

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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SHOULD WE TRY TO CHANGE?

THERE are many aspects to this question: Is “change” *necessary*? Should we try to change *ourselves*? Should we try to change *others*? Should we try to change the environment or the *situation*? Should we try to change the *society*, *religion* or the *world* at large, and if yes, what is the true spirit of reform?

There are two personality types: *Change-phobic* are the ones averse to change, they even fear change, and prefer steady, predictable ways, doing things in the old way. *Change-philes* are the ones who love change; they love the new and the different. There is change for the better and change for the worse. There are those who dislike monotony and seek constant change in their environment, forever seeking variety in clothes, cars, computers, including friends and partners. But such people are not equally flexible when it comes to changing their habits, outlook, viewpoints or vices. Thus, there are those who may welcome so-called physical change, but may be completely inflexible when it comes to mental, moral or emotional change.

Those who resist change are the ones who are reluctant to leave their “comfort zone.” A comfort zone is a psychological state in which things feel familiar to a person and he/she is at ease and in control of his environment, experiencing low levels of anxiety and stress, and where one’s uncertainty and vulnerability are minimized. Over the years psychologists have been exploring the reasons for

resistance to change, which takes an extreme form in people with High-Functioning Autism (HFA), who find it difficult adjusting to new situations. It has been observed that while such children love new toys, digital devices, etc., they have difficulty adjusting to new environments, different teachers at school, or any major changes in their daily routines, causing frustration and emotional outbursts. They rigidly stick to old habits, and their rigidity results in obsessive and/or compulsive thought and behaviour.

Younger people are more open to change, in fact, they *seek* change. But as one grows older, one begins to resist change, as one is habituated to a certain way of life. Likewise, women are more inclined to resist change than men. Writes Mr. Judge: “You can easily see that the general tendency of women is to keep things as they are and not have change. Woman—not here and there women—has never been the pioneer in great reforms. Of course, many single, individual women have been, but the tendency of the great mass of women has always been to keep things as they are until the men have brought about the great change. This is why women always support any established religion, no matter what—Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, or Brahmin.” (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, p. 59)

In fact, everywhere in one form or another, we come across force of conservatism. We are enveloped by customs and traditions in every walk of life—at home, in the office, in social and religious life. But curiously, a Hindu who criticizes the colour bar in South Africa, may observe caste rule in India. Thus, in each one of us both the Reformer and the Orthodox are present. The way to happiness lies in a harmonious blending of the two opposing forces of reform and of convention. He who wants to reform himself is up against the wall of his own habits, customs, prejudices, and of racial pride. Our habits and customs, which are ordinarily acquired by heredity and through education, are sometimes seen by us as requiring change and reform. Whether one is contemplating individual, social or religious reform, it is essential to find out *causes* for the existing defects. There must be deliberation before effecting

a change. For instance, those crusading against religious orthodoxy, make a great haste and tend to throw away the baby with the bath water, failing to realize that there is an element of truth hidden in some of the traditions, customs and even superstitions. Conventional habits are born of conventional thinking and it is the *thinking* that we need to change by implanting right ideas, and by arousing public opinion in the right direction. While slavery to convention is undesirable, slavery to a thoughtless unconventionalism is injurious, and does not lead to peace and happiness.

Social and religious reforms strive to bring about change in the masses. Reform is meant to be a new formation or a rebuilding, which necessarily involves change. The true reformer instructs and guides. He does not seek to bend the will of another to his own uses. It is not difficult to realize that the reformer must himself be the living example of the reform that he upholds for emulation. “You must be the change you wish to see in the world,” said Gandhiji. This quote is based on a well-known incident in his life wherein he advised a child to give up eating too many sweets, only after he himself was able overcome addiction to sweets. When we *apply* what we believe in, we are able to show ways and means of effecting the change.

We are slow to reform ourselves when we see the disparity between the advice given to us and the action performed by the one who advises us. However, in case of the great spiritual reformers such as, Krishna and Buddha, Jesus and Zoroaster, we find that They fully practiced what They preached. Every reform was based on highest form of morality. Ever condemning sin, They never cast the sinner out of Their heart. These great spiritual reformers were free from religious orthodoxy, without becoming irreligious; they were free from social cant and hypocrisy, without becoming selfish or sophisticated.

Probably this is the kind of balance one has to keep in mind while effecting individual reform. For instance, a worried mother asked, what should her teenage boy do, who preferred reading spiritual books and did not quite share the interests of boys of his age, and as a result felt left out? Each one has a unique temperament,

inclinations and interests, and therefore, according to one view, a jasmine flower should not try to imitate a rose. But, on the other hand, spiritual life does not mean being alienated from worldly life, and therefore, especially when one feels left out, it is necessary to cultivate other interests so as to have a common ground on which one can meet others.

Even on the utilitarian plane it is recognized that overcoming resistance to change or stepping out of the comfort zone is necessary, as it leads to greater productivity, makes it easier to deal with new and unexpected changes, makes it easier to push one's boundaries in the future and increases creativity.

Philosophically, change is the very nature of existence. No one expressed it better than the Buddha who taught, "All Conditioned existence is impermanent." It is not possible to hold onto things, people or places forever and ever. Our body, our ideas and emotions, all keep changing. We try to derive pleasure out of sensations. But *Light on the Path* cautions: "In sensation no permanent home can be found, because change is the law of this vibratory existence. That fact is the first one that must be learned by the disciple. It is useless to pause and weep for a scene in a kaleidoscope which has passed." Things and pleasures of the world are as fleeting as the scene or pattern formed in a kaleidoscope.

For any change to be permanent it must be from within. What is needed is an inner conversion, change in people's minds and hearts. We cannot have good society without good men, and we cannot have good men, merely by imposing laws. The emphasis must be on individual morality.

The heart of alchemy is transmutation and that implies change. We resist change, because it involves going from one state of consciousness to another. Mr. Crosbie describes such a transition stage in the disciple's life, thus: "There may, and there often does come a time when one feels...like 'standing on nothing, in nothing and about to topple over.' The centre of consciousness has been changed; old landmarks are slipping away, and sometimes black doubt ensues." (*The Friendly*

Philosopher, p. 8)

"Transition," in general, means change from one state or condition to another. In the "transition state" we have not quite left behind the old state, and we are *only beginning to get the grasp* of the new state. We may perhaps consider adolescence as one such period in an individual's life, where one is in the process of leaving behind immaturity of the child and grasping the maturity of the adulthood. Such a "transition period" is faced by every spiritual aspirant, as he struggles to leave behind ordinary life—centred in personal care and worldly affairs—to live a spiritual life. This "transition period" is the most delicate and crucial period in an aspirant's life, because it is difficult to leave the familiar in order to grasp the unknown and the unfamiliar. Not only are we called upon to break old moulds of thought, old ways of looking at life and its meaning, but also touch deeper levels of consciousness through refinement of feelings. It is here that one has to summon courage and take the next higher step, which requires both faith and trust.

The seed must die to give birth to a tree; the nonessentials must die for the spiritual regeneration. If the aspirant resists change from fear of the suffering it entails, he invites stagnation. "Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage?" (*S.D.*, II, 475)

Every change must be effected judiciously, after due deliberation and reflection. Often those desiring change are only novelty-seekers or escapists—running away from difficult people and situations. Change is a way of life and yet we must see to it that it does not begin to apply to the things that we have found by experience to be true and good and valuable. There is this lovely prayer we can keep in mind: "God, grant me the serenity to take the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and *wisdom to know the difference.*"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT SELF-RELIANCE

HATIM TAI had a great reputation among the Arabs of old for the lavishness of his gifts and alms. "Have you ever met anyone more excellent than yourself?" his friends once asked him. "Yes," replied Hatim Tai. "One day I had forty camels sacrificed and I offered a feast to whoever would like to come and share it. Then I set out with several chiefs to invite guests from far and wide. On the way we came across a woodcutter who had just cut a bundle of thorns. This was the way he earned his livelihood. Seeing that he was poor, I asked him why he did not go to the many feasts given by Hatim Tai. "Those who earn their living," he answered me, "have no need of the bounty of Hatim Tai."

Why then did Hatim Tai declare that the woodcutter was a better man than himself? It was because he thought it nobler to work and to provide for oneself than to give others gifts which cost no effort or sacrifice and which, moreover, discourage them from being self-reliant.

Of course it is quite natural that friends should give presents to their friends; it is good that strong arms should come to the help of the poor and the needy; but an able bodied man should work with his hands, not hold them out for alms. Of course this implies no reflection on those who consecrate themselves entirely to the contemplative life and the search for wisdom.

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Though the woodcutter's conduct was noble, yet it was less so than that of the Persian prince whose story I shall tell you. He was a prince of ancient times and his name was Gushtasp.

He was much annoyed that his father did not treat him as heir to the throne, so he left his native land and wandered to the West. Alone and hungry, he realized that from then on he would have to work for his living. So he went to the sovereign of the land and said to him: "I am a skilled writer and I should be happy to be employed

as a scribe."

He was told to wait for a few days, for no scribes were needed at the moment. But he was too hungry to wait, so he went to the camel-drivers to ask for work. They did not need any new helper; however, seeing his dire need, they gave him something to eat.

A little further on Gushtasp stopped at the door of a forge and offered his services to the smith. "Here," said the man to him, "you can help me to hammer this piece of iron." And he placed a hammer in Gushtasp's hands.

The prince had tremendous strength. He lifted the heavy hammer, brought it down on the anvil and smashed it at the first stroke. The smith was furious and immediately turned him out. And so Gushtasp started wandering once more in great distress. Whichever way he turned, there was no way in which he could show his usefulness. At last he met a farmer working in a cornfield, who took pity on him and gave him food and shelter.

One day there came the news that the daughter of the King of Rum was of an age to marry and that all young men of princely family were invited to the royal banquet. Gushtasp decided to go there and sat at table among all the others. Princess Kitaban saw him, loved him and gave him a bunch of roses as a token of her favour.

The king took a violent dislike for Gushtasp in his poverty. He dared not forbid his daughter to marry him, but as soon as they were married he drove them out of his palace. So they went to live in the heart of the forest and built their hut not far from the river.

Gushtasp was a great hunter. Each day he would cross the river by boat, catch an elk, or a wild ass, give half to the boatman and take the rest home to his wife.

One day the boatman brought young man named Mabrin to see Gushtasp. "My Lord," said Mabrin, "I wish to marry the second daughter of the king, your wife's sister, but I cannot unless I kill the wolf who is ravaging the king's lands. And I do not know how to do it."

“I will do it for you,” said Gushtasp, the hunter. He went out into the desert and when he found the monster, he shot it down with two arrows and thence cut off its head with his hunting knife. The king came to see the dead beast, and in his joy gave second daughter to Mabrin.

Some time later, the boatman brought another young man named Ahrun to see Gushtasp. Ahrun wished to marry the third daughter of the king, but first he had to kill a dragon. Gushtasp promised and accomplished this new feat, so that Ahrun married the third daughter of the king.

You will not be surprised to hear that in the course of time such a valiant prince became the king of Persia in succession to his father. It was during the reign of Gushtasp that the holy prophet Zerdusht, or Zoroaster, taught the Persian faith in Ormuzd, Lord of light and sun and fire and of righteousness and justice.

* * * * *

However, you can see that Gushtasp did not immediately find his place and work in the world. He tried many things without success, and even at first incurred the enmity of many men, for example, that of the good smith.

At last, however, he gained his true station in life and was able to help others until the time came for him to govern them wisely. And it was precisely in helping others that he was better than the woodcutter of whom we have just spoken; for, according to the story, the woodcutter was content to work for himself. Gushtasp was also better than the generous Hatim Tai, for instead of giving from the excess of his wealth, the Persian prince gave the strength of his arm and even risked his life for the sake of others.

None is more worthy of respect than one who, relying on himself, is able by his own effort not only to provide for all his needs, but to increase the well-being and the prosperity of those around him.

Respect the father, the engineer, the woodcutter, writer or labourer, tradesman, smith or explorer, who by his work, whatever it may be,

earns a good living and increases the well-being of his family.

Respect the worker who, in order to serve both his own interests and those of his comrades, joins with them to organize co-operative stores or workshops, or trade-unions which enable each one to assert his rights by raising the powerful voice of the many instead of the weak and pleading voice of an isolated individual. These workers' associations teach workers to rely on their own strength and to help one another.

And you too, school-children, learn to enrich your intelligence by concentrating on the task your master gives you. And, while you mount the steps of knowledge as best you can, learn also to help, when need arises, the friend who is less alert and skilful than yourself. In fairy-tales, one has only to utter a word or rub a lamp or wave a wand for genies to appear and carry people through the air, build palaces in the twinkling of an eye, and cause armies of elephants and horsemen to spring from the ground.

But personal efforts bring about still greater marvels: it covers the soil with rich harvests, tames wild beasts, tunnels through mountains, erects dykes and bridges, builds cities, launches ships on the ocean and flying machines in the air; in short it gives more well-being and security to all. By personal effort man becomes more noble, more just, more kind: this is the true progress.

[Taken and abridged from *Tales of All Times* by The Mother. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.]

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“In the world mental as in the world spiritual each man must progress by his own efforts,” writes H.P.B. Self-reliance is not only freedom from dependence upon others but also liberation from enslaving desires of every kind. Only when we free ourselves from the bondage of the lower personal self, which is greedy and egoistic, and follow the dictates of our true and immortal nature, can we become truly independent in the spiritual sense.

H.P.B. points out that petitionary prayers kill self-reliance. When

one considers oneself separate from God and prays to Him, there is no merit in the achievement. H.P.B. argues: Would you pay the labourer you hired to work in your fields a full day's wages if you did most of his work for him, while he sitting under an apple tree prayed to you to do his work? In such prayers we are living in moral idleness, passing on our burden to God.

In his essay on "Self-Reliance" Emerson writes, "Whoso would be a man must be nonconformist...For non-conformity the world whips you with its displeasure." The need of the hour is to change from dogma or creed to faith in the law and impartial justice. The practice of ceremonies and rituals for appeasing gods has driven mankind further than ever from the goal. To all those who adhere to religious, philosophic, scientific, social or political systems which teach dependence on any power, force or law outside of man himself, Theosophy says, "Come out from among them and be ye separate."

Mr. Crosbie gives us a few maxims to cultivate self-reliance: "Never ask another to do for you what you can do for yourself;" 'Know where your things are and get them for yourself when you need them;' 'Do for others all you can in a nice way, but don't expect others to do for you;' 'You are valuable only when you are helpful, not when you require help.' These will be found good, if we try them out." (*The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 121)

Altruism is rated higher than mere self-reliance in the above story. Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian who served people as a doctor in equatorial Africa, says: "Open your eyes and seek another human being in need of a little time, a little friendliness, a little company, a little work. It may be a lonely, an embittered, a sick or an awkward person for whom you can do something, to whom you can mean something. Perhaps it will be an old person or a child. Or else a good cause that needs voluntary workers. Do not lose heart, even if you must wait a bit before finding the right thing, even if you must make several attempts."

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA QUALIFICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP—III

SPIRITUAL life involves an earnest study, a persistent and constant endeavour to discipline and purify the very Soul in the body, the *Kshetrajna*. It does not call for heroic and mysterious and strange trials and tests; it simply calls for the everyday practice and application of the ethical rules, the spiritual precepts. They must be applied, not to big things in our life, but to every trivial detail of routine existence and work, and that is the point to be remembered in connection with this description of the qualifications. It is enlightening to study them in connection with those given at the end of the previous discourse, and also in connection with the Divine *Paramitas* (transcendental virtues) mentioned in the *Voice of the Silence*. These qualities, which we have to apply every day, are:

True wisdom of a spiritual kind is freedom from self-esteem, hypocrisy, and injury to others....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, the self being effaced, and worship paid in a solitary spot, and a want of pleasure in congregations of men; it is a resolute continuance in the study of Adhyatma, the Superior Spirit, and a meditation upon the end of the acquirement of a knowledge of truth—this is called wisdom or spiritual knowledge; its opposite is ignorance.

The first three qualifications are given in negative terms: to get rid of three particular things—self-esteem, hypocrisy and injury to others. It is sometimes difficult to understand that we must free ourselves from self-esteem and at the same time rely on the self and become self-dependent as the Third Fundamental teaches us. When we esteem ourselves we are putting a high value on our own personality, on the *Kshetra*, failing to realize that it is simply an instrument through which we are trying to work as Divine Souls.

Self-esteem then is not contrary, or does not oppose itself to self-reliance. When we rely on ourselves, it means we must rely on the Divine Self, and the Divine Self is not active in all of us, thereby the necessity for us to make sure what is the nature of the Self in us, that we are relying on and dependent upon, and to try and rely, while the Self is not active, upon the philosophy and the Living Example of Those who have exemplified the Philosophy, and that is the only way to free ourselves from this terrible sin, shall we say, of self-assumption, esteeming our own personal self.

Hypocrisy has been called by H.P.B. one of the two unpardonable sins, the other one is doubt. It is easy to understand freedom from injury to others—not to injure other beings, at the level of body, mind and feelings, not to injure their reputation, their authority, their work; the spirit of competition which we have in this civilization in the Western World has made us fall into the sin of injuring other people. Then comes “patience, sincerity, respect for spiritual instructors, purity, firmness, self-restraint, dispassion for objects of sense, freedom from pride, and meditation upon birth, death, decay, sickness and error.” It can be seen that each one unfolds the next one, and is the natural development and outcome of all the preceding ones. Our attention was already drawn to the quality of “respect for spiritual instructors,” by Krishna in the Eleventh discourse, where Arjuna apologised to Krishna for having disregarded his authority, because of his friendship and personal intimate companionship with his own Teacher. “Freedom from pride” is really freedom from self-esteem, but it comes up again, for when we have succeeded, to some extent, in achieving these qualities, we tend to be proud of the fact that we have succeeded. At every step we must constantly watch so as to free ourselves from every idea of pride, *i.e.*, of personality. The meditation upon death, decay, sickness and error is interesting, but not because birth is mentioned among unpleasant things. We have a conception that birth is something we must rejoice over and death we must cry and be sad about. From the spiritual point of view birth and death are the same things and we must look upon

them so. It is natural for the human being, to avoid unpleasant situations, but the life of discipleship calls for the facing of unpleasant things, for we have to face our lower nature which is unpleasant, and that is why we must meditate upon these events, even sickness, because to the soul the opportunity to understand something about the nature of the Universe and the manifestation of Law, and sickness itself, from the disciple’s point of view, can be looked upon as an experience and a valuable lesson.

“The exemption from self-identifying attachment for children, wife and household”—the idea that the things we possess are really our own—my children, my wife, my husband, my friends, my family, my books—the things we have in the spiritual life are simply given to us for us to use for the service of the whole of humanity. We are the trustees of these objects, and we are not to look upon them as belonging to us.

“Constant unwavering steadiness of heart upon the arrival of every event whether favourable or unfavourable”—that has been said at the close of the Twelfth discourse, when Krishna said that his devotee was unexpected and unsolicitous about the event of things, meaning that he has stopped looking for rewards and fruits, but perseveres in his task day after day without trying to figure out what will be his position or work in days to come. “A never ceasing Love for me alone, the self being effaced”—these two go together. At our present stage of evolution, because the self is not effaced, we give praise and value to this lower self. When the latter is effaced, we can manifest love for the Masters. “Worship paid in solitary spot”—very important, and exactly the same advice has been given by Jesus, to worship, to offer prayer in secret, in the solitude of one’s closet, meaning in one’s own heart and not in the multitude and openly. We do get an emotional uplift from the big crowds, and that gives us a certain pleasure from the personal point of view, and the disciple must learn to overcome that thrill which comes from being in great crowds. Then the final qualifications are, “a resolute continuance in the study of” Theosophy, the Wisdom Religion and

meditation upon the acquirement of a knowledge of truth. The constant meditation, brooding over and reflection upon the great Lodge of Masters, is the goal which has to be attained through this knowledge. “This is called spiritual Wisdom” and “its opposite is ignorance.” So he makes no compromise. This is called from the spiritual point of view, knowledge; all that is not this is simply ignorance, relative knowledge. Then this lower knowledge becomes from the higher point of view, ignorance. It is this spiritual knowledge which enables man to act as the *Para-Purusha* and to him applies what is said in verse 32: “This Supreme Spirit, O son of Kunti, even when it is in the body, neither acteth nor is it affected by action, because, being without beginning and devoid of attributes, it is changeless.” And again in verse 35 we have: “Those who with the eye of Wisdom thus perceive what is the difference between the body and Spirit, and the destruction of the illusion of objects, go to the Supreme.”

The “destruction or liberation from illusion of objects,” is rendered in Sanskrit as *Bhuti-Prakriti Moksha*. These beings called here *Bhuti-Prakriti*, beings of matter or creatures of matter are ourselves until we become disciples ourselves. From the point of view of *Purusha*, it is the Consciousness which gets entangled in the qualities of nature, in the qualities inherent in the body, and the personal man. How it is possible that this incarnated soul sent by the Higher Self to work in the body, becomes involved and entangled in the web of matter, is the subject matter of the next discourse. The subject dealt with in the next discourse is the web of the soul, which man weaves for himself and finds such a prison. It really imprisons and interferes with the union we want to achieve, the union between the incarnated soul and the Divine Father above. The union between the would-be disciple and his own Living Master which constitutes discipleship, and this can only be achieved from the practice, every day of our lives and every hour in the day, of these simple qualities to all events in our own life.

(Concluded)

ON TEMPLES AND TABERNACLES

I

TEMPLES, mosques, synagogues and churches may all be regarded as “space” created for the divine by human beings. They are looked upon as links between God and Man, between earthly life and divine life. A temple is a house of worship—“house” of one or more deities, and hence also called *devasthan*. It is a structure reserved for religious rituals and ceremonies, which is designed to bring human beings and gods together. A Hindu temple symbolizes spiritual principles. The symbolism and structure of a Hindu temple are rooted in Vedic tradition. The structural rules for building of a temple are described in *Shilpa Shastras* and *Vastu Shastras*. *Shilpa Shastra* deals with arts and crafts such as, making of statues, icons, painting, carpentry, etc. The Sanskrit word *vastu* means a dwelling or house, derived from the root *vas*, means “to dwell, stay or reside.” The term *Shastra* means teaching or science. Thus, *Vastu Shastra* means the “science of dwelling,” and deals with building of houses, temples, villages, etc.. The goal of a temple’s design is to bring about the descent or manifestation of the unmanifest and unseen. There are various kinds of Hindu temples built using different methods of construction and style. Thus, there are mountain temples, rock-cut temples, cave temples, forest temples, as also, sea-shore and river bank temples.

Rock-cut temples like Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora are monolithic architecture, made of a single piece of rock. In India, there are several such temples and caves, which include Bhaja Caves, Elephanta Caves, Kanheri Caves, Ananta Vasudeva Temple, Anantasaayi Vishnu Temple, and many temples in the south.

Major Hindu temples are built at the confluence of rivers, or on river banks and sea-shores, as recommended in the ancient texts. A Hindu temple is a place of pilgrimage, and also called *tirtha sthan*, a holy place with a holy river flowing by. However, where a natural source of water is not present near the temple, it is recommended that a pond should be built. H.P.B. mentions that outside every temple

in India, there is a lake, stream, or reservoir full of holy water, in which the Brahmins and the Hindu devotees bathe daily. The bathing festivals or *baptismal rites*, are held twice every year. During these festivals the statues of gods, goddesses and idols are immersed in water by the priests—as was done in ancient Egypt and Greece. “The object of the ceremony being to wash away from them the sins of their worshippers which they have taken upon themselves, and which pollute them, until washed off by holy water....The Orphic hymn calls *water* the greatest purifier of men and gods” (*Isis*, II, 138). Perhaps, it symbolizes the restoration of pure magnetism to the idols, as well as the temple, as the temple atmosphere is said to be vitiated by our purely petitioning prayers, creating a kind of psychic miasma.

Temples have been looked upon by the ancients as energy centres. They were created as powerful spaces where an individual could imbibe the enshrined energies, and that is why it is recommended that after offering prayers and worship, one should sit silently for some time in the temple. “The whole of India is dotted with sacred shrines, to which pilgrimages are made.... One great reason for this, given by those who understand the inner significance of it, is that the places of pilgrimage are centers of spiritual force from which radiate elevating influences....It is asserted by many, indeed, that at most of the famous places of pilgrimage there is an Adept of the same order to which the Theosophical Adepts are said to belong, who is ready always to give some mead of spiritual insight and assistance to those of pure heart who may go there,” writes Mr. Judge. (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 39)

Temple-building is both an art and a science. However, not all temples are built in the Vedic way. When floods ravaged the hills of Uttarakhand in June 2013, Kedarnath temple, considered to be one of the most ancient temples, escaped with only minor damage. Experts believe that the temple’s highly scientific construction enabled it to withstand nature’s fury. Ancient temples, which were built without the help of modern machinery and facilities, may well

be regarded as result of devotion and dedication of human heart. The construction of many of these temples was started by one generation to be completed by the next. It was indeed a labour of love and devotion. It is a well-known fact that the Somnath Temple in Gujarat, India, was plundered and destroyed several times, but also, as many times reconstructed. The last time when it was reconstructed, in 1950, the then President of India remarked, “The Somnath Temple signifies that the power of reconstruction is always greater than the power of destruction.”

In *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. draws our attention to the architectural marvels of Greek temples and Pyramids of Egypt. In the same book, Eusebe Salverte is quoted as saying, “Mechanism was carried by the ancients to a point of perfection that has never been attained in modern times.” We are also told that these architectural wonders have survived the buffets of the centuries, the inclemency of the climate, earthquakes and ravages of men, and some of them survive to this day, as living standards of beauty and proportion.

The Secret Doctrine asserts that early humanity got its first notions of all the arts and sciences, as well as of spiritual knowledge, from the Wise and exalted beings, who were guides and teachers of early humanity. It is they who laid the first foundation stone of early civilization. H.P.B. draws our attention to works on architecture by Vitruvius Pollio, in which all the rules of proportion mentioned are those that were taught in ancient times at the time of *initiation*. There is the deep esoteric significance hidden in every rule and law of proportion. Further,

It is the pupils of those incarnated Rishis and Devas of the third Root Race, who handed their knowledge from one generation to another, to Egypt and Greece with its now lost *canon of proportion*; “It is owing to the divine perfection of those architectural proportions that the Ancients could build those wonders of all the subsequent ages, their Fanes, Pyramids, Cave-Temples, Cromlechs, Cairns, Altars, proving they had the powers of machinery and a knowledge of

mechanics to which modern skill is like a child's play, and which that *skill* refers to itself as the 'works of hundred-handed giants'" (See "*Book of God*," *Kenealy*). Modern architects may not altogether have neglected those rules, but they have superadded enough empirical innovations to destroy those just proportions. It is Vitruvius who gave to posterity the rules of construction of the Grecian temples erected to the immortal gods; and the ten books of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio on Architecture, of one, in short, *who was an initiate*, can only be studied esoterically. The Druidical circles, the Dolmen, the Temples of India, Egypt and Greece, the Towers and the 127 towns in Europe which were found "Cyclopean in origin" by the French Institute, are all the work of initiated Priest-Architects, the descendants of those primarily taught by the "Sons of God," justly called "The Builders." (*S.D.*, I, 208-9 fn.)

The science of temple building has many aspects, which includes precise measurements of every structure in the temple, as also the direction in which the idols and the rooms have to be situated. According to Devdutt Pattanaik, *Vastu-Shastra* is an Indian knowledge system which believes that if you design a house (and so also a temple) in a certain way, positive energy, peace, and prosperity can flow through the house. People, who keep a temple inside the house, keep it facing the north-east direction. Pattanaik writes that north is identified by the Pole Star, a symbol of permanence. The sun rises in the east, and hence it is symbol of growth. Thus north-east is the combination of permanence and growth. He writes, "Typically, all temples are oriented towards the east so that the first rays of the rising sun can fall on the god's idol. The deity faces east and devotees face west; so that the sun's rays fall on the god and be reflected on the devotee."

Temples and churches are oriented towards the east, and they are comprised of a square or rectangular shape. Domes are common to temples, churches and mosques. In her book, *The Penguin Guide to Vaastu*, Sashikala Ananth explains that the *vaastu* tradition has

developed its entire system of building technology upon the fundamental premise that the earth or soil is a living organism out of which other living creatures and organic forms emerge. The life force contained within the earth is called *vastu* by the tradition. This premise is extended further, and all objects that occupy the earth containing life energy are likewise called *vastu*. Thus plants, trees, buildings and sculptures are all considered to be alive and part of the whole living subsystem. Each substance or *vastu* is placed on a plane or support called *vaastu*. Thus, *vaastu* is the individual site or land identified for building a temple, house, etc. The tradition considers earth a primary mother goddess, while the life energy contained in it is perceived as a male principle. This energy is known as *vaastu purusha*, explains Sashikala Ananth.

Once the site for the temple has been selected, the architect begins by drafting a square, and from this drawing, the *Vastu-Purusha-Mandala* is drawn up for the temple. This square is further divided into (8x8) 64 squares or (9x9) 81 squares, etc. The *Vastu-Purusha-Mandala* is considered to be a mystical diagram, and is considered to represent the manifested form of the Cosmic Being, upon which the temple is built. The temple is considered to be situated in Him, comes from Him, and is a manifestation of Him.

A typical temple consists of: (1) an entrance, often with a porch; (2) one or more attached or detached *mandapas* or halls; (3) the central space, or *inner sanctum sanctorum*, called *garbhagriha*, meaning literally, "womb chamber" and (4) a tower or *shikhara* built directly above the *garbhagriha*. The *garbhagriha* is often enclosed space, which represents *Purusha* or Universal essence. In some temples however, this central space houses the idol of the principal deity. "Every nation of the earth began with temples devoid of idols and even of symbols. It is only when the remembrance of the great abstract truths and of the primordial wisdom taught to humanity by the dynasties of the divine kings died out, that men had to resort to mementos and symbology." (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

In larger temples, the *garbhagriha* is usually surrounded by a circumambulatory path, for the devotee to walk around and ritually circumambulate the *Purusha*, the Universal essence. This walk around is called *Pradakshina* or *Parikrama*, and it is performed in clockwise direction. When circumambulation is performed around the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, which represents the Highest Deity, one is reminded of the fact that God is the centre, source and essence of our lives, so that one must perform one's daily activities, keeping the divine in view. Our thoughts and actions must always be centred in God. According to Adi Shankaracharya, real *Pradakshina* is the meditation that thousands of universes are revolving around the Great Lord, the unmoving centre of all forms.

The temple structure reflects the symbolism associated with the concept of spiritual transition, from daily life to spiritual perfection, as a journey through stages. A devotee starts at the doorway of the sanctuary, during *Parikrama*, and then moves inward towards the *sanctum sanctorum*, where the deity is enshrined. So also, during spiritual transition a devotee moves inward through various levels of life, and reaches the most sacred centre of spiritual energy of the deity, explains Michell George in the book *The Hindu Temple*.

Shikhara, which literally means "mountain peak," is the tower that rises symmetrically over the *sanctum sanctorum*, and is the most visible and prominent part of Hindu temples. These spires come in many designs and shapes, but they all have mathematical precision and geometrical symbolism. H.P.B. points out that all the steeples, turrets, domes, and Christian temples, are reproductions of the primitive idea of the *lithos*, or phallus, while the *Sanctum sanctorum* or the *Holy of Holies* in the temples is the symbol of the womb. This idea seems to have been borrowed by the Jews from the Egyptians and Indians.

(To be continued)

INVESTIGATING PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

HUMAN beings have potentially extraordinary psychological, psychical and spiritual powers. People are generally unaware of it. However, some people have developed them to more or less extent. They are able to exercise psychic powers to produce physical and psychological phenomena, which appear as miracles or "supernatural" to those, who are not aware of the laws governing the occult nature. An unusual event which cannot be accounted for by familiar laws of nature is called a miracle or supernatural in the common parlance. A moment's reflection, however, is enough to show that no phenomenon, however strange and apparently inexplicable, can be outside the ambit of the laws of nature. In that sense there cannot be anything supernatural or miraculous. Laws of nature which are not known at the present time might have been well known in the past, and may yet be rediscovered sooner or later.

Great advance has been made in our times in scientific exploration of outer space and accumulation of knowledge of the laws of the physical world. But the modern day scientific explorers have made no significant progress whatever in the exploration of the vast realms of the inner spaces of Mind, Soul and Spirit of nature and man, which lie hidden behind the veil of the three dimensional world of matter. Many a psychological, physical and spiritual phenomena have been seen and testified to by trustworthy witnesses, in the past as well as at the present time, but they have remained uninvestigated and unexplained. Even such, not so uncommon, phenomena as prophetic dreams, inspired dreams, somnambulism, apparitions, mesmeric powers in healing, hypnotism, reading letters in sealed envelopes, séance, handling with bare hands or walking bare foot over red hot coal etc., etc., are not explained except advancing vague and contradictory theories by those who do investigate them. Of the three objects of the Theosophical Movement, the third one is investigation of the hidden mysteries and unexplained laws of nature,

and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in man, especially. The scope of the pursuit of this object has been clearly defined by the Founders of the Movement:

What we have to do is to seek to obtain *knowledge* of all the laws of nature, and to diffuse it. To encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people, the so-called Occult Sciences, *based on the true knowledge of nature*, instead of, as at present, on *superstitious beliefs based on blind faith and authority*. (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 47-48)

Belief that is not based on human reason, or scientific knowledge, is superstition. Superstition breeds fear, on the one hand, and skepticism, on the other, and these breed a spate of social evils. And these grow in the masses in proportion to the absence of knowledge of recondite laws of nature and of occult powers which are natural to, but now, generally, latent in man. Such a state of society is the fertile breeding ground of bigotry, charlatanry, priestly exploitation of masses, and a reactionary skepticism and materialism, which are obstacles to progress.

Hypnotism, for instance, has come to be practiced by professional psychologists in the treatment of some of the emotional and mental afflictions. It is practiced even by some lay people, who have learnt the technique, for the purpose of divination, or for simple entertainment, and some misuse it on gullible people and commit various crimes. Such crimes go unnoticed because of ignorance of occult laws of mind and soul. Diffusion of the knowledge of the underlying psycho-physiological principles and laws would lead to reform, and the terrible dangers to the society by misuse of hypnosis can thus be averted. The details of what those dangers are can be found in the theosophical literature.

There are practitioners of séance who are believed to be specialists in invoking invisible “spirits,” and “spirits” of dead people, and interact with them in visible shape. They are called “mediums,” as they act as passive channels through whom invisible denizens of

the Astral World manifest. They are sought after by people who long to communicate with the “spirits” of their dear relatives who have passed away, or for divination or prophecy. Though the knowledge of the occult laws underlying mediumship and séance has been given out in the Theosophical literature, they are not widely known. Therefore, misconceptions and blind beliefs about the phenomenon persist among the practitioners of the art. Not only do the mediums, and those who consult them, come to great harm, but also the practice has deleterious effect on the society as a whole. In ancient times when true knowledge prevailed, practice of the art was discouraged, and even forbidden by secular and religious laws.

There are clairvoyants who are consulted by people in distress for tracing their missing friends or relatives or to find lost objects. There are seers who prophesize the future events of the life of individuals, or tell their past, by merely looking at their faces. In many cases the prophecy, or the reading of the past events, have turned out to be true.

Reports of numerous instances of children remembering their past lives have been investigated and authenticity of many of them have been established. Modern theories of psychology are unable to account for it, nor are they able to explain why, if reincarnation be true, people generally do not remember their past lives, barring few exceptions, and what is the reincarnating entity, where is the seat of memory, and so on.

The fact that modern science, and in particular, psychology, is unable to explain, what are mistakenly termed the supernatural events, is because of their faulty epistemological assumptions, and their entire and exclusive reliance on empirical methods of research and inductive reasoning. The basic premises of science are that the mind is the product of brain substance, and that man is no more than a biological creature. Reasoning based on such faulty assumptions lead to erroneous conclusions, though deduction from Major and Minor terms of syllogism will be correct. The inevitable result of it is that the one who reasons is deluded into mistaking

effects for causes, and causes for effects, leading one far from truth.

Leading thinkers among the community of scientists, however, have gradually come to recognize the limitations of their methods, and are forced to reevaluate their original assumptions. This they are forced into by the very facts unfolding before them in their researches into sub-atomic fields, wherein the apparent dichotomy between subject and object, or mind and matter, is seen to be dissolving, and the reality of consciousness as the basic foundation of the universe is emerging. It is in this context that the third object of the Theosophical Movement gains importance.

When asked by an inquirer, whether Masters aid scientific men to discover occult laws and forces in nature and man, They said that science can make no claim on their help since it has no basis in philanthropy (*Heart Doctrine*, p. 13) but that help will be given to them in such ways and means that they progress upon the fittest lines for them. (*W.Q.J. Series No. 9*, p. 30)

An instance of such aid, given to science by Adepts may be cited. It may be seen in the dialogue the leading scientists of the West have been frequently holding with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. They are seeking the wisdom of Mahayana Buddhist mysticism for explanation of psychological and other scientific riddles about which science is uncertain, or has no answer. One such mystery they explored was the exact moment and signs of death of a man or woman, in the face of numerous medical and civic records of persons pronounced clinically dead, reviving and coming back to life after hours, and even days later. His Holiness gave them an explanation of the occult laws of post-mortem separation of principles. He explained that “clear light” at the time of death is experienced by everyone without exception, and, “as long as the clear light of the death experience is sustained, the connection between the very subtle energy-mind and the gross physical body has not yet been severed. It is in the process of being severed but it has not yet been completely severed. At the very moment that the severance takes place, the body begins to decay,

and at that point we say death has occurred,” (*Sleeping, Dreaming and Dying*, Wisdom publication, Boston, 1997, pp. 163-64) and that some people can remain in that state of suspended animation for a week, or even three weeks (*Gentle Bridges*, Shambala publications, 1992, p. 160). His Holiness even demonstrated to medical fraternity in reputed American hospitals, with the help of Initiated Buddhist Monks gifted with spiritual perception, the fact that between clinical death of the medical science and the beginning of decay of the body a few days or even week may elapse, during which the body remains fresh, without signs of decay.

Teachers have made it abundantly clear that investigation into psychic powers in man was to be carried on along the lines of study of Occult philosophy, and understanding the laws underlying phenomena, which lie beyond the purview of empirical methods, and not by attempting to develop psychic powers. Unless one has attained absolute purity of mind, body and heart through practice of divine virtues and highest altruism, trying to develop psychological powers for investigation of the psychic realm is full of danger, especially in the present state of civilization in which selfishness reigns supreme. Hence, the right kind of investigation which is implied in the third object of the Theosophical Movement has been defined by the Teacher, W.Q. Judge, thus:

Our philosophy explains the facts already at hand, and shows distinctly how the virtues and excellences of character must be developed and realized before we are all ready for practically touching the psychic forces. At the same time, by giving a sufficient analysis of man’s composite nature it tends to prevent and do away with all superstition in respect to the many psychic phenomena that daily have place. This latter method of investigation is the right one in my opinion, and the one to be retained rather than the other. (*Forum Answers*, p. 102)

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: What is the approximate time period for the deceased to take birth again on earth? Can an Ego refuse to take birth again?

Answer: The question is intimately connected to the state of the Ego after death, and we can reframe the question as, “how long does the Ego remain in *Devachan* (*swarga* or *paradise*) after death? *Devachan* is an intermediate state between death and rebirth. It is a condition or a state of mental bliss and rest. In case of an average human being, it is necessary for the Ego to experience complete bliss and rest in *devachan* before taking birth again. The time period in *devachan* depends upon the proportion and strength of a person’s noble and moral thoughts in his previous life. During life we have many high aspirations, ideals and thoughts, but we are not able to live them all out, and hence these are stored as mental energy or force. Our physical body, astral body and the brain do not permit the full development of this force. As a result, this energy remains latent and after death, when the bondage of lower principles is absent, these thought-forces expand and develop. For instance, an artist, who aspired to advance in the field of art but could not achieve it during life, carries the force of aspirations to *devachan*. In *devachan* it would fully blossom like a flower, and also get assimilated with his higher nature (Ego). In *devachan* there is an assimilation and expansion of all the nobler qualities—sympathy, love for beauty, art, and the abstract things of life.

The Ego remains in *devachan* for a time exactly proportionate to the psychic impulses generated during life. It depends on the degree of spirituality and the merit or demerit of the last incarnation. In *The Ocean of Theosophy*, Mr. Judge says that it being a matter which

deals with the mathematics of the soul, no one but a Master can tell about *average* time spent in *devachan*. The Master says that a person can be in *devachan* for an average of 1000 to 1500 years. We eat our meal in 15-20 minutes, but it takes several hours for it to get transformed into blood or physical energy. So too, the time needed for assimilation in *devachan* is longer. However, the time of stay in *devachan* varies from person to person. For instance, persons with a materialistic bent of mind, who have not created the mental force to keep their higher principles in *devachan*, are born quickly. The thirst for earthly life (*tanha*) draws them quickly back to earth. Those who are totally materialistic, not believing in the soul, God or in rebirth and those who are selfish and unsympathetic, who have never shed a tear for others, may emerge out of *devachan* and are reborn in a month. We might say that the stay in *devachan* depends upon the “food” for ideation and assimilation carried by the Ego, after death, in terms of pursuit of spiritual life, efforts to understand and apply philosophy, pursuit of abstract subjects, such as, music, art, painting, mathematics, for their own sake, and altruistic endeavours.

However, it is indicated in our literature that it is possible for a Master of Wisdom to help a sincere student-worker to skip *devachan* or to pull him out early from *devachanic* rest. However, there are conditions to be fulfilled by one aspiring to secure such extraordinary help. There must be in the person one-pointed devotion and aspiration to serve humanity, and work towards Universal Brotherhood. There must be faith in the Masters and willingness to labour strenuously. One has to formulate the desire to serve the Masters, and to work for Humanity, while alive, and must also be willing to let go of the rest, joy and peace of *devachan*. The feeling must arise, “I want to serve.” One must have cultivated the virtue of adaptability, which in turn depends upon cultivation of *vairagya* or detachment. One must have developed the capacity to grapple with the new environment. There is also the question of exhaustion, renovation and renewal of spiritual stamina. We have to be able to so live the life that we can do without *devachanic* rest.

On the other hand, it appears that it is possible to extend one's stay in *devachan* (heaven) through performance of certain rituals and ceremonies, and thus *delay* the rebirth on earth. In the Ninth Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, we are told about those who are well-versed in the three Vedas and who perform the rituals and sacrificial actions with the intention of enjoying celestial bliss. Referring to such people, Shri Krishna says, "having enjoyed that spacious heaven for a period in proportion to their merits, sink back into this mortal world, where they are born again as soon as their stock of merit is exhausted." Mr. Judge writes that some ceremonies procure entrance into a delightful state after death which will last for incalculable periods of time.

An Ego can take birth again only when an appropriate environment is available. The Ego itself chooses and takes birth to such parents and family where he has strong karmic affinities through past Karma. It appears that a woman conceives when some ego makes connection with her. Is it not possible that when a couple resorts to artificial birth control methods, the Ego's attempt of making a connection with that pair of parents and of acquiring a body could be thwarted? That would mean delay in taking birth.

We know almost nothing about the process of the descent of the Ego from the invisible *devachanic* realm to the visible realm; from the unembodied state to rebirth in a physical body. But there are one or two hints thrown out by Mr. Judge in *The Ocean of Theosophy*. It appears that only certain foods contain the germ of physical reproduction, *viz.*, female ovum and male sperm, and others do not. He writes: "As we know that no human body is formed without the union of the sexes, and that the germs of such production are locked up in the sexes and must come from food which is taken into the body, it is obvious that foods have something to do with the reincarnating of the Ego. Now if the road to reincarnation leads through *certain food* and none other, it may be possible that the Ego gets entangled in food which will not lead to the germ of physical reproduction, a punishment is indicated where Manu says that such and such practices

will lead to transmigration, which is then a 'hindrance.'"

From the foregoing it is clear that at best, one can *postpone* returning to earth in another body for immensity of years, by performing "special ceremonies," but one cannot altogether escape re-birth, till a certain stage has been reached. Though our immortal Ego can choose the environment in which to take birth, it is guided and controlled by law, by justice, and by the necessities of upward evolution, and therefore cannot refuse to take birth. In fact, it is forced to take birth, because of unexhausted karma and unspent karmic affinities.

When a person renounces interest in the fruits of actions, he is not bound by actions, because then, he does not offer an individual focus, where karmic effects could return. He only introduces beneficent causes into collective karma of humanity. He is like a writer who has made a deal that all money that comes to him as royalty must be distributed as charity. He is then not *forced* to take birth, but voluntarily, complying with the law of cycles, can take birth at appropriate times to help humanity. Such are the Great Beings, known as *Mahatmas* or Elder Brothers of Humanity. For these generous-hearted Beings, the whole of manifestation is like a *small* family.

Question: Can the Ego interchange gender, *i.e.*, choose to take birth in one life as male and in some other life as female?

Answer: At death, the Ego takes a review of the life just ended. Similarly, on emerging from *devachan* and before taking birth, the Ego is in a state of complete *manasic* consciousness with which it is able to analyze the acts of past lives and the resulting causes. It is according to these causes that the Ego takes new birth. The Ego selects a portion of these karma to take birth in a place and surroundings which offer least resistance to their coming to fruition, as a reward or punishment. The Ego itself selects and takes birth to such parents and family where it has strong karmic affinities through past Karma. Just as we do not go to market carrying our entire bank balance, so also, each Ego is born with only a portion of mental

deposits or karmic causes, which determine such things as, station in life, sex and conditions of the irresponsible years of childhood.

In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Mr. Judge writes that there is no sex at the level of Spirit. There, all men are women and all women are men, two coalesced into one. But in psychic consciousness there are still distinctions. Each human being prepares to move over from a male body to the female body, and *vice versa* in some subsequent life for gaining experience. However, he does not agree with the theory that the Ego incarnates alternately in the male and female sexes.

Mr. Judge mentions that the essential female character is totally different from the essentially male one. For instance, the female character *per se*, according to him, is concrete, *i.e.*, its tendency in thought, speech and act is concrete. While the male character *per se*, is the opposite, or tending to abstractness. He hints at two or three other distinguishing characteristics. If an Ego has evolved with infinite pain over many lives, a female character then that tendency will not exhaust itself in one life so as to allow the ego to take birth in the male body. If an Ego in the male body in prior life chooses to take birth in the female body, then it would set up a tendency to essential character of the female. But an Ego can choose to incarnate in male or female sex for many other reasons.

Thus, for instance, we often see a person in a male body with many psychic characteristics and tendencies, predominantly feminine, or *vice versa*. All of us must have lived in past incarnations many times in male as well as in female bodies by now. There are lessons to be learnt in both male and female bodies, and through masculine and feminine natures. Until an appropriate instrument is found, karma related to it remains unexpended. For instance, so long as one is in a male body, one cannot have the experience of motherhood. In fact, Mr. Judge says that he is quite indifferent as to whether his next birth will be in a male or female body. For one ego did very well in a female-body called H. P. Blavatsky, and another ego did well in a male-body called Shankaracharya!

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

On the eve of World Environment Day, which was observed on June 5, Seema Burman reflected on oxygen-releasing plants which reduce man-made pollution. When the amount of harmful chemicals in the air become excessive, leaves show brown spots, and some of them also develop large holes, with the exception of Peepal leaves, also known as *Ficus religiosa*. In the Tenth Discourse of the *Gita*, Shri Krishna says, “Among the trees, I am the *Ashwattha*,” and he indicates that the tree was a gift of God to mankind. Krishna is believed to have breathed his last under the peepal tree, which is called *Ashwattha* in Sanskrit. Biologically also, peepal tree is of importance. Due to its ability to perform a type of photosynthesis called crassulacean acid metabolism, the peepal tree releases oxygen during night as well. With the increase in pollution, the peepal tree can come to the rescue of human beings. Shyamkant Padoley, a botanist, says that there are other oxygen-releasing plants, such as, “*Tulsi* or holy Basil, which gives out oxygen for 20 hours and ozone for four hours a day, along with the formation of nascent oxygen which absorbs gases like carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide from the environment.” The *Tulsi* plant is known to have diverse healing properties.

The top three oxygen producing plants, according to National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) are: sprouts, snake plant and areca palm. Sprouts have greenhouse effect and release oxygen in the air. The snake plant converts carbon dioxide to oxygen at night and also removes formaldehyde. The areca palm, besides converting carbon dioxide to oxygen during daytime, removes xylene and toluene, and provides enough oxygen for the entire day. Oxygen producing plants maintain oxygen levels in the blood, and thus increase one’s productivity and improve longevity.

Insufficient oxygen supply to the brain can cause strokes, cancers and many diseases, and so oxygen-breathing amid nature, early in the morning, was recommended by ancient sages. But according to

the World Health Organization, China and India are facing the world's deadliest air pollution, giving rise to companies that are marketing fresh mountain airs in bottles to China.

Homes are polluted due to synthetics and chemicals used in carpets, toys, ceramics and fibres. Aloe Vera plant is among many others such as lady palm, bamboo palm, rubber plant, Boston fern and peace lily, which purify the air by absorbing chemical toxins, writes Seema Burman. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, June 4, 2017)

Man and Nature are inseparably interrelated in an intricate web of life from the very origin of the earth. Science is increasingly admitting the significant link between the life of humanity and the environment, just as the whole human body and its minutest parts are synergistically interdependent. Only lately have we begun to understand a little more in-depth the advancing science of Ecology and the link between man and nature. And only recently has there been a global response, in search of real causes and the extent of damage done over the years to our biosphere.

Some years ago, Huxley described civilization as a “conspiracy against nature”—his observation has been proved prophetically true today. We can no more ignore threats to our living condition on earth and the future. There are more reasons why we should be concerned with the “health” of Nature, which is intrinsically linked with the wellbeing of man. It is literally true that both nature and man thrive together physically and psychically. “Not only climate, but also occult influences daily felt not only modify the physio-psychological nature of man, but even alter the constitution of so-called inorganic matter in a degree not fairly realized by European science,” writes H.P.B. (*Isis*, I, 211)

World Environment Day is not just a day to remember, but a Day of reckoning, to measure our values and our role, positive or not, in developing sustainable progress for all.

Henry Slade was an American “clairvoyant” con man and a self-

proclaimed spirit medium, who electrified Europe's scientific community. The apparent proof of Slade's abilities, and therefore, of the supernatural, involved a series of 30 séances, which were held in Leipzig, Germany, in 1877, and were attended by the luminaries at the University of Leipzig, which included Johann Zollner, the University's chair of astrophysics, who wrote them up in the book *Transcendental Physics*, and described them as “experiments” in truth.

“Slade first impressed the Leipzig luminaries by deflecting a compass needle with only a wave of his bare hand. Later, as the men sat in a circle holding hands, objects in the room winked into and out of existence. Impossible knots appeared in lengths of cord. Lights flickered....Books and furniture might be flung about by mysterious forces.” During his psychic demonstrations he claimed that he received communications from his deceased wife, Alcinda and other souls. Some attributed his psychic demonstrations to “jugglery” or sleight of hand, but Zollner and Alfred Russell Wallace spoke in defence of Slade.

A faculty member at the University of Leipzig, Wilhelm Wundt argued that scientists were not the best people to assess Slade because they might not be the most qualified to detect deception. For instance, when Slade deflected the compass needle with hand, scientists sought to explain it in terms of “molecular currents” while a non-scientist “would scarcely have neglected to examine the coat-sleeves of the medium” looking for hidden magnets. Zollner, however, believed that Slade's miracles represented empirical evidence of an otherwise unobservable fourth spatial dimension. He theorized that the vanishing objects did not really vanish but were simply rotated into the fourth dimension.

In 1885, an investigative commission comprising magicians and scientists from the University of Pennsylvania interviewed the surviving witnesses and concluded that his demonstrations were, “so closely resembling fraud as to be indistinguishable from it,” writes Matthew Tompkins. (*New Scientist*, June 17, 2017)

The Theosophist magazine, for February 1881, carried the review of Professor Zollner's book *Transcendental Physics*, by H.P.B. She writes that his work is "one of the most valuable that have ever appeared in connection with the mediumistic phenomena," and that "it should be in the library of everyone who pretends to hold intelligent opinions upon the subjects of Force, Matter, and Spirit." She describes him as a profound metaphysician, who had surmised that "besides length, breadth, and thickness, there might be a fourth dimension of space, and that if this were so then that would imply another world of being, distinct from our three-dimensional world, with its own inhabitants fitted to its four-dimensional laws and conditions, as we are to ours of three dimensions."

In a unique experiment, which had not been tried with any medium before, Professor Zollner kept a cord in front of Slade, which had its two ends tied together, and sealed with wax. He then asked Slade to tie a knot in this *endless cord*, and found to his surprise that not one but four knots had been tied in his string. H.P.B. writes that here was an instance which proved that matter *could* be passed through matter. What Professor Zollner termed fourth dimension of space was really the fourth property of matter, called permeability. "Numerous other like phenomena were obtained during the thirty sittings which Professor Zollner had with Slade. Among them the abstraction of coins from a hermetically-sealed box, and their passage through the table onto a slate held flat against the underside of the tabletop," writes H.P.B.

In the article, "Nature's Human Magnets" we are told that Baron von Reichenbach proved that the body of man is filled with a fluid (magnetic) which he gives off at the head, hands and feet. In some individuals this vital magnetic force is intensely strong. There are many such *magnetically surcharged* people, and medium Slade was one of them. In an experiment, a compass was placed on a table enclosed in glass. Professors Zollner and W. Weber had their hands joined with those of Slade, which were over a foot distant from the compass. So great was the magnetic aura discharging from Slade's

hands, however, that "after about five minutes the needle began to swing violently in arcs of from 40° to 60° till at length it several times turned completely round."

There is invisible side of both man and nature. Unfortunately, science has limited its scope by relying exclusively on physical senses, laboratory experiments, observations, analysis and reasoning. While these are excellent tools for investigation of the physical world, they are inadequate for investigation of the psychic world, and are absolutely useless for getting even a glimpse of the spiritual world. Any abnormal occurrence or exhibition of psychic powers is explained by religion to be the work of god or devil. Science classes the whole thing as deception or a fraud.

What happens after power goes to head? How do the powerful lose touch with reality? How are they able to say outrageous things like, "Let them eat cake," as was said by Queen Marie Antoinette of the poor people in France? Research shows "subjects under the influence of power...acted as if they had suffered a traumatic brain injury—becoming more impulsive, less risk-aware, and crucially, less adept at seeing things from other people's point of view," says an article in *The Atlantic*. When neuroscientist Sukhvinder Obhi studied the brains of powerful and not-so-powerful people under a transcranial-magnetic-stimulation machine, "he found that power impairs a specific neural process, 'mirroring,' that may be a cornerstone of empathy." Mirroring is the phenomenon in which when one watches another person perform an action, the part of the brain that one would use to perform that same action, lights up in sympathetic response. Powerful people are also found to have poor ability of reading people's feelings or anticipating how another person might interpret a remark. They are found to become empathy deficit, in that they lose the ability to laugh or be anxious when others around display these feelings.

The "disorder of the possession of power, particularly power which has been associated with over-whelming success, held for a

period of years and with minimal constraint on the leader,” is the condition described as “hubris syndrome.” The symptoms include contempt for others, loss of contact with reality, restless or reckless action and displays of incompetence.

The article suggests that powerful people can avoid getting into this situation by recalling the days when they were not powerful, or by paying heed when well-wishers make them aware of their abhorrent conduct, as was done during World-War II by Winston Churchill’s wife, who wrote to him, “I must confess that I have noticed a deterioration in your manner; and you are not as kind as you used to be.” (*Sunday Times of India*, June 25, 2017)

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity. But if you want to test a man’s character give him power.” Lord Acton, a historian, warned, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” A person in power tends to be selfish and self-centred. It is very difficult to be in a position of power without compromising the humane qualities. The one who happens to be in a superior position should make himself agreeable and approachable to his subordinates, but at the same time he must maintain a healthy distance. Only a few, in the positions of power, are able to master this art.

The paradoxical concept, we must “stoop to conquer” has been explored by Robert Greenleaf in his book *Servant Leadership*. Greenleaf advocates that the leadership concept must be based on openness, the ability to listen, humility, the cultivation of intuition, as a means of insight, introspection, faith, and so on, and echoes Lao Tzu’s concept of lowliness and humility: “The Sage, wishing to be above the people, must by his words put himself below them; wishing to be before the people, he must put himself behind them. In this way, though he has his place above them, the people do not feel his weight.... Therefore all mankind delight to exalt him, and weary of him not.”