

Karma: The Law of Consequences

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Theosophical Manual Series

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I — INTRODUCTORY

The word karma refers to one of the basic teachings of theosophy by which it is able to explain the meaning of human life and to resolve its enigmas and seeming injustices. It is a Sanskrit term expressing tersely the principle of action and reaction, or the law of consequences. This word and the idea which it embodies are now quite commonly used in fiction and philosophy, cinema and drama. Karma is a law of unerring, never-failing justice, the workings of which stretch from the atom to the uttermost and innermost cosmic spaces; from the birth of a thought to that of a universe.

In the New Testament, the action of karma is formulated in the well-known words of Paul in his *Epistle to the Galatians* 6:7: "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Yet while it has been thus forcibly expressed by the great Christian apostle and initiate, the Christian nations, crippled by the lack of any real philosophy of life, have failed to understand the profound meaning in this formulation of the law of ethical justice. Overlooking its far-reaching action, they have accepted it superficially only and not as a working

hypothesis on mental and spiritual planes. But this has been the case only in the field of moral and social life, for the law of action and reaction is so evident in the physical world that our lives are unconsciously guided by our sense of its infallibility. Day follows night unflinchingly, as birth is succeeded by death. Certain common principles of mechanics expressing this law are understood and acted upon instinctively, even by children. Law and order are the rule everywhere and are constantly readjusting the disorder which ignorance and carelessness produce. The presence of this law of logical results following upon action is indeed plainly revealed over the whole range of external nature, yet the Western world, at least, has failed to realize its universal reign and to follow the indelible record written beneath the surface.

This failure to connect human life with the universal working of the habit of action and reaction amounted, in the last century, to a veritable mental aberration. In the pursuit of science cause and effect on the physical plane were recorded with the greatest accuracy; their relation was studied with such skill that results could be foreseen and absolutely relied upon. Out of the close observations of the transformations of nature, in which every atom of energy had to be accounted for, grew the formulation of the law of the Conservation of Energy, which, although only partly true, still disclosed the reign of trustworthy law in the physical world. Yet beyond the borderline which our present physical senses cannot cross, there was said to be chaos — mere chance — reigning, and we heard such meaningless expressions as "a fortuitous concourse of atoms"; until finally the strange conclusion was drawn that the very minds which had so carefully observed and comprehended the reactions of matter, were themselves nothing but the secretions of that which they had studied and controlled. This special nightmare is passing, for now we find some leading scientists asserting that "mind-stuff" or consciousness, rather than matter, is the fundamental thing in the universe. (Cf. *The Esoteric Tradition* by G. de Purucker, 3rd & rev. ed., pp. 203-4.) Nevertheless, this old error of the scientists is here cited to show how adrift humanity has been without a knowledge of the true philosophy of life. Lacking this, they have studied effects only, and through these have undertaken the difficult, indeed impossible, task of finding causes. Theosophy, the ancient wisdom, on the contrary, shows the causes which explain the effects we everywhere observe.

To understand karma, it must first be clearly perceived that the cosmos, the universe, is a unit — one single organism composed of an infinite number of lesser organisms in an immense variety of grades of consciousness and development, all united into a single whole by the one consciousness which includes and is common to them all. This sublime idea is well illustrated by man himself, who is a universe, a cosmos, in miniature. Is he not composed of an almost infinite number of centers of life or consciousness — atoms, molecules, cells, organs, ganglia, etc. — under the unifying overlordship of the human individual consciousness, which pervades and unifies and directs them all? And just as a felon on the finger is felt by the whole body, so we are taught that a thought of hatred or a throb of mental anguish has its due effect throughout the greater cosmic organism. For the law of action and reaction, of cause and effect, so evident in the limited sphere of mere physical life, is simply an evidence on the surface of what takes place in the inner spiritual and causal realms. The physicist perceives only that action and reaction are equal in the world of matter, but the eye of the spiritual seer discovers the same law acting behind the scenes, and acting with far greater dynamic energy. In *The Key to Theosophy*, H. P. Blavatsky defines karma as

. . . the *Ultimate Law* of the Universe, the source, origin and fount of all other laws which exist throughout Nature. Karma is the inerring law which adjusts effect to cause, on the physical, mental and spiritual planes of being. As no cause remains without its due effect from greatest to least, from a cosmic disturbance down to the movement of your hand, and as like produces like, *Karma* is that unseen and unknown law *which adjusts wisely, intelligently and equitably* each effect to its cause, tracing the latter back to its producer. — p. 201, orig. ed.

From the foregoing it is plainly seen that karma is the ultimate law of the universe because every entity contained within the cosmos is a vital part of it. Every thought and action affects, to the degree of energy involved, every other entity, which inevitably reacts in corresponding degree upon the thinker of the thought or the performer of the action.

It not infrequently happens that an evil intent is thwarted on the physical plane. A man, for instance, may be filled with hatred for another; he may even go so far as to plan to kill him. But the object of his evil passion, we will imagine, suddenly dies. Thoughts and desires, however, are energies, the more real and powerful the

nearer their momentum approaches to expression. In this case the death of the intended victim turns that dark torrent back upon its creator, within whose nature this strong evil energy has been brought into being. Shall this force, though physically unexpressed, produce no effect? Remembering the law of action and reaction, we see that can never be. It is at least plain that the hater has poisoned his own nature. He has altered his character for the worse, and the process of repairing the damage is certain to be a painful one.

It is here that the twin doctrine to karma comes in to make possible the complete process of human evolution — the doctrine of *reincarnation*. This means the rebirth of the spiritual part of man again and again on this earth. At each rebirth or reincarnation he has a new body which is the karmic result of the thoughts and actions of his past lives. And as with his body so with his environment: it is the unerring consequence of what he has desired, worked for, or failed in, during past lives on this earth. Thus by living again and again here on earth and experiencing the exact effects of what he has made himself in the past, he gradually learns how to control and develop his own energies and faculties, and so begins to re-create his destiny. This is what Katherine Tingley called "self-directed evolution." But this wonderful process of self-salvation would not be possible unless all are reborn to reap in character and environment what they have sown in thoughts, desires, and actions in previous lives. Men do not "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles": neither do they sow a crop in one place and reap it in another.

So in some future life on earth these two enemies pictured above must meet again, drawn together by those very unexpended forces which connected them before; for hate is as magnetic and dynamic as love. Then, who can tell? — will the rebound return as hate to the one who sent it forth? Or will the victim of this evil energy be great enough to work the magic transmutation, by the divine alchemy of compassion — great enough to transform hate into love? However this may eventuate, the energy brought into being must produce its effect, it may be through many lives, until equilibrium or harmony is restored. We little realize with what dynamics we so idly play in this magnetic ocean of life in which we live. Action and reaction, cause and effect, energy and its consequences, balance each other not only in the outer world of physical effects but also through the inner spiritual and causal worlds where moral and ethical forces act with mathematical precision. This is the message which theosophy brings regarding the majestic law of karma, this merciful law which is our teacher, friend, and savior.

II — IS KARMA BLIND FORCE?

It has been stated that to understand karma, the universe must be recognised as an organic whole. If this were not the case, its various parts could not act and react upon each other. Take the human body as an example. Through it runs a complex system of nerves, arteries, and avenues for the circulation of electrovital forces, intimately and instantly connecting every organ, cell, and atom with every other. Let the foot slip and immediately the counteracting muscles seek to restore the balance. The eye closes automatically if a foreign substance threatens to enter it. The reaction is perfect because the body is an organism. Further it is necessary to observe that every cell in this organism is an individual life under the control of a higher center. In the case of a muscle, for instance, all the cells act together; and similarly in an organ. So by a series of grades the cells come under the control of more and more highly developed centers up to the brain, and through that to an invisible center of intelligence which unifies and coordinates all the functions of this marvelous mechanism, making of it an organism. Then the body itself is part of a greater organism, man himself. Men collectively form humanity. Above this are innumerable hosts of beings gradually mounting, each grade vitally connected with and responsible for the grade below it, and helped by the grade above it. Thus we have beings above the human reaching up to gods; then above them, supergods, planetary spirits; rulers of solar systems; greater ones holding together groups of solar systems; up and up to a ruler of a universe and ever up to THAT, the Unknown, behind all manifestation. Rivers of life connect all these infinite grades of beings, like a network of nerves through which run vital currents unceasingly. And this mighty being fills all space, is indeed space itself. Or we can say that space consists of conscious beings of infinite types interlinked and interdependent.

This concept may seem strange to many because unfamiliar, but let the mind dwell upon it and it will gradually become clear that unless the universe was an organic unit, it could not hold together. The chaos which some of our physical scientists have imagined would actually exist, and there would not be the beautiful order and harmony which we have come to rely upon in those celestial bodies which we see

apparently floating in an ocean of ether — bodies indeed of divine beings. The universe is truly what its name implies — a whole — and this is what theosophists mean when they declare that "brotherhood is a fact in nature." This identity of origin and nature, this "one in many" and "many in one" makes not only possible but inevitable the interaction of all the parts of this whole and their reaction to each other.

G. de Purucker in *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, page 35, presents the same idea, as follows:

When man realizes that he is one with all that is, inwards and outwards, high and low; that he is one with them, not merely as members of a community are one, not merely as individuals of an army are one, but like the molecules of our own flesh, like the atoms of the molecule, like the electrons of the atom, composing one unity — not a mere union but a spiritual *unity* — then he sees truth.

We see that interdependence is a fundamental principle in the universe, and we shall find that this basic principle is worked out in all parts of the universal organism. We have shown the human body as an illustration of it. The atom, the solar system, the galaxy, all in their structure and their workings proclaim the basic reality of harmony and interdependence as the underlying, regulating principle throughout all life.

Every action, then, every expenditure of energy, whether physical, mental, or moral, has its due effect upon this underlying harmony, this basic balance and interdependence. Selfish thoughts or actions disturb the harmony and suffering in the near or far future results. We see all around us those whose disappointments and struggles in unfavorable environments are the result of ignorance and wrongdoing in this or past lives. The condition exists in some degree in the lives of all of us, for everyone has made mistakes in past lives, as we are making them now. G. de Purucker has put the matter very forcibly in *Man in Evolution*, chapter 14, "The Rationale of Reincarnation," p. 177:

Everything that we do, everything that we think, is a productive cause, affecting us and affecting those around us, yet leaving the seeds and the fruits of such thoughts and actions in ourself. This is common knowledge. We have laid up for ourself in past lives treasures for happiness; but we may have also laid up for ourself a treasure house of another kind, and we are doing similarly in our present life.

But, although karma is spoken of as a law, there is no lawgiver, no over-ruling entity, who decrees this or that. Rather is it a quality inherent in the very nature of things. The ancient teaching is that every action is the result of a previous cause, and then becomes a cause for a future action, and so on indefinitely. This constant movement is not the outcome of blind forces, but a living stream of changes flowing from the thoughts, acts, emotions and feelings, aspirations, and desires of the lives which make up and are the universe.

Man is one of an innumerable host of beings, imbodyed consciousnesses, who infill the universe. Nowhere do we find anything other than these hierarchies of beings, these consciousnesses active during the cosmic manvantara, and each individual of these hosts weaving its own web of destiny, its energies pouring out of its own inner being and directed by the intelligence streaming from its own spiritual and mental foci. — G. de Purucker, *The Esoteric Tradition*, 3rd & rev. ed., p. 248

There is no lawgiver, we repeat, and yet in a way there may be said to be agents of karma. Who are they? They are those great and wise beings who have consciously found their place in the universe; who are sufficiently evolved to be perfected in regard to a certain stage or plane, and therefore can be relied upon to work in harmony with universal law over that field. Above them are others, and so on ad infinitum.

It goes without saying that in this orderly, complex universe there is a plan, a meaning, and that every unit, being a part of the universe, is part of the plan. When, therefore, the harmony is disturbed by unevolved, learning entities anywhere, there is an overwhelming force tending to restore it. The actions of karma are always toward the restoration of harmony, but as every change is due to consciousness and the universe is but imbodyed consciousness, in the last analysis karmic adjustments are made by conscious beings, who are incarnate justice in their field of action. For instance, the ruler of a planet is such because it has reached that point in evolution when it has absolute knowledge of everything pertaining to that planet. Above that stage it is a learner, but as to the realm below it, it is perfected. Its knowledge thereof is of the nature of intuition or

instant vision, and its guidance must be in harmony with justice and the divine plan. It is said that the gods never interfere with karma. They could not. Learning beings must be free to work out their own destiny, which means that their mistakes recoil upon themselves, for it is thus that they learn. Men themselves decide their fate by their choice of the various alternatives which life presents, while karmic agents execute what man has decreed.

Those above, however, guide, protect, and help forward the evolution of their younger brothers. The teaching is very beautiful and inspiring as to these relations. All the way up the ladder of life, the greater stand to those next below as parent to child. They live to inspire, to serve their offspring, and in later, more highly developed stages of humanity this relationship is recognised. Even great Masters, though below the level of godhood and still human beings, are perfected as to *our* plane and turn back to give help, which we realize as little as does the babe its mother's watchful care. Thus it is that the universe is bound together with a glowing web of compassion.

Canst thou destroy divine COMPASSION? Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of LAWS — eternal Harmony, Alaya's SELF; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting Right, and fitness of all things, the law of love eternal.

The more thou dost become at one with it, thy being melted in its BEING, the more thy Soul unites with that which IS, the more thou wilt become COMPASSION ABSOLUTE. — H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, pp. 69-70, orig. ed.

III — YOU ARE YOUR OWN KARMA

Sow an act, and you will reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you will reap a destiny, because habits build character. This is the sequence: an act, a habit, a character, and a destiny. You are the creator of yourself. What you make yourself to be now, you will be in the future. What you are now, is precisely what you have made yourself to be in the past. What you sow, you shall reap. — G. de Purucker, *Golden Precepts of Esotericism*, p. 104

It is a fundamental teaching of the wisdom-religion that every atom, being an inseparable part of the universe, has locked up within itself all the potentialities of that universe, as the seed contains the future tree locked up within itself. Hence every atom will in time become a man — then a god, then reach still higher grades of divine life.

It follows that in the case of man these possibilities have been unfolded as far as the human stage, at which point is incurred the responsibility of creating personal karma. From this time forward, equipped with mind and free will, he will carve his own destiny. Theosophy teaches that in those early days humanity was instructed as to the purpose of life by great teachers, who launched these pilgrims on their long journey to godhood. Many, many times since then have they lived — in various climes under various racial conditions, and in different bygone civilizations. Man has never been left without sufficient light to find the Way: there has been the voice of conscience; there have been the results of wrong and right action as lessons for the future; there have been mind to interpret these and free will to choose. Therefore it is fair to say that man has created himself and is his own karma.

This latter expression implies the fact that every act and thought alters character. From moment to moment we change. Nothing remains for an instant *in statu quo*, so that constantly and progressively man is the resultant, the fruitage, of all his thoughts, emotions, actions; of the use or non-use of his will. He stands at every moment as his own autobiography — or he is the great artist, having the tools of destiny in hand and compelled under the laws of being, to carve and carve until the outer becomes a worthy temple for the god within. Life is indeed the highest art.

Every moment, then, may be taken as a new starting point, as expressed in a beautiful "Salutation to the Dawn":

Look to this Day, for it is Life, the very Life of Life. In its brief course lie all the possibilities and

realities of your existence.

Plainly, one can unfold or grow only from the point at which one has arrived. Whatever of power or vision has been gained, none can take away, and whatever of burdensome rubbish, pernicious habits, or degrading qualities one has acquired, can evidently be removed only by the evoking of the will of the one who acquired them. They have become a part of the nature, and no extraneous Savior can by any process of magic extract them from the character of another. But the saviors do seek, and all down the ages have sought, to awaken the warrior in the heart of every pilgrim who has lost his way. When such awakening happens, the sway of karma is altered. The whole purpose of life takes a new direction and gradually constructive forces are generated which modify the old destructive ones. We *must* meet the energies already generated, but we can then meet them with courage and understanding and with a new armor which they cannot pierce — possibly even with an opposite equal force which will neutralize them.

Weak characters furnish a weak focus for karma. They take things easily, as they come, drift along the river of life, enjoy and suffer without asking why, and leave their bodies much as they entered them.

But Nature will not have it thus always: finally there comes the karmic impulse, the karmic stimulus, then you suffer a little; but in doing so you awaken and begin to grow. Bless the karmic stimulus; be not afraid of it. Look to the essential divinity within. Remember that everything that happens is transient, and that you can learn from everything, and in learning you will grow — grow great, and from greatness pass to a larger sphere of greatness. — G. de Purucker, *Questions We All Ask*, Series I, No. 34

But when the real man is aroused and consciously grips himself and cooperates with nature, which is seeking to evolve him, his unfolding proceeds rapidly. The past will decide the future events. They may bring quickly a sense of glorious freedom with deeper sympathies, new friends and opportunities; or perhaps more often, misfortunes, suffering, or enemies may be called out of the mysterious past; for none of us has avoided clashes with the universal law. All this, however, is but clearing the way. Eventually such self-directed evolution will lead out into the open spaces of freedom; into glorious possibilities; into friendship with those great ones who have overcome.

We are constantly upon the fringe of great opportunities and at some crucial point; and then, instead of grasping these opportunities and moving on to a larger view and a broader spiritual life, we shrink, we hold back through timidity — and so we lose them all. The present is an unusual cycle, and never in this life shall we meet present opportunities again . . .

Fear nothing, for every renewed effort raises all former failures into lessons, all sins into experiences. Understand me when I say that in the light of renewed effort the karma of all your past alters; it no longer threatens. It passes from the plane of penalty before the soul's eye, up to that of tuition. It stands as a monument, a reminder of past weakness, and a warning against future failure.

So fear nothing for yourself; you are behind the shield of your reborn endeavor, though you have failed a hundred times. Try slowly to make it your motive for fidelity that others may be faithful. Fear only to fail in your duty to others, and even then let your fear be for *them*, not yourself. — Katherine Tingley, *Theosophy: the Path of the Mystic*, pp. 68-9

Physical disease is one of the unpleasant expressions of past karma. It even shows itself in infants, who may come into life with such marks. The compilers of the New Testament give evidence of having recognised this fact in the question recorded in *The Gospel according to Saint John* 9:2: "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Dr. de Purucker, in speaking of disease, has said:

I will tell you a little esoteric secret in this connexion: Every time when a man flies into a passion, whether of desire or of anger, whether of fear or of hate, he has lost control of himself and at the time exemplifies the characteristic and power of some elemental being under whose influence he

has fallen. This natural fact, so simple, so easily understood, is the basis of the old superstition about the action upon human beings of 'devils.'

These elementals are not 'devils'; they are simply elemental beings, and they have a natural and strong affinity for man. They look upon man much as we humans look to the gods; but when the man becomes degenerate and drops to their lower sphere, then is their chance. Automatically and instinctively they act; and they act as impersonally and as much without conscience as does the electric current. And I may say here that the electric current is but a stream or flow of these elemental beings. Turn the switch, release the current, and, if the circumstances are right, the man whose hand touched the switch is a dead man.

I will go a little farther: Diseases are the result of loss of self-control at some time, either in this or in some past life. You can say that an Elemental has entered into the man's vital aura . . . and if the man does not oust it with his will and by aspiration to better things, in other words by resuming his normal spiritual manhood, that seed will grow, and disease or horrible consequences will be the result for him. -- *Questions We All Ask*, Series II, 31

This ousting it with one's will is quite different from apparent cures through psychic methods.

A man also can indeed apparently cure certain diseases of the body, if he can use certain psychological faculties that he has. . . . But the results . . . are not good. All disease is a purging, a purgation, a cleansing. Nature's law is that the poison should come out. If it remains within, it poisons the body, the constitution, still worse than before; and the physicians of the future will know perfectly well how to lead disease out of the body so that the body shall not be injured at all. But be very careful about damming it back, throwing it back into the stream of consciousness; for one of these days the trouble will come out despite your best efforts and it will have gained strength and power and be like ten devils worse than the first. — *Questions We All Ask*, Series II, 9

It might be added that the physicians referred to in the above quotation are those of the far distant, not immediate future. Every inharmony, through the beneficent processes of nature, tends to work to the surface. Sometimes we observe in ourselves or in others a succession of mishaps or disasters which are commonly attributed to "bad luck." Then suddenly Dame Fortune changes her tactics, and everything undertaken turns out well. This suggests that the so-called bad karma has expended its force. But it is truly bad only if the lessons have not been learned; only if one continues to roam through life in an idle, inconsequent attitude, willing to be buffeted alternately by good and bad "luck." If people could only realize that they are the results of what they have thought and felt and done in this and other lives; that through these thoughts and acts they have altered the very fabric of their character — a character often which invites misfortune — would they not learn self-control, kindness, helpful cooperation, and thus become beneficent forces in nature? Human nature is complex, and the results of inharmony will naturally express themselves through the channels where the disturbance occurred.

This whole subject is complicated in its workings though simple in its broad outlines, and it would be idle for us in our present stage of evolution to attempt to follow the details. We sometimes see a deformed body, fine mind, and sunny disposition in the same individual; or again, a robust body housing a distorted mind and selfish disposition. In the former case, seeds of disease are working off, while in the latter, they are being planted, even though the physical energies may be strong enough to resist them through that incarnation. Often we see a beautiful nature, refined, sympathetic, in one who is working strenuously to benefit mankind, but who is careless regarding the body. It would seem in such a case that karma would begin and end on the physical plane, though there must always be a reaction from one plane to another. Or, one may concentrate his energies on the laws of health and forget the sufferings of his fellow men. Such may gain a strong body temporarily, but at what cost! Law reigns throughout. We attain what we ardently strive for. The infinite potentialities of the universe are before us, but only he whose note chimes with that of the overmastering law — the law of compassion — can hold his victories.

When at last this great achievement becomes a fact, it is said that man rises above karma. This, however is only a figure of speech. Karma acts forever, everywhere, but when the great currents of the universe are no

more thwarted, no friction is felt. One moves forward easily, rapidly, knowing the "glory of action" and the "bliss of growth."

Yes; "our destiny *is* written in the stars!" Only, the closer the union between the mortal reflection MAN and his celestial PROTOTYPE, the less dangerous the external conditions and subsequent reincarnations — which neither Buddhas nor Christs can escape. This is not superstition, least of all is it *Fatalism*. The latter implies a blind course of some still blinder power, and man is a free agent during his stay on earth. He cannot escape his *ruling* Destiny, but he has the choice of two paths that lead him in that direction, and he can reach the goal of misery — if such is decreed to him, either in the snowy white robes of the Martyr, or in the soiled garments of a volunteer in the iniquitous course; for, there are *external and internal conditions* which affect the determination of our will upon our actions, and it is in our power to follow either of the two. Those who believe in *Karma* have to believe in *destiny*, which, from birth to death, every man is weaving thread by thread around himself, as a spider does his cobweb; and this destiny is guided either by the heavenly voice of the invisible *prototype* outside of us, or by our more intimate *astral*, or inner man, who is but too often the evil genius of the embodied entity called man. Both these lead on the outward man, but one of them must prevail; and from the very beginning of the invisible affray the stern and implacable *law of compensation* steps in and takes its course, faithfully following the fluctuations. When the last strand is woven, and man is seemingly enwrapped in the network of his own doing, then he finds himself completely under the empire of this *self-made* destiny. It then either fixes him like the inert shell against the immovable rock, or carries him away like a feather in a whirlwind raised by his own actions, and this is — KARMA. — H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* 1:639

IV — THE PROBLEM OF HEREDITY

It may be asked, if you are your own karma, how explain heredity? Theosophy offers here a solution more in harmony with facts as we observe them, as follows: one is born into his present family because he has been connected with it in the past and belongs there because of the psychomagnetic ties previously created. These ties consist of vital energies and must have their effects in the sphere where they were brought into existence. In studying karma, we see again here that we must study equally the teaching of reincarnation, as one is meaningless without the other. We are born among certain people and of certain parents because of the ties we formed with them in the past. As long as we love or hate anyone, we have a tie with that individual which will persist as long as that love or hate continues. So we all come back to earth together — friends, relatives, enemies — to take up again our joys and sorrows, our work and play, our experiences and lessons in human life.

We may say that the family affords the expression for individual heredity, for we repeat again what cannot too often be recalled: karma is inherent in the individual, it is not imposed from the outside. Remembering this, we see that the heredity of a reincarnating entity is determined by what it itself is. Why do the members of one family differ, often so widely, although all are born under similar conditions and from the same hereditary strain?

The differing combinations of hereditary qualities in individuals are governed by the psychomagnetic attractions inherent in the *skandhas* of the reincarnating entity. The Sanskrit word "skandhas" is used in theosophical literature because there is no English word to designate exactly those qualities which are the concentrated aggregate, the essence, of the personal life of an entity. They refer to the attributes, tendencies, qualities, both high and low, which distinguish one personality from another. They are the seeds of acts, thoughts, and feelings, either of a material nature, which help to form the next body, or of mental or moral traits.

The nature and action of the skandhas can best be grasped if we understand first about the life-atoms. These may be described as the souls of the atoms, through which the incarnating entity is enabled to embody itself. They are the building blocks of which all things are fashioned. They exist on every plane in nature, spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, and in every degree of development or evolution within those planes. In human

life, they form the human body with its cells and organs, they form our intermediate mental or emotional nature, and also our spiritual constitution.

These life-atoms which now make up our physical bodies, and also our psychological and our spiritual natures, are being every second impressed by our every thought and action, no matter what. If we are loving, pure, unselfish, joyous, we have given them that impress; and equally we can impress them with selfishness, qualities of passion and hate, or give them vibrations of fear or pessimism. As our bodies and inner natures are constantly changing through growth, development, and decline, these life-atoms do not stay with us, but flow out from us to combine temporarily with those other natures and substances which are akin to the impressions they have absorbed from us.

This happens all through life, but more completely after so-called physical death. Then there is a separation of the principles which have made up the human being. The spiritual part, after withdrawing into itself all of the personal man that had become purified, rises to higher spheres; the passionate, emotional nature rests on its own plane for a time before disintegrating; and the body as we know, is dissolved quickly. Then the life-atoms on all these planes, charged with the tendencies and qualities given them in the last earth-life, find their natural habitats. But on reincarnation, under the influence of natural attraction, they flock back to the entity which sent them forth.

It is these life-atoms which carry the skandhas, the aroma of our past lives. They are the building materials of many different degrees of evolution which thus shape by their inherent characteristics the personality that is about to be born. As stated by G. de Purucker in *Man in Evolution*:

the next body that we shall get will be — not the same old body that we had before; that is to say, not the same John Smith or Mary Brown, not at all; for John Smith and Mary Brown are but a name and a form — but our new body will be composed of these same life-atoms in which we lived and worked and expressed ourself in the preceding incarnation . . . these life-atoms exist not merely on this physical plane . . . they exist likewise on the intermediate planes; that is to say, on the astral and emotional planes, as well as on the intellectual and spiritual planes. — p. 179

It might be added that because they are our own children, we are responsible for them. They, too, are evolving entities, bound to us throughout the ages. Only the outlines of the changes which bridge the apparent gap between two incarnations on earth of the human ego have been roughly sketched, in order to sustain the explanation regarding heredity given by theosophy. Similarities as well as differences are thus accounted for in a way which is not only logical but just.

We reap what we sow, and where we have sown; and if we have sown seeds of good and evil in this life and on this earth, it is only in another life on this earth that we can reap what we have sown. Would not a farmer be considered a lunatic did he sow a field in one part of the country where he lived, and some months later travel to another part of the country, far from where he sowed his seed, in order to reap his crop? So it is with man. He sows seeds of thought and action, and he reaps that crop where he sowed them, which is in himself and in this physical world.

Our universe is ruled by law and order; and this word karma expresses that fact of universal harmony and consistency manifesting as what we call law and order. — *Man in Evolution*, p. 177

V — FATALISM OR DESTINY

This Law — whether Conscious or Unconscious — predestines nothing and no one. It exists from and in Eternity, truly, for it is ETERNITY itself; and as such, since no act can be co-equal with eternity, it cannot be said to act, for it is ACTION itself. It is not the Wave which drowns a man, but the *personal* action of the wretch, who goes deliberately and places himself under the *impersonal* action of the laws that govern the Ocean's motion. — *The Secret Doctrine* 2:305

Probably there is no truth which cannot be perverted so as to appear something it is not. As has been said, karma is essentially, intrinsically, a doctrine of free will. Yet this, which implies choice of action, is often, by

a strange mental twist, interpreted as fatalism. What imp of darkness is it that has ever suggested to man — the embryo god, the carver of his own destiny — that he lives under a doom foreordained? But in any case, whatever may be the surface expression of a mood, every man, deep in his nature, knows that he is free to act and to think. As evidence, he constantly makes efforts in this direction or that from which he expects results. If he attributes to himself those which are favorable, by what logic is the "will of God" to account for the others — unless, indeed, it be the will of the god within himself? Or, as so excellently expressed:

In practical daily life there is no uncertainty about man's having free will. A man's freedom, within certain natural limits, is obvious. In his relations to his fellow-men his freedom of choice and therefore his responsibility are fundamental. Our whole social structure and our laws are founded upon it. The whole idea of moral responsibility presupposes free will. A man who refused to act, or to accept responsibility for his acts, on the ground that he did not have free will, would be considered a man of addled brain or one obstructing duty and right action by senseless caviling. A man whose acts escape the control of his will is defective, a hysteric, or insane. The civil Courts would send him to an asylum, not to jail. They do not execute a man whose free will is inhibited.

The question of free will is much beclouded by an exaggerated idea of what freedom is. The assumption, perhaps unconscious, is that if there are any limitations there is no freedom.

Freedom can only be exercised on condition that it is not abused. A man has personal freedom within the laws of the society to which he belongs. If he violates these laws his freedom is thereafter limited to the inside walls of a prison. Does anyone ever doubt or question that a man at liberty has freedom when compared to a man in prison?

In a society governed by law and order all men have freedom within the limits of law and while they conform to the social order. A law-abiding citizen is not a slave because he conforms to the necessary restraints of the social order. — *Lucifer* (6:9), March, 1935

Law-breakers must suffer penalties, more manifestly when the *higher* law is broken — that law of unity, cooperation, and compassion which holds the universe together, which is the very nature, the essence of things. Every current set in motion strikes its objective and returns, rebounding with force in direct proportion as it is aimed consciously against the higher law. *But* it is always possible to start a counter current to weaken or neutralize the force of the first. Suppose, for instance, that one is involved in a family feud like those which poisoned the life of Venice during the Middle Ages, with feelings running higher and fed with new life by every generation; and that then such a one resolved — as happened sometimes in those days — to break the spell, to make offers of friendship and settle the old quarrel. That would mean starting a new karma to counteract the old and would bring peace where there had been discord.

There is another twist which the selfish lower mind sometimes brings to bear upon this teaching. All, at times, while traveling their own path, run into others suffering from accidents or misfortunes with which they are apparently disconnected, and occasionally one with a pharisaical respect for the law hesitates to interfere with the other's karma. Or he may be frankly brutal and say: "The sufferer brought it on himself; let him take the consequences." In such cases, there is always this to be considered: we *may* run into the misfortunes of another because in the past we helped to bring them about; and this is to be remembered: "Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin" (*The Voice of the Silence*). In this intricate web of life binding us all together, how often in our blindness do we make a tangle of the threads!

But let us beware of indifference. The man fallen by the wayside which we for the moment travel, has a claim upon us. If it is his karma to be sore beset, it is equally his karma that someone able to help him should come along. That needs no argument, surely. But more fundamental than the law of consequences which brought us there, is the "Law of Laws, Compassion." It is our patent *duty* to help and succor him. We can trust the laws of divine justice to see to it that a man gets what he deserves, "without ourselves giving an extra pinch." And Dr. de Purucker says very plainly:

It is our duty to help others, where we see that they are in danger or in pain, or need help. It is our duty to share what we have of the beautiful and of the good, with others. This is simply decently

We are our brother's keeper. Woe to us if we callously "pass by on the other side." Better the millstone around our neck and the depths of the sea to receive us.

Certain things indeed *are* inevitable. We are all in the universe and we *must* live. We are here on this earth and we must continue to come back to it again and again until we learn its lessons — we are tied to it until that day. But we ourselves guide our bark through its streams either wisely or unwisely. When we have mastered its problems and ourselves in relation to them, we are then free to move forward — we then, in fact, *decree* to move forward. The basic fact overlooked in this theory of fatalism is that man at the core of his being is at one with the core of the universe, than which there is no higher authority.

We cut these numerous windings in our destinies daily with our hands, while we imagine that we are pursuing a track on the royal high road of respectability and duty, and then complain of those ways being so intricate and dark. We stand bewildered before the mystery of our own making, and the riddles of life that *we will not* solve, and then accuse the great Sphinx of devouring us. But verily there is not an accident in our lives, not a misshapen day, or a misfortune, that could not be traced back to our own doings in this or another life. If one breaks the laws of Harmony . . . one must be prepared to fall into the chaos one has oneself produced. . . .

Therefore, if any one is helpless before these immutable laws, it is not ourselves, the artificers of our destinies, but rather those angels, the guardians of harmony. Karma-Nemesis is no more than the (spiritual) dynamical effect of causes produced and forces awakened into activity by our own actions. . . .

This state will last till man's spiritual intuitions are fully opened, . . . Until then the only palliative to the evils of life is union and harmony — a Brotherhood IN ACTU, and *altruism* not simply in name. The suppression of one single bad *cause* will suppress not one, but a variety of bad effects. — H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* 1:643-4

VI — WHY KARMA HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN

It is natural to ask why a teaching so in harmony with facts and common sense should not have had general recognition in Western lands, as it has in the East, wherever the ancient wisdom has not been forgotten. The answer is not far to seek. Western nations have been taught to believe in a personal God outside of themselves, one who could be influenced by prayers for special favors — a god who was, in fact, an enormous image of human personality. How could people so believing be expected to develop the impersonal, the lordly and divine side of their natures? How could they, taught that they were born in sin and that eternal bliss or torture was to follow this short life on earth — lived often against great odds and with little help; taught also that belief in the blood of the Son of God insures their safety: how could they, indeed, fail to have their sense of justice blunted? The fact that, in spite of this, the qualities of compassion, gentleness, forbearance, mercy, kindness still flower in Western lands, is a standing witness to the divinity within the human heart.

But if we step outside the little circle of creed and consider the universe as a whole balanced by the exquisite adjustment of parts, how all sound logic, how the faintest glimmering sense of Justice revolts against this Vicarious Atonement! If the criminal sinned only against himself, and wronged no one but himself; if by sincere repentance he could cause the obliteration of past events, not only from the memory of man, but also from that imperishable record, which no deity — not even the Supremest of the Supreme — can cause to disappear, then this dogma might not be incomprehensible. But to maintain that one may wrong his fellow-man, kill, disturb the equilibrium of society, and the natural order of things, and then — through cowardice, hope, or compulsion, matters not — be forgiven by believing that the spilling of one blood washes out the other blood spilt — this is preposterous! Can the *results* of a crime be obliterated even though the crime itself should be pardoned? The effects of a cause are never limited to the boundaries of the cause, nor can the results of crime be confined to the offender and his victim. — H. P. Blavatsky,

It is astounding how such perversions and misinterpretations of the true teachings ever developed; how there were ever found people to teach them or others to believe them. No doubt there are many mysteries connected with this which must some day be explained. It is certain, however, that the great teacher known as Jesus, one of those avatars who appear at certain cyclic periods, never taught any of these dogmas. He came, as did every other great teacher, to restore once more the ancient wisdom — that inexhaustible source of all the religions and philosophical systems of the world; for Christianity was, in its beginnings, pure theosophy. This can be proved through an intimate study of those times in the light of the Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic systems. For perhaps fifty years after the passing of Jesus, his teachings survived, but even he could not stem the ebbing spiritual tide of that age. A dark cycle, begun about the time of Pythagoras, lifted a little for short periods, but gradually grew heavier, its lethal vapors clouding human intuitions, until in the fifth century those recognised channels for conveying truth — the Mystery schools — whose light had by this time burned low or vanished, were closed by order of the Emperor Justinian.

Many of the old forms and ceremonies were, it is true, used by the church which called itself Christian, but the life and meaning went out of them, and new interpretations crept in, transforming those vehicles of spiritual splendor into agents for mental paralysis. Rites and forms distracted from realities and drugged the souls of men. The multitudes were obsessed by selfish fear, which was exploited by others until gradually it was as if a dense cloud settled over men's minds, shutting out a knowledge of the glorious past, even of the contemporaneous areas of sunshine on the globe, such as the golden age of China, ushered in by Li-Shih-min, until the Europeans were lost and isolated in the gloom of the dark ages.

People speak of Christianity as if it were wholly derived from Judaism. Very little of it is. It is, in its theology, almost wholly derived from misunderstood Greek thought, mainly, as said, from the Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic systems; and this is obvious to anyone who reads the writings of those who are called the great doctors of Christian theology, such as Dionysius, the so-called Areopagite, whose system is, in essentials, entirely taken from the Neoplatonic philosophy. Mainly derived from him, again, are the present standard theological works of the Church of Rome: I mean the works of Thomas Aquinas. These are today the standard by which the theology of Rome is directed and settled when disputed points are to be adjudicated. And yet, while this is so, and while much of that which was taken over by the early Christian Fathers still remains as factors and words in the Christian theology, it has utterly forgotten the spirit of these early pagan thoughts, and that religion today stands reduced to a system of forms and ceremonies, mostly. — G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, p. 487

. . . practically all the civil institutions of ancient times, punishments among others, were based upon what took place in the Mystery Schools. Such, for instance, was the crucifixion of the Romans, taken direct from one of the ceremonies of initiation, the "mystic death"; taken from it, stolen from it, and made an instrument of legal murder by the State, in later, degenerate times. Another instance, also taken from the ceremony of the mystic death, was the "cup," in India the Soma draft; in Greece we find Socrates punished by drinking from the cup of hemlock; and we are reminded of Jesus, praying that the "cup" might pass from him. Numerous other very different instances could be cited. . . .

Another instance which we might mention, of a quite different type, is that of the wearing of a crown or a diadem by civil rulers, formally enacted in the coronation of a king — a ceremony adopted from the Mysteries. Some of the earliest crowns which they wore had outstanding spikes, reminding one of the crown of thorns of Jesus; . . . -- Ibid., p. 255

It is a few philosophers who, driven by the political events of the day, tracked and persecuted by the fanatical Bishops of early Christianity — who had yet neither fixed ritual nor dogmas nor Church — it is these Pagans who founded the latter. Blending most ingeniously the truths of the Wisdom-religion with the exoteric fictions so dear to the ignorant mobs, it is they who laid the first foundations of ritualistic Churches . . . — H. P. Blavatsky, *Lucifer*, Vol. 4, p. 37, March, 1889

Other remarkable instances are the festivals of the Christmas and Easter seasons. These are materialized reflections of sacred ceremonies of initiations held at these times and described in symbols, which the Church interpreted as physical facts. All of which goes to bear out our statement that Christianity *in its beginnings* was pure theosophy.

From the dark ages we have happily emerged. They are past, and a great cycle of opportunity is before us, but the old false dogmas have left a stain, not yet wiped out. Among those obliterated teachings which were essential to an understanding of life was that of reincarnation. It was believed in the early centuries of this era, but discouraged by the Church when it became a political power. Finally at the second Council of Constantinople, AD 553, the teaching was anathematized. Thus, gradually, the knowledge of it faded out in the dark night which followed.

Without this fact of re-embodiment, life would be an absurdity, a grotesque farce without meaning. The events, emotions, ambitions, fortunes, or misfortunes of any one life period, would be anomalous, as incoherent, as dislocated, as would be any one day with the yesterdays and tomorrows blotted out. Try to picture such a crazy unhinged day, if you can. Observing superficially, one might say that from day to day we have the same body, the same brain, and a memory, conditions not present between lives. But this comprehensive, archaic philosophy, every aspect of which dovetails into every other, relating all parts to the whole, leaves no unexplained gaps, but shows the perfect analogy between the day and the life cycle. At the close of a life, all the entities which make up the complex nature of man, separate and go to their respective realms, as has been stated. The body, as we know, disintegrates, and the teaching is that its life-atoms gain experience by transmigrating through the kingdoms of nature. The human or reincarnating ego passes into a state of consciousness known as devachan, leaving behind the groups of attributes or skandhas which make up its personality. This longer night is for the human soul one of absolute bliss and rest, one in which all the experiences of the past are assimilated; all the nobler aspirations realized and worked into the nature; and from which it awakens, refreshed and strengthened, to take up its unfinished duties. The striking fact in the analogy drawn between sleep and death is that the complete man returns identical in all his elements. The higher aspects begin again to function together; the skandhas again become active; even the same life-atoms which made up the old body are magnetically attracted to their old places. The stage is set in new surroundings, but the same old actor is there charged with the same energies, tendencies, power or lack of power to deal with the problems which he himself has created, and which he is therefore bound to face. Without a knowledge of these facts it has been impossible for people to realize that they must reap what they sow. The thread of continuity, though unbroken and clear to the higher parts of the human constitution, has been lost to view by the brain of each succeeding rebirth. Thus with intuition clouded by false teachings, life has become an enigma. Our civilization is indeed an exemplar of the dire results of the loss of a true, deeply-rooted sense of justice and responsibility.

The Law of KARMA is inextricably interwoven with that of Reincarnation.

. . . it is only this doctrine, we say, that can explain to us the mysterious problem of Good and Evil, and reconcile man to the terrible and *apparent* injustice of life. Nothing but such certainty can quiet our revolted sense of justice. For, when one unacquainted with the noble doctrine looks around him, and observes the inequalities of birth and fortune, of intellect and capacities; when one sees honor paid fools and profligates, on whom fortune has heaped her favors by mere privilege of birth, and their nearest neighbor, with all his intellect and noble virtues — far more deserving in every way — perishing of want and for lack of sympathy; when one sees all this and has to turn away, helpless to relieve the undeserved suffering, one's ears ringing and heart aching with the cries of pain around him — that blessed knowledge of Karma alone prevents him from cursing life and men, as well as their supposed Creator. . . .

Truly a robust "faith" is required to believe that it is "presumption" to question the justice of one, who creates helpless little man but to "perplex" him, and to test a "faith" with which that "Power," moreover, may have forgotten, if not neglected, to endow him, as happens sometimes. Compare this blind faith with the philosophical belief, based on every reasonable evidence and life-experience, in Karma-Nemesis, or the Law of Retribution.

. . . Karma creates nothing, nor does it design. It is man who plans and creates causes, and Karmic law adjusts the effects; which adjustment is not an act, but universal harmony, tending ever to resume its original position, like a bough, which, bent down too forcibly, rebounds with corresponding vigor. If it happen to dislocate the arm that tried to bend it out of its natural position, shall we say that it is the bough which broke our arm, or that our own folly has brought us to grief? — *The Secret Doctrine*, 2:303-5

VII — KARMA AND JUSTICE VERSUS PUNISHMENT

It knows not wrath nor pardon; utter-true
Its measures mete, its faultless balance weighs,
Times are as naught, tomorrow it will judge,
Or after many days. — *The Light of Asia*

The sense of justice is deeply rooted in the human mind because mind is part of the cosmos, all of whose actions and reactions are based upon justice. There is nothing a child so keenly resents, nothing that so embitters an adult, as a feeling that he has been unjustly treated. People will accept misfortunes, at least without bitterness, if they *know* they deserve them. Unfortunately, in the confused and distorted mental outlook of today, with selfishness so rife and the "every man for himself" doctrine so commonly practiced, there is in Western lands no confidence in the justice of things. How could there be, after centuries of false teachings and counter-strokes of revenge all down the ages, until few can be found who are not in the tangle? Nothing but a true philosophy of life can possibly make people face the facts. There must be a broader outlook than the one-life theory offers. Some chance to harmonize with justice the frequent sight of good punished and bad rewarded must be given men before they can clean their hearts of bitterness, turn suspicion into trust, and shake off the deceiving lenses which have disguised every brother as an alien.

It is more particularly in Christian lands that the perception of justice in the universe has been so completely lost sight of. In Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Vedantism, Taoism, the teaching of karma has not been lost, and even though the countries under these religions are in their dark cycles, crime is not as rampant as with us. In *The Key to Theosophy*, H. P. Blavatsky said in 1889:

According to the last census in Ceylon and India, in the comparative table of crimes committed by Christians, Mussulmen, Hindoos, Eurasians, Buddhists, etc., etc., on two millions of population taken at random from each, and covering the misdemeanors of several years, the proportion of crime committed by the Christian stands at 15 to 4 as against those committed by the Buddhist population. — pp. 73-4 (orig. ed.)

Since then, we know, crime has enormously increased in the West. In *Lucifer*, Vol. 2, p. 147, April, 1888, H. P. Blavatsky writes editorially:

This is what one reads in the *Tablet*, the leading organ of Roman Catholic Englishmen, about Creeds and Criminality. I underline the most remarkable statements.

"The official statement as to the moral and material progress of India, which has recently been published, supplies a very interesting contribution to the controversy on the missionary question. It appears from these figures that while we effect a *very marked moral deterioration in the natives by converting them to our creed*, THEIR NATURAL STANDARD OF MORALITY IS SO HIGH that, however much we Christianize them, *we cannot succeed in making them altogether as bad as ourselves.*"

The following quotation from *The Wheel of the Law* may suggest an explanation of these facts:

Buddhists believe that every act, word, or thought has its consequence, which will appear sooner or later in the present or in the future state. Evil acts will produce evil consequences, good acts will produce good consequences . . . — p. 57

Theosophy teaches that justice does not call for punishment from us. Karma will take care of this more efficiently than we can possibly do, and bring to all *just* what they deserve. Why should any seek to add to this? Our sole care should be to help men to meet their deserts bravely. What might we not accomplish if our prison system were based on educative rather than punitive measures! The wisest and best minds of our civilization in increasing numbers are realizing this in considering the most outstanding violation of the duty of one to another, namely, legalized murder, which is a stigma upon our age. Future citizens of our Republic will certainly look back with horror to the barbarous custom of capital punishment. The karma of thwarting nature's plan in this way must be heavy for the nations who have permitted it. Society must, of course, be protected against malefactors, but in such a way that the latter are redeemed, not made worse. When one's moral sense is shocked, it is safe to assume that there is always a philosophic basis for this in the facts. Theosophy has given very specific teachings in regard to the sin of taking the life of another, which seems, in a way, to be magnified when the State is the murderer, because so many are involved in the crime.

Without attempting to explain in detail here the teaching as to the reaction upon society, it may be said that one who is violently deprived of his body does not really die — that is, leave this earth atmosphere — but remains on the astral plane, more at liberty in a way than behind the prison bars, until his natural life-term has expired. Here he can and does freely influence the weak-minded to commit crime and inject his feeling of hate against society, which has so ill treated him, into the minds of living men. Think of the terrible karma this brings to all concerned, and contrast that with the results which would follow an intelligent and sincere effort to help the criminal out of the mire he is in. Certainly, in this country at present, we manufacture criminals.

Resist not evil, and render good for evil, are Buddhist precepts, and were first preached in view of the implacability of Karmic law. For man to take the law into his own hands is anyhow a sacrilegious presumption. Human Law may use restrictive not punitive measures; but a man who, believing in Karma, still revenges himself and refuses to forgive every injury, thereby rendering good for evil, is a criminal and only hurts himself. As Karma is sure to punish the man who wronged him, by seeking to inflict an additional punishment on his enemy, he, who instead of leaving that punishment to the great Law adds to it his own mite, only begets thereby a cause for the future reward of his own enemy and a future punishment for himself. — H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 200 (orig. ed.)

Theosophy also states something which may further complicate the reading of the karmic law. Besides the so-called misfortunes which come unwittingly and unasked to the majority, there are those who have surpassed this majority in the school of life, and whose egos sometimes take up deliberately what is called bad karma for the sake of discipline, to overcome defects, and to gain fortitude. Or, they may assume difficult and unpleasant tasks, such as voluntary living in the slums or our prisons, solely for the sake of helping our brothers. There will occur to the mind many other such examples, which are happily becoming more and more frequent and form many a bright picture against the black background of our civilization.

Another evidence that the sense of justice is obscured is found in the belief in prayer to an external deity. This does not refer to aspiration, to the effort to reach to the god within — which should be ever in the background of consciousness when not in the foreground — but to the begging for personal benefits. H. P. Blavatsky calls this foolish and useless unless accompanied with willpower; when so accompanied it becomes black magic. Impersonally regard the spectacle of two armies sent forth to murder each other, each side appealing piously to God to bring it victory! If sincere, prayer for personal favors is weakening and degrading; if not sincere, it is pure *cant*. How much more healthy, virile, stimulating, and elevating is the teaching of karma! How it evokes the innate dignity in man to know that he is master of his destiny; that as he sows, so shall he reap; that there is no chance in the universe; that "privileged beings" do not exist, but that the unlimited treasures of nature are open to all who meet the conditions.

There is a gentler aspect to the justice dealt to all which should not pass notice. After the life of struggle, of discipline, of perhaps pain and disappointment, there comes the beautiful devachan — a wonderful compensation of bliss and rest, a glorious preparation for the new day.

Such is the law which moves to righteousness,

Which none at last can turn aside or stay;
The heart of it is love, the end of it
Is peace and consummation sweet. Obey! — *The Light of Asia*

VIII — NATIONAL AND RACIAL KARMA

We have said that all life is one, that it has a common origin: in other words, that the universe is a great organism. But within this are contained uncountable lesser organisms in an infinitely descending scale, all rooted in the unknown source, and springing into life from it as children from their parents. Thus we have, as said in Chapter 2, rulers of the cosmos; of solar systems; of planets; gods; demi-gods; great seers and sages. When we come to humanity, we find its units assembled together in countries, cities, families, etc. It follows that karma must act collectively as well as individually. Great cycles will affect races as a whole; smaller ones, the various subdivisions. In this some have seen fatalism or inescapable destiny, but it is no more present than in the individual cycles. These groupings are no more arbitrary than are those which the chemist finds among the elements. All are where they are, because they belong there. And everyone has built up his own attractions.

The choosing of environment begins with the individual. The reincarnating egos, as has been said, on returning to earth bring their characters with them — an axiom which, it would seem, could go without saying. Having then well-defined tendencies, they are of necessity drawn to those parents who can give them a body most akin to their characteristics. This teaching casts an entirely new light on the problem of heredity, one in accord with essential justice, as has been shown. When life is viewed from this standpoint, children cannot throw upon their parents the responsibility for the bad tendencies they bring with them, and blame fate and luck for their birth and environment. Parents, of course, may fail to meet the problems they find in their offspring problems which they, perhaps, helped to create in past lives, and which must, in such event, recoil heavily upon themselves. But that is another story.

Thus, just as the individual chooses his family, so does the family choose its nation and race; that is to say, it is reborn where by its inherent nature it belongs. Therefore individuals are involved in national karma because they have helped to make it. A narrow and intense nationalism might attach one to a particular nation in one way; while in quite another would a strong feeling of duty toward that nation or a desire to help it.

The old Aztec and other ancient American peoples died out because their own karma — the result of their own life as nations in the far past — fell upon and destroyed them. With nations this heavy operation of karma is always through famine, war, convulsion of nature, and the sterility of the women of the nation. The latter cause comes near the end and sweeps the whole remnant away. And the individual in race or nation is warned by this great doctrine that if he falls into indifference of thought and act, thus moulding himself into the general average karma of his race or nation, that national and race karma will at last carry him off in the general destiny. This is why teachers of old cried, "Come ye out and be ye separate."

With reincarnation the doctrine of karma explains the misery and suffering of the world, and no room is left to accuse Nature of injustice.

The misery of any nation or race is the direct result of the thoughts and acts of the Egos who make up the race or nation. In the dim past they did wickedly and now suffer. They violated the laws of harmony. The immutable rule is that harmony must be restored if violated. So these Egos suffer in making compensation and establishing the equilibrium of the occult cosmos. The whole mass of Egos must go on incarnating and reincarnating in the nation or race until they have all worked out to the end the causes set up. Though the nation may for a time disappear as a physical thing, the Egos that made it do not leave the world, but come out as the makers of some new nation in which they must go on with the task and take either punishment or reward as accords with their karma. Of this law the old Egyptians are an illustration. They certainly rose to a high point of development, and as certainly they were extinguished as a nation. But the souls — the old Egos — live on and are now fulfilling their self-made destiny as some other nation now in our period. They

may be the new American nation, or the Jews fated to wander up and down in the world and suffer much at the hands of others. This process is perfectly just. Take, for instance, the United States and the Red Indians. The latter have been most shamefully treated by the nation. The Indian Egos will be reborn in the new and conquering people, and as members of that great family will be the means themselves of bringing on the due results for such acts as were done against them when they had red bodies. Thus it has happened before, and so it will come about again. — W. Q. Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 96-7 (orig. ed.)

But history shows that often in national disasters, all are not involved. We query why the cyclone, in its seemingly mad rush, chose its victims so curiously; why the earthquake destroyed certain areas and not others; why, when the tidal wave destroyed the city, some had accidentally (?) been elsewhere than at home. Even in the sweeping racial cataclysms the same curious fact is on record. This is strikingly illustrated in the story given in *The Secret Doctrine* of the sinking of the main continent of Atlantis. Before the close of the highly intellectual and brilliant Atlantean civilization, many of the spiritual and higher psychic powers unfolded in the race. A large portion used these selfishly and became wicked sorcerers or black magicians. On the other hand, many of the nations and tribes turned into what is called esoterically the right-hand path, and became white magicians, using their powers impersonally. These latter were warned of the coming general disaster by those great ones who eternally watch over the human races. A striking and graphic description of this period in our ancient history is given in *The Secret Doctrine*, 2:427-9, in which H. P. Blavatsky hints that the story of the Exodus in the Old Testament was built up on legends of this distant event. She tells how the "great King of the dazzling Face" sent his air-vehicles to his chiefs all over the land, and how the great Adepts and their followers escaped to safe quarters of the earth in *vimanas* or air-ships far superior to anything we have today, and became the founders of the fifth race. The description closes with this:

the nations that were led away, were as thick as the stars of the milky way. . . . Like as a dragonsnake uncoils slowly its body, so the Sons of men, led on by the Sons of Wisdom, opened their folds, and spreading out, expanded like a running stream of sweet waters. . . . many of the faint-hearted among them perished on their way. But most were saved.

One can see the beneficent working of nature here. Although the evil Atlanteans were destined, of course, to reincarnate later in the fifth race, they came into fresh, clean lands, where the followers of the karmic law had already gained the upper hand and where opportunities for improvement were greater. They are, nevertheless, a part of ourselves, and it has been stated that we are still suffering from Atlantean karma. Knowing the close ties that bind together the members of our human family, we must infer that responsibility for the disturbing elements will not end until all are redeemed. Should this fail to be recognised, then the suffering they are certain to cause to the nobler, more advanced, will become a reminder of our unfortunate Atlantean inheritance, and compel action.

Karma, as has been said, is universal. It moves from world to world. Planets are born out of their parent-planets; solar systems and universes, the same. Everything is the result of a previous cause. Nothing comes by chance. The peoples of our earth make its history in very truth, generate the forces which are so certain to focus at a given time that the great seers can foresee the future to which the past and present so surely point. They can tell why and when a race is to run its course, when cataclysms are due, when the high and low spots of a civilization will appear; and thus know just how and when to use their energies to lighten so far as possible the heavy karma of the world.

Why does this (Karmic) sterility attack and root out certain races at their "appointed hour"? The answer that it is due to a "mental disproportion" between the colonizing and aboriginal races is obviously evasive, since it does not explain the sudden "*checks to fertility*" which so frequently supervene. The dying out of the Hawaiians, for instance, is one of the most mysterious problems of the day. Ethnology will sooner or later have to recognise with Occultists that the true solution has to be sought for in a comprehension of the workings of Karma. As Lefevre remarks, "the time is drawing near when there will remain nothing but three great human types" (before the Sixth Root-Race dawns [several millions of years hence]), the white (Aryan, Fifth Root-Race), the yellow and the African negro — with their crossings (Atlanto-European divisions). Redskins, Eskimos, Papuans, Australians, Polynesians, etc., etc. — all are dying out. Those who realize that

every Root-Race runs through a gamut of seven sub-races with seven branchlets, etc. will understand the "why." The tide-wave of incarnating Egos has rolled past them to harvest experience in more developed and less senile stocks; and their extinction is hence a Karmic necessity. — H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* 2:780

Yet in the prognostication of *such* future events, at any rate, all foretold on the authority of cyclic occurrences, there is no psychic phenomenon involved. It is neither *prevision*, nor *prophecy*; no more than is the signalling of a comet or star, several years before its appearance. It is simply knowledge and mathematically correct computations which enable the WISE MEN OF THE EAST to foretell, for instance, that England is on the eve of such or another catastrophe; France, nearing such a point of her cycle, and Europe in general threatened with, or rather, on the eve of, a cataclysm, which her own cycle of racial *Karma has led her to*. The reliability of the information depends, of course, on the acceptance or rejection of the claim for a tremendous period of historical observation. Eastern Initiates maintain that they have preserved records of the racial development and of events of universal import ever since the beginning of the Fourth Race — that which preceded being traditional. — *Ibid.* 1:646

IX — FRUITS TO FLOW FROM RESTORATION OF THE TEACHING OF KARMA

Our civilization is being shaken to its foundations. Many have said that its fate is hanging in the balance. The feeling of instability and uncertainty as to the future is widespread. Earnest people are asking what can restore normal conditions and are answering the question by a growing recognition of the fact that human hearts must be changed before radical reforms can become effective.

People are not going to do right unless they see a reason for it; unless their minds are molded in harmony with the facts of nature. Fed as the Western nations have been, on unpleasant fairy tales about life, present and future, they are at sea for a rational explanation. Current religious misinterpretations of the original teachings given to every race have outraged man's sense of justice; in the groping after truth, a confusion of sects, good, bad, and indifferent, has arisen worse than the Babel of tongues. The ancient wisdom-religion — the fountain-head of all the great religions and philosophies, the source of knowledge in science and arts — in its universality and power to coordinate every faculty of the mind, can restore harmony and sanity to our world and evoke the true dignity of human nature.

An honest and whole-hearted belief in the law of karma in its relation to life as a whole would alone completely change the character of our civilization. This may, perhaps, seem an extravagant claim to those not understanding its deep meaning. Yet the mere broadening of the present-day outlook would, in itself, be a wonderful thing. Human minds are now concentrated on one physical incarnation, a mere wink of the eye in the soul's history, and all events contained in it assume an undue importance in one way and a lack of importance in another. The sense of proportion and perspective is absolutely lost, and can only be regained by lifting the veil and revealing the illimitable vistas beyond. Simple common sense would then call into play the faculties of reflection and judgment, to say nothing of the awakening in the spiritual nature.

Gradually self-discipline would grow, beginning, perhaps, in self-interest, but merging by degrees into something greater, until the character is radically altered. Self-pity and whining would be stamped out when the realization came that misfortunes had been self-induced, and courage, will, and endurance would be evoked. There would be less condemnation and uncharitable criticism, and more kindness, more patience with the failings of others, if a deeper understanding of the difficulties as well as the possibilities in human nature were in the human race. We all know that among the subtle poisons of our life is the tendency to criticize others, to judge them unkindly, to impute to them unworthy motives, etc. And we also know how this takes the edge off every pleasure, and on the contrary, how fresh and clear the air is when suspicion is absent and an atmosphere of healthy sympathy exists.

The knowledge that one is master of his own destiny would remove the fear that at any time, out of the blue, an avalanche of misfortune might be precipitated, once that the old records are cleaned up; and the knowledge

that these old records themselves can be softened in their results or even sometimes neutralized by the force of will intelligently directed, would arouse courage.

The easy-going irresponsibles, the indifferent, would gradually awaken if the truth of karma were in the minds of the majority, for, by degrees, these sleepers would feel such an invigorating mental atmosphere. Further, when the teaching of karma is realized, people will not seek to get something for nothing, or envy those who have more than themselves. They will know that time and the rolling cycles adjust all wrongs; that the only way to gain life's treasures is to concentrate on the duty in hand and leave the results to the Law.

There is a law of compensation in the Universe, meaning that all evil-doing has its own retribution by Nature's own act. Leave it therefore to the gods to avenge you if you have suffered, and suffered wrongly. "Vengeance is mine," said the Scriptures claimed by the Christians, merely re-echoing an ancient truth, a teaching of the Sages and Seers. Harmony is at the heart of things, for all Nature is orderly, and beautifully moves in system and stately measures. Give justice when you receive injustice. Ally yourselves with the gods, with your own inner god. Requite never hate with hate, for thus you but add fuel to an unholy flame. Requite hatred with compassion and justice. This is the ancient law. Thus also you make no evil Karma for yourself; thus you ally yourself with Nature's own spiritual procedures and you become a child of the cosmic life, which thereafter will beat in your own heart with its undying pulses. — G. de Purucker: *Questions We All Ask*, Series II, 27

Imagine the sense of responsibility which would dignify life if all realized the intimate ties binding together all that is; if each one verily believed that "no man can live unto himself alone"; that with every act and thought he is either raising or dragging down the hosts of which he is a part. Even physical health would follow such realization, a natural result of moral health.

We make our own bodies, we make our own lives, we make our own destinies, and we are responsible for it all, spiritually, morally, intellectually, psychically, and even physically. It is a manly doctrine; there is no room in it for moral cowardice, no room in it for casting our responsibility upon the shoulders of another — God, angel, man, or demon. — G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, p. 130

Yet, as in every advance that nature makes, as the cycles in their wheeling course come round, there are some who lag behind and lose sight of their heritage, blinded by the desire of personal gain, by ambition and love of power; so that today there are some who refuse the opportunity that for ages their souls have waited for. The cycles have brought them and ourselves to the point of former achievement and former failure. We and they have met in the past as in this life, and shall meet again in the future, and by our action today we are forging the links that shall help or mar their progress, as well as our own and that of all humanity, in the future.

But the crucial point of the cycle is past; the fiercest ordeal is over; no powers in heaven or hell can longer stay the onward progress of humanity. The hosts of light are already victorious. — Katherine Tingley, *Theosophy: the Path of the Mystic*, pp. 58-9