity. Altruism and forgetfulness of the personal self are considered to be two important conditions for spiritual success. When the person is devoted in this manner, he will find spiritual knowledge springing up spontaneously in himself in the progress of time, says Shri Krishna. But the perfection in yoga is not attained by intermittent effort. The effort has to be continuous. The disciple who becomes complacent, thinking that he has attained much progress, and stops the discipline finds that the Self within no longer guides him and he loses spiritual wisdom.

11. *Cut down the whole forest of desire, not single trees;*

danger lurks in that forest. Having cut down trees and uprooted the weeds of desire you are free, O Bhikkhus. (283)

12. *So long as the desire, however small, of a man for woman is not destroyed, so long his mind clings like a suckling calf to its mother. (284)*

13. *Cut out the love of Self as you would an autumn lily. Then resort to the Path of Peace, to Nirvana. The Happy One has shown this. (285)*

By our desires we remain bound to this world of suffering was shown by the Buddha in his doctrine of the Twelve Nidanas. Therefore, we are asked to cut down the whole forest of desires and not single trees. So long as even a single tree remains, it is likely to proliferate and re-populate the forest. However, it is difficult for us to get rid of all our desires at once and therefore we try to overcome them one by one, little by little. But we must not stop till we have uprooted them all. Moreover, while gross desires are noticeable like the trees in a forest, we tend to overlook our subtle desires which like the weeds can ruin the soil and make it worthless. Therefore, we need to pay attention to all our selfish and purely personal desires, small or large and strive to uproot them. We may succeed in conquering our gross desires so that we would not desire to acquire wealth by unfair means; we would not harm another to get hold of our object of desire; we would not use other people as stepping stones for obtaining success and so on; but we may still have subtle desires. For example, without knowing it, we might look for some sort of recognition or a feeling of gratitude from the recipient of our help. Having helped them, we feel that they should consult us and follow our well-meaning advice in the matter and if it is not followed, we feel offended. If not this, then we want people to love us for our kind action. All these are personal and selfish desires and are sufficient to prevent the disciple from attaining complete success in spiritual life. Any such desire like Achilles' heel can make us vulnerable and destroy us. Of these, Egotism and sex are the last to go.

In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Mr. Judge writes:

The question of sex is not the most difficult. The personal one is still harder. I mean the purely personal, that relating to “me.” The sexual really relates only to a low plane gratification.

The disciple has to “destroy” all personal desires. He must not merely *suppress* them by strong effort of will and allow them to remain within his nature like the fire smoldering under thin layer of ashes. As well hope that a band of drunken chimney-sweeps, hot and greasy from their work, may be shut up in a Sanctuary hung with pure and white linen, and that instead of soiling and turning it by their presence into a heap of dirty shreds, they will become master in and of sacred recess, and finally emerge from it as immaculate as that recess, writes H.P.B in her article “Occultism Versus the Occult Arts.” Letting go of the desires should happen as easily as plucking of the autumn lily which is delicate and offers no resistance. When we are able to let go our desires without struggle, it means that we have truly relinquished. Then we are ready to tread the path that leads to Nirvana.

14. *“Here shall I pass the monsoon; there shall I dwell in winter and summer.” This is foolish reflection. He does not consider obstacle of existence. (286)*

15. *Flood carries off a sleeping village. Death comes and carries off the man absorbed in cattle and children; he is distracted of mind. (287)*

16. *Sons are no protection, nor father, nor kinsmen when one is seized by death. There is no help from relations when death seizes one. (288)*

17. *Recognizing the significance of this a wise and good man should straightaway begin to clear the path that leads to Nirvana. (289)*

We are all aware of the terrible fact of life that “death is certain to all things which are born,” and yet, we live as if there is no death.

This is what Yudhisthira in the *Mahabharata* found most amazing. From the cradle to the grave, we are planning and preparing for the future, not realizing that the next moment could be our last. There is nothing wrong in planning for the future but we need to prepare ourselves for the eventuality of death. When we do that, we will learn to live each day and each moment fully, extracting what lesson they have to teach us. If we keep that awareness in our mind, we would not only plan for the future in this world but also for life in the world after death, by gathering soul-wealth in young age. We would make provision for the journey after death. Otherwise, as a sleeping village is carried off by the flood, death will carry us off when we are engrossed in worldly life and not yet ready to go. It is not surprising that many people who have had “near-death experience” begin to value life in a true sense. In the *Gita* (XIII), Krishna gives us the following advice:

“True wisdom of a spiritual kind is freedom from self-esteem, hypocrisy, and injury to others; it is patience, sincerity, respect for spiritual instructors, purity, firmness, self-restraint, dispassion for objects of sense, freedom from pride, and a meditation upon birth, death, decay, sickness, and error; it is an exemption from self-identifying attachment for children, wife, and household, and a constant unwavering steadiness of heart upon the arrival of every event whether favourable or unfavourable; it is a never-ceasing love for me alone...this is called wisdom or spiritual knowledge; its opposite is ignorance.”

When we meditate upon death, we may understand the profound truth of what Mr. Judge tells us: “what a petty lot of matter we spend time on, when so much is transitory. After a hundred years what will be the use of all this? Better that a hundred years hence a principle of freedom and an impulse of work should have been established. The small errors of life are nothing, but the general sum of thought is much.”

(Concluded)

NUMBERS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

I

A NUMBER is a mathematical object used to count, label and measure. Whether there is knowledge of counting or not it is found that in man as also in some species of animals there is “number sense.” The number sense is not the ability to count, but the ability to recognize that something has changed in a small collection. If there is a change in the number of young ones, the mother animal will notice the change. Likewise, many birds have good number sense. If a nest has four eggs then one egg can be removed safely, but if two eggs are removed, then generally the bird deserts the nest. In an experiment, a squire was trying to shoot the crow that had made a nest in the watch-tower of his estate. He found that as he approached the watch-tower the crow would fly, and then watch from a distance and not come back until he had left the tower. Next time, the squire took another man with him to the tower. He found that the crow did not return to the watch-tower till both the men had left the tower. The experiment was repeated with three men and then four men, with the same result. Only when the experiment was repeated with five men entering the watch-tower, the crow returned to the tower while there was still one man in the tower. Small children can become aware if an object is missing from a group of objects, but the child’s ability to perceive the increase or decrease in the *number* of people or objects around him is very limited, especially when the number goes beyond three or four, writes Dantzig Tobias in the book, *Number: The Language of Science*.

Professor Brian Butterworth has been doing research on a condition called *dyscalculia*, or number blindness, in which one’s number sense is defective. It occurs in an estimated three to six per cent of the population. Dyscalculics do not “get” numbers the way most people do. For instance, if we write down two figures, 65 and 24 and ask them to tell which of these two figures is the biggest, they would take around three seconds to give the correct answer,

while a normal person would take less than half a second. It is not as if dyscalculics are not able to count, but they seem to lack intuition about numbers and may tend to use their fingers more in counting. Severe dyscalculics can barely read time. Dyscalculia can be thought of as number version of dyslexia, writes Alex Bellos in the book, *Alex’s Adventures in Numberland*.

Numerals are the symbols used for representing numbers. The number five can be represented by both base ten numeral “5,” by the Roman numeral “V” and also ciphered letters. Thousands of years ago fingers, rocks or sticks were used for representing numbers. The Egyptians represented their numbers by hieroglyphics. The origins of our modern decimal, or base-10, number system can be traced to ancient Egyptian, Babylonian (Sumerian), and Chinese roots. The bulk of the credit for the base-10 system, however, complete with a symbol for zero, goes to the Hindu mathematicians of the fifth and sixth centuries. After their discovery of the system it was transmitted to mathematicians in the Islamic world who developed it to include decimal fractions during the period from the 9th to 11th centuries A.D. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The most commonly used system of numerals is known as *Arabic* numerals or *Hindu-Arabic* numerals.

A deep significance was attached to numbers in hoary antiquity. There was not a people with anything like philosophy, but gave great prominence to numbers in their application to religious observances, the establishment of festival days, symbols and even the geographical distribution of empires, writes H.P.B. Similar to Pythagoras, St. Augustine of Hippo believed that everything had numerical relationships and it was up to the mind to seek and investigate the secrets of these relationships or have them revealed by divine grace.

Numerology makes use of numbers to interpret a person’s character or to divine the future. The theory behind numerology is based on the Pythagorean idea that all things can be expressed in numerical terms because they are ultimately reducible to numbers.

There are many numerology systems which assign numerical value to the letters of an alphabet. For instance, *Gematria* is the practice within Jewish tradition of assigning numerical value to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and then assigning mystical meaning to the words based on their numerical value. Kabalists used this method to get an insight into sacred writings or to understand the hidden meaning of letters, words and sentences, and to establish analogies between words and phrases. “Of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the first ten are given number values consecutively from one to ten, the next eight from 20 to 90 in intervals of ten, while the final four letters equal 100, 200, 300, and 400, respectively. More complicated methods have been used, such as employing the squares of numbers or making a letter equivalent to its basic value plus all numbers preceding it” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). H.P.B. points out that in the *Mahabharata* the *Prajapatis* (or progenitors) are 21 in number, or ten, six, and five (1065), or thrice seven. In the Kabala the same numbers are a value of Jehovah or 1065, because Jehovah is Jod, He, Vau, He, *i.e.*, Jod, Vau and twice He. The numerical value of Jod is 10, of Vau is 6 and of He is 5, thus 1065. If we add all the digits we arrive at 21 or thrice seven. (*S.D.*, I, 90 and fn.)

People who believe in numerology claim that numbers derived from the date of birth of a person, or his name can give a key to his personality, his relationships, and even help to determine the future. Though it is very difficult to verify the truth of such claims, many have been fascinated by numbers and the insight numerology can offer. In the Preface to *Cheiro's Book of Numbers*, the author says that the secret or occult significance of numbers was known to the elect and revealed to humanity from antiquity. We do not know the origin of life, but we know that life exists. So also, we are unable to trace the origin of numbers, but as Balzac puts it, “without numbers the whole edifice of our civilization would fall to pieces.” Numerology is based on the fact that there are only nine numbers by which all the calculations on our earth are made. There are only nine planets in our solar system. Number nine marks the end of the

series of numbers on which all our calculations are based. After number 9 all other numbers are but repetitions of first nine numbers. Thus, 10, which 1 plus 0, is 1. 11 is 1 plus 1, which is 2. Likewise, 12 is 1+2 or 3, and so on. From the ancient times numbers 1 to 9 were assigned to the nine planets in our system. The numbers associated with the planets are Sun—1, Moon—2, Jupiter—3, Uranus—4, Mercury—5, Venus—6, Neptune—7, Saturn—8, Mars—9. The days are also numbered 1 to 9. In numerology, the day of birth gives the *Key number*, and that is related to the planet bearing the same number. Thus, if a person is born on 1, 10, 19, or 28th of the month, his *Key number* is 1, and that is related to Planet Sun, which bears number 1. This *Key number* may or may not be in accord with the *Name number*.

The *name number* is arrived at by adding the numbers corresponding to every letter in one's name. Cheiro points out that the best system for numbering the alphabets is the one used by the ancient Chaldeans, and passed on to the Hebrews. When applied to the English alphabets, we have A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5, F=6, G=7, H=8, I=1, J=1, K=2, L=3, M=4, N=5, O=7, P=8, Q=1, R=2, S=3, T=4, U=6, V=6, W=6, X=5, Y=1, Z=7. Number 9 is not assigned to any letter of the alphabet.

We are given the example of Napoleon Bonaparte, who used to write his name as Napoleon Buonaparte to begin with, and the numerical value of two words was 5 each and the total was 10. However, in later part of his life he replaced “Buonaparte” by “Bonaparte” which had the value 8. Hence the total of the name changed from 10 to 13. We are told that number 8 of Saturn denotes anarchy, revolution, waywardness, and on a lower plane it implies tragic ending to life. The total was number 13, which is depicted in the system of occult symbolism as a *skeleton with a scythe*, “mowing men down.” It is symbol of “Power,” which if wrongly used can bring about one's own destruction.

Cheiro points out that there are colours associated with every number because there are also gems or precious stones associated

with every number. If a person is born on 6th January then “6” becomes his individual number and he should use the colour corresponding to number 6 and so on.

We are told that there is attraction between those having compatible or same numbers. Number 1 is considered to be compatible with 2, 4 and 7. Number 3 is compatible with 6 and 9. Number 5 is compatible with all. The analogy given is that if you spread sugar in the jungle at one place, and at another place, few kilometers away tie a goat, then ants will be attracted to where the sugar is spread, while the tiger will be attracted to where the goat is tied. In a similar manner we are attracted or we attract towards us things and people which are compatible with our numbers. *The secret of the numbers depends upon the mysterious law of vibration.*

In the article, “Occultism: What Is It?” Mr. Judge writes: “It is said that each person has a distinct mathematical value expressed by one number. This is a compound or resultant of numberless smaller values. When it is known, extraordinary effects may be produced not only in the mind of the person but also in his feelings, and this number may be discovered by certain calculations more recondite than those of our higher mathematics. By its use the person may be made angry without cause, and even insane or full of happiness, just as the operator desires” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 18*, p. 3). The science of numbers seems to be based on vibrations.

In *Vernal Blooms* we are told that the differences among all persons are greatly due to vibrations of all kinds. “Human beings are like so many keys on the piano, each having its own sound, and the combination of which produces other sounds in endless variety.” One of the things which differentiates an ordinary person from a partly developed student and an Adept, is the difference in the rate of vibrations of brain molecules. The brain of a *chela* (disciple) is attuned to the brain of the Master. His vibrations synchronize with those of the Adept. It appears that we could change the vibrations of the brain molecules by changing the quality of the brain, and that in turn depends upon the purity of our thoughts. By purifying our

thoughts we can purify our lower four principles, or the quaternary, so that it can vibrate in unison with the Divine Trinity or Higher nature.

The correspondences of numbers, letters, colours, etc. seem to be based on vibrations. H.P.B. points out that every letter when *uttered* produces sound or vibrations, and the spoken letter corresponds to musical notes, numbers and shades of colours, and can awaken various elemental forces of nature. *The Secret Doctrine* mentions six *saktis* or powers, one of which is *Mantrika sakti*, the power or the occult potency of sound, words, letters and numbers that are used in the *mantras*. The effect produced by any *mantram* is determined by the numbers, syllables, and intonation of the sacred metre. For instance, *Aum* can be pronounced as one, two or three syllable word, and when pronounced with right intonation, in each case the effect produced will be different.

(To be continued)

THROUGH violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness.

Only light can do that. Difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

—DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

SPIRITUAL CULTURE

“SPIRITUAL CULTURE” is an expression which is in common use of late. Different people attach to it different meaning according to the context in which it is used and according to the ideas they hold on the subject. Devotees aspiring to progress on the path of spiritual development are often found speaking of spiritual culture or self-culture. Mr. Judge writing on the same subject says that it is an incorrect expression to use because it conveys the idea that Spirit or the Self can be cultivated, which is an absurdity, as Self or Spirit is Eternal and inherently perfect, and to speak of cultivating that which is Eternal and perfect is to contradict a basic truth. Elsewhere, Mr. Judge lays emphasis on the correct use of terms, or words of expression, to designate specific truisms in philosophical pursuits. Whatever goal or ideal we set about to achieve the first requisite is to acquire the right knowledge of the nature of the object of our pursuit and of the means by which it is to be accomplished. Mind is the real plane of action and it acts along the line of ideas we hold. Therefore, if we make a mistake in our conception of the nature of the end we have in view, or use verbal expressions, the meaning of which do not represent the latter, then we will not only fail to achieve what we set out to achieve but involve ourselves deeper in errors. Especially is this true in respect of spiritual pursuits, as even a slight error in philosophical propositions or premises will lead us far away from the goal we had in view, just as we would miss hitting the target in archery if we make even a slight error in our aim.

Mr. Judge, therefore, suggests that the appropriate expression to employ, which more accurately represents the aspiration of the devotee of spiritual wisdom, is *Yoga*, which means pursuit of that study and discipline by which one might arrive at the realization of the union of one’s self with the Universal Self. Yoga is defined in Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorsims as concentration of the mind, which is the thinking principle. In order to realize the truth of the essential oneness of our Soul with the Universal Soul we have to learn to

direct our mind with one-pointed concentration upon the ideal, and acquire perfect discriminative knowledge of what is Soul as distinguished from what is not Soul.

Mind is, by its very nature, restless and in constant agitation, because it is modified by every impression it receives from the senses and from the memory of past sensations and experiences, of which it is the repository. The mind is altered into the nature of the subject or object brought before it. These impressions flow in ceaseless stream throughout the life of man. Hence the mind is in perpetual agitation in ordinary life. The Soul, the Perceiver, that has not learnt to control the mind, *seems* to be coloured by his perceptions and thereby deluded, though it is innately unmodifiable. It is somewhat analogous to the fact that a white translucent crystal appears red if placed under red light, or blue if placed under blue light, and so on. Consequently the Soul, the Real Man, fails to apprehend the true nature of his own being and of the things he apprehends, and falls into the error of regarding what is not self to be the self. Hence it is said in the *Voice of the Silence*, “The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer.” Only thus can Self-knowledge arise. Yoga is that science and discipline by which this is accomplished. Yoga consists in so controlling the modifications of the mind and concentrating it upon any one chosen subject or object to the exclusion of every other impression for as long as one wishes—*ekagrata*. It is called meditation with a seed. When this is perfected higher forms of meditation, meditation on truth in the abstract, opens up before the devotee. The whole purpose of the philosophy and practice of Yoga is to gain mastery over the mind and direct thought and aspiration to the Higher Self, the *Iswara* within, to the exclusion of all else. In ordinary life, Will which is the sovereign power of *Iswara*, is subject to, and moved by *kama*—desire. When it is freed from the dominion of desire by renunciation of the personal self through perfection of discriminative knowledge of what is real and what unreal, then the liberated Will, by degrees, subdues the mind itself and gains mastery over it. Then the Soul,

the real Man, by the power of the Will and perfect discriminative knowledge and devotion to *Iswara*, the supreme Spirit, arrives at realization of his oneness with Him.

However the practice of Yoga or concentration or meditation—is as these are all synonymous—is not easy. When Arjuna complains to Krishna that restraint of the mind is as difficult as that of the wind, Krishna does not deny that it is difficult but assures that it may be acquired by proper means (*Gita*, VI). The means he advocates, confirming the teaching of the Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms, are regular practice (*abhyasa*) and exercise of dispassion (*vairagya*). The practice consists in attempting to concentrate the mind on any chosen subject or object to the exclusion of all other thoughts, every day, for a certain period at a certain set time. Mind wanders defying attempts to restrain it. But the Teachers say that if persisted in without intermission for a long period one gradually develops the power of concentration. Such a practice carried out every day at a set time is of the greatest importance. This is because the law of cyclic return of impressions develops and accumulates psychic energy by our daily practice, which rises like a tide at the set time every day, the force of which aids us in concentration when we sit for our practice at that particular time.

But mere practice will not accomplish the object. There must be detachment from desires, which arise due to our tendency to identify ourselves with the body and the personal self. The wrongful self-identification with personality is due to the delusion produced by the absence of knowledge of the Soul as distinct and separate from the body, and to be a portion of the Supreme. As the discriminative knowledge of the true nature of the Soul and Spirit grows stronger, the hold of the personal idea on us, with which we are constantly swayed and deluded, begins to lessen, and desires of personal self gradually give place to devotion to true Self, which being Eternal, is the Self of All. Altruism, love of and devotion to humanity, gradually becomes the main motive of one's life.

It is evident that proficiency in the practice of Yoga or

concentration is not easily attained. Long persistent effort throughout life and for many lives to come would be required to bring our personal nature to accord with the divine nature. The effects of having lived innumerable lives in the past based on wrong ideas and selfishness can scarcely be overcome by efforts in one life. Our mind, brain and the body which we have acquired by our past Karma are impervious to the light that ever shines from the Higher Self which broods over us. The task before us, then, in life is to so think and act based on the acquirement of right knowledge of Self, which will reveal to our understanding that sacrifice and altruism are the laws of higher life, and not selfishness, and inspire us to live in order to benefit mankind. Right knowledge, right thought, right living and right aspirations perseveringly pursued are the means by which we might transform our nature so as to make it porous to the vivifying rays of the Spiritual Sun. Great encouragement is found in the words of Krishna that the efforts of such a devotee is never lost even if he dies before perfecting himself but that, by reason of the tendency set up in him by his past practice and merit earned, he will be born in a fortunate family, after enjoying reward in *Devachan* (*swarga* or paradise), and will come back to the knowledge which was his in former life and will be led on to greater effort and higher attainment. Those who thus make great progress in spiritual culture may even be born in the family of wise men, which Krishna says is difficult to obtain, which will be conducive to perfection of spiritual cultivation. When the devotee gives himself up to the dictates of the Higher Self and lives with no other motive than to benefit mankind, the Master will lead him on to perfection. Such is the promise of Krishna: "To them thus always devoted to me, who worship me with love, I give that mental devotion by which they come to me. For them do I out of my compassion, standing within their hearts, destroy the darkness which springs from ignorance by the brilliant lamp of spiritual discernment." (*Gita*, X)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

Question: In ancient times, when certain musical “*ragas*” were played the surrounding area would be lighted up. When certain other “*ragas*” were played, they would cause rain to fall. What are these *ragas*? How can we revive them?

Answer: The concept of *raga* seems to be peculiar to the Indian Classical music. A *raga* uses a series of five or more musical notes upon which melody is constructed. Often the word *raga* is defined as “the act of colouring or dyeing.” In the given context, and taken figuratively, *raga* is something which colours one’s emotions. In a broad sense, *raga* may be said to be a set of rules or constraints which binds the performance of a singer in such a way that it tends to induce a certain emotion or mood in the minds of the listeners. However, the concept of *raga* seems to be abstract or intriguing, because a *raga* has to induce an emotion, and it is not as if every set of notes that follows these rules become a *raga*. A *raga* consists of a defined set of notes which could vary with individual *raga*. Each *raga* is associated with ascending and descending pattern which defines the order of the notes, known as *aroha* and *avaroha*.

In the Indian musical tradition, *ragas* are associated with different times of the day or with seasons. It is observed that when these *ragas* are performed at the prescribed time, they have maximum effect. For instance, many of the *Malhar* group of *ragas* are performed during the monsoon and are ascribed the magical power to bring rain. Thus, *Megh Malhar raga* is said to have the power to cause rain in the area where it is sung. The word *Megh* in Sanskrit means *cloud*.

Some musicians of the ancient times had the perfect knowledge of these *ragas*, and they could bring into play the magical power of the *raga*, while singing it. One such person was Tansen, who flourished in the sixteenth century and was considered to be one of the greatest musicians of India. He was a court musician to Emperor Akbar and reckoned one among the *Navratnas* or nine jewels, *i.e.*, nine illustrious persons in Emperor Akbar’s court. Legends associated with Tansen say that he could bring down rains by singing *raga Megh Malhar*, and start fire with *raga Deepak*. Other legends speak of his ability to make wild animals listen with attention. When he sang certain *ragas*, candles used to light up automatically. Once he tamed a wild elephant, using the power of *ragas*, so that the emperor could ride him.

We might say that the magical power of *ragas* is the magical power of music, which in turn is associated with the power of spoken word or sound. In *Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, H.P.B. describes some occult arts, and one of them is *Guhya-Vidya*. It is “knowledge of the mystic powers residing in Sound (Ether), hence in the Mantras (chanted prayers or incantations) and depending on the rhythm and melody used; in other words, a magical performance based on Knowledge of the forces of Nature and their correlation.” The *Secret Doctrine* describes six *Shaktis* or primary forces in Nature, and one of them is *Mantrika-Shakti*. It is “the force or power of letters, speech or music. The *Mantra Shastra* has for its subject-matter this force in all its manifestations. . . . *The influence of melody is one of its ordinary manifestations.*” The *spoken word has a potency unknown to, unsuspected and disbelieved in*, by the modern man. “Sound and rhythm are closely related to the four Elements of the Ancients; and because such or another vibration in the air is sure to awaken corresponding powers, union with which produces good or bad results, as the case may be” (*S.D.*, I, 307). Mr. Judge writes that there are many men in Germany, Austria, Italy and Ireland who can bring about extraordinary effects on horses, cattle, and the like, by

peculiar sounds uttered in a certain way.

The efficacy of the *mantram* depends upon the form given to it, and that in turn depends upon many things, such as, numbers and syllables of the sacred metre, rhythm, correct pronunciation, intonation, etc. If pronounced slowly and in a certain rhythm, one effect is produced; if quickly and with another rhythm, there is a different result. It can be responded to either by the gods or the *Rakshasas* (bad spirits).

A *mantram* is a spoken power, which awakens another corresponding and still more occult power in the world of spirits. These powers are elementals, which are said to be the soul or essence of four elements—earth, water, air and fire. What is said about the *mantram* becomes applicable to various *ragas*. Hence, it is not surprising that singing of certain *ragas* awaken fire elementals causing light or fire, and water elementals causing rain. For instance, *Kumila-Madan* (elementals associated with water), when invoked they will shower rain. *Porthu-Madan* (earth elementals), help in taming of the wild animals (*Isis*, I, 496). Just as there are very few people who have perfect knowledge of *mantras* so as to bring about the desired effect, so also, even today there must be only a few who might possess perfect knowledge of the magical power of *ragas*.

Question: What are *Akasic* records?

Answer: In order to understand “*Akasic* records” we must understand what *Akasa* is. *Akasa*, here, does not mean the blue sky. Theosophy teaches that *Akasa* is a form of extremely ethereal and luminous matter. *Mula-prakriti*, as the name suggests, is the root of all matter in the manifested universe. It is also called Pre-cosmic root substance which undergoes differentiation to give rise to various grades of matter—from the most subtle to the most dense and gross matter we see on our plane. Hindu Philosophy mentions seven planes of *prakriti* comparable to seven planes of matter, of which higher planes of matter are described as *Akasa* or Divine Astral. The lower layers of matter are called Astral light, which is gross as compared to *Akasa*, but is very subtle and ethereal as compared to gross matter

of our earth. *Akasa* is the plane of eternal divine consciousness. Just as every word or action on our plane is preceded by a thought or idea, so also, it is said that before any idea of object can come into existence on our plane it first exists in the form of model or prototype in *Akasa*. Our universe is a universe of phenomena, illusion, *maya* and of relativity. The *Akasic* world is the Archetypal world of *noumena*, or of things-in-themselves. Thus, it is said that no form can be given to anything, either by nature or by man, whose model, or ideal type does not already exist in *Akasa*. In fact, every form or shape that a human mind could conceive or imagine, already exists in *Akasa* or archetypal world. Tables are seen and used on earth because “tabularity” exists in its archetypal counterpart. Day and night on our plane are represented by *manvantara* and *pralaya* on the higher plane, and so on.

Ideas are the *archetypes* or *models* of which particular objects, properties and relations are copies. We are told that “prototypes or ideas of things exist first on the plane of Divine eternal Consciousness (*Akasa*) and these become reversed in the Astral Light.” H.P.B. gives the analogy of the acorn and the germ to explain prototypes in *Akasa* and Astral Light. Acorn contains both the astral form of the future Oak and also the germ, which will grow into a tree. This tree can take any one of the million forms, depending upon the atmosphere, sunlight, soil, water, etc. These forms are contained in the acorn potentially. We are told that what exists in the *Akasa* is the noumenal germ. In the astral light, we have the subjective picture. The development of the oak tree is the result of the developed prototypes in the Astral Light, which development proceeds from higher to lower planes. Thus, we descend downward from the most ethereal to grosser planes till we reach the grossest plane, where there is consolidation and a perfectly developed tangible form. (*Transactions*, pp. 96-98)

Besides the archetypal ideas, the ideations and words of Great Beings are impressed on *Akasa*. All our noble thoughts, feelings and actions are impressed on *Akasa*. On the other hand, our lower,

sensual, personal and mundane thoughts, feelings and actions get recorded in the astral light. As soon as a thought leaves the brain, it combines with a unit of life energy called an elemental and forms an entity. This “entity” gets its character from us, depending upon the quality of the thought—good or bad. The length of the life of this “entity” depends upon the intensity of the thoughts. These “entities” are *our* creations, and we are responsible for them. These thoughts not only help or hinder their creator, but also are impressed on the invisible register called astral light, forming a common pool of thoughts. The astral light acts as a photographer’s sensitive plate. For every action there are two kinds of pictures impressed on the astral light. One picture is for the action and the other is for the thoughts and feelings associated with the act. These pictures in the astral light throw down upon us the suggestion to repeat the same act or thought. Each one of us attracts from this pool, the thoughts that are consubstantial with our nature. Our unwholesome or evil thoughts of revenge, hatred, jealousy, etc., do not vanish but get impressed on the astral light, and the same could be attracted by another person having similar thoughts, and give him an added impulse in that direction. Likewise, we can attract higher thoughts and ideations from the *Akasic* plane, if we attune our mind to that plane. It is similar to attuning the radio, in order to hear a particular program broadcast from the radio station. While writing an article, if the student becomes concentrated, then the currents of his thought could become consubstantial with what the Masters and the Great Ones have ideated upon [which is impressed on the *Akasa*], and he may catch the benign influence even without being consciously aware of it, writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

The time for which the impressions or records of thoughts and feelings are preserved in the astral light is determined by the intensity of thought and the class of elementals with which the thought is associated. Akasic records, on the other hand, are permanent.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

To live well, we must try to follow the natural rhythm of the universe. There is a saying: “Timing is everything.” When trying to conceive a child or launching a new product, timing is crucial. Scientist Franz Halberg showed that radiation given to mice at certain time of the day could have little effect, but the same radiation given at the corresponding time at night can kill them. His results are now used to improve the treatment through chemotherapy. It has been observed that natural births occur at a significantly higher rate between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. than at any other time. Heart attacks are three times as common in the morning as they are at night.

Everything in the universe has its own biological rhythm. For good health, instead of asking “what” to do, and “how” much to do, we must focus on “when” to do. Since we are intimately connected to cycles of sun, moon and the universe as a whole, we should try to live in attunement with these cycles. Ayurveda mentions *doshas*, which are basic underlying principles of intelligence that governs all life. There are three *doshas*: *vata* which is light, spacy and airy, like the wind. *Pitta* is hot, dynamic and intense, like fire. *Kapha* is slow, heavy and earthy. Each *dosha* governs different times of the day, month and year, according to these qualities. Ayurveda divides the 24-hour period into six cycles of four hours each. Each of these cycles is governed by a particular *dosha* or the underlying principle, which supports particular physiological function. We must keep this fact in mind and accordingly plan our activities, such as eating, exercising, etc., to enjoy good health. We are designed to eat our main meal in the middle of the day, when the sun and our digestive fire are at their peak and not in the evening or night.

Ayurveda tells us that if we have a heavy meal in the night, then all our bodily resources, which are normally engaged in revitalizing our brain, in detoxing our liver and rejuvenating our muscles, would be used up in trying to digest the heavy dinner. Over a period, the

undigested food called *Ama*, begins to block vital internal channels, which in turn affects memory, clear thinking and decision-making, and may also lead to weight gain and joint-stiffness. Hence, at *what time* of the day we eat food seems to be more important than how many calories we eat, writes Mark Bunn. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, December 23, 2012)

“There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,” is the line from the play *Julius Caesar*, by Shakespeare, in which Brutus seems to urge his comrades to seize a fleeting opportunity in an armed conflict. There are opportune moments, as also, auspicious and inauspicious times. In the yearly cycle, the astral life of the earth is young and strong in the time between Christmas and Easter, so that we get added impetus from nature in keeping the resolutions made during this period. When the cycle is ascending, it is easier to make progress. In *Kali Yuga*, when there is moral darkness everywhere, doing good and being good is difficult, as compared to the Golden Age, when everyone around is moral. It is the shortest of the *yugas* in which the rate of cause and effect is much faster. We can do more, learn more and can make more progress in *Kali Yuga*. Every effort made to stem the tide of selfishness in the world or within us, will have fourfold effect. We have to regard each life as a *rare* cyclic opportunity, which is going to come again only after 1000 to 1500 years. It is only proper to question every action and every aspiration during life.

Research in the field of bio-rhythmic cycles shows that human beings have a rhythmic Cycle that governs their lives; which begins at the moment of their birth, and linked to outside forces, *viz.*, fluctuations in barometric pressure, gravitational field, phases of the moon, etc. There are three basic cycles in human nature. A 23-day physical cycle of vitality, strength, resistance; a 28-day emotional cycle of moods, sensitivity and feelings; and a 33-day intellectual cycle of memory, alertness and reasoning power.

What is religion? “To me religion was a form of poetic expression, a metaphor that tried to put into words that which we are otherwise unable to express. It is ‘the filigree on the tapestry of silence.’ Good poetry like ‘good’ religion lifts us above our humdrum daily preoccupations and helps us gain an exalted state of heightened consciousness,” writes Jug Suraiya. In her book, *The Case for God*, Karen Armstrong compares religious or spiritual experiences with our response to art, or to a marvelous symphony, or a great painting. New Age atheists, such as, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens have misunderstood religious faith, and attacked it on the basis of logical thought. The true domain of religion is “mythos,” or the world of psyche, which is both below and above our normal range of consciousness. Logical thought and “mythos” are complementary to each other. Logical thinking focuses on the practical and the particular, and has taught us how to make fire and perform brain surgery, etc. The “mythos” is the wellspring of all art, of which religion is one expression, and may enable us to perform an act of ecstasy, which is literally “stepping outside of oneself.”

If mathematical and logical thinking requires effort and concentration, so also, religious, spiritual or artistic experiences of transcendence do not come easily. Religious faith is not passive acceptance of mantras and scriptures, but it is the faith that demands deep sense of commitment followed by sustained practice. Karen Armstrong points out that Dawkins and other such atheists have misunderstood religious faith to be some sort of spiritual security blanket, like a cuddly teddy bear. “Religious faith is a demanding and unrelenting exercise, like learning to play the piano better, and better still. You’ve got to use it, or you’ll lose it. . . . Faith is not belief,” it wakens us to what we can become, if we are ready to step outside ourselves, writes Jug Suraiya. (*The Times of India*, November 28, 2012)

The modern materialist insists on a gulf between science and religion. H.P.B. points out that there never was any conflict between true science and religion of antiquity. Science and religion can be

reconciled, if only religion could be cleared of its cobwebs of dogmatism and superstitions, and science of its materialism and atheism.

Religions, as a general rule, discourage intellectual study of belief. Somehow there is a feeling that to question the scriptures or religious authority is to be irreverent towards your religion. True religion must seek to replace blind belief by reasoned and then intuitive faith. H.P.B. points out that between *faith on authority* and *faith on one's spiritual intuition*, there is a very great difference. She says that blind faith, based on human authority or hero-worship, is like logic of some emotional women, for whom 2 plus 2 is generally 4, but it could be 5 also, by the will of God. It is this kind of blind faith which leads to religious conflicts and fanaticism. When we accept our religion on such a faith, we are more likely to be intolerant of other religions. "Faith," says *Light on the Path*, "is a great engine, an enormous power, which in fact can accomplish all things. For it is a covenant or engagement between man's divine part and his lesser self." A covenant is a pact or agreement. The covenant between man's lower and higher nature is analogous to the agreement between a child and his parents. It is based on trust.

The English word religion is derived from the Latin *religio*, which means "to bind back," as it is made up of the root, *re* (again) and *ligare* (bind or connect). The theosophical definition of true religion is:

True religion must give us a basis for thinking, and consequently, a basis for acting; it must give us an understanding of nature, of ourselves and of other beings. Religion is a *bond* uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs—binding not only all Men, but also all Beings and all *things* in the entire Universe, into one grand whole. Just that basis and that bond are presented in the three fundamental propositions of the *Secret Doctrine*. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 211)

Are we taking too many liberties with people's feelings in the name of entertainment? Recently, Mel Greig and Michael Christian, two Australian Radio presenters, made a hoax radio-call, impersonating Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles, respectively, to get information regarding the state of Prince William's pregnant wife Kate Middleton. Jacintha Saldanha, a 46-year-old nurse at King Edward VII hospital in United Kingdom, unsuspectingly gave out medical details of Kate Middleton, and on discovering that she had made mistake, she hanged herself, unable to bear the fact that she let the hospital down, and unable to handle being the centre of the joke. The duo had the intention of sharing a good laugh, but they did not think about the consequences.

Sociologist Nandini Sardesai says that this incident only reflects the times we live in. In today's world people have become "desensitized." "The depth of feeling is lost. We are sceptical, callous, and don't take anything on face value. In Sociology, we call it a 'blasé outlook,' where people have an 'I-don't-care-about-anybody-else-but-myself' attitude." Adman and columnist, Suhel Seth is of the opinion that "we are living in a soulless society where people aren't generous with either their time or their kindness. We love to see other people helpless and being humiliated." Clinical psychologist Varkha Chulani feels that life is a series of combats. Too much competition has driven us to the point of combativeness. We feel strong and superior by bullying and making another person feel small, or by having a good laugh at them. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche used the term "schadenfreude," meaning pleasure derived from the misfortunes of the others, and it seems to be the driving emotion of our society today. Humiliation for the sake of entertainment is very common in our today's world, but when the consequences are severe, even fatal, it is time to ask whether the current culture of casual cruelty has gone too far, writes Purvaja Sawant. (*Times Life!*, *Sunday Times of India*, December 23, 2012)

The Upanishadic philosophy mentions two kinds of pleasure, *preyas* or, pleasures of little worth, and *shreyas* or pleasures of greater

worth. But in our times we become aware of the third category of pleasure, called sadistic pleasure, or pleasure derived from harming another or seeing another in pain. We laugh when someone slips on a banana peel. The idea of “clean fun,” “good sense of humour,” has been warped, and at times, even borders on immoral, as witnessed in “ragging” of the new-entrants in the college by the senior students. Much deliberation is called for when we derive pleasure at another’s expense. We need to take into account the fact that some people could be extremely sensitive, and what we call innocent joke or fun might be viewed seriously by another. We seldom take care to know what would be the effect of our words or actions on the other person.

Lack of empathy is described by a psychiatric term called “Empathy Deficit Disorder,” which needs recognition and treatment. Empathy is the capacity to feel what the other person is feeling inside, and becoming aware of his emotions, desires, inner conflicts, etc. There are things in life that give much satisfaction, like healthy relationship with friends and loved ones, and which are “the essential part of mental health.” The lack of these essentials of healthy living results sometimes in cruelty, criminality and psychopathic behaviour. Empathy is a natural outgrowth of this feeling of belonging to one another, and which must be nurtured from childhood, by example and precepts.

Empathy may be termed “imaginative sympathy,” and good literature helps cultivate it. The more we have cultivated the feeling of oneness and the more impersonal and self-effacing we are, easier it is for us to practice empathy. An empathizer must have detached concern. Empathy helps establish harmony by making it easier for us to appreciate another’s point of view.

RE-EXAMINE all you have been told....dismiss, what insults
your soul.

—WALT WHITMAN