

## On Karma by Annie Besant

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FRIENDS,

[Page 1] Wondering what I should say to you this evening —being specially a members' meeting — I asked Mr. Graham Pole, who was lately in Paris when I went there, and he suggested that I might take up one of the subjects that I dealt with at a members' meeting there — the ever-fresh subject of Karma, put in a way which may, perhaps, enable some of you to understand better the underlying principle, and so to answer for yourselves the questions that arise when you are dealing with special applications of the law.

It has very often seemed to me that students are too much inclined to study details, each by itself, and so they become entangled in really an infinite series of details, each one of which has to be dealt with separately, and there is no end to it. If, instead of doing that, the serious students amongst you would try rather to grasp the principle, and then, having grasped it, apply it to any new detail that may arise, I think you would discover that you know very much [Page 2] more than you think you know, and that you could answer for yourselves the questions that you very often put to those whom you believe to be more learned students than yourselves. It is much easier to see the relations of complicated attachments when you look at them from the centre, than when you try to study them from the circumference. If you can stand in the centre and look over the whole field, you can then see, generally, the relations that exist between the different parts; but if you stand at the circumference and see only a little bit of that, and then a mere tangle stretching from every side to the centre, you are very little likely, I think, to reach satisfactory conclusions, and you will remain more or less in a muddle, as to how the great principles that you recognise work, when they are manifested in the world. This seems especially the case with Karma. The particular question that was put to me in Paris as a subject for my talk was: "When did individual Karma begin?" and if people start with that kind of question, and ask other questions of a similar nature, they may, I think, ask for the rest of their lives and never be very much wiser. If, on the other hand, they would try to see "Karma" as part of a universal law, special expressions of a law which everywhere is found, part of the whole mechanism of the universe, existing from the beginning of the universe so far as manifestation is concerned, and existing always as part of universal nature, [Page 3] then, studying it from that standpoint, they would be able, I think, to get a clear view of the principle involved, and then proceed at leisure, when any particular detail turns up, to apply the principle to the explanation of that special fact. Now, it seems to me that the first fundamental thing to understand about Karma is that it has no beginning and, therefore, that any attempt to find out a beginning for Karma is hopeless. You may find out beginnings in a particular universe, and endings in a particular universe. You may take up any fragment that you choose to separate off from the rest of existence and, as regards that fragment, you can find beginning and ending; but when you are dealing with Karma you are dealing with a great principle, a universal principle, which has neither beginning nor ending, which cannot be spoken of as though it were a thing, or an object, with certain lines which limit it. You have to think of it as a principle in

the divine nature and to begin your study, I think, in trying to realise to some extent how things exist in the divine mind; the conditions of such existence and the inevitable differences which accrue when they pass out of the divine mind into manifestation; the conditions according to which manifestation takes place; the space and the time necessary for a manifested universe, but non-existent in what the Greeks used to call the intelligible world, from which any special universe is derived or reflected. [Page 4]

Now, think for a moment along what people call metaphysical lines. Realise that existence always is, and that any particular mode of existence, any particular thing, always has existed and always will exist — not always in manifestation but always in potentiality — and that it is literally true, that which was laid down by one of the great Musalmān doctors in the ninth or tenth century, that everything that can ever come into existence, everything that has been in existence, or that has any possibility of existence, always is in the divine eternity. It is put in quite another way in a verse in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*: "The unreal has no existence; the real never ceaseth to be". And if you can think that out, you have the key to many a problem concerning Karma. In the divine mind exist as thought-forms every possibility of existence, always there, owing their being to God Himself and sharing His eternity. That which He thinks is the stuff out of which universes are made. One portion of these thoughts of His may come out for one universe, another portion for another universe, but in Him and in His eternity they are ever-existent and ever-present. And, by virtue that they are all the thought-forms of His mind, generated, if one may use the phrase, in eternity, by that mind — in that fact is implied the interrelation between every one of them, all of them being related to each and each to all, by virtue of that unity of life in which they ever exist. You cannot separate [Page 5] off one from the rest, nor from any other. You cannot take one as an isolated thing out of relation to all else. They all exist in relation, in interdependence, in interrelation, in that divine intelligible world, and that is the source of all manifested existences. They only are, because they are in God. In His eternal thought they exist; from that they draw their life. And you want, if you can, to dwell on that thought until it has become part of your mental machinery — the realisation, as to beginnings and endings, that these belong to our limited minds, existing under the conditions of space and time. These limitations do not, cannot, exist in the universal consciousness where there is, literally, always the All.

You know people often get into a muddle — to take a rather side-issue for the moment—when they say: "Why should the universe exist ?" because they imply that there was a time when the totality of universes was not, and that God brought it into existence; and then they necessarily muddle themselves up with the idea of the everlasting — which is not at all the same as the eternal — and they get into that position in which Shelley was when he wrote: "Out of an eternity of idleness, I, God, awoke" — a misconception. If you are thinking of God as the ever-existing — and no other thought of Him is possible — for that which was brought into existence would again need something behind it; it is only the [Page 6] Self-existent which is eternal — unless you think of God in that way the whole conception becomes impossible; if you think of Him as existing ever, doing nothing, thinking nothing, and suddenly beginning to think and to bring universes into being, you find yourselves tangled up with all sorts of impossibilities and inconceivabilities. If you think of Him as the Ever-Existent, in whom there is all, literally all — all that can be as well as all that has been — then you at least have an intelligible conception from which you can go out and understand, very dimly, something of what are often called the mysteries of the existence of universes. Every universe that can be, is, already. In manifestation it only becomes what we call objective; that is, to our minds it becomes a visible, tangible thing. But our minds, again, are but the thought-forms in the divine mind. There is nothing but He, and that is the fundamental idea that you want to grasp. He may manifest; He may show parts of Himself to other parts of Himself. But He, the Self-existent, is the All, outside of whom there is nothing — there is no outside. So that you can no more say: "Why should there be a universe ?" than: "Why should there not be a universe ?" That which always is

does not need explanation; that it is, is all that can be said of it. Reasons only become necessary when you have come into the realm of succession, of one thing following upon another, and then you at once begin to ask why and how. But for that which [Page 7] ever is, the totality of existence in the fullest sense of the term, for that there is no reason; it needs no reason; it always is. And that idea of Self-existence has to be grasped, otherwise you will be continually asking questions for which there is no answer; and it is only in realising that tremendous conception of Ever-Existence that then the partial existences become relatively intelligible. When a universe comes forth into manifestation, then two conditions must ever be present — space, or distance between objects; time, succession of states of consciousness by which objects are recognised. That is all time is. It is only a succession of states of consciousness, or of conscious being, if you prefer the phrase. You will very soon realise that, if you look a little into the measures of time that you have in your waking consciousness and that you have in your dream consciousness, There is no objective time by which you can measure either of these. In your waking consciousness you have certain definite successions. In your dream consciousness you also have successions; but the time-measure is completely different, as we have been shown by very numerous experiments. Take those numerous cases of dream instigated by a touch from outside, a touch on the body. Probably you have read many of these in Du Prel's *Philosophy of Mysticism*. He gives a large number of them. Let me recall just one to remind you of the nature of these experiments. A man had a touch, either by the [Page 8] finger or a knife on the back of the neck, and it woke him. He was asked whether he had dreamed and if so, what ? The answer was that he had dreamed that he had fought a duel, and he had killed his opponent; that he was arrested and tried for murder. He went through the whole scene of his trial in court before the judge, counsels' speeches, and all the rest of it. He was finally found guilty and was condemned to die. He was taken away to the condemned cell, and went through I forget how many days between the sentence and the execution. He was led out to the guillotine, the knife fell upon his neck — and he awoke.

Now there you have incidents, certainly extending over what we should call two or three weeks, in the fraction of a minute which intervened between the touch on the back of his neck and his being awakened by that touch, the whole of that compressed in the states of consciousness of the man in the dream state. There are a great many cases of that kind in which the person has always been awakened by the thing which generated the dream, so that in every case you only have the fraction of a minute in which all these states of consciousness succeed each other. It has been made one of the arguments, you know, for the activity of consciousness in other states of matter than the physical — matter clearly very much finer, able to vibrate very much more rapidly than physical matter, and so responding to these moods of consciousness, these changes, with what we should [Page 9] call enormously increased rapidity. An argument has been founded on that for the immortality of the soul, or, at least, for the persistence of the soul on the other side of death. Now the moment you realise that and assimilate the results of the many experiments which have taken place along these lines, you will begin to understand what is meant when the metaphysician says that time is only a succession of states of consciousness. Time, for you, is the order in which you perceive the objects amidst which you are living and it has been compared, I think quite well — the existence of a universe — to a picture gallery, or a gallery of statuary. All the statues are there, but they only come into your sight at night-time as you go about with a lantern. As the light of the lantern falls on the statue, that statue, to you, comes within your consciousness. When the light of the lantern goes from it, the statue vanishes out of your consciousness; but it is the light of the lantern that enables you to see it. The statue is changed in no way. And so with all objects. Always they are there, existing; we see them in succession, we, as it were, moving about in what for the moment we might call a stationary universe; the whole of the universe being the ever-present, but we moving through that, so that one thing comes into our consciousness after another — we call that a succession of events; it is really a succession of changes of consciousness. [Page 10]

I do not know whether you will think me perfectly mad if I just mention one thing to you, but it has a great bearing on a Christian doctrine which is very much discussed and always discussed on wrong lines — the forgiveness of sins. The particular danger of your thinking me a lunatic is the statement that the past can be altered, and that what you are now influences what you were in the past. I am aware that it sounds perfectly cracked, but it is not so, because there is neither past nor future. You are an ever-present fact, an ever-present consciousness, and what you are now as much conditions what you were in Atlantis, as what you were in Atlantis conditions what you are now. It is possible to catch a glimpse — only a glimpse of course — of the mind of the LOGOS, so as to see that past, present, and future are only our names for our successions of states of consciousness, and that none of them have any real existence; that it is always "ourselves" and always "now"; hence that the future affects the past backwards as much as the past affects the future forwards; and if you have the patience to try to think that out, without standing on your heads, you will find there is no real difficulty in it. You have to get a little outside your consciousness; and *there* comes in the difficulty, because you are always working under the forms of thought with which you are familiar, and you have to take yourself out of that, and, by a great effort of the imagination, imagine everything as present all [Page 11] together, interrelated; and then you will have hold of a very real idea, and then you will have a glimpse of what is meant by the forgiveness of sins. It is a getting rid of the cause, not a getting rid of the effect, the annihilation, so to speak, of that which produced the attitude of mind that you call sin. I do not in the least expect that you will really understand what I am saying at the moment, but, I think, if you think it over, you will catch a certain understanding of it. It is difficult to think it in the physical brain. But it is just possible to get a little out of the physical brain, and catch glimpses of things that through the brain you cannot see. The only thing is, if you try to do it, do not try to do it for long together, because the strain on the physical matter of the brain is too great. You should only try to do it for a very short time; then come back to your normal way of thinking; and if it causes the least dullness or pain in the brain, drop it, because it means that your brain is not yet ready to undergo that strain. Physically, it means that you are trying to force the life of the Spirit through another set of spirillae in the physical atom, and that can only be done with great care and caution, otherwise you will injure your brain. That, as I said, is rather a side-issue.

Now let me come back to the central idea. I ask you to take for granted for the moment that all the objects in a given universe, existing as thought-forms [Page 12] in the divine mind, are interrelated. Imagine those put forth into manifestation under the laws of space and time, and you will see then that the interrelations that exist in the mind become successions under the condition of time. "All these lines that you may think of, which join together the thought-forms of the LOGOS in an immense web, as it were — which is a universe — as the things are drawn out, become successions; and the Karma that is eternal is the link in the divine thought between all the thought-forms that He puts forth as a universe; and Karma, in time, is the succession of these — the principle of causation, as we call it, when one follows another in a definite order, meaning only that they are interlinked in the divine mind, and therefore are interlinked down here; only we see them in a succession, where the LOGOS would see them simultaneously. If you work in that way, you will see that Karma never begins; it only *manifests* when the conditions for its manifestation are present. Like any other law in nature, it will always be seen working where the conditions for its working are present. The conditions do not create the law, but the law manifests only when the conditions are present. The principle of the law is ever-existing. The manifestation of the law in time comes whenever the conditions are there which enable that principle to show itself out.

And so with Karma. It has no beginning, but you have local and temporary manifestations of that [Page 13]

eternal principle wherever the objects, ever related to each other in the divine consciousness, become related to each other in their own consciousness, as being present side by side, before and after. Now apply that to the manifestation of the Monad. The Monad lives in the eternal, beyond the limitation of our fivefold universe, in the second of those divine worlds, the two divine worlds which make up the seven of our universe — only five are manifested, the other two are divine. The Monads are part of the LOGOS, inseparable from Him, part of His consciousness, so that the Will and the Awareness and the Creative Intelligence of these are part of God Himself and therefore, on that plane, unlimited. The LOGOS wills to manifest the universe. The Monads will to act in that universe. There is only one Will. We speak of God and the Monads. But the Monads are part of God. What He wills they will. He wills manifestation; they will it. And so they draw to themselves, as you know, the atoms of matter that we call the permanent atoms, and that is the beginning of manifestation in this special universe, when these atoms are appropriated by the Monad. And he and his atoms in all the worlds of the manifested universe are separated from all other Monads and all other appropriated atoms. This great mass of Spirits, as we call them — for the Monad really is a Spirit the moment he has taken to himself these atoms of matter — they are all separated from each [Page 14] other by virtue of the separation of the matter to which each fragment of divinity is linked, and the separation lies in those atoms. The moment those are appropriated — the beginning of manifestation — that moment each Monad has his own set of atoms which he is going to keep with him through the whole of that universe, unless he chooses to return, as it were, to throw them aside of his own will, and realise only his unity with God.

That is the next great thought you want to get hold of, because you are identifying yourself with what you call the individual, that is, the causal body with the ego-consciousness within it, which is only one manifestation of individuality. The true individual is the Monad himself with his atoms; nothing less — the Self. And you get into many tangles when you begin your individuality in the middle of manifestation. I know we have all done it, and we have all found the difficulty which comes out of it, the difficulty which has made Western people so entirely misunderstand the Hindû and Buddhist ideas of Nirvāna. The individual who begins, ceases; all that has a beginning has an end. To use the old argument, you cannot have a stick with one end. The moment you have a stick, you have two ends. The moment you have one end, you have another end. If you think of yourself as beginning with the ego-individual, you must come to an end as an ego-individual; and there is where our Orientalists [Page 15] get into such a muddle about Nirvāna. They see quite clearly that that which began in time must end in time, and so they thought that Nirvāna meant annihilation. They did not realise that from the Hindû and the Buddhist standpoint, existence, which always is, cannot end, and that they are part of that, and that the manifestation in time — this appropriation of matter and so on, necessary for the separation — is only the manifestation of a supreme Individuality which takes these atoms for a local and temporary expression of himself for gaining as much knowledge as he wants, for obtaining freedom under certain conditions in which he chooses to work; and that, as the Lord Buddha has said, if there had not been the uncreated and the eternal, the created and the temporary could not exist. We begin by thinking of the created and the temporary, and then get into confusion as to our own fate when we leave these things to which we cling. If we began in the Eastern way, by thinking of the eternal as the source of the temporary, the uncreated as the source of the created, then we should realise that the temporary and the created might disappear, but we ourselves should remain. There is a splendid verse, in the Hebrew Apocrypha, of the *Book of Wisdom*: "God created man in the image of His own eternity" — a thoroughly Eastern thought. And that image, that reproduction of the divine existence, can never cease to be. He may lose one sheath after another; [Page 16] he may fling aside one garment after another; but he himself is always there, and the ego in the causal body is only a temporary expression of that supreme eternal Self which is your real life. There lies your memory, which gives the sense of identity. You do not begin your sense of identity with the ego. You may imagine that from the statement of the Lord Buddha when He spoke of the time when

He was a tiger, which was before He was individualised as man; and that came out very strongly, as far as we were concerned ourselves, in the researches which are embodied now in *Man*. We found to our astonishment — at first we felt rather stupefied by it — that we could find ourselves in the mineral kingdom; and to find yourself as a mineral, when you had always thought of the ego as beginning with the third wave and the individuality, such individualisation was rather a shock; and yet we, who were doing those investigations, found ourselves in different minerals, quite separated from each other, with a consciousness which was the same consciousness as that now living in these bodies — realised as the same by the sense of identity, the memory, which is quite different from looking at the thing from the outside. You know yourself to be the same consciousness as you were as a child, because you remember; and the ego of the child is known in your consciousness to be identical with your ego now — I do not mean identical in extent; you may have drawn [Page 17] more into it than you had in it when you were a child consciously — but you know it is yourself. Nothing would persuade you that yourself as a child was not yourself, not the same *you*, that is now existing; and it is that sense of individual identity which remains through all changes and which enabled us to find ourselves in those ridiculous minerals which we were simply studying from the outside.

Well, when we came to reason about it, we saw how perfectly sensible it was. As Monads we had appropriated atoms. Those atoms were plunged into the mineral kingdom; and the Monad and his consciousness, and his putting of his consciousness into these atoms, made a perfectly intelligible procedure. We did not have to break off anywhere, or trouble about the formation of individuals and so on, but only the consciousness gradually appropriating more and more matter, through which it could express more of itself than it could in its earliest experiments. Certainly consciousness in the mineral was a very feeble thing in its self-expression, frustrated, held back, imprisoned, as it were, in this matter into which it was pushed, unable to express itself through it for the time, except by a dull groping — which was a very peculiar condition of consciousness to find yourself in, groping vaguely after something, you did not know what, and yet, as it were, trying to push upwards, to unfold outwards, and unable to do it. Tracing this consciousness onwards, always clinging, you see, [Page 18] to the permanent atoms, which are the only connecting link you can get, you can trace it through the vegetable kingdom into the animal kingdom, through the animal up into the human; and there comes a certain point in that in which an exceedingly interesting change takes place, which we call individualisation.

But now think for a moment what lives — streams of life I had better say — are present just before individualisation takes place. There is the stream of life in the atoms—a very undeveloped form of life as expressed in the life of the atoms — which is that of the Third Logos — the Holy Spirit, as the Christian would say. That is one stream. Then you come to the stream of the life of the Second Logos, which has come downwards through the matter of the universe built up by the Third, giving to that matter qualities; that is, putting it into mechanical terms, powers of vibration — these powers of vibration being imposed by Him on the matter by His own changes of consciousness, each change of consciousness in the Logos being answered by a vibration in the matter around Him. Now the Hindûs use a very good phrase for that fact. They call it "the measure of that", the extent, as it were, of a mode of divine consciousness. It is that which makes the essence of the atoms, all the way down through all the planes, and then, when the Second Logos pours His life over all [Page 19] these formed atoms and aggregations of atoms, then He imposes upon them a number of qualities in which all the separate vibrations are, as it were, grouped together and made to answer either to will, or to awareness of an outer world, or to creative intelligence — activity, that is — and these qualities, imposed upon matter, are imposed first on the permanent atoms — the ātmic and the buddhic and the mānasic — and then, later on, imposed on the mental unit and the astral atom and the physical atom, which are really the lower expressions of the three higher. Now the

Second Logos does not work in those three higher atoms, but leaves them for the time, and He goes on working in the mental unit and the two lower atoms, related by the link of life to the higher, but not otherwise played upon. The Monad himself cannot at this stage play upon those atoms, those lower atoms; he can only play upon the higher. The life of the Second Logos invigorates these and gives them their characteristics, and finally, in the upward arc, begins to build them into bodies, and through the bodies the qualities of the permanent atoms are expressed. When that has grown up to a certain point of development through the help of the group soul, which is part of the Second Logos, from that group soul these lower atoms are plunged down into matter. When death comes they are pulled back again into the group soul, but these permanent atoms never change their attachment. [Page 20]

They come out over and over again. There is a definite linking of all their experiences, the difference between that and the more separate individuality of the later life being that when these permanent atoms are drawn back into the group soul they distribute all their experiences, that is, all their powers of vibration, through the whole matter of the group soul so that all have a share in it. But your line of individuality is always there all the same. The set of atoms are never separated the one from the other, from the first moment the Monad appropriated them in the beginning of manifestation — and so, climbing upwards with the divisions of the group soul going on over and over again, with fewer strings of permanent atoms connected with each subdivision as the subdivisions proceed, until at last there is only a fragment of group soul with one set of atoms.

Now in those there is every possibility of all future evolution. The life of the Logos is there, but instead of allowing these possibilities to unfold themselves from below, as they ultimately might have done, the Monad pours down his life, stimulated by the first Logos, from above, as we say — above and below are meaningless—the germinal line in the ascending life is stimulated by the mānasic qualities of the higher, the reproduced aspect of the Monad of creative activity, and that approach of the one to the other, that H. P. B. once called "Heaven and earth kissing each other", causes that union [Page 21] between the fragment of the group soul and the matter of the higher mental plane which makes what we call the causal body, always formed, you know, in a flash. The descent of the one and the ascent of the other reach a point where they affect each other, and then the flash takes place. And if you have read the ways of individualisation, you may remember that it was always the upreaching from below that caused the little stir in the matter of the subtler plane; that, in that plane, whilst yet there was no form there, no causal body, there was a little stir in the matter near the permanent atom, caused by the condition of the permanent atom in the lower world, and that little response it was which made the flash of individualisation. And so you get what we call the three right ways, all based on love — love which showed itself in action on the physical plane, stirred the ātmic matter and made the response from the ātmic plane; love, inspired by devotion to a superior, not showing . itself in act but showing itself in pure emotion, brought the response from the buddhic plane, and individualisation from that; love on the lower mental plane, trying to understand the object of devotion, brought the response from the intelligence, the higher mānasic plane, and so you had these three methods, all of which we call light methods, you may remember. But then there were three other ways — wrong ways — which had their roots; two of them in selfishness, and one of them in hatred. [Page 22] You cannot have read that without asking why, in a world of justice, one set of individualisations should have taken place along the wrong lines, while others took place along the right lines; for it governs the whole life. The whole life connected with the causal body is conditioned by the method of individualisation, and if there was no karma behind it, that would be a very terrible thing, just as terrible as the man in the slum and the man in the palace, if they only had the one life and were newly created in these two positions. People do not seem to have troubled to go behind that, and yet it is obvious you must go behind it. And there must have been a karma present there, which

brought about that difference of way. Now I can only throw out a suggestion; although I am fairly sure it is accurate, yet I do not know whether it is one that will recommend itself to you. It is that this is not the first time that we come into a universe; that those other ways, which we call the wrong, had been experienced by us in some previous universe altogether, and had been lived through, and we learned what they had to teach; and that then, coming into another universe, we differed from those who were only beginning their separate life in this one, and with that experience behind us, we went along the good ways, having learned by experience the lessons of the others. I know that to some people that idea will be very unwelcome. I was talking over it with a member the other day and he said: **[Page 23]** "Do you mean that we may some day have to go back into a mineral in a universe?" I replied dryly: "Why not?" — to this member's horror. It is not the form we wear that matters. It is the amount of consciousness in ourselves. And you have to transfer your sense of individuality to the Spirit, and not keep it, clinging to the bodies, as we mostly do. As a matter of fact, you have to realise that to the Spirit all these different forms are of exceedingly small importance, simply ways of gathering experience; and provided he is gathering experience that makes the content of the Spirit fuller and greater, it does not matter to him whether he is a mineral, vegetable, animal, or man. They are all stages; but the content of the Spirit would be very much greater, when taking up the mineral form for the helping of evolution, after you had gone through your present experiences. You would not lose these, and you would not lose yourself; yourself, you can never lose. The more highly you are evolved, the less do you care about the special form which, for the time, you take, in order that you may enrich your consciousness with an expression which you see will be valuable to it.

I know I am taking you into rather deep waters this evening, but it is all the fault of your General Secretary; and he heard me talk about this in French when I was in Paris, so he ought not to mind my talking about it in English here. **[Page 24]**

It is along these lines of close, careful thinking, in which you try to identify yourself with your real Self — the Spirit, the eternal mind — that gradually, although slowly, there grows upon you a sense that nothing of the outer matters, except as it can be used for the enrichment of the content of the Spirit, your real Self, the one true consciousness. What you gain by each experience is more power to subdue matter to your own purposes; and there was one very curious difference that we noticed at the time — though I did not then think of it along these lines — in the different consciousnesses in the mineral kingdom. Some of those who were connected with various forms, the ordinary earth, the formless kind of earth that you get, had the merest gleam of consciousness, and did not, as it were, try to do anything. Those that went into metals and from the metal went on into the crystal — in those it was clear that the life in them had a gleam of comprehension of what it was doing, made an effort to do a thing, which was entirely absent from the other; and if I had had any sense at the time, I should have seen that that implied some difference. But I had not, and simply, noted the fact without seeing the implication, that the difference between effort and non-effort meant a difference of experience behind it; otherwise one would never try to do a thing, however vaguely and gropingly, while the other remained entirely inert. And if you realise that every atom has to be evolved, that there **[Page 25]** is an infinite past behind us in relation to atoms, that slow evolution of the atom, probably through a whole universe, in order to make the atom fit to be taken up and appropriated by a consciousness, you will begin to realise then, vaguely I know, but still to some extent, that we cannot cut ourselves off at a particular point and say: "Here we began"; that we are always going on, and, in that going on, passing through many, many different phases of consciousness. We are now in the human, but our real individuality does not depend on the human. We are going out of the human to the superhuman presently, but we shall not lose our individuality by it. The whole experience of our past is that as we reach a higher and higher state of body — I am using body in the

widest sense, the difference between the animal, the vegetable and the man — there is an expansion of consciousness with which the sense of individuality deepens; that as we come up to the place where we learned to function, and other places than those in our evolution, every new plane that we consciously function upon is an enormous expansion of consciousness, and an increase in the Spirit, in the individuality; that that goes on through the astral and mental planes, the buddhic plane and the nirvânic plane. There is no reason why it should stop. If the whole of our past has been an increasing individuality and an increasing extent of consciousness, the whole analogy goes to show that we, [Page 26] the individual, are something much more than all these forms, and that, reaching the nirvânic consciousness and mastering that, we shall then pass to the Superman. The human will lie behind us with all its limitations. We are as much limited as man in comparison with the Superman, the Master, as the dog is limited in comparison with ourselves. It is not a loss of what we are, but an enormous addition. The dog's consciousness is much less than yours. When he sees you reading a book, judged from the dog's standpoint you must seem an exceedingly foolish creature, to sit there doing nothing, simply staring at a piece of paper and some black dots, when you might be running after a rabbit or trying to catch a hare. He must think you a perfect fool. You know that your consciousness is much wider than his, that you have not lost anything by being a human being now. So with the other. I do not know myself personally, of course, the conditions of the Superman in my own consciousness, but I know, by every expansion of consciousness that I have gone through, that it adds to the sense of the strength in the individual, to the keenness of memory, to the feeling of identity, and I see no reason why I should lose that in taking another expansion. Looking at it in this way, you see at once, then, that individuality does not cease to be, and that it never begins; that that is your real Self, and that all that you are doing, fidgeting about with this matter that we have come [Page 27] into, is utilising the matter in order that we may be able to act freely in a universe composed of matter. It is not that it is of any importance to us, but we want that we shall not be fettered by it, blinded by it, hindered by it. We want to move as freely in the physical world as we moved in the world whence we came, and in order to do that we have to conquer this matter and turn it to our own purposes. The higher we can rise in the unfolding of consciousness the more are we masters of physical matter as well as other matter, and that is what we are here for: to be able in any world to freely express ourselves and manifest our divine powers. We are busy at that all the time. Matter blinds us, hinders us, cramps us, when we first come into it. Slowly and gradually we obtain mastery over it, and what we gain is this power of expressing ourselves in any world of matter like this. We do not go back as we came out. We go back with powers unfolded, and masters of the mystery of the universe. And so, in any future changes we may imagine that we shall undergo, we ourselves shall always be there, our consciousness constantly getting richer, fuller, with more content. Our aim now is — being blinded by physical matter, and held by it, and unable to remember as the Spirit ever remembers and ever knows — to become able to use that power of the Spirit, whatever may be the material form in which we are clothed. That is the purpose of evolution. It is for [Page 28] that that we come out into this world, in order that in this world we may subdue every force and every form, so that they may perfectly express the mood of the eternal consciousness.

Now I am afraid that this is a very dry talk, but I cannot help it. It is the fault of the Secretary, because he asked me to talk about it, and I cannot talk about it with any use for you except on lines that do need some thinking and do mean thought for you; and if you do not like it, do not come to another lecture of this sort.