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**Guest Editorial**

**Big Change**

The current global crisis, popularly known as ‘corona virus caused’ pandemic, has shown the limit of human ingenuity. Man in his super ambition to master Nature, assaulted her citadel and now when she has retaliated, is gasping for breath not knowing what to do to save his life. In the past when our elders suggested having recourse to things and forces beyond the physical to tame the ferocious tiger hidden in our own hearts, our worldly wise men brushed this aside saying either that it was superstitious or at best an escape route for those who wanted to take shelter in the other world after death and were unable to face the harsh realities of this earthly world. In their desperation the wise men of the world, the politicians and scientists are running hither and thither groping in darkness for a formula to cure the disease. They may or may not succeed in their endeavour. Even if they succeed, that will not be a lasting solution to the problem of human life since they are overlooking the real cause: they are not taking into account the whole human being, only the surface-part (the physical) like that of the tip of an iceberg is being recognised and dealt with, — the main body, the rest of the iceberg, remains unseen and unrecognised. That is the root cause of the problem.

The under-surface part of the human iceberg is all powerful. If it is unregenerate as mostly it is today, it creates all the havoc in the world, the kind witnessed in the current crisis. When it is refined, developed and purified, its potentialities are so great that it can transform the mortal creature into an immortal, divine being.

The sad fact is that the number of people with the refined under-surface aspect of man is in such a microscopic minority that they are unable to have an impact on the vast majority who are gripped by the death-bound technology. Secondly, their own approach is theoretical and instructive, not practical and demonstrative, that is, it is not result-oriented and scientific.

With this background and realising the folly of the human approach to himself, man has at last awakened to the reality that he is a whole being, nondivisible and limitless, more than the sum total of parts and aspects, over-surface and under-surface, objective and subjective, dynamic and static etc. Consequently he will have to adopt a wholly new approach to himself realising that he is a fathomless unit of life which extends limitlessly in all dimensions and directions. Recognition of the holistic truth about man is a great achievement for science and man himself that will determine our approach to him for future development.

Here a Big Change in the history of human life shall occur.

Every development in the life of a tree is determined by the seed: it grows in all directions and dimensions simultaneously. Its downward growth develops the root and gives strength and stability to the tree and its upward rise forms the main body of the tree which flowers and bears fruits. Likewise, in our human case it is the development of Holistic Consciousness which forms the foundation of our life and world. The creative principle in this Consciousness shapes the outer physical world and inner spiritual world through its manifestation. It is the planetary being, which you may call Earth Being, that is growing and shaping the planetary life of which all the various aspects humanly called political, economic, social etc., are as well coordinated and harmoniously related as various limbs of our body so that the whole thing moves as one entity, governed and directed by Holistic and Integral Consciousness. What to us ordinary humans looks like a high philosophical concept is, in fact, a most concrete reality of the earth.

This is the Big Change that we the human race have to effect in our consciousness from divided, fragmentary, self-contradictory, limited mental consciousness to Integral, Holistic, unlimited consciousness. This is not something utopian, it is an evolutionary logical necessity and man is in possession of its potentiality. Now is the time for its being effected, — the current global crisis calls for it. This is not only a human need but also the fulfillment of planetary life which Nature according to its law must enforce.

Man as an agent in the process of Nature must play his part actively and consciously. As a conscious agent of Nature man must be able to read Her indications and understand Her intentions and thereby play a leading role. Today man is called upon to spearhead the Big Change and a New Future to planetary life.

Swami Om Poorna Swatantra
Equilibrium

In reality illness is only a disequilibrium; if then you are able to establish another equilibrium, this disequilibrium disappears. An illness is simply, always, in every case, even when the doctors say that there are microbes — in every case, a disequilibrium in the being: a disequilibrium among the various functions, a disequilibrium among the forces.

This is not to say that there are no microbes: there are, there are many more microbes than are known now. But it is not because of that you are ill, for they are always there. It happens that they are always there and for days they do nothing to you and then all of a sudden, one day, one of them gets hold of you and makes you ill—why? Simply because the resistance was not as it used to be habitually, because there was some disequilibrium in some part, the functioning was not normal. But if, by an inner power, you can re-establish the equilibrium, then that’s the end, there is no more difficulty, the disequilibrium disappears.

There is no other way of curing people. It is simply when one sees the disequilibrium and is capable of re-establishing the equilibrium that one is cured. Only there are two very different categories you come across... Some hold on to their disequilibrium—they hold on to it, cling to it, don’t want to let it go. Then you may try as hard as you will, even if you re-establish the equilibrium the next minute they get into disequilibrium once again, because they love that. They say: “Oh no! I don’t want to be ill”, but within them there is something which holds firmly to some disequilibrium, which does not want to let it go. There are other people, on the contrary, who sincerely love equilibrium, and directly you give them the power to get back their equilibrium, the equilibrium is re-established and in a few minutes they are cured. Their knowledge was not sufficient or their power was not sufficient to re-establish order—disequilibrium is a disorder. But if you intervene, if you have the knowledge and re-establish the equilibrium, quite naturally the illness will disappear; and those who allow you to do it get cured. Only those who do not let you do it are not cured and this is visible, they do not allow you to act, they cling to the illness. I tell them: “Ah! you are not cured? Go to the doctor then.” And the funniest part of the thing is that most often they believe in the doctors, although the working remains the same! Every doctor who is something of a philosopher will tell you: “It is like that; we doctors give only the occasion, but it is the body that cures itself. When the body wants to be cured, it is cured.” Well, there are bodies that do not allow equilibrium to be re-established unless they are made to absorb some medicine or something very definite which gives them the feeling that they are being truly looked after. But if you give them a very precise, very exact treatment that is sometimes very difficult to follow, they begin to be convinced that there is nothing better to do than to regain the equilibrium and they get back the equilibrium!

Sri Aurobindo says,

“Disease is needlessly prolonged and ends in death oftener than is inevitable, because the mind of the patient supports and dwells upon the disease of the body”. [Thoughts and Aphorisms, in SABCL, Vol.17, p.126.]

and I add,

“An illness of the body is always the outer expression and translation of a disorder, a disharmony in the inner being; unless this inner disorder is healed, the outer cure cannot be total and permanent.”

Some people are spontaneously free from fear even in their body; they have a sufficient vital equilibrium in them not to be afraid, not to fear, and a natural harmony in the rhythm of their physical life which enables them to reduce the illness spontaneously to a minimum. There are others, on the other hand, with whom the thing always becomes as bad as it can be, sometimes to the point of catastrophe. There is the whole range and this can be seen quite easily. Well, this depends on a kind of happy rhythm of the movement of life in them, which is either harmonious enough to resist external attacks of illness or else doesn’t exist or is not sufficiently powerful, and is replaced by that trembling of fear, that kind of instinctive anguish which transforms the least unpleasant contact into something painful and harmful.

There is the whole range, from someone who can go through the worst contagion and epidemics without ever catching anything to one who falls ill at the slightest chance. So naturally it always depends on the constitution

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The Mother

(CWM, Vol. 05, pp. 121-122)

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The Mother

1 October 1959

(CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 137-138)

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of each person; and as soon as one wants to make an effort for progress, it naturally depends on the control one has acquired over oneself, until the moment when the body becomes the docile instrument of the higher Will and one can obtain from it a normal resistance to all attacks.

But when one can eliminate fear, one is almost in safety. For example, epidemics, or so-called epidemics, like those which are raging at present—ninety-nine times out of a hundred they come from fear: a fear, then, which even becomes a mental fear in its most sordid form, promoted by newspaper articles, useless talk and so on.

The Mother 19 June 1957 (CWM, Vol. 09, pg. 123)

**Be Protected**

The Ramayana says that when Ram went to hunt the golden deer he left Sita in the lonely hut in the forest in the care of his brother Lakshaman. On hearing the false cry raised by the Rakshasa deer in the voice of Ram, Sita got disturbed and entreated Lakshaman to go out to Ram’s succour. Lakshaman drew a line outside the hut, the line of protection, and warned Sita for her safety that she should not cross it. The king of Rakasasa, Ravana, rusefully persuaded Sita to cross the line, and abducted her.

Quite a significant anecdote. So long as Ram’s, the Divine’s representative Lakshaman was physically present in the cottage, Sita was not asked to remain within a fixed boundary. She was assured of all security in a wide space; her movements had no restriction. The whole burden rested on the shoulders of the protector. But once she was physically alone a limit was counseled to her; a line was drawn to limit the zone of protection. Ravana had to play the game according to its rules; he knew that it was not in his power to efface the line drawn by the protector and he had first to make Sita move out of the marked area.

When the Mother was with us physically, we were enjoying an incomparable security and immunity under her umbrella of a constant and tangible vigil spreading over all her children and surrounding them with her force of protection and grace. Most of the time we were carefree, we were not even conscious of the dangers she was diverting from our direction. We remembered her when we saw some danger facing us, and she was there with her ready relief. We thanked her; many a time we did not even thank her. For her it did not matter. She did her work and we joyfully took to other frolics.

Now that she is not here physically with us, the earlier immunity enjoyed by us is no more there. There is a line of protection that is to be respected. Care is needed not to cross the line; one has to stay within the protected zone. A minimum sincerity in the being is needed to stay in the protected zone. If that is there we can afford to be playful, a bit mischievous, even quite adventurous and daring; the Mother’s mighty arms continue to shield us. If that sincerity is not there, we enter into another zone; then we are no more the privileged ones.

What is that minimum sincerity? There is no fixed quantity, no fixed measure. It depends on the individual. Perhaps the more one had enjoyed the Mother’s nearness, the heavier would have been the minimum demanded of him.

Shyam Sunder (Reprinted from an earlier issue)

**March of Civilisation India**

The Spirit and Aim (1) ’It is the spirit of a nation that determines its destiny,’ says Sri Aurobindo.

What then is the spirit of India, what the essential characteristics that mark her out among the nations of the world? These characteristics, this spirit of the nation cannot be summed up in a single word, but we can discern three dominant strains. These are, first, a strong and constant urge to spirituality; second, a mighty creativeness and zest for life; and third, mediating between them, a powerful rational, ethical and aesthetic mind developed to a high pitch.

India has kept in view, consciously for the most part in the minds of the elite and not forgotten except in brief moments of darkness, a threefold aim in man’s existence. There is first, an aspiration to rise above and beyond the limits of the ordinary life and mind in a perishable body into
the glories of an infinite Existence which is at once Bliss and Knowledge and Power; this is what India means by spirituality. Second, there is a striving towards an utmost perfection of the mental instrument which man the mental being in an earthly body exposed to incapacity, illness, pain and death must necessarily use for this purpose. And third, as a base and lever of ascent, the fulfilment of the life-force and the physical being, the material body which this life-force has to use in all their capacity for joy and power and health and creativeness.

These three seemingly diverse aims, may in the luminous phrase of Sri Aurobindo, be reduced to a single formula: the divinisation of human life on earth. A divine life on earth is to live in Infinity while doing the works of life and mind and body to their utmost perfection and plenitude. But man must first be accomplished in mind-life and body before he can live even as the Divine in spirit.

This is a high hope, not yet realised either in India or anywhere else in the world. But to have helped man, not only the exceptional individual but all men and women according to their capacity and the stage they had reached in the human evolution, towards this threefold aim has been the peculiar feature of the Indian tradition, the whole meaning of its effort.

The Spiritual Aspiration

The spiritual aspiration, ‘the desire of the moth for the star, the devotion to something afar’, in Shelley’s inspired phrase, the heart’s craving for something that far exceeds in its beauty and joy, in its power and peace and knowledge, in its unity and permanence the discord and turmoil, the ignorance and incapacies of our brief existence in a mortal frame, this aspiration towards the Infinite has been the dominant motif, the inner force behind all Indian creation.

It has been the mainstay of its religion and philosophy. It provides the raison d’être of yoga. It is the underlying spirit of all literature worthy of the name. It inspires all art in its best specimens. It is the spirit and aim in Indian music, dance and drama. Education takes this as its essential objective. The life-values are replete with it. The social framework, the economy, even the political organisation, as we shall see, have this as their ultimate goal. To miss this fact is to misunderstand the whole drift of the Indian tradition.

The Divine, in its view, manifests Himself in Time and Space, through His innumerable Powers and Personalities, in numberless worlds visible and invisible, in human time and timelessness. And to man it does not deny the capacity to come into close contact and even union with one or more of the Divine Aspects, in this world or in any of the numberless world beyond or above his ordinary life on earth, in time or in timeless eternity.

To be aware of this possibility, to make it real for the individual and for the race is the goal set before man. To furnish him every opportunity to move towards this goal, through all his thought and faith and works, in all the details of his social, economic and political life: this has been the spiritual aim in the Indian tradition. To have made this the supreme aim gives it a uniqueness, which it does not share with any other culture ancient or modern that lays claim to greatness.

Intellect and Ethicality

But in laying a dominant stress on spirituality, the Indian tradition did not lose sight of the fact that true spirituality does not flourish in a void. It demands a solid base of mind, life and body. We find thus a high and rich intellectuality, ‘at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail’ 2 a prominent feature of the Indian tradition. Not only is this noticeable in its philosophy and science, — philosophy in India was one of the most austere games of the human intellect, her sciences were busy with the minutes details, — but it is visible on every side. India’s social and political thinking bears the impress of an acute mind. Indian literature is remarkable in its thought content; literary criticism delights in hair-splitting analysis. Indian education had for one of its main objectives the training of the intellectual faculty. Even purely aesthetic pursuits like music and the dance, painting, sculpture and architecture did not dispense with background knowledge of principles.

‘On one side there is an inexhaustible curiosity, the desire of life to know itself in every detail, on the other a spirit of organisation and scrupulous order, the desire of the mind to tread through life in the right rhythm and measure.’ 3

Closely allied to this high intellectuality was the strong preoccupation. “Hindu thought and literature might almost be accused of a tyrannously pervading ethical obsession; everywhere the ethical note recurs.” 4

The reason is simple. Sheer intellectual eminence devoid of the saving power of ethics does not make for harmony; it is a titanic trait, and titanism was one of the things most abhorred by India. Dharma, the ideal law of living has been a major keynote of the Indian tradition; it insisted on the ethical imperative.

The resolution of the problem of evil, the victory of the gods over the titans in the symbolic language of the Vedas and the Brahmanas, was one of the main themes of its earliest literary records. This was the main purport of the two Great Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Gita is built round the question as to what constitutes Dharma. In the teachings of the Buddha and of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, in the legends of the Puranas, and in that vast body
of gnomic and didactic literature in Sanskrit Prakrit, Pali and the modern vernaculars, a place has been given to ethics that defies comparison with anything done in this respect elsewhere in the world.

“We are enamoured of the Eternal… Nothing satisfies us until we get at the eternal things. This ... is evident everywhere in the arts as in religion, philosophy and literature”.

Sanat K. Banerjee
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)

The Divine Play

Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
And never thought to exceed the human start
And never learned to climb towards the Sun.

Sri Aurobindo
(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 443)

When the Divine is discontented with the movements in the world he strikes. He sends his godheads onto the earth to alter the course of human history.

A small virus has shaken the entire world. It is the divine play curtailing the egos of mankind.

The ongoing COVID-19 epidemic has sparked widespread fear all over the world and has thrown life into a tizzy.

Throughout human history, infectious diseases have managed to spread their tentacles across the world. This happens when man, in his egoistic and ignorant ways, tries to replace the Divine by himself; pushing away the divine from every action he does, from every cell he processes, emptying the space for this adversity. The cure is to bring back the divine to help us drive out these forces. It requires a tremendous effort and faith which needs a total amalgamation with the divine which very few possess. There has to be a total inner surrender and faith that the divine power is always there to reach out to and help to us. Scientifically proven cures can fail but not the ones that come from enlightened forces. There were many marauders and conquerors in past history who decimated huge populations to satiate their desires to have huge kingdoms and enforce their ideology. These viruses are just another form of these marauders. Man is living way beyond what the earth can sustain— decimating resources and nature, polluting the main sources of life that is earth, water and air. Viruses which have survived for millions of years encapsulated in ice will surely start spreading due to global warming and the melting of ice in polar regions.

The Divine keeps on giving warning knocks on our doors. We are deaf to god’s footsteps following us. Man has to evolve keeping the comfort zone of nature in mind, otherwise this viral attack, future viral attacks will be harder to contain. An interesting story illustrates this fact beautifully. There was a cholera outbreak. In a village in the outback there was a pond where all the animals were bathing, people were washing and bathing and all the filth from the village was being emptied in the pond. Now, people of the village were drinking water from the same pond, scooping up the water, letting the dirt settle and then drinking it. But, there was no cholera outbreak in that village. They did not chlorinate to treat the water but let Nature takes its own course. Divine play or complete innocence and faith in the divine plan, is not a difficult guess.

It has been happening since time immemorial. People forget the Mahabharata, the intricacy and the links in the epic. Actually not many people know that there is a link between the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Ramayana is the story of Vishnu’s incarnation, Rama, during Treta Yuga. Rama came on earth for the sake of dharma sansthapan. Mahabharata happened in Dwapara Yuga which is after Treta Yuga and Lord Vishnu came down as Krishna to establish Dharma. So when there was a problem on earth, gods descended to fight the adverse forces. Many will be in a confused state about the link between the Mahabharata story and the present day
scenario. Let us say these viral attacks are attacks by the adverse forces. These attacks are nothing but the foolishness of mankind who, in his greed, turns away from the Divine and allows these forces to take his place. In Ramayana this starts when Rama kills Vali to help Sugreeva regain his throne. Now let us come to Krishna and Mahabharata. Krishna was resting under a tree when a hunter thinks it is a deer and shoots an arrow at it. The hunter runs towards Krishna and becomes absolutely flabbergasted and inconsolable over what he has done. Krishna consoles him and recounts an incident to him. You are the Vali of Ramayana and I am Rama. This illustrates how over the Yugas fates are linked so that even the Divine has to bear them. Perhaps the present day situation is a result of what happened multiples of decades ago.

Is it not the greed of mankind and unnecessary destruction of nature which unleashes these viruses? Are they not to remind mankind that it does not take much for these forces to unleash destruction? In the Mahabharata there was the entire destruction of the Kauravas, the Pandavas and the Yadavas. It was all over a piece of land, or a kingdom, Hastinapur. If one comes to the present nothing much seems to have changed. Possession of property or wealth is foremost in the mind. Is it not killing people also a kind of virus? We forget the creator and the limited time we have to live. Many plagues have killed millions but we have learned nothing from them. We forget we are nothing but playthings in the Divine’s hands. There is always a war between the gods and the asuras when even the gods have to turn to divine help. The next evolution of man is defined but there is resistance to the change which allows these forces to enter the space. Perhaps another Krishna or Sri Aurobindo is going to take birth.

The Supramental Force, which the Mother saw descending in the Ashram Playground, is already amongst us but we fail to realise it.

Listen to the nature see the beauty around you before it is too late. Nature is reclaiming its space, feeding on the fear of death of humans.

And as the Mother said:

Each time a wave of these monstrous adverse forces sweeps over the earth, one feels that nothing can ever stop the disorder and horror from spreading, and always, at a certain time, unexpectedly and inexplicably a control intervenes, and the wave is arrested, the catastrophe is not total. And this is because of the Presence, the supreme Presence, in matter. (CWM, Vol. 09, pg. 340)

CHINTAN JUNJHUNWALA

SHE – THE MOTHER

She is in Summer as blossoms and bowers, She is in Rain as the hail stone shower.

She is in the River as the current strong, She is in the Cuckoo as the sweet song.

She is the bounty when the Harvest reaps, She is in Flowers as the nectar sweet.

She is in the Calf as frolic all day, She is in the Child as laughter and play.

She is the Pearl in the ocean deep, She is in darkness as the Light that peeps.

She is the Life in seed and tree, She is the Soul in you and me.

She is the Treasure in the Earth’s core, She is all this and much, much more !

She is the Divine Mother none can miss, She is the Peace, Joy and Delight of all that is.

SUDHA
Yuvaan was now really looking forward to being at the Somnāth temple at Prabhas Patan. He had just received a brief lesson about the history of the reconstruction of this great temple after Indian independence in 1947 — via a conversation with a gentleman at the café where they had stopped for their tea break. This gentleman had been going to the Somnāth temple once a month for the last twenty years.

Yuvaan had some vague sense that this temple was of great significance—historical, religious, spiritual, cultural—but did not know anything specific about the temple’s long history. He had heard about the repeated destructions the temple had faced at the hands of invaders. But that was the fate of many temples in India, what was special about Somnāth,— he had never really bothered to learn. Nor was this ever covered in any significant way in his history books in school or college. There is so much I don’t know about my country, my nation’s history — that was the first thought which came to Yuvaan’s mind when he heard the old Gujarati gentleman mention Sardar Patel’s and K.M. Munshi’s role in the reconstruction of the temple. He decided to read up a bit before reaching the temple.

As the car sped again on the highway, sitting quietly in the backseat Yuvaan spent the next several minutes searching the internet for K. M. Munshi and his work on the Somnāth temple. He bookmarked a few articles and also downloaded a couple of books by Munshi. He was tempted to read some of the material right away, but remembered that he should first complete the chapter which he was reading from Essays on the Gita before stopping for a tea break. He smiled as he realised that his interest in exploring the deeper truths of Indian culture and history had also helped him become a better student— more systematic and organised; but, more importantly a more sincere, patient and open-minded learner. This was something that he had struggled with during his regular school and college years!

Yuvaan was enthralled and deeply fascinated when he read the Gita’s teaching of the spirit of equality with which all work must be done. This equality, according to the Gita, is not mere disinterestedness but a state of inner poise and wideness. Sri Aurobindo says that this is the foundation of spiritual freedom. And in that freedom, one must do the “work that is to be done,” a phrase, as Sri Aurobindo explains, is used by the Gita with the greatest wideness, including in it all works, and which far exceeds, though it may include, social duties or ethical obligations.

Yuvaan somehow felt that this was the spirit in which Sardar Patel and K. M. Munshi must have worked on the Somnāth temple reconstruction project—as the “work to be done” in a state of inner poise and wideness. He was thrilled to see these emerging deeper connections between what he was reading and what he was experiencing in his travels to different places in India.

What is my work to be done — Yuvaan wondered for a few minutes. But as he read further, he learned that,

1. “What is the work to be done is not to be determined by the individual choice; nor is the right to the action and the rejection of claim to the fruit the great word of the Gita, but only a preliminary word governing the first state of the disciple when he begins ascending the hill of Yoga.”

2. “The argument of the Gita resolves itself into three great steps by which action rises out of the human into the divine plane leaving the bondage of the lower for the liberty of a higher law. ...The first step is Karmayoga, the selfless sacrifice of works, and here the Gita’s insistence is on action. The second is Jnanayoga, the self-realisation and knowledge of the true nature of the self and the world; and here the insistence is on knowledge; but the sacrifice of works continues and the path of Works becomes one with but does not disappear into the path of Knowledge. The last step is Bhaktiyoga, adoration and seeking of the supreme Self as the Divine Being, and here the insistence is on devotion; but the knowledge is not subordinated, only raised, vitalised and fulfilled, and still the sacrifice of works continues; the double path becomes the triune way of knowledge, works and devotion. And the fruit of the sacrifice, the one fruit still placed before the seeker, is attained, union with the divine Being and oneness with the supreme divine nature.”

Karmayoga, Jnanayoga, Bhaktiyoga — these terms were familiar to him. Perhaps most Indians—even in his generation—at some point or the other have heard of these terms, mused Yuvaan. But do we really understand what these terms mean? Do we realise the depth of meaning behind the ideas of “selfless sacrifice of works” or “self-realisation”, or even something that sounds so fundamental as “devotion”?

1CWSA, Vol. 19, pg. 36
2CWSA, Vol. 19, pg. 37-38
Maybe it is not about understanding these ideas but actually living them, actually realising the truth of being a devotee, being a karmayogi and a jnanayogi. But still, something in Yuvaan insisted that one’s intellectual curiosity must also be satisfied along the way. At least that was the case for him, he was becoming more aware by the day.

Coming to the end of the chapter titled “The Core of the Teaching” Yuvaan again realised the need to closely study the entire Bhagavad Gita with the help of a teacher. He really needed help, he knew that for sure,— to unlock the deeper truths behind the words of this eternal scripture, this timeless Song of the Divine. His heart sent up a silent prayer that he might find such a teacher at the right time, as he gazed outside from the car window, his head rested against the glass in a contemplative mood.

Catching sight of a signboard on a roadside shop which read “Jaya Somnāth,” Yuvaan suddenly realised that soon he would be standing in front of the Somnāth temple. He started browsing through the online material he had saved earlier about K. M. Munshi and his work. He learned about the multi-faceted personality of K. M. Munshi—freedom fighter, political thinker, lawyer, literary figure, institution-builder, and a great patron of Indian culture and civilisation. Yuvaan was especially thrilled to learn about Munshi’s association with Sri Aurobindo, who inspired him to work for the renaissance of India and for the renewal of her eternal and noble traditions, unsullied by ritual and dogma.

Munshi had done a good deal of historical research on the Somnāth temple, Yuvaan learned. This was reflected in his book “Somnāth: The Shrine Eternal” which was published on the occasion of the installation of the Somnāth deity in the newly constructed temple. Yuvaan was intrigued by the fact that Munshi had also written a historical novel titled “Jaya Somnāth” which he was definitely going to read soon.

• “Desecrated, burnt and battered, it still stood firm — a monument of our humiliation, and ingratitude. I can scarcely describe the burning shame which I felt on that early morning as I walked on the broken floor of the once-hallowed sabha mandap, littered with broken pillars and scattered stones. Lizards slipped in and out of their holes and the sound of my unfamiliar steps, and Oh! The shame of it! — an inspector’s horse, tied there, neighed at my approach with sacrilegious impertinence.”

This is how Munshi had described the deep anguish he felt when he first visited the ruins of Somnāth temple in 1922.

Given the great historical, cultural and spiritual significance of this temple and the geographical area of Prabhas in the collective psyche of Indians, after independence, both Munshi and Sardar Patel strongly felt that restoration of the temple to its glory would significantly enhance the faith of Indians in their future as a free people. Munshi was invited by Sardar Patel to draw up a plan for this important task.

As Yuvaan continued to browse and read selectively, he began to wonder why Munshi’s contribution towards the rebuilding of the Somnāth temple and the challenges he faced during that time were not common knowledge. Shouldn’t this history be known to people in his generation? After all, it is the history of the people who had built modern India.

while restoring and renewing her ancient spirit, who deeply understood the value of the cultural revitalisation that is needed for the modern age, who not only valued but also truly identified with the spirit of a dynamic religio-spiritual culture of India.

Beloo Mehra

Arjuna Paradox

The atmosphere was tense. Strong and muscular arms had gone limp, fingers that were known for their perfect grip and surgical precision when firing arrows at targets at the farthest end of the line of sight were quivering today. His throat had run dry and his body felt feverish as he trembled. The great and divine Gandiva bow slipped from the warrior’s hand as he fell back in his seat with drooping shoulders. What a sorry sight it was at Kurukshetra to watch the greatest hero of his time, Arjuna, fall down like a helpless weakling and all seemed lost for his righteous army until he uttered the magic words that turned the tide—“What is my right course of action? Show the way, Teacher”. What happened next, everyone knows as the sermon of the Bhagavad Gita, wherein Krishna gave to his disciple and friend Arjuna, a direction, meaning and purpose for his life when he found himself stuck at a crossroads, unable to see the right way forward.

Most of us at some point in our lifetimes, find ourselves facing the “Arjuna Paradox”. And it is precisely at these times that all the dark clouds of depression, diffidence, anxiety and fear start hovering over our lives. Unfortunately, not everyone is so lucky to have a Guru or even a wise friend or a trusted elder whom they can rely upon to raise them up when they are feeling low and vulnerable. But, everyone, even those outside of the spiritual discipline or the Guru-Shishyaparampara, has at some point of time identified directly or indirectly a teacher in the personal or professional life whom they have sought to emulate or learn some valuable lessons from that then shaped their life’s actions and conduct. This generally occurs during the early part of life at school or college or even in the initial years of one’s career when one’s heart and mind are open and more malleable; it very rarely occurs in the later stage of life as mostly an individual becomes more closed later on in life. This simple approach of emulating our ideal persons is often sufficient to keep us on track and enable us to hone the necessary skills to progress in our personal or professional lives. But the problem arises when unpredictable situations and events in life suddenly shake us out of our comfort
zone and make us re-calibrate our own actions and start to introspect. Our own self-confidence is replaced by doubts and this is compounded when we do not have the guiding wisdom of a friend, elder or a Guru. And it is at these unexpected times that the “Arjuna Paradox” surfaces. In retrospect, if we look at Arjuna, we find it baffling that this great hero who was known the world over for his superior skills and discriminative intellect and who had decided already that he would participate in the battle, suddenly developed cold feet and began questioning his own life’s decision and purpose and whether his action was right, precisely at the crucial time of performing action. And all this while having Sri Krishna beside him! If this was the case of Arjuna, what may be said of the doubts that an ordinary individual faces when he has to face a daily battle alone between the ideal and the practical in an atmosphere where the divine presence near him cannot always be perceived.

We see today that the same “Arjuna Paradox” that was first diagnosed over 5000 years ago is still affecting people in the same way. So I don’t think there is any harm in trying the same “Krishna Therapy” that was so effective in treating it then. As we have observed in the case history of Arjuna, we saw that the “Krishna Therapy” began working on him only when something in him stirred and told him to utter the magic words. Even though he did not know anything about what action he must take, and was emotional and disturbed, one part of him knew that in such a situation, the right action would be take the help of Krishna and when this impulse stirred, “The Krishna Therapy” suddenly began to take effect. If he had not been open and had not uttered those words to Krishna, there would have been no effect.

While we have before studied the sermon of Krishna which forms the core of the Bhagavad Gita and gained a preliminary understanding of the basic tenets of Karma Yoga or the Yoga of Action, we will now attempt to try and narrow our focus on the thing that stirred within Arjuna that enabled him to ultimately regain the lost footing and also eventually to try and answer this pertinent question that I was asked by a friend, “How does one know If whatever action one takes is the ‘right one’?”

We have come across many stories from across the world, where at different times great heroic acts performed by seemingly ordinary individuals in the most inauspicious of circumstances have saved the day, effected great transformations or saved innumerable lives. When these individuals were asked how or why they performed their actions, we could see a common theme reflecting in all of them such as “it was the right thing to do”, “I got the gut/inner feeling” or even a simplistic “I don’t know” or “Well, one’s got to do what one’s got to do”. While all their deeds were certainly divine and remarkable, in hindsight we see that none of them had any doubt that their action was the right one. It makes one wonder—“How were they so sure?” While all of them did courageous acts taking great risks, not all of them were known for their bravery. It seems, all of them had an internal compass which suddenly got activated at their times of crises and directed them to what the right action was even if it involved their doing extraordinary things which they had never done before. If this is the case, one can very well ask “Do I also have this ‘hero quirk” in me?” and if yes, “Is there a way to activate it?”

In the previous issues of this journal, I had written a series called “Everyday Heroes” where I wrote about the real life stories of some amazing people who inspired me and who by their actions were heroes every day. From how a young woman, Dora with acute myeloid leukemia and a fear of needles, braced herself for all the injections and also the terrible pain of various cycles of chemotherapy to not only win the battle but also to start a group called Quilling Cancer org. for cancer patients, to the story of a young orphan, Karthikeyan, who went on to become an ace psychologist who created an entire and inclusive village, ‘Sristi’, for children, which had its own organic farm, inclusive school and indigenous cattle for empowering individuals with disabilities, to how an auto rickshaw driver, Mr. Mohan, opened an old age home for the destitute and a school for disabled children, to how a strong willed world record holder, Mr. Rajendran, showed the way for several aspiring record holders across the world to set world records and created a world record organisation of his own—“Assist World Records”.

Recently I came across the story of the late Sir Nicholas Winton that made tears well up in my eyes. The otherwise unknown 79 year old former stockbroker was among the audience in a BBC Reality Program— “That’s Life”, where the show’s host proclaimed to the world that they had a list of names from a diary handed over to them by Mr. Winton’s wife who had come across it almost 50 years after he had written it. The anchor announced that their organisers had been able to track a lady Vera Gissing who was probably in her late sixties who was sitting right next to Mr. Winton and that she would like to thank him for saving her life. As the cameras turned to Mr. Winton who was visibly moved and in tears as she shook his hands and hugged him, the show’s host announced “Now, Is there any one in the audience who owes their lives to Mr. Winton. If so, could you stand up please?”. And the next moment, the entire row of several smiling senior citizens stood up and Mr. Winton only looked at all of them in silence and his simple and satisfied smile said it all. He had not only done the right action but also forgotten about it completely...
and moved on in life. It was only after the talk show that the world came to know how Mr. Winton had saved the lives of 669 Czechoslovakian children from Nazi Germany and found a safe passage for them to Britain in an operation that was later called the “Czech Kindertransport”. Although almost all the parents of the children died, all the children found their homes in Britain and many went on to become famous doctors, poets, politicians and celebrities.

As for Mr. Winton, he went on to receive several awards and recognitions post the TV show. He was knighted by the Queen as Sir Nicholas Winton in 2003 and, in 2004 at the age of 104, conferred with the highest honor of the Czech Republic, the Order of the White Lion (1st class), by Czech President Miloš Zeman. If we look at his story, we see all this started when, at the age of 31, he decided to cancel a skiing holiday in Switzerland before Christmas and lend a hand to his friend in Prague who was involved in humanitarian work for Czech refugees. Now wasn’t this a really ‘right’ action? I am sure he did not have the slightest idea that he would later on go to save 669 children!

Looking at the inspiring lives of all these remarkable heroes makes me feel very strongly that each of us has this ‘Divine guiding being’ inside of us, which can guide us to perform the right actions. The voice within always knows, we only need to pay heed to it.

I feel this being is the “Chaitya Purusha” or the Psychic being that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have taught us about. This being can guide us, and be our Krishna each time the “Arjuna Paradox” manifests in us. Only we need to know that the psychic being is present within and trust and believe in it. Many times the psychic being’s instructions are refracted like rays of light passing through a prism and deviated by virtue of one’s emotions or preconceived notions or inhibitions. But if we sincerely try to focus beyond the noise of our mental and emotional clutter, we can hear the soft but firm voice of the chaityapurusha. And when that voice is heard, there is nothing else that needs to be heard and no action that is impossible to an individual.

For your psychic being is that part of you which is already given to the Divine. It is its influence gradually spreading from within towards the most outward and material boundaries of your consciousness that will bring about the transformation of your entire nature. There can be no obscurity here; it is the luminous part in you. Most people are unconscious of this psychic part within them; the effort of Yoga is to make you conscious of it, so that the process of your transformation, instead of a slow labour extending through centuries, can be pressed into one life or even a few years. The Mother (CWM, Vol. 03, pp. 62-63)

May each of us not only hear the calls of our psychic being within us but also pay heed to the call for that is the very purpose of our birth. A great deal of ‘right action’ is needed to correct the many wrongs that are taking place in our world today and the world needs to hear many powerful Arjunas standing tall and firm with one hand holding the Gandiva and in the other the quiver roaring like a lion “KarishyeVachanamTava”

Be ever one-pointed in your surrender and sincere in your aspiration and you will constantly feel the presence of the Divine’s help and guidance. The Mother (CWM, Vol. 14, pg. 86)

Sushrut Badhe

Press Pause

Thoughts on these “crowning” days

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness…” In the opening of Charles Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities, the “time” is the French Revolution. Uncertainty and chaos bring out the worst and the best in men, as alternating night and day in each one’s life. Sometimes we are thrust into personal crises precisely to re-evaluate what’s best and what’s worst in us. But when did the entire organism called humanity get to press pause? What seventy years of United Nations could not do, what fifty years of environmental crisis could not do, has been done by an infinitesimal entity in fifty days. Nations and people have united, leaving behind petty politics and scarcity economics. “We are in it together” is the new slogan. If one wins, we all win. If one loses, we all lose. What a chance to be given time-off for introspection. And enough time too. There is no need to panic or be in a hurry. All the big questions we kept for later will show up. After this, we will not be the same persons ever again. The world will not be the same either. Relationships will be valued over material assets; compassion will replace competition; encouragement, appreciation, gratitude will drive interactions; the human consciousness will change into something magnificent.

Sometimes we act out of fear; sometimes out of love.
Our moods swing as we try to cope. Some are hoarding as though Noah’s ark was leaving for the promised land, and only the self-sufficient can get on board. Others realise the folly of self-sufficiency. They are united in feelings with people in far-off countries. They feel the stress in social distancing, and the pain of loss of income. These people come out to help with things they can share — some food, a book, a listening ear. Fear and love, the formidable enemies, are at war; with our minds, bodies and hearts as their battleground.

We are all taking the same journey across time in the Titanic. We used to live in physical and psychological luxury. We were in control of our future. Suddenly we hit the iceberg. We all know the lifeboats — the hospitals — can hold only some of us. We use several coping styles. Some will vent, to whoever is around, whether they are listening or not. Some will watch movies, gamble, play trivial games, anything that will distract them and let them escape the situation. Some will succumb to fear and scramble to the life boats, even elbow others out if necessary. Some will find a scapegoat to displace their fear and anger onto, acting out their insecurity. Some will rationalise with conspiracy theories of how the iceberg is man-made to eliminate a section of the population, and how the parachutes will be provided to the richest bidders, and so on. Some will curl up in a foetal position and wait for their mothers to rescue them. Some, paralysed, will assure themselves that “this too shall pass”. Some will laugh at their predicament, and float up in their levity. If enough people could levitate, perhaps the ship wouldn’t sink. Some will become creative and busy. They will write stories, try new recipes, draw, stitch, read, sing, dance, converse. And then there will be those who will cope with prayers. They will hold on to their belief of a transcendental hand that overrules all human actions, and is in control of our destiny.

Perhaps within the same day you cycle through all the coping mechanisms? Krishna says in the Gita, “Whatever your faith, that will determine who you are”, “yo yat shraddha sa eva sah” (Gita 17.3). Shall we have faith in optimism and let the positive energies drive us, define us, and pull the collective along with us? Any situation can be reframed in a positive light. Every cloud can have a silver lining. Let’s do a journaling exercise. Write down future scenarios that are bright, even if just a shade more than now. Let’s make this a “season of Light”. Let this be the best of times.

The Lighthouse

The lighthouse shines out for you and me. We steady our boats on a choppy sea. thank my stars on this rocky ride A million brothers row by my side. I’m grateful to have seen anew — You’re here for me and I for you.

The ancient mariner — what a cruel fate! His shipmates all dead, in a windless state. No food or water, no land in sight, Lonely to the bones, no beacon of light. There was a task he had to face And only then was he shown the grace.

Today I see you shining in the night Illuminated at last by the finger of light. I want to tell you before it’s too late, Let’s work this out, my brave shipmate. Something’s to be done to reach the shore The light shines down, let’s heave once more.

A positive outcome of this forced ‘stay at home’ policy is the wiping out of the human footprint from nature. In just a few weeks we see the enormous healing power of Mother Earth. The air clears up, stars can be counted, fish breathe easy, birds reclaim their old habitats. While men watch from inside their cages, animals run free. Trees too will thrive given some more time. Humans are benefitting no less. The cessation of noise pollution from traffic and places of worship has produced inner peace. People are finding new ways of spreading love: showing concern, sharing inspiring digital content, giving virtual hugs, connecting deeply. A sense of “life is fragile, who knows when someone will be gone” pervades human relationships. There is appreciation for what we had taken for granted. There is gratitude for little things.

May we never return to the old normal. As long as we have this lesson to learn, let the fear of the virus hang over our heads. This is a selfish verdict delivered from a comfortable position. It is heartless from the perspective of people who live in cramped quarters and do not have means to sustain a wage-less lifestyle. But let us indulge in this point of view for a moment. Maybe the time-spirit is asking our economists and politicians to re-think urbanisation. Decentralisation works, it has been proven many times, all over the world. Rural development and agricultural funding are eco-friendly. Distributing educational, medical and job opportunities around the country distributes populations. The daily commute is the biggest producer of air pollution. It degrades the quality of life; produces exhaustion; the immune system is compromised. A tired person cannot give love. He can, and does, act out aggressively. There is much advantage in rethinking our society completely in terms of “Small is Beautiful”. This is the time to restructure; press pause and reconstruct priorities. I feel grateful towards this being that has taken things into its own hands and made human systems kowtow to it. It was time we learnt humility. I bow down to the corona virus, the king who wears the “crown”.
Nothing saddens me more than witnessing the disturbing deluge of events threatening the very edifice of humanity. With ecological and political imbalances destroying the stature of all that is pristine and pure that Nature silently offers to us, one wonders whether we are just helpless spectators, impotent to change our lot. But all is not lost. Recent events hold a ray of hope for the beleaguered spirit hounded by despondency and despair. One hears of the fiery speech of the brave sixteen year old Greta Thunberg, who dared to raise her voice in the forum of climate change and one is once again filled with hope. Many such harbingers of change have lent their voices to wake us up from our slumbering callousness to save the world from the incumbent dangers of global warming. This is the true exercise of freedom of speech where it creates a resounding impact with its sense of purpose and determination. The right to live in a world free from war and terror is also the cry of youth awakened to the ideal of the brotherhood of nations. Through the medium of music and art, through literary festivals reiterating the ideals of human unity one cannot but marvel at this clarion call summoning the youth to defy rigid norms and light the torch of peaceful coexistence between men and nature too.

Freedom is the innate yearning of the soul to live life with the spontaneity of a blithe spirit soaring to heights, undaunted by what the unknown holds for it. Yet this remains an unfulfilled dream for most of us as we lie shackled in the chains of fear, afraid to let go of the comfort zone, hesitant about future uncertainties.

Sri Aurobindo says in Savitri:

Our range is fixed within the crowded arc
Of what we observe and touch and thought can guess
And rarely dawns the light of the Unknown
Waking in us the prophet and the seer.
The outward and the immediate are our field,

The dead past is our background and support;
Mind keeps the soul prisoner, we are slaves to our acts;
We cannot free our gaze to reach wisdom’s sun.
Inheritor of the brief animal mind,
Man, still a child in Nature’s mighty hands,
In the succession of the moments lives;
To a changing present is his narrow right;
His memory stares back at a phantom past,
The future flees before him as he moves;
He sees imagined garments, not a face.
(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 53)

Freedom involves a quantum leap of consciousness where the gravitational pulls of the subconscious and inconscient realms cannot restrain the flight to the heights beyond mind and space.

Recently I was visiting an old relative of mine who was ailing with a terminal disease and I was surprised to see the indomitable spirit she displayed in her approach to life. She talked about how she is enjoying her life as gift of god and grateful for all the bonus moments still left in her life. The ability to face life with a positive attitude is one of the boons showered on one who is liberated from all bondage of the past or future. Enjoying the present means letting go of all attachments and not worrying about whatever the future may be: like a faded leaf that gently leaves the branch ready to drift away in the wind.

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This freedom to be at peace come what may is indeed a great achievement. The condition of taking the right course of action presupposes an immense freedom of will to choose to do what is right.

To be free does not mean to do what one likes but to be able to do the right thing at each moment. I remember a beautiful quote on freedom by the Mother where She elucidates so
One Life, Many Masters

One of the great Sufi Masters, Junnaid, was dying. His chief disciple came close to him and asked softly, “Master, you are leaving us. One question has always been in our minds. Who was your Master? This has been a great curiosity among all your disciples because we have never heard you talk about your Master. But we could never gather the courage to ask you.”

Junnaid opened his eyes and said, “It will be very difficult for me to answer because I have learned from almost everybody. The whole existence has been my Master. I have learned from every event that has happened in my life. And I am grateful to all that has happened, because out of all that learning I have arrived.”

Junnaid said, “Just to satisfy your curiosity I will give you three instances...

One:

I was very thirsty and I was going towards the river carrying my begging bowl, the only possession I had. When I reached the river a dog rushed, jumped into the river, started drinking.

I watched the dog for a moment and threw away my begging bowl. Because I saw it is useless. A dog could do without it. I also jumped into the river, drank as much water as I wanted. My whole body was cool because I had jumped into the river. I sat in the river for a few moments, thanked the dog, touched his feet with deep reverence because he had taught me a lesson.

I had dropped everything, all possessions, but there was a certain clinging to my begging bowl. It was a beautiful bowl, very beautifully carved, and I was always aware that somebody might steal it. Even in the night I used to put it under my head as a pillow so nobody could snatch it away. That was my last clinging. The dog helped. It was so clear: if a dog can manage without a begging bowl... I am a man, why can’t I manage? That dog was one of my Masters.

Two:

I lost my way in a forest and by the time I reached the nearest village that I could find, it was midnight. Everybody was fast asleep. I wandered all over the town to see if I could find somebody awake to give me shelter for the night, until finally I found one man. I asked him, ‘It seems only two persons are awake in the town, you and I. Can you give me shelter for the night?’

The man said, ‘I can see from your gown that you are a Sufi monk....’”

The word Sufi comes from suf; suf means wool, a woollen garment. The Sufis have used the woollen garment for centuries; hence they are called Sufis because of their garment.

The man said, “I can see you are a Sufi and I feel a little embarrassed to take you to my home. I am perfectly willing, but I must tell you who I am. I am a thief. Would you like to be a guest of a thief?”

The man said, ‘I can see from your gown that you are a Sufi monk....’”

The thief said, “Look, it is better I told you. You seem hesitant. The thief is willing but the mystic seems to be hesitant to enter into the house of a thief, as if the mystic is weaker than the thief. In fact, I should be afraid of you—you may change me, you may transform my whole life! Inviting you means danger, but I am not afraid. For a moment Junnaid hesitated. The thief said, “Look, it is better I told you. You seem hesitant. The thief is willing but the mystic seems to be hesitant to enter into the house of a thief, as if the mystic is weaker than the thief. In fact, I should be afraid of you—you may change me, you may transform my whole life! Inviting you means danger, but I am not afraid.
You are welcome. Come to my home. Eat, drink, go to sleep, and stay as long as you want, because I live alone and my earning is enough. I can manage for two persons. And it will be really beautiful to chit-chat with you of great things. But you seem to be hesitant.

Junnaid became aware that it was true. He asked to be forgiven. He touched the feet of the thief and he said, “Yes, my rootedness in my own being is yet very weak. You are really a strong man and I would like to come to your home. And I would like to stay a little longer, not only for this night. I want to be stronger myself.”

The thief said, “Come on!” He fed the Sufi, gave him something to drink, helped him to prepare for sleep and he said, “Now I will go. I have to do my own thing. I will come back early in the morning.” Early in the morning the thief came back. Junnaid asked, “Have you been successful?”

The thief said, “No, not today, but I will see tomorrow.”

And this happened continuously, for thirty days: every night the thief went out, and every morning he came back empty-handed. But he was never sad, never frustrated — no sign of failure on his face, always happy — and he would say, “It doesn’t matter. I tried my best. I could not find anything today again, but tomorrow I will try. And, God willing, it can happen tomorrow if it has not happened today.”

After one month Junnaid left, and for years he tried to realise the ultimate, and it was always a failure. But each time he decided to drop the whole project he remembered the thief, his smiling face and his saying “God willing, what has not happened today may happen tomorrow.”

Junnaid said, “I remembered the thief as one of my greatest Masters. Without him I would not be what I am.

Three:

I entered a small village. A little boy was carrying a lit candle, obviously going to the small temple of the town to put the candle there for the night.”

And Junnaid asked, “Can you tell me from where the light comes? You have lighted the candle yourself so you must have seen. What is the source of light?” The boy laughed and he said, “Wait!” And he blew out the candle in front of Junnaid. And he said, “You have seen the light go. Can you tell me where it has gone? If you can tell me where it has gone I will tell you from where it has come, because it has gone to the same place. It has returned to the source.”

Junnaid said, “I had met great philosophers but nobody had made such a beautiful statement: ‘It has gone to its very source.’ Everything returns to its source finally. Moreover, the child made me aware of my own ignorance. I was trying to joke with the child, but the joke was on me. He showed me that asking foolish questions — ‘From where has the light come?’ — is not intelligent. It comes from nowhere, from nothingness — and it goes back to nowhere, to nothingness.”

Junnaid said, “I touched the feet of the child. The child was puzzled. He said, ‘Why you are touching my feet?’ And I told him, ‘You are my Master — you have shown me something. You have given me a great lesson, a great insight.’

“Since that time,” Junnaid said, “I have been meditating on nothingness and slowly, slowly I have entered into nothingness. And now the final moment has come when the candle will go out, the light will go out. And I know where I am going — to the same source.

I remember that child with gratefulness. I can still see him standing before me now, blowing out the candle.”

No situation is without a lesson, no situation at all. All situations are pregnant with meaning and intelligence. But we have to discover them. They may not always be on the surface.

When we see life itself as our master, these lessons become more accessible.

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