

PRACTICE PASSAGE - 5

The single most important philosophy in Rome was Stoicism, which originated in Hellenistic Greece. The contents of the philosophy were particularly amenable to the Roman world view, especially since the Stoic insistence on acceptance of all situations, including adverse ones, seemed to reproduce what the Romans considered their crowning achievement: *virtus*, or "manliness," or "toughness." The centerpiece of Stoic philosophy was the concept of the logos. The universe is ordered by God and this order is the logos, which means "rational order" or "meaning" of the universe.

After the death of Zeno of Citium, the Stoic school was headed by Cleanthes and Chrysippus, and its teachings were carried to Rome in 155 by Diogenes of Babylon. There its tenets were made popular by Panaetius, friend of the great general Scipio Aemilianus, and by Posidonius, who was a friend of Pompey Cicero. It drew heavily on the works of both. Stoic ideas appear in the greatest work of Roman literature, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and later the philosophy was adopted by Seneca (c. 1-65 A.D.), Lucan (39-65; poet and associate of the Emperor Nero), Epictetus (c. 55-135; and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (born 121, Emperor 161-180; author of the *Meditations*). Stoicism is perhaps the most significant philosophical school in the Roman Empire, and much of our contemporary views and popular mythologies about Romans are derived from Stoic principles.

No. of words : 699 Time taken to read : _____ minutes

Summary of the passage:

This is actually not a philosophical school, but one could generally group a number of Hellenistic schools under this rubric, including the Second Academy (Hellenistic Platonists), the Second Sophistic, the Cynics, the Sceptics, and so on, and, for the most part, the Stoics as well. What is important for our purposes is that all these schools, to some degree or another, espoused the idea that human beings cannot arrive at certain truth about anything (not all denied certainty was impossible, only that human beings could never be certain).

Basically, life became this great guessing game: the lot of humanity is to be cast into a twilight world in which all that we know and think is either false or occupies some middle position between the false and the true (which was called the "probable," "readily believable," or the "verisimilar"). This comes to dominate thought in late antiquity; the first philosophical attacks Christianity levels against the thought of antiquity are refutations of sceptical principles. Of all the philosophies of antiquity, this is perhaps the most familiar to you: the sceptic principle of doubting everything became, in the modern era, the fundamental basis of the scientific method.

Logos is a linguistic term; it refers particularly to the meanings of words. The meaning of an individual word all by itself is *semeion*; the meaning of an individual word in the context of a sentence is *logos*. For the Stoic, the

meaning (*logos*) of each individual life, action, and situation is determined by its place in a larger whole, which is, of course, the whole course of history. In this view, history becomes a kind of speech by God.

It is progressive, it is teleological, it is meaningful (but only when it's all done: a sentence has no meaning until it's completed). Each and every event, physical and historical, has a place within this larger rational order or meaning. Since the order is rational and meaningful, that means nothing happens which is not part of some larger reason or good.

For the Roman, this larger good came to mean the spread of law across the face of the planet; this law was to be spread through Roman imperial conquest and was called the Law of Nations. The grand design for history, then, was the spread of the Roman Empire and her laws.

Therefore, each and every function a Roman undertook for the state, whether as a farmer or foot-soldier, a philosopher or emperor, partook of this larger purpose or meaning of world history. The central values of this complex are *officium*, or "duty," which is the responsibility to perform the functions into which you have been born to the best of your abilities, and *pietas*, or "respect for authority." Each station in life has its duties; every situation in life has duties or obligations incumbent on it.

Reading speed: _____ w.p.m.

PRACTICE PASSAGE – 6

The first two experiences remembered as having occurred in the third or fourth year of my life, are dreadful to think, as they were interwoven with temptation, greed, avarice, deceit, groaning, loss, lamentation and the like.

A 'mara naai' as they call it in Tamil or teddy cat (an animal which generally climbs on trees and destroys the fruits during nights) somehow got into a room in the house and thrust its head into a small copper pot containing jaggery. The animal was not able to pull out its head and was running here and there in the room all through the night with its head stuck in the pot.

People in the house and neighbours were aroused by the noise and thought that some thief was at his job. But, the incessant noise continued even till morning hours, and some bravados armed with sticks opened the door of the room and found the greedy animal. It was then roped and tied to a pillar. Some experienced men were brought and after being engaged in a tug-of-war, they ultimately succeeded in removing the vessel from the head of the animal. The animal was struggling for life. It was at last taken to some spot and set free, I presume. The first experience of my life was this dreadful demonstration born out of greed causing all our neighbours to spend an anxious and sleepless night.

The next experience relates to a man in the street who entered the house seeing me alone with tiny golden bangles upon which he began to lay his hands. I asked him

to tighten the hooks of the bangles which had become loose and gave a peremptory and authoritative direction to him to bring them back repaired without delay.

The man took my orders most obediently and took leave of me with the golden booty. In glee of having arranged for repairs to my ornament, I speeded to inform my people inside of the arrangement made by me with the man in the street who gave his name as Ponnusami. The people inside hurried to the street to find out the culprit. But the booty had become his property true to his assumed name, Ponnusami (master of gold).

These two experiences at a tender innocent age are recurring successively in some form or the other even at this tottering age, nearing seventy, reminding me of being liable to be duped or eagerness to get by some short cut some material gain.

In attempting to judge the objective world with this rod of selfishness and superficiality of mine which has rightly earned for me the reputation of being a clever Swami, I am prone to come to the conclusion that there lives none without predominantly selfish motives.

But with years rolling on, an impression, that too a superficial one true to my nature, is dawning upon me that there breathe on this globe some souls firmly rooted in morals and ethics who live exclusively for others, voluntarily forsaking not only their material gains and comforts but also their own sadhana towards their spiritual improvements.

PRACTICE PASSAGE – 7

The way genetically-modified food is tested for safety in Europe must be improved before any new GM plants are declared fit for human consumption, according to a report by the Royal Society, the UK's foremost scientific society.

"The battery of tests should be spelt out much more clearly," says Eric Brunner at University College, London and one of the authors of the report. Some animal testing may also be required, he says.

The testing regime must be independently scrutinised, recommends the report, so that companies cannot submit selective data about their new GM products. Otherwise,

Brunner says: "Companies could carry on generating data until they get the answer they want."

However, the report concludes that there is no reason to doubt the safety of foods made from GM ingredients that are currently available, nor to believe that genetic modification makes foods inherently less safe than their conventional counterparts.

The UK Food Standards Agency welcomed the report but said it was "satisfied that the current safety assessment procedures are sufficiently robust and rigorous to ensure that approved GM foods are as safe as their non-GM counterparts".

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Adrian Bebb of Friends of the Earth believes that the report will add to public scepticism about GM foods. "It confirms the public's suspicions," he says. "But the report leaves lots of questions unanswered."

At present, companies must demonstrate that a GM product is 'substantially equivalent' to its conventional version. This is a less rigorous standard than used, for example, in testing new drugs. But the report accepts that using such standards for foods would be impractical, given the complexity of foodstuffs. Also, many traditional foods

The equivalence test compares, for example, protein, carbohydrate and fatty acid levels between the GM and non-GM plants. But there are no clear and universal guidelines over exactly what to test and how similar the two should be. Brunner says different interpretations of the regulations by different countries might leave a regulatory 'back door'. "One country should not be used as a fast route into the EU market." Such differences of interpretation are already apparent between the EU and the US. For example, all products from a herbicide resistant variety of GM oilseed, rape, developed by Aventis were approved in the US. In the EU, only the processed oil was deemed safe.

"Substantial equivalence is a very blunt instrument," says Brunner. "It is a flawed concept if used on its own." Animal testing may be needed to explore particular safety aspects of a new food, he adds.

While the report's authors were sceptical about current testing arrangements, they saw no reason to believe that current GM varieties are unsafe. They argue that if they were dangerous, problems would have emerged during widespread consumption in the US.

They also quash fears that engineered genes could incorporate into the human genome via the gut. We eat DNA. Smith, chairman of the Welcome Cancer Research Campaign Institute in Cambridge, who chaired the report. Bebb counters that there has been no post-market monitoring of the long-term health effects of GM ingredients. So, problems caused by the foods might have been missed.

But the report does recommend that all new foods be tested to see if they cause allergic reactions when particles are inhaled. GM foods are no more likely to trigger such allergies than conventional crops, the report says, but they say that current regulation would miss these lung allergies.

No. of words : 583 Time taken to read : _____ minutes

Summary of the passage:

Reading speed: _____ w.p.m.

Express the main idea of the passage in one sentence:

PRACTICE PASSAGE – 8

Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Bhagavan. He spoke Bhagavad-Gita to Arjuna, who is in a direct relationship with Krishna as his friend and devotee. Only by the process of devotional service can one revive one's relationship with Krishna. Therefore, Bhagavad-Gita should be taken up in a spirit of devotion.

Everyone is full of anxiety because of material existence. The cause of suffering and the actual destination of life are proper subjects of enquiry. Krishna answered these questions, through Bhagavad Gita, and thus relieved Arjuna from all material miseries by making him understand his constitutional position.

Sri Krishna is the Supreme enjoyer, controller and friend of all. Nature (prakriti) is His energy. Jiva, the individual living entity, is part and parcel of His spiritual (internal) energy. Material nature (constituted of three qualities or modes viz., sattva, rajas, and tamas) consisting of eight elements namely earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego, is His external energy. By a combination of the three modes of material nature and under the control of time (which is another energy of Krishna) there are activities and resultant reactions. Material nature is real and eternal, whereas the manifestation of the material world (of these activities and reactions) is real but temporary.

The Supreme conscious Lord Krishna, is conscious of all the bodies, everything and every atom. Even when He appears, within the material creation in any form, His consciousness is never materially affected. Jiva is only conscious of his own body. Matter is unconscious, without the presence of jiva.

The following is a summary of Sri Krishna's explanations of Absolute Truth in Bhagavad-Gita:

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Due to material pollution of the consciousness, the living entity is entangled in bodily actions and reactions which are actually carried on by the modes of material nature. This pollution can be purified by dovetailing the activities in full co-operation with the will of Krishna. These activities in pure consciousness called bhakti are transcendental to the three modes and thus the performer becomes free from actions and reactions. In this liberated stage, one attains his constitutional position as servant of Sri Krishna.

All the planets within material existence have the material miseries of repeated birth, death, old age and disease. The spiritual world has no such ineptities. Following in the footsteps of Arjuna, if we act according to Krishna's instructions, we can attain the abode of Krishna from where we never have to return to this material world.

Vedic knowledge is infallible, above all *doubts and mistakes. The purpose of Vedic knowledge is to know the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna reveals this knowledge through Bhagavad-Gita. Therefore, Bhagavad-Gita should be accepted 'as it is' without interpretation, deletion or addition.

No. of words : 531 Time taken to read : _____ minutes

Reading speed: _____ w.p.m.

Summary of the passage: