



KEY NOTEBOOK

XII

(Continued from October Supplement)

Section XII

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XII. WHAT IS PRACTICAL THEOSOPHY?

Duty.

Why, then, the need for re-births, since all alike fail to secure a permanent peace? Because the final goal cannot be reached in any other way but through life experiences, and because the bulk of these consist in pain and suffering. It is only through the latter that we can learn. Joys and pleasures teach us nothing; they are evanescent, and can only bring in the long run satiety. Moreover, our constant failure to find any permanent satisfaction in life which would meet the wants of our higher nature, shows us plainly that those wants can be met only on their own plane, to wit — the spiritual.

The natural result of this is never a desire to quit life by "suicide." Such a result can never be a "natural" one, but is ever due to a morbid brain disease, or to most decided and strong materialistic views. It is the worst of crimes and dire in its results. On the contrary, the **natural** result would be aspiration to reach spiritual existence, not a wish to quit the earth. Voluntary death would be an abandonment of our present post and of the duties incumbent on us, as well as an attempt to shirk karmic responsibilities, and thus involve the creation of new Karma.

Our philosophy teaches us that the object of doing our duties to all men and to ourselves the last, is not the attainment of personal happiness, but of the happiness of others; the fulfillment of

right for the sake of right, not for what it may bring us. Happiness, or rather contentment, may indeed follow the performance of duty, but is not and must not be the motive for it.

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"Duty" in Theosophy is that which **is due** to Humanity, to our fellow men, neighbors, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves. This is a debt which, if left unpaid during life, leaves us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts in our next incarnation. Theosophy is the quintessence of duty. Those who practice their duty towards all, and for duty's own sake, are few, and fewer still are those who perform that duty, remaining content with the satisfaction of their own secret consciousness. It is —

the public voice
Of praise that honors virtue and rewards it,"

which is ever uppermost in the minds of the "world renowned" philanthropists. Modern ethics are beautiful to read about and hear discussed; but what are words unless converted into actions? Finally: if you ask me how we understand Theosophical duty practically and in view of Karma, I may answer you that our duty is to drink without a murmur to the last drop, whatever contents the cup of life may have in store for us, to pluck the roses of life only for the fragrance they may shed on **others**, and to be ourselves content but with the thorns, if that fragrance cannot be enjoyed without depriving someone else of it.

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No Theosophist has a right to call himself one unless he is thoroughly imbued with the correctness of Carlyle's truism: "The end of man is an **action** and not a **thought**, though it were the noblest" — and unless he sets and models his daily life upon this truth. I say — **action**, enforced action, instead of mere intention and talk. The profession of a truth is not yet the enactment of it, and the more beautiful and grand it sounds, the more loudly virtue or duty is talked about instead of being acted upon, the more forcibly it will always remind one of the Dead Sea fruit. **Cant** is the most loathsome of all vices.

What we consider due to humanity at large is, for example, the full recognition of equal rights and privileges for all, and without distinction of race, colour, social position, or birth. This due is not given when there is the slightest invasion of another's right — be that other a man or a nation; when there is any failure to show him the same justice, kindness, consideration or mercy we desire for ourselves. The whole present system of politics is built on the oblivion of such rights, and the fiercest assertion of national selfishness.

However, as a Society, we carefully avoid politics for the reasons given below. To seek to achieve political reforms before we have effected a reform in **human nature, is like putting new wine into old bottles**. Make men feel and recognize in their innermost hearts what is their real true duty to all men, and every old abuse of power, every iniquitous law in the national policy, based on human, social or political selfishness, will disappear of itself. Foolish is the gardener who seeks to weed his flower-bed of poisonous plants by cutting them off from the surface of the soil, instead of tearing them out by the roots. No lasting political reform can be ever achieved with the same selfish men at the head of affairs as of old.

The Theosophical Society is, therefore, not a political organization, but international in the highest sense in that its members comprise men and women of all races, creeds, and forms of thought, who work together for one object, the

improvement of humanity; but as a society it takes absolutely no part in any national or party politics.

Theosophy does not, however, stand altogether aloof from social questions. If humanity can only be developed mentally and spiritually by the enforcement, first of all, of the soundest and most scientific physiological laws, it is the bounden duty of all who strive for this development to do their utmost to see that those laws shall be generally carried out. All Theosophists are only too sadly aware that, in Occidental countries especially, the social condition of large masses of the people renders it impossible for either their bodies or their spirits to be properly trained, so that the development of both is thereby arrested. As this training and development is one of the express objects of Theosophy, we are in thorough sympathy and harmony with all true efforts in this direction.

Each social reformer has his own idea of what a "true effort" is, each has his own panacea, and each believes his to be the one and only thing which can improve and save humanity. Yet, in most of these panaceas there is no really guiding principle, and there is certainly no one principle which connects them all. Valuable time and energy are thus wasted; for men, instead of co-operating, strive one against the other, often, it is to be feared, for the sake of fame and reward rather than for the great cause which they profess to have at heart, and which should be supreme in their lives.

Theosophical principles should be applied so that social co-operation may be promoted and true efforts for social amelioration be carried on. Let me briefly remind you what these principles are —

**Universal Unity and Causation;
Human Solidarity;
the Law of Karma;
Re-incarnation.**

These are the four links of the golden chain, which should bind humanity into one family, one universal Brotherhood.

In the present state of the so-called civilized countries, we are continually brought face to face with the fact that large numbers of people are suffering from misery, poverty and disease. Their physical condition is wretched, and their mental and spiritual faculties are often almost dormant. On the other hand, many persons at the opposite end of the social scale are leading lives of careless indifference, material, luxury, and selfish indulgence. Neither of these forms of existence is mere chance. Both are the effects of the conditions, which surround those who are subject to them, and the neglect of social duty on the one side is most closely connected with the stunted and arrested development on the other. In sociology, as in all branches of true science the law of **universal causation** holds good. But this causation necessarily implies, as its logical outcome, that human solidarity on which Theosophy so strongly insists. If the action of one reacts on the lives of all, and this is the true scientific idea, then it is only by all men becoming brothers and all women sisters, and by all practicing in their daily lives true brotherhood and true sisterhood, that the real human solidarity, which lies at the root of the elevation of the race, can ever be attained. It is this action and interaction, this true brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental Theosophical principles that every Theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life.

All good and evil things in humanity have their roots in human character, and this character is, and has been, conditioned by the endless chain of cause and effect. But this conditioning applies to the future as well as to the present and the past. Selfishness, indifference, and brutality can never be the normal state of the race — to believe so would be to despair of humanity — and that no Theosophist can do. Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities. Now, true evolution teaches us that by **altering the surroundings of the organism** we can alter and improve the organism, and in

the strictest sense this is true with regard to man. Every Theosophist, therefore, is bound to do his utmost to help on, by all the means in his power, every wise and well-considered social effort that has for its object the amelioration of the condition of the poor. Such efforts should be made with a view to their ultimate social emancipation, or the development of the sense of duty in those who now so often neglect it in nearly every relation of life.

Yet, no one person and no society can lay down hard-and-fast rules to discern the wisdom of this or another course of action. Much must necessarily be left to the individual judgment. One general test may, however, be given. Will the proposed action tend to promote that true brotherhood which it is the aim of Theosophy to bring about? No real Theosophist will have much difficulty in applying such a test; once he is satisfied of this, his duty will lie in the direction of forming public opinion. And this can be attained only by inculcating those higher and nobler conceptions of public and private duties, which lie at the root of all spiritual and material improvement. In every conceivable case he himself must be a centre of spiritual action, and from him and his own daily individual life must radiate those higher spiritual forces, which alone can regenerate his fellow men.

If “separateness” inheres in our comprehension of Theosophy, we are likely to say: “But why should he do this? Are not he and all conditioned by their Karma, and must not Karma necessarily work itself out on certain lines?”

Yet, it is this very law of Karma, which gives strength to all that has been said. The individual cannot separate himself from the race, nor the race from the individual. The law of Karma applies equally to all, although all are not equally developed. In helping on the development of others, the Theosophist believes that he is not only helping them to fulfill their Karma, but that he is also, in the strictest sense, fulfilling his own. It is the development of humanity, of which both he and they are integral parts, that he has always in view, and he

knows that any failure on his part to respond to the highest within him retards not only himself but all, in their progressive march. By his actions, he can make it either more difficult or more easy for humanity to attain the next higher plane of being.

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All this has an intimate connection with the fourth of our principles, **Reincarnation**, for if our present lives depend upon the development of certain principles which are a growth from the germs left by a previous existence, the law holds good as regards the future. Once grasp the idea that universal causation is not merely present, but past, present and future, and every action on our present plane falls naturally and easily into its true place, and is seen in its true relation to ourselves and to others. Every mean and selfish action sends us backward and not forward, while every noble thought and every unselfish deed are stepping-stones to the higher and more glorious planes of being. If this life were all, then in many respects it would indeed be poor and mean; but regarded as a preparation for the next sphere of existence, it may be used as the golden gate through which we may pass, not selfishly and alone, but in company with our fellows, to the palaces which lie beyond.

ON SELF-SACRIFICE.

Equal justice to all and love to every creature is, however, not the highest standard of Theosophy. There is an even far higher one.

The giving to others more than to oneself — **self-sacrifice**. Such was the standard and abounding measure which marked so pre-eminently the greatest Teachers and Masters of Humanity — *e.g.*, Gautama Buddha in History, and Jesus of Nazareth as in the Gospels. This trait alone was enough to secure to them the perpetual reverence and gratitude of the generations of men that come after them. We say, however, that self-sacrifice has to be performed with discrimination; and such a self-abandonment, if made without justice, or blindly, regardless of subsequent results,

may often prove not only made in vain, but harmful. One of the fundamental rules of Theosophy is, justice to oneself — viewed as a unit of collective humanity, not as a personal self-justice, not more but not less than to others; unless, indeed, by the sacrifice of the *one* self we can benefit the many.

Self-sacrifice for practical good to save many, or several people, Theosophy holds as far higher than self-abnegation for a sectarian idea, such as that of “saving the heathen from *damnation*,” for instance. In our opinion, Father Damien, the young man of thirty who offered his whole life in sacrifice for the benefit and alleviation of the sufferings of the lepers at Molokai, and who went to live for eighteen years alone with them, to finally catch the loathsome disease and die, *has not died in vain*. He has given relief and relative happiness to thousands of miserable wretches. He has brought to them consolation, mental and physical. He threw a streak of light into the black and dreary night of an existence, the hopelessness of which is unparalleled in the records of human suffering. He was a **true Theosophist**, and his memory will live forever in our annals. In our sight this poor Belgian priest stands immeasurably higher than — for instance — all those sincere but vain-glorious fools, the Missionaries who have sacrificed their lives in the South Sea Islands or China. What good have they done? They went in one case to those who are not yet ripe for any truth; and in the other to a nation whose systems of religious philosophy are as grand as any, if only the men who have them would live up to the standard of Confucius and their other sages. And they died victims of irresponsible cannibals and savages, and of popular fanaticism and hatred. Whereas, by going to the slums of Whitechapel or some other such locality of those that stagnate right under the blazing sun of our civilization, full of Christian savages and mental leprosy, they might have done real good, and preserved their lives for a better and worthier cause.

Such sectarians act upon an erroneous belief. They think that by baptizing the body of an irresponsible savage they save his soul from damnation. One church forgets her martyrs; the other beatifies and raises statues to such men as Labro, who sacrificed his body for forty years only to benefit the vermin, which it bred. Had

we the means to do so, we would raise a statue to Father Damien, the true, practical saint, and perpetuate his memory for ever as a living exemplar of Theosophical heroism and of Buddha- and Christ-like mercy and self-sacrifice.

We regard self-sacrifice as a duty; and explain it by showing that altruism is an integral part of self-development. But we have to discriminate. A man has no right to starve himself to *death* that another man may have food, unless the life of that man is obviously more useful to the many than is his own life. But it is duty to sacrifice his own comfort, and to work for others if they are unable to work for themselves. It is his duty to give all that *which* is wholly his own and can benefit no one but himself if he selfishly keeps it from others. Theosophy teaches self-abnegation, but does not teach rash and useless self-sacrifice, nor does it justify fanaticism.

We reach such an elevated status by the enlightened application of our precepts to practice. By the use of our higher reason, spiritual intuition and moral sense, and by following the dictates of what we call "the still small voice" of our conscience, which is that of our **EGO**, and which speaks louder in us than the earthquakes and the thunders of Jehovah, wherein "the Lord is not."

Thus we have our duties to humanity at large, **plus** those that arise from special obligations with regard to family ties. The first of the Theosophical duties is to do one's duty by *all* men, and especially by those to whom one's *specific* responsibilities are due, because one has either voluntarily undertaken them, such as marriage ties, or because one's destiny has allied one to them; I mean those we owe to parents or next of kin.

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And thirdly there is the duty of a Theosophist to himself, namely: To control and conquer, **through the Higher, the lower self**. To purify himself inwardly and morally; to fear no one, and naught, save the tribunal of his own conscience. *Never to do a thing by halves; i.e., if he thinks it the right thing to do, let him do it openly and boldly,*

and if wrong, never touch it at all. It is the duty of a Theosophist to lighten his burden by thinking of the wise aphorism of Epictetus, who says: "Be not diverted from your duty **by any idle reflection the silly world may make upon you**, for their censures are not in your power, and consequently should not be any part of your concern."

If, for instance, a member should plead inability to practice altruism by other people, on the ground that "charity begins at home;" urging that he is too busy, or too poor, to benefit mankind or even any of its units; we would reply that no man has a right to say that he can do nothing for others, on any pretext whatever. "By doing the proper duty in the proper place, a man may make the world his debtor," says an English writer. A cup of cold water given in time to a thirsty wayfarer is a nobler duty and of more worth, than a dozen of dinners given away, out of season to men who can afford to pay for them. No man who has not got it in him will ever become a Theosophist. We have no rules by which we could force any man to become a practical Theosophist, if he does not desire to be one.

All are welcome and we have no right to pre-judge a person, not even if the voice of a whole community should be against him, and I may tell you why. In our day, *vox populi* (so far as regards the voice of the educated, at any rate) is no longer *vox dei*, but ever that of prejudice, of selfish motives, and often simply that of unpopularity. Our duty is to sow seeds broadcast for the future, and see they are good; not to stop to enquire why we should do so, and how and wherefore we are obliged to lose our time, since those who will reap the harvest in days to come will never be ourselves.

ON CHARITY.

A good percentage of collective charity sticks to the hands it passes through before getting to the needy, while a good portion of the remainder gets into the hands of professional beggars, those who are too lazy to work, thus doing no good whatever to those who are really in misery and suffering.

Therefore, Theosophy recommends that we act individually and not collectively. Follow the Northern Buddhist precepts: "Never put food into the mouth of the hungry by the hand of another;" "Never let the shadow of thy neighbor (*a third person*) come between thyself and the object of thy bounty;" "Never give to the Sun time to dry a tear before thou hast wiped it." Again "Never give money to the needy, or food to the priest, who begs at thy door, **through thy servants**, lest thy money should diminish gratitude, and thy food turn to gall."

Theosophical ideas of charity mean **personal** exertion for others; **personal** mercy and kindness; **personal** interest in the welfare of those who suffer; **personal** sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles or needs. Theosophists do not believe in giving money through other people's hands or organizations. We believe in giving to the money a thousandfold greater power and effectiveness by our personal contact and sympathy with those who need it. We believe in relieving the starvation of the soul, as much if not more than the emptiness of the stomach; for gratitude does more good to the man who feels it, than to him for whom it is felt.

THEOSOPHY FOR THE MASSES.

One might ask how it is that we expect our doctrines to ever take hold among the uneducated masses, when they are so abstruse and difficult that well educated people can hardly understand them?

We would answer to this that it is precisely modern education, which makes it difficult to understand Theosophy. Modern education fills our mind with intellectual subtleties and preconceptions such that our natural intuition and perception of the truth cannot act. It does not require metaphysics or education to make a man understand the broad truths of Karma and Reincarnation. Look at the millions of poor and uneducated Buddhists and Hindus, to whom Karma and reincarnation are solid realities, simply because their minds have never been cramped and distorted by being forced

into an unnatural groove. They have never had the innate human sense of justice perverted in them by being told to believe that their sins would be forgiven because another man had been put to death for their sakes. And the Buddhists, note well, live up to their beliefs without a murmur against Karma, or what they regard as a just punishment; whereas the Christian populace neither lives up to its moral ideal, nor accepts its lot contentedly. Hence murmuring and dissatisfaction, and the intensity of the struggle for existence in Western lands.

It might be objected that this contentedness, which we praise so much, would do away with all motive for exertion and bring progress to a standstill. But this is not so, for, after all, what is progress? The "progress and civilization" of the 20th century are no better than a host of will-o'-the-wisps, flickering over a marsh which exhales a poisonous and deadly miasma. This, because we see selfishness, crime, immorality, and all the evils imaginable, pouncing upon unfortunate mankind from this Pandora's box called "progress," and increasing *pari passu* with the growth of material civilization. At such a price, better the inertia and inactivity of Buddhist countries, which have arisen only as a consequence of ages of political slavery.

To the masses, who need only practical guidance and support, metaphysics and mysticism are not of much consequence; but for the educated, the natural leaders of the masses, those whose modes of thought and action will sooner or later be adopted by those masses, they are of the greatest importance. It is only by means of the philosophy that an intelligent and educated man can avoid the intellectual suicide of believing on blind faith; and it is only by assimilating the strict continuity and logical coherence of the Eastern, if not esoteric, doctrines, that he can realize their truth. Conviction breeds enthusiasm, and "Enthusiasm," says Bulwer Lytton, "is the genius of sincerity, and truth accomplishes no victories without it;" while Emerson most truly remarks that "every great and

commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm." And what is more calculated to produce such a feeling than a philosophy so grand, so consistent, so logical, and so all-embracing as our Eastern Doctrines?

History tells us that the masses adopted Buddhism with enthusiasm, while, as said before, the practical effect upon them of this philosophy of ethics is still shown by the smallness of the percentage of crime amongst Buddhist populations as compared with every other religion. The chief point is, to uproot that most fertile source of all crime and immorality — the belief that it is possible for humans to escape the consequences of their own actions. Once teach them that greatest of all laws, Karma and Re-incarnation, and besides feeling in themselves the true dignity of human nature, they will turn from evil and eschew it as they would a physical danger.

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HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP THE SOCIETY.

Fellows of Theosophy may help in many ways the advance of the Cause they hold dear. First by studying and comprehending the theosophical doctrines, so that they may teach others, especially the young people. Secondly, by taking every opportunity of talking to others and explaining to them what Theosophy is, and what it is not; by removing misconceptions and spreading an interest in the subject. Thirdly, by assisting in circulating our literature, by buying books when they have the means, by lending and giving them and by inducing their friends to do so. Fourthly, by defending the Society from the unjust aspersions cast upon it, by every legitimate device in their power. Fifth, and most important of all, by the example of their own lives.

The spread of literature is of much importance, and does more practical good than many may realize, for we hold that a good book which gives people food for thought, which strengthens and clears their minds, and enables them to grasp truths which they have dimly felt but could not formulate — we hold that

such a book does a real, substantial good. As to the so-called practical deeds of charity, we follow the Buddhist precepts and do our work directly, not by proxy or by subscribing publicly to charitable funds. What the Theosophist has to do above all is to forget his personality.

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WHAT A THEOSOPHIST OUGHT NOT TO DO.

No Theosophist should be silent when he hears evil reports or slanders spread about the Society, or innocent persons, whether they be his colleagues or outsiders.

If what one hears is the truth, or may be true without one knowing it, then he must demand good proofs of the assertion, and hear both sides impartially before he permits the accusation to go uncontradicted. We have no right to believe in evil, until we get undeniable proof of the correctness of the statement. If this last should be the case, then we are directed to pity and forbearance, charity and long-suffering. These feelings ought to be always there to prompt us to excuse our sinning brethren, and to pass the gentlest sentence possible upon those who err. A Theosophist ought never to forget what is due to the shortcomings and infirmities of human nature.

If by forgiving, we risk to injure, or allow others to be injured, then we must follow the dictates of our conscience and that which our higher nature suggests; but only after mature deliberation. Justice consists in doing no injury to any living being; but justice commands us also never to allow injury to be done to the many, or even to one innocent person, by allowing the guilty one to go unchecked.

No Theosophist ought to be contented with an idle or frivolous life, doing no real good to himself and still less to others. He should work for the benefit of the few who need his help if he is unable to toil for Humanity, and thus work for the advancement of the Theosophical cause.

No working member should set too great value on his personal progress or proficiency in Theosophic studies; but must be prepared rather to do as much altruistic work as lies in his power. He should not leave the whole of the heavy burden and responsibility of the Theosophical movement on the shoulders of the few devoted workers. Each member ought to feel it his duty to take what share he can in the common work, and help it by every means in his power.

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No Theosophist should place his personal vanity, or feelings, above those of his Society as a body. He who sacrifices the latter, or other people's reputations on the altar of his personal vanity, worldly benefit, or pride, ought not to be allowed to remain a member. One cancerous limb diseases the whole body.

No fellow has a right to remain idle, on the excuse that he knows too little to teach. For he may always be sure that he will find others who know still less than himself. And also it is not until a man begins to try to teach others, that he discovers his own ignorance and tries to remove it. But this is a minor clause.

A Theosophist must be ever prepared to recognize and confess one's faults. To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbor's efforts. Never to backbite or slander another person. Always to say openly and direct to his face anything you have against him. Never to make yourself the echo of anything you may hear against another, nor harbor revenge against those who happen to injure you.

Regarding slander, there is a line of demarcation between backbiting and just criticism. In rare cases it becomes one's duty to warn one's friends and neighbors against those whom one knows to be dangerous associates. If by allowing the Slanderer to go on unchecked other persons may be thereby injured, it is certainly our duty to obviate the danger by warning them privately. But true or false, no accusation against another person should ever be spread abroad. If

true, and the fault hurts no one but the sinner, then leave him to his Karma. If false, then you will have avoided adding to the injustice in the world. Therefore, keep silent about such things with every one not directly concerned. But if your discretion and silence are likely to hurt or endanger others, then I add: Speak the truth at all costs, and say, with Annesly, "Consult duty, not events." There are cases when one is forced to exclaim, "Perish discretion, rather than allow it to interfere with duty."

In mysticism and the **small old Path** to one's inner chamber a clean mind and pure heart are more and more demanded as one progresses. Members who fail to carry out such an ideal and difficult undertaking occasionally desert the ship of responsible effort and vent their wrath on the innocent looking-glass, which reflected too faithfully their faces. **People never forgive those whom they have wronged.** The sense of kindness received, and repaid by them with ingratitude, drives them into a madness of self-justification before the world and their own consciences.

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Our Work has been done in the hope of training a few individuals to carry on our work for humanity by its original programme when the Founders are dead and gone. They have already found a few such noble and devoted souls to replace them. The coming generations, thanks to these few, will find the path to peace a little less thorny, and the way a little widened, and thus all this suffering will have produced good results, and their self-sacrifice will not have been in vain. At present, the main, fundamental object of the Society is to sow germs in the hearts of men, which may in time sprout, and under more propitious circumstances lead to a healthy reform, conducive of more happiness to the masses than they have hitherto enjoyed.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Chih Pei Yu

OR

Knowledge Rambling In The North ¹

Chapter I

Knowledge had rambled northward to the region of the Dark Water, where he ascended the height of Imperceptible Slope, when it happened that he met with Dumb Inaction. Knowledge addressed him, saying, "I wish to ask you some questions: By what process of thought and anxious consideration do we get to know the Tao? Where should we dwell and what should we do to find our rest in the Tao? From what point should we start and what path should we pursue to make the Tao our own?" He asked these three questions, but Dumb Inaction² gave him no reply. Not only did he not answer, but also knew not how to answer.

Knowledge, disappointed by the fruitlessness of his questions, returned to the south of the Bright Water, and ascended the height of the End of Doubt, where he saw Heedless Blurter, to whom he put the same questions, and who replied, "Ah I I know, and will tell you." But while he was about to speak, he forgot what he wanted to say.

Knowledge, again receiving no answer to his questions, returned to the palace of the Ti, where he saw Hwang-Ti, and put the questions to him. Hwang-Ti

said, "To exercise *no thought and no anxious consideration* is the first step toward knowing the Tao; to *dwell nowhere and do nothing* is the first step toward resting in the Tao; to start from *nowhere and pursue no path*³ is the first step toward making the Tao your own."

Knowledge then asked Hwang-Ti, saying, "I and you know this; those two did not know it; which of us is right?" The reply was, "Dumb Inaction is truly right; Heedless Blurter has an appearance of being so; I and you are not near being so. As it is said, "Those who know the Tao do not speak of it; those who speak of it do not know it,"⁴ and "Hence the sage conveys his instructions without the use of speech. The Tao cannot be made ours by constraint; its characteristics will not come to us at our call. Benevolence may be practiced; Righteousness may be partially attended to; by Ceremonies men impose on one another. Hence it is said, "When the Tao was lost, its Characteristics appeared. When its Characteristics were lost, Benevolence appeared. When Benevolence was lost, Righteousness appeared. When Righteousness was lost, Ceremonies appeared. Ceremonies are but the unsubstantial flowers of the Tao, and the commencement of disorder. Hence

¹ The Chih, or "Knowledge," is the twenty-second book of Chuang and the last of the "Outer" books. His remaining books are classed as miscellany. This is one of the most typical books of Chuang in its figurative style; yet in it he speaks most plainly of his own views of the Tao.

² All these names are metaphorical, having more or less to do with the qualities of the Tao, and are used as the names of personages, devoted to the pursuit of it.

³ These three conditions show up in all the sacred texts, but with different language and different contexts. No manipulative thought, no anxious consideration, no thought of success and failure is the first big hurdle. The second cautions us to suit the act to the need on the highest level of which we can reach — *i.e.*, we don't live anywhere or do anything but meet the stream of events. This last is more *Svadharmā* than an act — it's the blood the god in us shares, the compass to the sky. The third is asking us to be occultists, to eschew religious practices, but to "live to benefit mankind," to be spontaneous and give each event our best shot whether we be in the meditation chamber or the stockbroker's desk.

⁴ See the "Tao-Teh King," chapters LVI. Chuang-tze is alluding to these two passages — *i.e.*, "He who knows, speaks not; he who speaks, knows not."]]

also it is further said, "He who practices the Tao daily diminishes his doing. He diminishes it and again diminishes it, till he arrives at doing nothing. Having arrived at this non-inaction, there is nothing that he does not do."¹ Here now there is something, a regularly fashioned utensil; if you wanted to make it return to the original condition of its materials, would it not be difficult to make it do so? Who but the TAO could accomplish this?

¹ See the *Tao-Teh King*, Chapters XXXVIII and XLVIII, An illustration of activity in stillness is in the spinning of a top. At its greatest speed there is most apparent stillness, and we say that the top is then "asleep." Or as Chap. 48 says: "By activity in learning we are daily enriched. By activity of Tao we are daily diminished — diminished and yet more diminished, until we arrive at activity of Inner Life, and activity of Inner Life becomes stillness of Inner Life. By the practice of Inner Life stillness we can continually conquer all things. By practice of returning to possessions, nothing that we conquer will be sufficient for us."

Two other sources offer picturesque confirmation: Even as there are two sorts of inactivity — the *sub-activity* which is true inactivity, and the *super-activity* of Tao and the top, which is only apparent inactivity — so there are two kinds of silence and two kinds of darkness. Of the gamut of sound vibrations only one portion is sensed by our human ears. The part below is silence to us, and the part above is silence. But the nether silence and the upper silence are not the same silence, for the former is the indolence of sound waves, or their complete passivity, and the silence above is sound whose "unperturbed velocity the spirit of the simoon mocks," and for which we may find no hospitable ear. Passing from these comparatively coarse vibrations in the ruder medium of the air to the nobler, more subtle, vibration of the ether, we find a parallel. Only a very restricted area of the long scale of ether vibrations is visible to our normal physical eyes. That region is but an octave; each note of it is a color; and when all are played together there comes crystal light. It is as if we had pianos, and all other musical instruments, of only one, and the same, octave. Exquisite work is done by nature and by man on that brief island of light. But what would be achieved if we had at our disposal as many of the octaves of light as we have of sound? ... Meanwhile beneath our delectable little octave of colors is darkness, a thing less active, less subtle, than itself, or, indeed, wholly passive, while above it, too, is darkness, but darkness more active, more subtle, than itself — darkness that is as the stillness of the Tao or the top. [Extract from Dr. Isabella Mear's translation of *Tao Teh King* — commentary on Chap. 48]

"Life is the follower of death, and death is the predecessor of life; but who knows the Arranger of this connection between them? Life is due to the collecting of the breath. When that is collected, there is life; when it is dispersed, there is death. Since death and life thus attend on each other, why should I account either of them an evil?"

"Therefore all things go through one and the same experience. Life is accounted beautiful because it is spirit-like and wonderful, and death is accounted ugly because of its fetid and putridity. But the fetid and putrid is transformed again into the spirit-like and wonderful, and the spirit-like and wonderful is transformed again into the fetid and putrid. Hence it is said, "All under the sky there is one breath of life, and therefore the sages prized, that unity." Knowledge said to Hwang-Ti, "I asked Dumb Inaction, and he did not answer me. Not only did he not answer me, but also he knew not how to answer me. I asked Heedless Blurter, and while he wanted to tell me, he yet did not do so. Not only did he not tell me, but while trying to do so, he forgot all about my questions. Now I have asked you, and you knew all about them; why do you say that you are not near doing so?" Hwang-Ti replied, "Dumb Inaction was truly right, because he did not know the thing. Heedless Blurter was nearly right, because he forgot it. I and you are not nearly right, because we know it." Heedless Blurter heard of all this, and considered that Hwang-Ti knew how to express himself on the subject.

IMMIGRANT ALLY

Open polis: NEW YORKER RUNS FOR ATHENIAN OFFICE

BY CORAL DAVENPORT
Special to the Christian Science Monitor
ATHENS

TO many Greeks she is "the chocolate Aphrodite" — a television celebrity

they call simply “Yvette.”

But to African and other immigrants struggling to make a life in this historically homogeneous country, Yvette Jarvis is something else: an ally.

Born in New York, educated in Boston, this basketball star turned talk-show host, who moved to Athens 20 years ago, hopes to become the first black person elected to municipal office in Greece.

If elected Sunday [She lost, but polled almost 30%], Jarvis would take a council seat in a city trying to cope with a massive influx of immigrants and a rising tide of xenophobia.

In recent years, the number of immigrants in Greece has soared to more than a tenth of its 11 million population. Many Greeks blame migrants for rising crime and delinquency. As in other European countries, immigration has become a volatile political question, one few politicians are comfortable with. Jarvis has made it the centerpiece of her campaign.

She wants to trim bureaucratic hurdles in the migrant’s path from illegal to legal status. She also criticizes a lack of acceptance of other cultures here and the isolation of immigrants into ghettos.

Just recalling my own upbringing as a black American, I have a history of knowing exclusion and racism,” Jarvis says. “This is a chance for me to be a role model to immigrant children here. So many of those children don’t have an identity, and there are no role models here of immigrants succeeding.

Yet her life story is quite different from that of the impoverished, desperate people who wash up on Greece’s shores

from places such as Albania, Ethiopia, and the Philippines

Jarvis grew up with four siblings in the tough neighborhood of Red Hook, Brooklyn, then won an academic and athletic scholarship to Boston University, graduating magna cum laude. After falling in love with a Greek basketball player, she moved to Athens, where she was signed on as a player for the leading Panathinaikos basketball team, earning the nickname “Black Diamond.

Ever nimble and increasingly popular, Jarvis later became a cosmetics model — an exotic beauty dubbed by Greeks as the “chocolate Aphrodite” — and a nightclub singer. Now a Greek citizen and fluent Greek speaker, she debuted as a talk-show host nine years ago.

Jarvis acknowledges that there is a difference between the way Greeks view her — as an exotic import — and the way they perceive other immigrants. She recalls a woman telling her on the campaign trail that something needed to be done “about those blacks,” gesturing to Africans selling wares on the street.

“I’m so familiar to them [Greeks], I’m *tous dikous*,” meaning “one of them,” says, Jarvis, who frequently switches to Greek in conversations. “I just have to keep reminding them, ‘Just like you let me in, you have to let them in,’” Jarvis says. I also have to remind them that [Greeks] were given a chance [when they immigrated to] other countries.”

Jarvis’s celebrity status was one reason mayoral candidate Christos Papoutsis signed her to his ticket, his spokesman, Kritolaos Vasilikopoulos, concedes. But he adds that the Socialist party also sees her as someone who can help loosen prejudices here.

Ms. Jarvis has been involved with volunteer and community programs to help foreigners, curb racism, and raise awareness about issues such as domestic violence and the needs of people with disabilities — topics rarely addressed in Greece.

"Athenian society must accept that we are going through a period of change. In the future Athenians will have to get used to the fact that we all have to live here, that we have to start to be a kind of melting pot," said Mr. Vasilikopoulos. "Yvette can help us do that"

The "melting pot" idea has been slow in coming to Greece. After a long delay, last year the government finally began a drive to legalize immigrants living here for years without residence permits. But that effort has now been put on the back burner, mired by conflicting laws, under-staffed offices, and processing delays,

Meanwhile border controls have been stepped up, as have calls for arrest of illegal migrants. The government tripled police officers assigned to randomly stop and check people for residence permits. Heavily armed police patrol most major corners in poorer areas of the city, which Jarvis and other politicians fear are starting to become "migrant ghettos."

Jarvis says she has heard disturbing stories of how little racial and cultural diversity is accepted here. She recalled talking to African nurses who applied for jobs at an Athens hospital but were told, "You're too black, you'll scare the patients." Muslim women have been told their children couldn't register for school unless they changed their religion.

"There's a big need for communication between the municipality, the state, and these people — I can give that," she says.

Jarvis wants to promote understanding through language classes, cultural centers, and multicultural programs in schools. Those ideas give hope to new arrivals like Moavia Ahmed, an immigrant from Sudan and a leader of the Athens' migrant community.

"She knows about the problems we have, the problems with the new laws," Mr. Ahmed says, "As immigrants in Greece, we don't have the right to vote. But her presence inside the municipality of Athens will be like a channel for us. She will make our voice heard."

But Jarvis's detractors say that her candidacy is mostly about celebrity. "The immigration card is not what's giving her the winning profile — what's giving her the winning profile is that she's a foreigner, that she's on television," says political analyst Spiros Rizopoulos, who runs a private consulting firm. Even so, he says, "It's still a step forward for the country to have a non-Greek running for office. Greece has to get used to the idea.

Jarvis is not the only immigrant seeking office on Oct. 13. Other candidates include a Pole and two Palestinians, also seeking seats on the city council.

ASTROLOGY

The popular idea of Astrology seems to be that the planets and the stars exercise a certain influence upon the destiny of man, which the science of Astrology can determine; and that there are means within the reach of that science which can be used to propitiate "the evil stars." This crude notion, not philosophically understood,

leads to two unscientific fallacies. On the one hand it gives rise to a belief in the doctrine of fatality, which says that man has no free-will inasmuch as every thing is predetermined, and in the other it leads one to suppose that the laws of Nature are not immutable, since certain propitiatory rites may change the ordinary course of events. These two extreme views induce the "rationalist" to reject "Astrology" as a remnant of the uncivilized condition of our ancestors, since as a matter-of-fact student he refuses to recognize the importance of the saying, "Real philosophy seeks rather to solve than to deny." It is an axiom of the philosophic student that truth generally lies between the extremes. If one therefore proceeds in this spirit, he will find that there is yet not an unreasonable or unscientific hypothesis which can reconcile all these different view, and which, not unlikely, was what the ancients meant by Astrology. Although a study of this science may enable one to determine what the course of events will be, it cannot necessarily be inferred therefrom that the planets exercise any influence over that course.

The clock indicates, it does not influence, the time. And a distant traveler has often to put right his clock so that it may indicate correctly the time of the place he visits. Thus, though the planets may have no hand in changing the destiny of man, still their position may indicate what that destiny is likely to be.

This hypothesis leads us to the question, "What is destiny?" As understood by the Occultist, it is merely the chain of causation producing its correspondential series of effects. One who has carefully followed the teachings of Occultism, as recently given out, concerning *Devachan* and future re-births, knows that every individual is his own creator or his own father, *i.e.*, our future personality will be the result of our present mode of living. In the same manner our

present birth, with all its conditions is the tree grown out of the germ sown in our past incarnations. Our physical and spiritual conditions are the effects of our actions produced on those two planes in previous existences. Now it is a well-known principle of Occultism that the ONE LIFE, which pervades ALL, connects all the bodies in space. All heavenly bodies have thus mutual relation, which is blended with man's existence, since he is but a microcosm in the macrocosm. Every thought, as much as action, is dynamic and is impressed in the imperishable Book of Nature — the *Akasa*, the objective aspect of the UNMANIFESTED LIFE. All our thoughts and actions thus produce the vibrations in space, which mould our future career. And astrology is a science, which having determined the nature of the laws that govern these vibrations is able to state precisely a particular or a series of results, the causes of which have already been produced by the individual in his previous life. Since the present incarnation is the child of the previous one, and since there is but that. ONE LIFE which holds together all the planets of the Solar system, the position of those planets at the time of the birth of an individual — which event is the aggregate result of the causes already produced — gives to the true Astrologer the data upon which to base his predictions. It should be well remembered at the same time that just as the "astronomer who catalogues the stars cannot add one atom to the universe," so also can no astrologer, no more than the planet, *influence* the human destiny. Perhaps the following beautiful passage from that exquisite work of Bulwer Lytton's — *Zanoni* — may help to make the meaning still clearer: —

For the accomplishment of whatever is great and lofty, the clear perception of truths is the first requisite — truths adapted to the object desired. The warrior thus reduces the chances of battle to com-

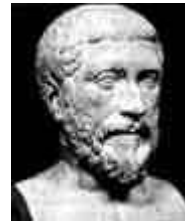
binations almost of mathematics. He can predict a result, if he can but depend upon the materials he is forced to employ.

This necessitates a consideration of the element of clairvoyance necessary to constitute a true astrologer.

The ancient *Rishis*, to condemn whose books without a hearing was, till recently, a general practice, had by observation, experiment and deep occult knowledge, taken account of all conceivable combinations of various causes and determined with mathematical precision almost to infinitesimal point their effects. But yet, since the cosmos is infinite, no finite being can ever take cognizance of *all* the possibilities of Nature; at any rate they cannot be **committed to writing**, since as *Isis Unveiled* says: — "to express divine ideas, divine language is necessary." Recognizing the truth of this most important but unfortunately often neglected axiom, they laid down as the first condition of success in astrology a pure life, physically, morally and spiritually. This was intended to develop the psychic capacities of the astrologer who could thus see in *Akasa* the combinations, not alluded to in the written works, and predict their results in the manner beautifully illustrated in the above extract from *Zanoni*. In short, true Astrology is a mathematical science, which teaches us what particular causes will produce what particular combinations, and thus, understood in its real significance, gives us the means of obtaining the knowledge how to guide our future births. True, such astrologers there are but few: but are we justified in condemning the science of electricity because there may be very few real electricians? We must not at the same time lose sight of the fact that although there are numberless combinations that must be determined by the psychic vision of the astrologer, there are yet a very large number of them that have been determined and put on record by

the ancient sages. It is these cases which baffle us when we find that some astrological calculations prove correct while others are quite beside the mark. [*The Theosophist*, Vol. V, #9, June, 1884]

Born: about 569 BC in Samos, Ionia
Died: about 475 BC



Pythagoras of Samos is often described as the first pure mathematician. He is an extremely important figure in the development of mathematics yet we know relatively little about his mathematical achievements. Unlike many later Greek mathematicians, where at least we have some of the books that they wrote, we have nothing of Pythagoras's writings. The society which he led, half religious and half scientific, followed a code of secrecy which certainly means that today Pythagoras is a mysterious figure.

We do have details of Pythagoras's life from early biographies which use important original sources yet are written by authors who attribute divine powers to him, and whose aim was to present him as a god-like figure. What we present below is an attempt to collect together the most reliable sources to reconstruct an account of Pythagoras's life. There is fairly good agreement on the main events of his life but most of the dates are disputed with different scholars giving dates which differ by 20 years. Some historians treat all this information as merely legends but, even if the reader treats it in this way, being such

an early record it is of historical importance.

Pythagoras's father was Mnesarchus, while his mother was Pythais and she was a native of Samos. Mnesarchus was a merchant who came from Tyre, and there is a story that he brought corn to Samos at a time of famine and was granted citizenship of Samos as a mark of gratitude. As a child Pythagoras spent his early years in Samos but traveled widely with his father. There are accounts of Mnesarchus returning to Tyre with Pythagoras and that he was taught there by the Chaldeans and the learned men of Syria. It seems that he also visited Italy with his father.

Little is known of Pythagoras's childhood. All accounts of his physical appearance are likely to be fictitious except the description of a striking birthmark which Pythagoras had on his thigh. It is probable that he had two brothers although some sources say that he had three. Certainly he was well educated, learning to play the lyre, learning poetry and to recite [Homer](#). There were, among his teachers, three philosophers who were to influence Pythagoras while he was a young man. One of the most important was Pherekydes who many describe as the teacher of Pythagoras.

The other two philosophers, who were to influence Pythagoras, and to introduce him to mathematical ideas, were Thales and his pupil Anaximander who both lived in Miletus. Pythagoras is said to have visited Thales in Miletus when he was between 18 and 20 years old. By this time Thales was an old man and, although he created a strong impression on Pythagoras, he probably did not teach him a great deal. However he did contribute to Pythagoras's interest in mathematics and astronomy, and advised him to travel to Egypt to learn more of these subjects. Thales's pupil, Anaximander, lectured in

Miletus and Pythagoras attended these lectures. Anaximander certainly was interested in geometry and cosmology and many of his ideas would influence Pythagoras's own views.

In about 535 BC Pythagoras went to Egypt. This happened a few years after the tyrant Polycrates seized control of the city of Samos. There is some evidence to suggest that Pythagoras and Polycrates were friendly at first and Pythagoras may have gone to Egypt with a letter of introduction written by Polycrates. In fact Polycrates had an alliance with Egypt and there were therefore strong links between Samos and Egypt at this time. The accounts of Pythagoras's time in Egypt suggest that he visited many of the temples and took part in many discussions with the priests. According to Porphyry, Pythagoras was refused admission to all the temples except the one at Diospolis where he was accepted into the priesthood after completing the rites necessary for admission.

It is not difficult to relate many of Pythagoras's beliefs, ones he would later impose on the society that he set up in Italy, to the customs that he came across in Egypt. For example the secrecy of the Egyptian priests, their refusal to eat beans, their refusal to wear cloth made from animal skins, and their striving for purity were all customs that Pythagoras would later adopt. Porphyry says that Pythagoras learnt geometry from the Egyptians but it is likely that he was already acquainted with geometry, as received from Thales and Anaximander.

In 525 BC Cambyses II, the king of Persia, invaded Egypt. Polycrates abandoned his alliance with Egypt and sent 40 ships to join the Persian fleet against the Egyptians. After Cambyses had won the Battle of Pelusium in the Nile Delta and had captured Heliopolis and Memphis, Egyptian resistance collapsed. Pythagoras

was taken prisoner and taken to Babylon. Iamblichus writes that Pythagoras: —

... was transported by the followers of Cambyses as a prisoner of war. Whilst he was there he gladly associated with the Magi ... and was instructed in their sacred rites and learnt about a very mystical worship of the gods. He also reached the acme of perfection in arithmetic and music and the other mathematical sciences taught by the Babylonians...

In about 520 BC Pythagoras left Babylon and returned to Samos. Polycrates had been killed in about 522 BC and Cambyses died in the summer of 522 BC, either by committing suicide or as the result of an accident. The deaths of these rulers may have been a factor in Pythagoras's return to Samos but it is nowhere explained how Pythagoras obtained his freedom. Darius of Persia had taken control of Samos after Polycrates' death and he would have controlled the island on Pythagoras's return. This conflicts with the accounts of Porphyry and Diogenes Laertius who state that Polycrates was still in control of Samos when Pythagoras returned there.

Pythagoras made a journey to Crete shortly after his return to Samos to study the system of laws there. Back in Samos he founded a school which was called the semicircle. Iamblichus writes in the third century AD that: —

... he formed a school in the city [of Samos], the 'semicircle' of Pythagoras, which is known by that name even today, in which the Samians hold political meetings. They do this because they think one should discuss questions about goodness, justice and expediency in this place which was founded by the man who made all these subjects his business. Outside the city he made a cave the private site of his own philosophical teaching, spending most of the night and daytime

there and doing research into the uses of mathematics...

Pythagoras left Samos and went to southern Italy in about 518 BC (some say much earlier). Iamblichus gives some reasons for him leaving. First he comments on the Samian response to his teaching methods: —

... he tried to use his symbolic method of teaching which was similar in all respects to the lessons he had learnt in Egypt. The Samians were not very keen on this method and treated him in a rude and improper manner.

This was, according to Iamblichus, used in part as an excuse for Pythagoras to leave Samos: —

... Pythagoras was dragged into all sorts of diplomatic missions by his fellow citizens and forced to participate in public affairs. ... He knew that all the philosophers before him had ended their days on foreign soil so he decided to escape all political responsibility, alleging as his excuse, according to some sources, the contempt the Samians had for his teaching method.

Pythagoras founded a philosophical and religious school in Crotona (now Crotonae, on the east of the heel of southern Italy) that had many followers. Pythagoras was the head of the society with an inner circle of followers known as mathematikoi. The *mathematikoi* lived permanently with the Society, had no personal possessions and were vegetarians. They were taught by Pythagoras himself and obeyed strict rules. The beliefs that Pythagoras held were: —

- (1) *that at its deepest level, reality is mathematical in nature,*
- (2) *that philosophy can be used for spiritual purification,*
- (3) *that the soul can rise to union with the divine,*

- (4) *that certain symbols have a mystical significance, and*
 (5) *that all brothers of the order should observe strict loyalty and secrecy.*

Both men and women were permitted to become members of the Society, in fact several later women Pythagoreans became famous philosophers. The outer circle of the Society was known as the akousmatics and they lived in their own houses, only coming to the Society during the day. They were allowed their own possessions and were not required to be vegetarians.

Of Pythagoras's actual work nothing is known. His school practiced secrecy and communalism making it hard to distinguish between the work of Pythagoras and that of his followers. Certainly his school made outstanding contributions to mathematics, and it is possible to be fairly certain about some of Pythagoras's mathematical contributions. First we should be clear in what sense Pythagoras and the **mathematikoi** were studying mathematics. They were not acting as a mathematics research group does in a modern university or other institution. There were no 'open problems' for them to solve, and they were not in any sense interested in trying to formulate or solve mathematical problems.

Rather Pythagoras was interested in the principles of mathematics, the concept of number, the concept of a triangle or other mathematical figure and the abstract idea of a proof. As Brumbaugh writes: —

*It is hard for us today, familiar as we are with pure mathematical abstraction and with the mental act of generalization, to appreciate the **originality** of this Pythagorean contribution.*

In fact, today we have become so mathematically sophisticated that we fail even to recognize 2 as an abstract quantity.

There is a remarkable step from 2 ships + 2 ships = 4 ships, to the abstract result $2 + 2 = 4$, which applies not only to ships but to pens, people, houses etc. There is another step to see that the abstract notion of 2 is itself a thing, in some sense every bit as real as a ship or a house.

Pythagoras believed that all relations could be reduced to number relations. As Aristotle wrote: —

The Pythagorean ... having been brought up in the study of mathematics, thought that things are numbers ... and that the whole cosmos is a scale and a number.

This generalization stemmed from Pythagoras's observations in music, mathematics and astronomy. Pythagoras noticed that vibrating strings produce harmonious tones when the ratios of the lengths of the strings are whole numbers, and that these ratios could be extended to other instruments. In fact Pythagoras made remarkable contributions to the mathematical theory of music. He was a fine musician, playing the lyre, and he used music as a means to help those who were ill.

Pythagoras studied properties of numbers, which would be familiar to mathematicians today, such as even and odd numbers, triangular numbers, perfect numbers etc. However to Pythagoras numbers had personalities which we hardly recognize as mathematics today: —

Each number had its own personality — masculine or feminine, perfect or incomplete, beautiful or ugly. This feeling modern mathematics has deliberately eliminated, but we still find overtones of it in fiction and poetry. Ten was the very best number: it contained in itself the first four integers — one, two, three, and four [$1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$] — and these written in dot notation formed a perfect triangle.

Of course today we particularly remember Pythagoras for his famous geometry theorem. Although the theorem, now known as Pythagoras's theorem, was known to the Babylonians 1000 years earlier he may have been the first to prove it. Proclus, the last major Greek philosopher, who lived around 450 AD, wrote: —

After [Thales, etc.] Pythagoras transformed the study of geometry into a liberal education, examining the principles of the science from the beginning and probing the theorems in an immaterial and intellectual manner: he it was who discovered the theory of irrational and the construction of the cosmic figures.

Again Proclus, writing of geometry, said: —

I emulate the Pythagoreans who even had a conventional phrase to express what I mean "a figure and a platform, not a figure and a sixpence," by which they implied that the geometry which is deserving of study is that which, at each new theorem, sets up a platform to ascend by, and lifts the soul on high instead of allowing it to go down among the sensible objects and so become subservient to the common needs of this mortal life.

Heath gives a list of theorems attributed to Pythagoras, or rather more generally to the Pythagoreans.

(i) The sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. Also the Pythagoreans knew the generalization, which states that a polygon with n sides has sum of interior angles $2n - 4$ right angles and sum of exterior angles equal to four right angles.

(ii) The theorem of Pythagoras — for a right-angled triangle the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. We should note here that to Pythagoras the square on

the hypotenuse would certainly not be thought of as a number multiplied by itself, but rather as a geometrical square constructed on the side. To say that the sum of two squares is equal to a third square meant that the two squares could be cut up and reassembled to form a square identical to the third square.

(iii) Constructing figures of a given area and geometrical algebra. For example they solved equations such as $a(a - x) = x^2$ by geometrical means.

(iv) The discovery of irrationals.

This is certainly attributed to the Pythagoreans but it does seem unlikely to have been due to Pythagoras himself. This went against Pythagoras's philosophy the all things are numbers, since by a number he meant the ratio of two whole numbers. However, because of his belief that all things are numbers it would be a natural task to try to prove that the hypotenuse of an isosceles right-angled triangle had a length corresponding to a number.

(v) The five regular solids. It is thought that Pythagoras himself knew how to construct the first three but it is unlikely that he would have known how to construct the other two.

(vi) In astronomy Pythagoras taught that the Earth was a sphere at the center of the Universe. He also recognized that the orbit of the Moon was inclined to the equator of the Earth and he was one of the first to realize that Venus as an evening star was the same planet as Venus as a morning star.

Primarily, however, Pythagoras was a philosopher. In addition to his beliefs about numbers, geometry and astronomy described above, he held [2]: —

... the following philosophical and ethical teachings: ... the dependence of the dynamics of world structure on the

interaction of contraries, or pairs of opposites; the viewing of the soul as a self-moving number experiencing a form of metempsychosis, or successive reincarnation in different species until its eventual purification (particularly through the intellectual life of the ethically rigorous Pythagoreans); and the understanding ...that all existing objects were fundamentally composed of form and not of material substance. Further Pythagorean doctrine ... identified the brain as the locus of the soul; and prescribed certain secret cultic practices.

In [3] their practical **ethics** are also described: —

In their ethical practices, the Pythagorean were famous for their mutual friendship, unselfishness, and honesty.

Pythagoras's Society at Crotona was not unaffected by political events despite his desire to stay out of politics. Pythagoras went to Delos in 513 BC to nurse his old teacher Pherekydes who was dying. He remained there for a few months until the death of his friend and teacher and then returned to Crotona. In 510 BC Crotona attacked and defeated its neighbor Sybaris and there is certainly some suggestions that Pythagoras became involved in the dispute. Then in around 508 BC the Pythagorean Society at Crotona was attacked by Cylon, a noble from Crotona itself. Pythagoras escaped to Metapontium and most authors say he died there¹. Iamblichus gives one version of events: —

Cylon, a Crotonaiate and leading citizen by birth, fame and riches, but otherwise a difficult, violent, disturbing and tyrannically disposed man, eagerly

¹ One author gives "suicide" as the ending, but evidently had not the teaching of the TWO ways of death: 1. When the body leaves the soul; and 2. When the soul leaves the body. Pythagoras, being an initiate, left by the second route. [Eds.]

desired to participate in the Pythagorean way of life. He approached Pythagoras, then an old man, but was rejected because of the character defects just described. When this happened Cylon and his friends vowed to make a strong attack on Pythagoras and his followers. Thus a powerfully aggressive zeal activated Cylon and his followers to persecute the Pythagoreans to the very last man. Because of this Pythagoras left for Metapontium and there is said to have ended his days.

This seems accepted by most but Iamblichus himself does not accept this version and argues that the attack by Cylon was a minor affair and that Pythagoras returned to Crotona. Certainly the Pythagorean Society thrived for many years after this and spread from Crotona to many other Italian cities. Gorman argues that this is a strong reason to believe that Pythagoras returned to Crotona and quotes other evidence such as the widely reported age of Pythagoras as around 100 at the time of his death and the fact that many sources say that Pythagoras taught Empedokles. In such a case, he must have lived well after 480 BC.

Thus the evidence is unclear as to when and where the death of Pythagoras occurred. Certainly the Pythagorean Society expanded rapidly after 500 BC, became political in nature and also spilt into a number of factions. In 460 BC the Society: —

... was violently suppressed. Its meeting houses were everywhere sacked and burned; mention is made in particular of "the house of Milo" in Crotona, where 50 or 60 Pythagoreans were surprised and slain. Those who survived took refuge at Thebes and other places.

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Pythagoras (*Gr.*) The most famous of mystic philosophers, born at Samos, about 565 B.C. He seems to have traveled all over the world, and to have culled his philosophy from the various systems to which he had access. Thus, he studied the esoteric sciences with the *Brachmanes* of India, and astronomy and astrology in Chaldea and Egypt. He is known to this day in the former country under the name of Yavanacharya (“Ionian teacher”). After returning he settled in Crotona, in Magna Grecia, where he established a college to which very soon resorted all the best intellects of the civilized centers. His father was one Mnesarchus of Samos, and was a man of noble birth and learning. It was Pythagoras who was the first to teach the heliocentric system, and who was the greatest proficient in geometry of his century. It was he also who created the word “philosopher,” composed of two words meaning a “lover of wisdom” — *philo-sophos*. As the greatest mathematician, geometer and astronomer of historical antiquity, and also the highest of the metaphysicians and scholars, Pythagoras has won imperishable fame. He taught reincarnation as it is professed in India and much else of the Secret Wisdom. (*Theosophical Glossary, p. 266*)

A Greek subscriber pointed us to *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras* as a fit summation of the life we have been considering: —

The Golden Verses of Pythagoras

1. First worship the Immortal Gods, as they are established and ordained by the Law.
2. Reverence the Oath, and next the Heroes, full of goodness and light.
3. Honour likewise the Terrestrial Dæmons by rendering them the worship lawfully due to them.
4. Honour likewise thy parents, and those most nearly related to thee.
5. Of all the rest of mankind, make him thy friend who distinguishes himself by his virtue.
6. Always give ear to his mild exhortations, and take example from his virtuous and useful actions.
7. Avoid as much as possible hating thy friend for a slight fault.
8. [And understand that] power is a near neighbour to necessity.
9. Know that all these things are as I have told thee; and accustom thyself to overcome and vanquish these passions:--
10. First gluttony, sloth, sensuality, and anger.
11. Do nothing evil, neither in the presence of others, nor privately;
12. But above all things respect thyself.
13. In the next place, observe justice in thy actions and in thy words.
14. And accustom not thyself to behave thyself in any thing without rule, and without reason.
15. But always make this reflection, that it is ordained by destiny that all men shall die.
16. And that the goods of fortune are uncertain; and that as they may be acquired, so may they likewise be lost.
17. Concerning all the calamities that men suffer by divine fortune,
18. Support with patience thy lot, be it what it may, and never repine at it.

19. But endeavour what thou canst to remedy it.
20. And consider that fate does not send the greatest portion of these misfortunes to good men.
21. There are among men many sorts of reasonings, good and bad;
22. Admire them not too easily, nor reject them.
23. But if falsehoods be advanced, hear them with mildness, and arm thyself with patience.
24. Observe well, on every occasion, what I am going to tell thee:--
25. Let no man either by his words, or by his deeds, ever seduce thee.
26. Nor entice thee to say or to do what is not profitable for thyself.
27. Consult and deliberate before thou act, that thou mayest not commit foolish actions.
28. For it is the part of a miserable man to speak and to act without reflection.
29. But do that which will not afflict thee afterwards, nor oblige thee to repentance.
30. Never do anything which thou dost not understand.
31. But learn all thou ought'st to know, and by that means thou wilt lead a very pleasant life.
32. in no wise neglect the health of thy body;
33. But give it drink and meat in due measure, and also the exercise of which it has need.
34. Now by measure I mean what will not incommode thee.
35. Accustom thyself to a way of living that is neat and decent without luxury.
36. Avoid all things that will occasion envy.
37. And be not prodigal out of season, like one who knows not what is decent and honourable.
38. Neither be covetous nor niggardly; a due measure is excellent in these things.
39. Do only the things that cannot hurt thee, and deliberate before thou dost them.
40. Never suffer sleep to close thy eyelids, after thy going to bed,
41. Till thou hast examined by thy reason all thy actions of the day.
42. Wherein have I done amiss? What have I done? What have I omitted that I ought to have done?
43. If in this examination thou find that thou hast done amiss, reprimand thyself severely for it;
44. And if thou hast done any good, rejoice.
45. Practise thoroughly all these things; meditate on them well; thou oughtest to love them with all thy heart.
46. 'Tis they that will put thee in the way of divine virtue.
47. I swear it by him who has transmitted into our souls the Sacred Quaternion, the source of nature, whose cause is eternal.
48. But never begin to set thy hand to any work, till thou hast first prayed the gods to accomplish what thou art going to begin.
49. When thou hast made this habit familiar to thee,
50. Thou wilt know the constitution of the Immortal Gods and of men.
51. Even how far the different beings extend, and what contains and binds them together.

52. Thou shalt likewise know that according to Law, the nature of this universe is in all things alike,
53. So that thou shalt not hope what thou ought'st not to hope; and nothing in this world shall be hid from thee.
54. Thou wilt likewise know, that men draw upon themselves their own misfortunes voluntarily, and of their own free choice.
55. Unhappy that they are! They neither see nor understand that their good is near them.
56. Few know how to deliver themselves out of their misfortunes.
57. Such is the fate that blinds mankind, and takes away his senses.
58. Like huge cylinders they roll to and fro, and always oppressed with ills innumerable.
59. For fatal strife, innate, pursues them everywhere, tossing them up and down; nor do they perceive it.
60. Instead of provoking and stirring it up, they ought, by yielding, to avoid it.
61. Oh! Jupiter, our Father! if Thou would'st deliver men from all the evils that oppress them,
62. Show them of what dæmon they make use.
63. **But take courage; the race of man is divine.**
64. Sacred nature reveals to them the most hidden mysteries.
65. If she impart to thee her secrets, thou wilt easily perform all the things which I have ordained thee.
66. And by the healing of thy soul, thou wilt deliver it from all evils, from all afflictions.

67. But abstain thou from the meats, which we have forbidden in the purifications and in the deliverance of the soul;
68. Make a just distinction of them, and examine all things well.
69. Leaving thyself always to be guided and directed by the understanding that comes from above, and that ought to hold the reins.
70. And when, after having divested thyself of thy mortal body, thou arrivest at the most pure Æther,
71. Thou shalt be a God, immortal, incorruptible, and Death shall have no more dominion over thee.

[Next: Notes on the Golden Verses of Pythagoras from the Commentaries of Hierocles](#)

NOTES ON THE GOLDEN VERSES OF PYTHAGORAS FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF HIEROCLES.

The Golden Verses may be divided into two parts, the first treating of the Practical or Human Virtues, whose aim is the making of Good Men; and the second, treating of the *Contemplative* or Divine Virtues, the end of which is to make Good Men into Gods.

One is greatly struck by the wonderful completeness of the Verses, and their scientific arrangement. They can be divided into groups dealing with practically every aspect and affair of life.

At the end of the first part (verse 47), we find the Most Solemn Oath that if a man follow these precepts faithfully, he will be ready to tread the further path, to devote himself to the Contemplative Virtues, and to become truly God-like, overcoming Death, and gaining a knowledge of the Gods.

The Verses may be grouped in the following manner:—

PART I.—THE PRACTICAL VIRTUES.

Verses.

- 1-3. Concerning Higher Intelligences.
- 4. Concerning Relations.
- 5-8. Concerning Friends.
- 9-12. Concerning One's Lower Nature.
- 13-14. Concerning One's General Behaviour.
- 15-20. Concerning Death and Misfortunes.
- 21-23. Concerning Doctrines.
- 24-31. Concerning Actions and Speech.
- 32-34. Concerning the Body.
- 35-39. Concerning the Manner of Life.
- 40-45. Concerning Introspection.
- 46, 47. Oath Concerning the Result of the Practical Virtues.

PART II.—

THE CONTEMPLATIVE VIRTUES.

- 48. Concerning the Help of the Gods.
- 49-51. Concerning the Nature and Constitution of Gods and Men.
- 52, 53. Concerning the Nature of the Universe, and what is possible.
- 54-60. Concerning Ignorance, and the Liberty of the Soul.
- 61-66. Concerning Knowledge and Deliverance.
- 67-69. Concerning Purifications.
- 70, 71. Concerning the Result of the Contemplative Virtues.

Notes

Verse 1. "Worship the Immortal Gods" with an understanding as to their order and function in the universe. For it is Impossible to worship unless you understand to some extent the nature and function of that which you worship. The Gods do not occupy their position by accident, nor from carelessness on the part of the Great Architect, nor are they isolated units independent of each other, but rather are they linked together in such a way as to form one perfect whole, like the different parts of one animal.

Pythagoras seems to have divided the beings in the universe roughly into three orders:—

(1) The Immortal Gods whose who live perpetually in the knowledge of God the Father and Creator of all, being secured from change or separation from Him);

(2) The Heroes, and

(3) The Terrestrial Dæmons.

2. Besides the Power that creates a universe, it is necessary that there should be a power that preserves and sustains it, and this power is embodied in the created beings.

For in their essence all beings are of one nature with the Father, and just in so far as they are conscious of Him will they carry out His will and design. They are said to be bound by an Oath to preserve all things in their respective places and to maintain the beauty and harmony of the universe; but this Oath is in reality innate and essential to them, because it is born with them and is part of their divine nature. Therefore, the Oath is constantly observed by the Immortal Gods, they being always conscious of the Divine Will; but by the

Heroes only to the extent to which they understand and know God.

The mortal Oath — that used amongst men — has to be revered as an image of the other, and as leading to the greatest strength and stability of character. And if man would reverence the Oath, then must he do all in his power to understand the laws that govern this universe, and endeavour to preserve harmony and order in all things.

The Illustrious Heroes are the second or middle order of beings, and are turned ever towards God, though not always to the same extent. They are divided into three subdivisions: —

- (1) The Angels, or Ambassadors (being nearest to the Immortal Gods in their nature);
 - (2) The Dæmons, or Spirits; and
 - (3) The Heroes.
3. *The Terrestrial Dæmons* are the souls of men, beautified with truth and virtue, being Masters of Wisdom, having true knowledge. They are "terrestrial," remaining on earth in order to guide and govern men.

The best worship to be offered to these men (who are men and yet resemble the Illustrious Heroes), is by obeying those precepts they have left and recommended to us, and by following their instructions as laws; purposing to ourselves the same course of life they lead, the tradition of which they have set down in writing. This tradition gives the principles of truth and rules of virtue, as an immortal and paternal inheritance, to be preserved to all succeeding generations for the common good. To obey these, and live accordingly, is the truest reverence that can be done them.

4. "Reverence thy parents." But how if those parents be depraved? "If the Divine Law directs us to one thing and

our parents to another, then in this deliberation we ought to obey the best, disobeying our parents in those things *only* in which they recede from the Divine Laws."

But always a most willing service and obedience must be rendered in all things pertaining to the body or estate.

To all others, the duties are in proportion to the nearness of the relationship.

- 7, 8. Never must friendship be broken for the sake of riches, or glory, or other frail and perishable things. Only if the friend falls into a corrupt and degraded mode of life is it right to break the sacred tie of friendship, and then only after every effort has been made to bring him back to the ways of virtue.

Hierocles warns us that we have far more strength than we imagine¹, and all we need is to feel the *necessity* of preserving friendship.

- 11, 12. If a man makes himself his own guardian, he is then not likely to fall into evil ways if he is out of the reach of public opinion, nor will he be rushed into folly through the influence of companions.

17. Such calamities as diseases, poverty, loss of friends, etc., are not real ills, for they hurt not the soul, unless it suffers itself to be precipitated into vice by them.

- 21-23. One should be able to hear every sort of doctrine patiently, carefully

¹ This is the keynote of *Theosophy*: Man has his destiny in his own hands if he but TRY. It is our refusal to look inward with confidence and follow our aspirations with determination that leads us into the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." *Service* to the plane upon which one *energizes* brings forth the Inner god to our aid, for it activates the Soul's *Reminiscence*.

discriminating between the true and the false (*i.e.*, false reasonings).

45. This verse completes the instruction concerning the *Civil* or *Practical Virtues*; verse 48 begins the Instruction concerning the *Contemplative Virtues*.

Regarding the practical virtues, Hierocles points out that the three aspects of the soul should be employed on them together, (1) Activity, (2) the Mind, and (3) the Emotions.

47. "I swear it by him," *i.e.*, by Pythagoras. The knowledge of the *Tetraktys* was one of the chief precepts among the Pythagoreans.

51. "How far they extend themselves," expresses their specific difference, and "What contains and binds them together" marks their generic community.

53. "Thou shalt not hope what thou ought'st not to hope," knowing the nature of all things, and what is possible.

55. The Gods near at hand are virtue and truth.

- 59, 60. The *fatal strife* is caused by our inclination "madly to run counter to God's laws." it is this strife that should be avoided by yielding to the will of God.

62. The Dæmon of whom they make use is their own soul, or essence, for to see and know this is to be freed from all evils.

67. *The Purifications* are divided into two parts, one concerning itself with the physical body, and the other with the "luminous body."

The Deliverance of the Soul is accomplished by "Dialecticks, which

science is the intimate inspection of beings."

Of the two former, one purifies through diet and the whole management and usage of the mortal body; and the other employs the Mathematical Sciences, Meditation, and Religious Ceremonies.

All three Purifications must be accomplished if man would become free, and Godlike. It is to be noted that they deal with

- (1) the body,
- (2) the emotions and **lower mind**, and
- (3) the **higher mind**.

Hierocles of Alexandria was a Neoplatonic philosopher of the fifth century AD. Hermann S. Schibli surveys his life, writings, and pagan and Christian surroundings, and succinctly examines the major points of his philosophy, both contemplative and practical. He includes the first modern English translations, with helpful notes, of Hierocles' *Commentary on the Golden Verses of the Pythagoreans* and of the remnants of his treatise *On Providence*.

For Hierocles as for Plato, philosophy is a self-conscious process of life-long growth towards spiritual and ethical maturity.

Philosophy is the purification and perfection of human nature; its purification, because philosophy delivers it from the temerity and from the folly that proceed from matter, and because philosophy disengages its affections from the mortal body; and its perfection, because philosophy makes it recover its original bliss by restoring it to the likeness of Deity.

To live in the presence of great truths and eternal laws, to be led by permanent ideals — that is what keeps a man patient when the world ignores him, and calm and unspoiled when the world praises him.

— HONORE DE BALZAC