

## Karma

The child is the father of the man, and none the less true is it:

**My brothers! each man's life  
The outcome of his former living is;  
The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes,  
The bygone right breeds bliss.  
This is the doctrine of Karma.**

But in what way does this bygone wrong and right affect the present life! Is the stem nemesis ever following the weary traveler, with a calm, passionless, remorseless step! Is there no escape from its relentless hand! Does the eternal law of cause and effect, unmoved by sorrow and regret, ever deal out its measure of weal and woe as the consequence of past action! The shadow of the yesterday of sin - must it darken the life of today! Is karma but another name for fate! Does the child unfold the page of the already written book of life in which each event is recorded without the possibility of being erased! What is the relation of karma to the life of the individual! Is there nothing for man to do but to weave the chequered warp and woof of each earthly existence with the stained and discolored threads of past actions! Good resolves and evil tendencies sweep with resistless tide over the nature of man and we are told:

"Whatever action he performs, whether good or bad, everything done in a former body must necessarily be enjoyed or suffered." (*Anugita*, chap. III.)

There is good karma, there is bad karma, and as the wheel of life moves on, old karma is exhausted and again fresh karma is accumulated.

Although, at first, it may appear that nothing can be more fatalistic than this doctrine, yet a little consideration will show that in reality this is not the case. Karma is twofold, hidden and manifest; karma is the man that is, karma is his action; each action is a cause from which evolve the countless ramifications of effect in time and space.

"That which ye sow ye reap." In some sphere of action the harvest will be gathered. It is necessary that the man of action should realize this truth. It is equally necessary that the manifestations of this law in the operations of karma should be clearly apprehended.

Karma, broadly speaking, may be said to be the continuance of the nature of the act, and each act contains within itself the past and future. Every effect which can be realized from an act must be implicit in the act itself or it could never come into existence. Effect is but the nature of the act and cannot exist distinct from its cause. Karma only produces the manifestation of that which already exists; being action it has its operation in time, and karma may therefore be said to be the same action from another point of time. It must, moreover, be evident that not only is there a relation between the cause and the effect, but there must also be a relation between the cause and the individual who experiences the effect. If it were otherwise any man would reap the effect of the actions of any other man. We may sometimes appear to reap the effects of the actions of others, but this is only apparent. In point of fact it is our own action.

**...None else compels  
None other holds you that ye live and die.**

It is therefore necessary, in order to understand the nature of karma and its relation to the individual, to consider action in all its aspects. Every act proceeds from the mind. Beyond the mind there is no action and therefore no karma. The basis of every act is desire. The plane of desire or egotism is itself action and the matrix of every act. This plane may be considered as non-manifest, yet having a dual manifestation in what we call cause and effect, that is, the act and its consequences. In reality, both the act and its consequences are the effect, the cause being on the plane of desire. Desire is therefore the basis of action in its first manifestation on the physical plane, and desire determines the continuation of the act in its karmic relation to the individual. For a man to be free from the effects of the karma of any act, he must have passed to a state no longer yielding a basis in which that act can inhere. The ripples in the water caused by the action of the stone will extend to the farthest limit of its expanse, but no farther; they are bounded by the shore. Their course is ended when there is no longer a basis or suitable medium in which they can inhere; they expend their force and are not. Karma is, therefore, as dependent upon the present personality for its fulfillment, as it was upon the former for the first initial act. An illustration may be given which will help to explain this.

A seed, say for instance of mustard, will produce a mustard plant and nothing else; but in order that it should be produced, it is necessary that the co-operation of soil and culture should be equally present. Without the seed, however much the ground may be tilled and watered, it will not bring forth the plant, but the seed is equally inoperative without the joint action of the soil and culture.

The first great result of karmic action is the incarnation in physical life. The birth-seeking entity, consisting of desires and tendencies, presses forward towards incarnation. It is governed in the selection of its scene of manifestation by the law of economy. Whatever is the ruling tendency, that is to say, whatever group of affinities is strongest, those affinities will lead it to the point of manifestation at which there is the least opposition. It incarnates in the surroundings most in harmony with its karmic tendencies, and all the effects of actions contained in the karma so manifesting will be experienced by the individual. This governs the station of life, the sex, the conditions of the irresponsible years of childhood, the constitution with the various diseases inherent in it, and, in fact, all those determining forces of physical existence which are ordinarily classed under the terms, "heredity," and "national characteristics."

It is really the law of economy which is the truth underlying these terms and which explains them. Take for instance a nation with certain special characteristics. This is the plane of expansion for any entity whose greatest number of affinities are in harmony with those characteristics. The incoming entity, following the law of least resistance, becomes incarnated in that nation, and all karmic effects following such characteristics will accrue to the individual. This will explain what is the meaning of such expressions as the "Karma of nations," and what is true of the nation will also apply to family and caste.

It must, however, be remembered that there are many tendencies which are not exhausted in the act of incarnation. It may happen that the karma which caused an entity to incarnate in any particular surroundings, was only strong enough to carry it into physical existence. When karma is exhausted in that direction, freedom is obtained for the manifestation of other tendencies and their karmic effects. For instance, karmic force may cause an entity to incarnate in a humble sphere of life. He may be born as the child of poor parents. The karma follows the entity, endures for a longer or shorter time, and becomes exhausted. From that point, the child takes a line of life totally different from his surroundings. Other affinities engendered

by former action express themselves in their karmic results. The lingering effects of the past karma may still manifest in the way of obstacles and obstructions which are surmounted with varying degrees of success according to their intensity.

From the standpoint of a special creation for each entity entering the world, there is vast and unaccountable injustice. From the standpoint of karma, the strange vicissitudes and apparent chances of life can be considered in a different light, as the unerring manifestation of cause and sequence. In a family, all under the same conditions of poverty and ignorance, one child will be separated from the others and thrown into surroundings very dissimilar. He may be adopted by a rich man, or through some freak of fortune receive an education giving him at once a different position. The karma in operation at the time of birth being exhausted, other karma asserts itself.

A very important question is here presented: Can an individual affect his own karma, and, if so, to what degree and in what manner?

It has been said that karma is the continuance of the act, and for any particular line of karma to exert itself, it is necessary that there should be the basis of the act engendering that karma in which it can inhere and operate. But action has many planes in which it can inhere. There is the physical plane - the body with its senses and organs; then there is the intellectual plane - memory, which binds the impressions of the senses into a consecutive whole, and reason, which puts in orderly arrangement its storehouse of facts. Beyond the plane of intellect there is the plane of emotion, the plane of preference for one object rather than another - the fourth principle of the man. These three, physical, intellectual, and emotional, deal entirely with objects of sense perception, and may be called the great battlefield of karma. There is also the plane of ethics, the plane of discrimination of the "I ought to do this, I ought not to do that." This plane harmonizes the intellect and the emotions. All these are the planes of karma or action, what to do, and what not to do. It is the mind as the basis of desire that initiates action on the various planes, and it is only through the mind that the effects of rest and action can be received.

An entity enters incarnation with karmic energy from past existences, that is to say, the action of past lives is awaiting its development as effect. This karmic energy presses into manifestation in harmony with the basic nature of the act. Physical karma will manifest in the physical tendencies bringing enjoyment and suffering. The intellectual and the ethical planes are also in the same manner the result of the past karmic tendencies, and the man as he is, with his moral and intellectual faculties, is in unbroken continuity with the past.

The entity at birth has therefore a definite amount of karmic energy. After incarnation this awaits the period in life at which fresh karma begins. Up to the time of responsibility it is, as we have seen, the initial karma only that manifests. From that time, the fresh personality becomes the ruler of his own destiny. It is a great mistake to suppose that an individual is the mere puppet of the past, the helpless victim of fate. The law of karma is not fatalism, and a little consideration will show that it is possible for an individual to affect his own karma. If a greater amount of energy be taken up on one plane than on another, this will cause the past karma to unfold itself on that plane. For instance, one who lives entirely on the plane of sense gratification will from the plane beyond draw the energy required for the fulfillment of his desires. Let us illustrate by dividing man into upper and lower natures. By directing the mind and aspirations to the lower plane, a "fire" or center of attraction, is set up there, and in order to feed and fatten it, the energies of the whole upper plane are drawn down and exhausted in supplying the energy needed below, due to

the indulgence of sense gratification. On the other hand, the center of attraction may be fixed in the upper portion, and then all the needed energy goes there to result in increase of spirituality. It must be remembered that Nature is all-bountiful, and withholds not her hand. The demand is made, and the supply will come. But at what cost? That energy which should have strengthened the moral nature, and fulfilled the aspirations after good, is drawn to the lower desires. By degrees the higher planes are exhausted of vitality, and the good and bad karma of an entity will be absorbed on the physical plane. If, on the other hand, the interest is detached from the plane of sense gratification, if there is a constant effort to fix the mind on the attainment of the highest ideal, the result will be that the past karma will find no basis in which to inhere on the physical plane. Karma will therefore be manifested only in harmony with the plane of desire. The sense energy of the physical plane will exhaust itself on a higher plane, and thus become transmuted in its effects.

What the means are, by which the effects of karma can be thus changed, is also clear. A person can have no attachment for a thing he does not think about; therefore, the first step must be to fix the thought on the highest ideal. In this connection, one remark may be made on the subject of repentance. Repentance is a form of thought in which the mind is constantly recurring to a sin. It has therefore to be avoided if one would set the mind free from sin and its karmic results. All sin has its origin in the mind. The more the mind dwells on any course of conduct, whether with pleasure or pain, the less chance is there for it to become detached from such action. The *manas* (mind) is the knot of the heart; when that is untied from any object, in other words, when the mind loses its interest in any object, there will no longer be a link between the karma connected with that object and the individual.

It is the attitude of the mind which draws the karmic cords tightly round the soul. It imprisons the aspirations, and binds them with chains of difficulty and obstruction. It is desire that causes the past karma to take form and shape and build the house of day. It must be through non-attachment that the soul will burst through the walls of pain; it will be only through a change of mind that the karmic burden will be lilted.

However inescapably true that action brings its own result, yet "there is no destruction here of the actions good or not good. Coming to one body after another they become ripened in their respective ways." This ripening is the work of the individual. The free will of man asserts itself and he becomes his own savior. To the worldly man, karma is a stern Nemesis; to the spiritual man, karma unfolds itself in harmony with his highest aspirations. He will look with tranquility alike on past and future, neither dwelling with remorse on past sin, nor living in expectation of reward for present action.