

## Karma Once More by Annie Besant

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FRIENDS:

[Page 1] The other day at Glasgow I was asked to speak on the well-worn subject of Karma, and to talk on that from the metaphysical standpoint, [See Adyar Pamphlet No.125, "*On Karma*"] the question of the origination of Karma, which I solved by saying that it did not originate, that it was eternal. As, however, people are concerned with Karma in their daily lives, as it comes constantly into the daily lives of people, and is very much misunderstood in its application and in its theory, I think I might perhaps somewhat continue the subject to you, knowing that many of you were present also in Glasgow, and try, if possible, to put it before you in a way which will free many of you from what apparently seems to be a hindrance to action, (Karma being taken rather as a limitation or restraint on action instead of being, as it really is, an intelligible foundation for activity.) (in no sense can it be said to give us orders as to what we shall do, but it enables us, to a very great extent, to understand what we can do, and how we ought to do it. [Page 2]

Nothing perhaps gives rise to more misconception than the idea that Karma is a kind of command from higher regions which ought to limit our activity. You so often hear people using phrases which show that they entirely misunderstand the real meaning of Karma, phrases about interfering with Karma, phrases which seem to imply that we are under some sort of subjection to Karma, and ought to obey it, and so on, as though it were a kind of divine law from a lawgiver. All these phrases show a fundamental misconception of what Karma is. You might just as well talk about interfering with the law of gravitation as interfering with the law of Karma. You can, in one sense of the word, interfere with both, and just so far as you are able to interfere, you have a perfect right to interfere.

There is no kind of sacredness about Karma, which ought to make you go down on your knees to it and imagine that you are bound to follow what you choose to think is Karma — generally somebody else's. The whole ordinary conception of it is apt to be not the idea of a law of nature, but some sort of command coming from a superior authority as God, and not coming out of your own past and so created by yourself; a lack of the realisation of the fact that Karma is not a thing which is completed, but a thing which is being continually made, changed and modified by exactly the same causes, which are active now, as were [Page 3] active in its creation in the past. Your position with regard to Karma ought to be exactly the same, in the ordinary sense of freedom, as you feel in relation to the usual laws of nature. You do not feel, if you understand the laws of nature aright, that they are things that you have to obey or things that it is wrong to disobey. If you understand anything about them, you know that you cannot help obeying them, and that you cannot disobey them in any possible way; but the idea of command, as coming into the conception of natural law is entirely mistaken. I do not know whether the confusion arises from the same word being used for human legislation and the manifestation of the divine hand which we find in what we call the laws of nature. Fundamentally the two conceptions have nothing in common with each other. Laws which are made by any form of lawgiver, whether it be a man, like a monarch, an

autocratic monarch, or whether an assembly of people like a Parliament, those laws are arbitrary things made by human will for a time, with artificial penalties attached to them, which can be broken if you choose to break them, which can be obeyed if you choose to obey them, and so on. They are altogether, as I said, artificial, and any penalty that you attach to them is equally artificial.

There is no connection at all between human law and the penalty attached to the breach of it. It is simply a connection which is made by the will of [Page 4] the lawgiver, or of the Council making the laws; and in different parts of the world, of course, the same offence against a human law is punished by entirely different penalties. The penalties attached to the breach of a law in one country vary with the civilisation of the country, showing that there is nothing inherent in the connection between such laws and the penalties which follow on their breach. Not very, very many years ago the crime of sheep-stealing was punished by hanging. No one would dream of proposing that, for stealing a sheep today; but the very fact that you can change the penalty shows the lack of any inherent connection between the offence and the punishment inflicted on it by the law. But when you come to the region of laws of nature you are not dealing with commands at all. It seems to me that a very large number of our students of Theosophy show a sort of confusion of mind, implied in the idea that you ought to obey the law of Karma. There is no "ought" in the matter. So far as you can get rid of anything which grows out of what we call the law of Karma, you are perfectly welcome to get rid of it. It is only a question of your own power and your own ability. There is no moral obligation in connection with this law of Karma. It is just exactly in the position of any other law of nature, and it is universal law, a law of certain definite, inviolable, natural sequences between certain events and certain other events; nothing more than that — a law [Page 5] which attaches naturally to a certain line of action a certain set of results. And put into the form of "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap", you have a perfectly true representation of the natural law.

Suppose that in any way, when you are dealing with the law, you find the action of the law is unpleasant to you — put Karma aside for the moment — you do not say: "This is a law of nature, and remain helpless under it. You at once try to circumvent it, which is the only rational thing to do with a law of nature which causes you any inconvenience; and you do not feel that in circumventing the law, by practically getting rid of its play upon yourself, you are doing anything irreverent, or improper, or wrong in any sense of the term. You are face to face with certain things which you find exceedingly inconvenient. You at once set to work to understand how these things can be put away, there and then. You set yourselves to get rid of them as promptly as you possibly can. That ought to be your attitude towards what we call Karma; that it is the result of certain forces which we have set a-going in the past, the results of which, when we experience them in the present, we find exceedingly disagreeable.

Take the ordinary laws of nature as you find them round the scientific man. It is perfectly true that before the scientist knows a particular law of [Page 6] nature he may suffer the greatest inconvenience from its operation. Take Roger Bacon. When he put certain chemical elements together, as the effect, by a law of nature, of the combination of these elements, an explosion was caused. He did not consider that that explosion was a punishment for what he had done, but simply the inevitable consequence, and he took care to keep these particular substances apart in the future. He did not think that he was breaking the law of chemical combination when he prevented the combination, and so prevented an injury to himself. He did not regard the blowing off of one of his fingers, which happened to him once, and the destruction of one of his eyes, as anything more than the result of his own ignorance and a thing he should most certainly prevent in the future by an understanding of the working of the law. He took care to counteract that working, so as not to allow it to injure him, as it had injured him in the days of his ignorance.

So also with this law that we speak of as Karma; if we find that in the past we have been thinking and wishing about things which have brought about undesirable results in our present life, our business is to try to understand what was done which brought about these results, and then at once to apply our knowledge to prevent the generation of similar results in the future as far as we possibly can, by knowledge of the way in which these [Page 7] results are happening, and how to neutralise them where they are unpleasant, and to bring other forces to bear upon them which shall prevent their causing action to our great inconvenience now. You are absolutely free, as regards your work with forces of nature, to oppose, to quicken, or to balance, or to neutralise, in any way that you can. You may do it for yourself, or you may do it with regard to anybody else. You would not dream for a moment if you saw a child playing with fire in a way that was likely soon to set the child on fire — you would not dream of saying: "There's a law of nature that fire burns, and I must not interfere with it as regards this child." You realise at once that you would be talking nonsense, if you spoke in that way; for though you cannot interfere with the working of the law that fire burns, you can prevent the child setting its clothes on fire by removing it from the fire. You can at once step in and prevent the action of that law, by keeping the lucifer match and the pinafore at a safe distance from each other. That is the kind of way in which you ought to look at Karma. Your attitude to it should be exactly the same as it is towards any other law of nature. If the law helps you, if it is working along the line and is having the results that you desire, you will do nothing to hinder its working. But if it is working along a line which brings about results that you do not desire, set all your mind to work to find out some way in which you can balance or prevent [Page 8] the working of that law from bringing about undesirable results. Anything that you are able to do you have a right to do, as far as Karma is concerned; and as regards any other law of nature, if you are able to bring another force against it, bring it; and if you realise how Karma came to be in any particular case, you will be able then to calculate the kind of force that you ought to set a-going in order to neutralise or lessen, if you cannot entirely neutralise, the results to which you object. For it is with Karma as with the law of gravitation, the law of chemical combination, and any law which is continually working around you.

Those of you who were in Glasgow will remember that I said then that the working of any particular cause began with the conditions in which that cause continually showed itself. That is the beginning of that particular line of action. It is not the beginning of the law itself. That belongs to all manifestations, and so with any particular piece of your Karma; you have a perfect right to try to trace that back to the generating cause and then, having so traced it, to set to work either to strengthen or to weaken it, according to the results which you see that cause, left uninterfered with, will inevitably bring about. But notice that "uninterfered with". I am taking it for granted that in the case of Karma, as in the case of any other law of nature, you can interfere with it in the practical sense of the term interference. I know [Page 8] perfectly well, of course, as every one who has studied Science knows, that you cannot annihilate any force; but you can counterbalance it. You cannot get rid of the working of a law, but you can make its work nugatory by bringing another law into activity, which will work against it. Do not, of course, misunderstand me, and think I am speaking of this as though I had forgotten the fact that every law of nature is an invariable sequence, and that it cannot be broken or violated. But you always have an opportunity to trace causes, and to bring out the counterbalancing energy. To take the commonest illustration — the tendency of gravity, moving bodies tending towards the earth. That is a tendency which you can oppose and overcome, but only by bringing to bear against the force which gives the body the tendency to move downwards an equivalent force which balances, and then a superior force which brings about movement in the other direction. You do not get rid of the law of gravity and the tendency to move downwards, but you oppose the tendency by countervailing energies. In that way you prevent the body falling to the ground. You are not breaking the law of gravity, but you are counterbalancing it by the muscular force of your own arm, or maybe, when you are not strong enough to prevent that tendency to

move towards the earth, it will overcome you. You know that is not because the law is a command to a piece of matter to move downwards, but merely [Page 10] because you have not available force to counterbalance, and so to render nugatory, that law for the time being in that particular place. On that, as you know, all Science is founded.

Karma is the only law of nature, so far as I know, which educated people treat in a non-scientific fashion. They speak as if interference were in some sense irreverent, as if you were insulting God in some curious way if you counterbalance the action of an uncomfortable piece of Karma. It is that that I want to get rid of from the whole of your minds. It hinders; it fetters you. This kind of view of the omnipotence of Karma is working untold evil in India where a misconception of it has arisen. It constantly puts the Indian at a disadvantage when he is dealing with the white man who knows nothing about Karma. He does not use exertion to fight where he chooses to assume that Karma is against him; he simply sits down and allows the law to play over him. The Englishman, of course, pays no attention to it, not knowing its existence, and goes blundering along and conquers. This is really one of the dangers of imperfect knowledge. Where knowledge is imperfect, this curious paralysing effect is found, just as if a person at the bottom of the stairs said: "I cannot walk upstairs because the law of gravitation is against me". The way to prove that you can walk upstairs, is just to set about it. The way to assure yourself that Karma is not a command that you shall not do a [Page 11] thing, which nature tells you you may do, is to rise up and do the thing and, by that, find out whether Karma is able to stop you or not. Think of it, then, simply as a sequence, as you would look at any other law of nature.

There are many cases in which we see this law working around us, and we want to know how we can deal with conditions that we find. One very important thing to realise as regards the working of this law is to understand what causes are at work, and what in the past has happened which makes what we call a karma effect. Now you all know well how Karma is generated: thought, desire, activity. You read that in all our text-books; you also read how that is worked out; that thought by the assimilating, transmuting action which goes on in the heaven-world, changes into character; that desire — which is attraction between yourself and an object, that object acting upon you, your reaction to it being either desire or repulsion, according to the nature of the object — you know that that makes a link between you and the object, if it be attraction, and that shows itself in the opportunity to get hold of that object of desire. Opportunity comes in your way, desire being the link which draws yourself and the object together, like the attraction of the magnet. You know also that your various activities bring about the circumstances amid which you find yourself, and if, for a moment, you could imagine that you always thought [Page 12] aright, desired aright, and acted aright, then you would be creating the best possible Karma, and such experience as you had would be working into good Karmic desires, would be drawing towards you all desirable objects; your activity, being all good, would bring most favourable circumstances as your environment. But that of course, is not the practical Karma with which any one of us is confronted. Look at any one day of our lives; we find we have not thought and desired and acted along one line, but in very many ways. So with the Karma of a particular day of the average man — I won't take one who is doing his very utmost to improve — but the average man who thinks, desires and acts without knowledge. The result in such a case will be Karma of both kinds, good and bad, and the outcome will be almost balanced; he will have thought well, he will have thought ill; desired well and desired ill; acted well and acted ill; so that he has generated a good deal of good Karma and a good deal of bad. All of it that is effective is a balance between the two. Most of it has counteracted itself in the very generation of it. The good and the evil thoughts have almost balanced each other; the good and the evil desires have almost balanced; the good and the evil passions have almost balanced. There is very little left over for good or evil, as the case may be, and that is the only effective part, the only part which really remains over to leave a

definite result, which is to be met [Page 13] with and dealt with in the future. Now take the man all through his life who has been thinking along these two lines, desiring and acting along them. In the results brought out day by day of a subsequent life or, in some cases even the same life, he will have a Karma to deal with which is almost balanced, so that at any given moment the result he has made is exceedingly feeble and can be balanced by thought, desire or action of the opposite sort at the moment, and very easily overcome, if he puts out a special effort along any of these three lines.

You have a number of characteristics which you bring with you into the world. Your tendency will be, at any given moment, to follow that part of your character which is called into activity by a temptation, by an attraction, by a pressure brought upon you from others, or from ordinary circumstances. Just that much of your character will be stimulated to show itself as is responsive to the particular condition in which you find yourself at the moment. If you have thought very strongly along a particular line, then the tendency of your character to act along that line, when suitable conditions appear, will be very marked. But for the most part, in the average man, there is no great power of reaction; there is only the tendency which, if not opposed, will carry him along a particular line. If he has sufficient knowledge to realise that he is creating fresh karma with every [Page 14] thought he will at once stir himself up to think in the opposite way to any harmful tendency that he finds in himself. If the tendency is one which will carry him into difficulty or danger, he will neutralise that tendency by the active present effort of the intelligence. And, unconsciously, even the average man does that when the reaction against him is unpleasant, and very often he succeeds in overcoming it. The student who is only beginning to learn Theosophy is rather apt to say: "It is my karma", and not make any effort to counteract a prejudicial force, so that he is really worse off, for the time, from the small amount of knowledge he has gained. The man who understands karma, looks at himself, feels the tendency pressing upon him to think along a particular line, to desire along it, or to act along it, and says quite deliberately: "This is my karma; it makes me think, desire and act in that way. I have made it by my thought and desire and activity in the past. I see now that if I go along that line, it will bring about undesirable results, so I shall not yield to this karma which I have created; I decline to give way to the tendency; I oppose my will to it now. My desire now is to do what I can to overcome it". So he deliberately sets himself against the karma which he realises is of an undesirable nature, never allows himself to be paralysed by saying: "Oh, this is my karma, I cannot help it". There is nothing which lies behind that you cannot struggle against, if you [Page 15] have time enough to think about what you are going to do before you act. The only way in which karma is really overpoweringly strong, is really irresistible, is when you, in your past, have just thought up to the point when the next thought will be an act. Those cases are comparatively rare. I admit that they exist. You may have thought so deliberately and continuously along one line in the past, that, if you had time and opportunity for one more thought-effort, that thought-effort would coalesce with, express itself in, action and death may have struck you down just at that point in your past thought and activity. If that be the case, then the very moment that an opportunity for action offers itself to you in this life, the tendency will assert itself as an action, and in that case it will assert itself before you think, and you will have done the thing before you realise that you are doing it. These cases are, however, rare.

Here comes a point where your knowledge will help you; for if you find that your utmost effort is not strong enough to overbalance the tendency you have created, you will continue to oppose the tendency to act until you have exhausted every power of thought and will that you possess. Then, like an exhausted swimmer, you will go down, and the past will then have the better of the present; past karma has been too strong for you. That is all it means — the overbalancing of the present forces by the accumulated weight of the past. [Page 16]

You may say: "Why resist as long as you can, if failure is inevitable? " Because you thus weaken the force of that tendency for the failure; your effort against it helps to exhaust it. There is many a case where there is a very, very strong tendency brought over from the past; take, for instance, drunkenness; if you can stir up a person to resist and persuade him to resist up to the very last point before he yields, if he fails, he will feel despairing because of the failure, and may cry out that it was no good for him to struggle. If you explain to him that it was good to struggle, and that he has taken away from the force which is working to drive him into drunkenness all the amount of energy that he has put into his resistance, then even though he has failed at the end, you will have encouraged that man to future effort, you will have made him realise how the self-created forces of his past are working in his present, but that there is no final failure for the man who determines to struggle on to the last, and to pick himself up again when he has fallen down. He recommences the struggle — an enormous struggle it may be — but the effort which he has put out in resisting the tendency is all to the good. Thus you can see a way in which a knowledge of karma is useful: you can always use it for encouragement, wherever a man is willing to struggle and fight, for law is law, and never fails us.

Suppose you come across a case of illness; suppose you say, as sometimes it is said in India: **[Page 17]** "Well, a person's death is fixed by his karma; it does not really matter what we do: he will either die or live, according to his karma". That is so in many cases, where the forces are working up for death. And you may occasionally find curious cases of that. I recall one I came across in Benares, where the eldest son of his parents was attacked by plague, and every care was lavished on the boy; doctors and nurses were brought and everything that could be done was done to save the boy's life; but he died. His younger brother caught the plague also, and the parents worn out, disheartened, broken, did not trouble to nurse the boy at all. They said: "We have done everything we could for our other son, and he died". That boy was actually left out on the veranda in the rain, left to himself entirely, and he recovered. That struck the parents extremely, and they were confirmed in the view that human effort was useless, that karma was overpowering, for the one who was cared for died, and the one who was not cared for recovered. Well, in both cases, they were face to face with an overwhelming karmic tendency, and they naturally drew the conclusion that it was no good to nurse, it was no good to try to help anyone; recovery or death was wholly the result of the past. Yet they were drawing quite a false deduction from these facts, strongly as the facts appeared to support that view. In many cases the death-hour is led up to by so many tendencies that it cannot be changed; **[Page 18]** but in many other cases of illness the person has a very large present contribution to make to the result which is coming out of it. What is the karma of a person, when he is threatened with death? Often, I cannot say always, often it is that the conditions around him either favour the coming of death at that particular time, or favour recovery at that particular time; but in order to bring about the one or the other, further conditions have to be introduced in the present, to decide the final result, for karma is always in the making.

That is the point to which I want to bring you. Karma is not a thing which is complete, except in comparatively rare cases, death being one of the most frequent of these; karma is a thing which is in course of making, in which the past has an influence, but in which the present has also an influence; and you can contribute forces either to help or to hinder a given result in the conditions brought about by the causes generated in the past. Suppose then that a person is ill. It rests with you whether you will allow these unfavourable conditions to work unchecked, unstruggled against, and so bring about death at that particular hour; or whether you will do your very utmost to bring about healthy conditions, opposed to those which are working towards death; and by thus modifying and changing the directions of the karma by the introduction of new forces, you may be able to carry the man over the critical moment of the **[Page 19]** culmination of the destructive forces, and enable him to pass on into the more favourable conditions

that follow, that opportunity of dying having been neutralised by the better conditions which you have introduced. There is nothing therefore which can be done in the way of help that ought not to be done. You ought to exert every possible influence that you have to counteract the bad influences which have been generated by the previous karma. You and his relation with you are part of his karma; the sick person's relation with you is a part of his karma. If you do not exert all the forces that you can to help him, then you are failing in your particular duty, and so are generating for yourself similar neglect when the hour of your need shall come.

If you look carefully at a horoscope, any wise astrologer will tell you the points at which the conditions are a danger to life. Unless he is foolish, he will only tell you that the conditions which surround you at a given time are hostile to continued life. If you know that beforehand, instead of becoming alarmed, as many do, and discouraged and frightened, you will simply, if you wish to go on in this world, summon whatever influences are within your reach in order to counteract these bad conditions; you will endeavour to overcome and get rid of them, to neutralise them. All good astrologers have always said that that is what you ought to do, and they are rather fond of [Page 20] quoting the phrase: "The fool obeys his stars, the wise man commands them". The wise man reacts on the influences around him. He is not a dead lump, to be tossed hither and thither by these influences around him. He is a living organism, that can react with those that are favourable against those that are unfavourable. I know many cases where people, who have horoscope predictions made to them, become simply helpless creatures under the influences they are told are going to play upon them. I have known a lady who would not go out of her room on a particular day, because it was said that on that day she was going to break her leg. A far better thing to do would have been to have walked about just as usual, taking a certain amount of extra care because there were unfavourable influences acting against her. Precaution is the reasonable thing to take as a result of knowledge. If knowledge paralyses you, you are not ready for it. If you realise that it is not the horoscope which makes a person's destiny, but that it simply shows the influences into which he is born, and that it is a man's past, his karma, which brings him into the world at the particular moment, in which all the influences that are there already present, work towards the carrying out of the causes he has set agoing in the past, then the knowledge contained in the horoscope would no longer be paralysing. As things are, one wishes very often that a person had never seen his [Page 21] horoscope, since it works on him as a mischievous influence, inducing fear, and so increasing the bad influences into which he is going, and working with them to injure him. Fear, as you know, is one of the most paralysing things you can possibly bring to bear upon a human being.

There is another real danger in all questions of foreknowledge, and it is one of the reasons why it is so much better for most of you that you should not know your past incarnations. If you did know them you would be able to look a little forward, and unless you are strong, and are fairly indifferent to what happens to you in the present life, you are far better, far stronger, more likely to be successful, if your past is veiled to you. As soon as you are strong enough to take it reasonably, there is a certain amount of advantage in knowing your past, because you can see the forces you have generated and the best way of dealing with them, especially where it is desirable to counteract them. In most situations in life past karmas are more or less balanced, and the present activity is often the final determining cause either of success or failure. If you realise that, you will feel free to face the difficulties and do your utmost to overcome them.

What is going to be your attitude where there is inevitable disaster ? Let us suppose you can do nothing. A terrible misfortune comes upon you, and you say: "Yes, it is my karma". How should karma help us in

these cases ? By enabling us to [Page 22] assume, I think, that attitude towards the inevitable which realises that it is cowardly to cry over that which you have yourself created when it bears its fruit in the present. That, of course, is a lesson in strength. Moreover, you understand that karma is only claiming the payment of a debt which you yourself have incurred, and that it is just that you should pay it; besides, as the payment is, at some time, inevitable, it is really better to pay it and to have done with it, than to have it hanging over you. Once paid, it is done with. If you can call up from the Spirit, who is yourself, the strength of the man who says: "I am willing to pay honestly the debt which I have contracted", then you will find that a very large part of the suffering will disappear in that recognition; and in the most painful of all things, where you are treated unjustly, as you say, looking alone at this little section of your life, you will be able to feel the strength of knowing that no such thing as injustice is possible, that whatever you have made comes back to you, and that none can injure you except yourself. Other people may claim the payment, but they are only like the tax-gatherer. It is only a very silly person who is angry with the tax-gatherer when he comes for payment of the tax which you know ought to be paid, and which you know you must pay. To fall out with the man who is simply an agent for the gathering is folly, is undignified, childish, mere petulance.[Page 23]

Exactly in the same spirit you should meet karmic justice, when it is exacting from you payment of the debts which you have incurred in the past. You realise that the man you thought your enemy is only the man who is claiming from you that which you owe, and you will find that all resentment against him disappears, and leaves you peaceful, and serene. It puts an end to any feeling of resentment against any one who injures you, because you know that one of two things is always true: either it is a debt out of your past which you ought to pay, and are bound in honour to pay contentedly; or you know that you have deliberately drawn upon yourself an opposing force, in order to prevent its striking something that you regard as valuable, because you are willing to stand between that force and that which you desire to defend, and to allow it to spend itself against you. That, remember, is quite a possible thing. We may, any one of us, deliberately put ourselves in the way of a force, and allow it to exhaust itself on our own persons. You can do that as much with what is called karma, as you can do it by putting yourself between a child and a blow that is going to fall upon it, using your greater strength to prevent that blow from injuring the helpless child. It does not seem to you to be unjust, if, by interposing yourself between a blow and its object, you save a child or an animal from a cruel blow. You feel yourself free to do it, if you can. Then [Page 24] why should you suppose that in the case of bad karma striking a person, you may not interpose between that person and the karma *if you can* ? Even if the person deserve to suffer, you have still the right to interpose if you can, and if you think it good and wise to do it. The reason for the interposition would be your recognition of the fact that the very power and opportunity to save another imposes on you the duty of saving him, if the saving be good for him. That is what you are bound to realise. Now it may be in some cases that the saving is only temporary, that the blow is not entirely to be turned aside, but that you may delay its action until the person is strong enough to bear it.

It is quite true that, if you look back into the past, you will probably find that the person had a claim on you, that he had done you some service which you now are repaying. Or, it may be that his karma is exhausted, and that you are the person who has the splendid privilege of interposing of your own free will between him and that blow, or it may be — and from some standpoints it seems to me that that is the most beautiful of all reasons because the deepest of all — that inasmuch as we are all one with those around us, inasmuch as separation between us is separation between the lower natures and not the higher, and because in the spiritual world we are one, you may choose to pour down what you call "your" strength into [Page 25] the other's form instead of into your own; in the spiritual plane, all these forms belong equally to all of us. There is there no question whether it is "your" strength or "mine". It is all the

divine strength, of which we down here are merely the channels, and there is no separation in that world. Separation is only here. That is what is meant by being "a Saviour". A person who is a Saviour has reached the stage of unity, and to him, you and I are simply forms of himself, by identity of nature. Having risen above the sphere of separation, all forms to him are equal, and he may select the one which is most in need of help, and identify himself with that for the moment.

That is a side of Karma more difficult to grasp, unless you realise that unity is the most fundamental fact of life. If you are still in that region which sees only separation, which thinks of the "Atonement", so-called, of Christ as being a kind of contract between the Father and the Son by which the Son gave so much of His own suffering in order to protect other people from the wrath of God, if you are in that very unspiritual region, realising only the separation, the doctrine becomes essentially and fundamentally untrue. But if you are in the higher spiritual region, if you have realised that you are one Spirit and therefore one with all the forms of men, then you can pour down the divine energy into any given form, and so help to quicken and uplift it, bringing more of the divine love into [Page 26] these forms than they would otherwise have been able to reach at their stage of development. And that is what is truly meant by the doctrine of Atonement, that "the Christ" is a state in which a divine man is one with all men, and, therefore, there is no question of "his" strength and "my" strength, there is only one strength which we are sharing, because of the fundamental unity. That carries you of course, into a mystical region in which some people find it a little difficult to make their footing, and yet it is the profound truth. It is the truth which underlies some of the Christian doctrines which are least acceptable to the rational critical man of today. He misses the spiritual unity which is the real strength of that much misunderstood doctrine of Atonement, and that is why, of course, St. Paul speaks of the Christ being "born in you", because it is only by that identity of nature that this becoming a Saviour of the World can possibly be achieved.

There is much in these old doctrines that is really fundamentally true, if you can see them from the spiritual standpoint, while they are entirely crude and impossible when you look at them from below in the crude form that they have in the minds of so many people who live in the world of separateness entirely, and do not touch the world of the Spirit.

Karma then becomes a force, like any other natural force, which the stronger may ward off from the weaker, which can be suspended, quickened, [Page 27] retarded, like other energies. There is no peculiar sanctity about it that we should yield to it. These subtle regions are naturally more obscure, more difficult to understand and to realise, because they are regions into which we are striving to rise and in which we have yet to establish ourselves as our natural home. But along that line you need not think, if you find it does not recommend itself to your own intellect and conscience, and that it does not present a view which is helpful to you. In such case it is better that you should content yourself with the way of looking at karma that I put to you before, the way of neutralising a tendency, of counterbalancing two forces.

Above all things, when you are thinking of the working of karma, remember that you ought never to try to be a karmic agent of suffering to your fellow-men. I once knew a Theosophist, a very estimable person in many ways, who, when he was exceedingly unpleasant to people, or scolded them very vigorously, would say: "I am acting as a karmic agent". Do not be karmic agents of that sort. You had better leave that to those who perhaps know more about the workings of karma than you do, because it is sure to make you unpleasant in character, and to have a very bad reaction on your own nature. Be a karmic agent for good as much as you like, but do not try to take into your own hands the working of karma where it is bringing about unpleasant results to your [Page 28] neighbours. Realise that whenever you

have an opportunity of doing a good and helpful thing, it is your duty to act and to do without hesitation, without question. Never let that absurd idea of "interfering with karma" come into your minds at all. It is prevalent among many, as I know, and there is nothing perhaps that does Theosophy more harm in the world than the idea that the Theosophist will hold back from helping anyone because he says: "Everyone receives the result of his own karma. Why should I interfere with it?" Everyone who gives cause for that misconception is doing very serious harm to the Divine Wisdom of which he ought to be an upholder amongst those with whom he comes into contact.

Look then into this subject from the different standpoints I have suggested to you. Assert your own freedom of action wherever you find that you can assert it. Your ability is the only limitation imposed upon you, and you may do within the law as much as you are able to do usefully and well. The more the scientist studies, the more sure he is of his freedom. You know the old phrase I have so often quoted: "Nature is conquered by obedience", and that is the result of knowledge. As you realise the laws of nature, you can turn them to your own purpose, and no law of nature is more docile than this law of karma, because the very essence of karma, so far as humanity is concerned, is that it consists of the three ever-playing forces, [Page 29] thought and desire and activity, and therefore, is always in the making.

Make then your karma well in the present, where you can create it, and do not trouble too much about the karma coming out of the past which is beyond your reach, save as knowledge enables you to modify it. Recognise it enough to be brave and strong, to be contented with whatever life may bring you. In all your activities, in all your relations with your fellow-men, do all you can to help and uplift, giving to the full extent of your power, to the full extent of your thought, of your will, of your activity. And you may be absolutely sure that in doing that, you are carrying out and working in harmony with the Great Law and Will of God working in all around you, bringing inevitable results because only thus can men learn wisdom and have certainty in their actions. Be sure that you are free, as free as your will enables you to be; for we are only free when we have identified our will with the Divine Will, and as that Will is for ever working for human good so our will is for ever working in the same direction. In that identity of the Divine Will and the human will, and in our realisation of that identity, in that alone is the perfect freedom, which it is the destiny of all men to achieve.