

Some Karmic Problems

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IN our early Theosophical days we grasped the broad idea of Karma, and it is only as we plunge more deeply into study that we discover the innumerable complexities in the working out of the Good Law; initial difficulties vanish as our vision clears, but new ones ever arise on the mental horizon, so that our ignorance seems to increase more rapidly than our knowledge.

In taking up some of these problems for study, we may assume that all Theosophists are acquainted with the three-fold division of Karma, and with the general workings of desire, thought and action.

The first type we may consider is an action which seems to be entirely out of relation to the character of the actor, as when a man of high character suddenly commits a crime. Such an action may be the result of a cause set going long ago in his past, a cause which has not found its opportunity of acting until many lives after the one in which it was generated. We have here an extreme instance of a general rule, that a man's actions often bear little relation to his present [Page 12] ideas. His actions are mostly the results of his desirings and thinkings in the past, modified but slightly by his desirings and thinkings in the present. A man is at one and the same time the reaper and the creator of Karma, and doing is reaping. As he acts he is sowing fresh seed for the future in his present desirings and thinkings, but the action as such is the harvest of past sowings; it is the outcome of the man as he was, not of the man as he is. To judge a man by his actions is to pass judgment on the man of the past, not on the man of the present; hence "Judge not" has been the maxim of the Teachers. None can judge a man aright, unless he can read his thoughts and desires, the outgrowth of his present character. Wide is the difference between our thoughts and our actions, our aspirations and our achievements. The thought comes from what we *are* at the present time, we create it according to the powers we have evolved; the action is fettered on all sides by its generating causes in the past, and is the manifestation of what we *were*.

The most startling discrepancies between present character and present actions arise in the more highly evolved types, and especially in persons whose evolution has been rapid.

In a far-off past a man has desired and thought an evil thing, and has completed it on the astral and mental planes (we will return to this in a moment). Now behind each man is a mass of [Page 13] mixed Karma, and only a certain amount of it can be worked out in any given personality. The Lords of Karma select out of this mixed mass such portions as are sufficiently congruous with each other to be worked out in a single type, within certain limitations of character and circumstances, and having regard to the persons in incarnation at the period of this particular man's life. The evil thing awaiting manifestation as action cannot find its opportunity for many lives — very possibly because the person or persons related to it do not take birth at the time when the man is on earth. Hence it is held over life after life. Meanwhile the man is making rapid progress, develops his character and strengthens all his powers. Yet this

veritable sword of Damocles is suspended over his head, ready to fall. The opportunity for action comes at last, and the evil thing takes birth as an action. The saint sins, to the astonishment of himself and of those around him; and all men question: "Why is this? Surely his present strength should suffice to prevent such an act".

This brings us to the meaning of the phrase used above: "completed it on the astral and mental planes". An activity is composed of three stages — desire, thought, act; we wish for a thing (desire), we think how to obtain it (thought), we grasp it (act). During the first two stages we enjoy comparative freedom; as we are desiring, thought, prompted by experience, may step in and wrestle [Page 14] with the desire, may conquer and slay it, so that, that activity is stayed and does not pass on into the second stage. Or we may reach the second stage, and be thinking how to accomplish our desire, and other thoughts, again prompted by experience, may wrestle with this thought and overcome it, and the activity is stayed at the second stage. But when the second stage is completed, and the thought is ripe for action, so that only the open door of circumstance is needed for the thought to burst through it into action, then freedom is past, and the moment the door opens the act will be done.

Sometimes a wall of circumstances is built between the completed second stage and the third, and the action waits; death may come, but still the action waits, standing on the threshold until the door opens. Many lives may pass, and the door may not open; suddenly, in some life, circumstances open the door of opportunity, and the man performs the action without another thought, aye, though fifty or a hundred lives may have intervened. Such an action is inevitable, for its generating causes are complete, and, however incongruous it may be with the tenor of the life in which it occurs, it must come.

It must be remembered that the condition of the inevitableness of an action is that the desire and thought stages are *completed*. If there is a moment in which the man can think before he [Page 15] acts, if the action be not instinctive — done without thought — he can resist. There are all grades of difficulty in resisting the impulse to do a particular act, but wherever there is time to think there is power to resist.

It may not be amiss here to note the fact that if a man, who has some evil thing behind him awaiting birth as an act, be a man sufficiently evolved to remember his past, he may then destroy the evil Karma that waits on the threshold, he may burn up Karma by knowledge. For he can send against the completed thought a new current of thought of the opposite character and destroy the evil ere opportunity has manifested the thought as act. In this way also, where the act is connected with a person, an ancient enemy, the enemy may be turned into a friend by sending to him streams of good will ere the meeting on earth takes place, and the old hatred seeking revenge may be made love seeking to bless.

The great Teachers of the world, knowing this possibility, have ever inculcated universal love and goodwill, and by obedience to Them a man may transform an ancient foe into a friend, even though he knows not of his existence. For, taking it for granted that in his past he has generated some Karma of hatred, he may daily send out a wave of goodwill to all that lives, so that his love, outspreading in all directions, may quench any fires of hatred still fed by long-past wrongs. [Page 16]

Some interesting karmic problems arise in connection with World-Teachers, the Divine Men who come into the world for its helping. For instance, let us consider the "working of miracles" by the Founder of

Christianity, miracles being, as we know, manifestations of the subtler forces on the physical plane.

The Karma generated by a miracle is of two kinds. First, there is the good done by it physically and mentally; secondly, there is the effect of the miracle on the minds of the onlookers. Such a manifestation of super-physical power usually convinces a number of the spectators of the authority of the person wielding the power; as time goes on, the miracle becomes more and more of a difficulty in their minds, until in the majority of cases it comes to be regarded as a trick or a hallucination, and resentment too often grows up against the Teacher, who is regarded as a deceiver. This evil thinking grows out of the act of the Teacher, since if He had not performed the miracle, the antagonism would not have been generated.

Yet it may be necessary for the Teacher to gain by such means a hearing for his Message; it may be necessary from the condition of the earth at the time, that there should be an exhibition of occult powers. Then the Messenger of the Great Lodge must, having undertaken the task, use the necessary means to win a hearing, and vindicate [Page 17] the reality of the invisible worlds, and hence, He generates this mixed Karma of good and evil, working on for hundreds of years. We can see in the modern revolt against miracles, due to what is called "the scientific spirit", the weapon against Christianity forged by that past necessity. What can the Teacher do? He must strike the balance between the good and the bad results, and do the action which brings the preponderance of good as its result. He must deliberately take on Himself the evil Karma as part of the sacrifice He makes in helping the world. And the way this Karma works is to bind Him to the movement He has started, and He must remain with His religion, guiding, loving, helping, until the Karma is exhausted that He generated in performing His work of salvation.

Many Messengers of the White Lodge, greater and lesser, have brought such reaction on themselves in the doing of the work — Mme. H. P. Blavatsky is a notable recent example. Out of this we may draw the general principle — one of the greatest practical importance — that no action done, in an imperfect world can be wholly good in its results. "Every action is surrounded with evil as a fire is surrounded with smoke". No action that we can do is wholly good. All actions generate mixed Karma, because, being done in an imperfect world, the best must cause some friction, and we can only strive to choose the lines of work in which [Page 18] the good most preponderates. We must study the Law in order that we may understand its workings, and then in all our activities seek the balance of good, cheerfully bearing the inevitable evil which must accompany all the good we do.

Nor must we forget the goal to which the universe is tending. It bears as fruitage not only Divine Men, but within its matrix a LOGOS is evolving, who will be the builder of a higher universe. Great as a LOGOS is, He has climbed through all the forms — mineral, vegetable, animal, human, superhuman; and it is only because He has done this that He has acquired all-knowledge, and thus can begin a higher universe within the one in which He evolved. All the imperfect stages are necessary for the gaining of perfect knowledge, and what is a passing misery which produces an everlasting power? All the sufferings round us work to this end, as well as towards the evolution of each individual, and all the friction that occurs is caused by the continual growth. As we all evolve, the friction diminishes, and the Saviours in the later stages of evolution, being surrounded by more highly evolved beings, will have a better field to work in than had Those of the past, and thus less evil Karma will be generated in the doing of Their good work.

When we understand this part of the working of the Law, we can act with cheerfulness, using our best

judgment, reason, thought, and all our [Page 19] experience, performing actions to the best of our ability, sure that some good and also some evil must result, but striving to maximize the good, to minimise the evil. In proportion as we reach this state of mind will our work be efficient, and we shall be able to see that while the Logos of the universe rules and guides all, among us also a Logos is evolving and we with Him. At every stage there is and must be imperfection, good and evil mixed, and all we can do is to cause as much good and as little evil as possible. To be troubled and regretful is to increase the friction which delays the total evolution, and anxiety can only throw fresh obstacles in the way. Brave cheerfulness is our right attitude, and as we advance we must grow more calm, peaceful, serene, contented, no matter what troubles may surround us. In the midst of the storm we may carry a heart of peace. If we clear our eyes from personality; if we learn to identify ourselves with the Divine Man who is our Self; if we seek only God and the Law, indifferent to all our own circumstances; then the vision will become clearer and clearer, the mists will disappear, the path of right conduct will shine out, and even if sometimes we fail to tread it, the very failure will teach us to tread better in the future, for "Never doth one who worketh righteousness, O Beloved, tread the path of woe". [Page 20]