

Extracts from "Answers to Questions on The Ocean of Theosophy"

CHAPTER XI KARMA

(...)

Q. Are not all the workers in socialism, in labor unions and in similar lines helping to mitigate the national Karma?

A. Doubtless they are all sincere in their devotion and self-sacrificing for it, but what permanent betterment can come if they are working for wrong things in a wrong way? Their motive is wholly concerned with physical existence, prosperity, ease, comfort. No attempt along those lines can ever bring any lasting benefit, as witness various so-called reforms that have come and gone—reformers with them. Where are their sacrifices? We all proceed from the same Source and are all traveling toward the same goal; but we shall not get right methods and right relations until we understand our own natures, and act in accordance with them. That is the only way we can mitigate either national or individual Karma.

Q. But if every one had an education he might be able to understand these things?

A. One's education makes no essential difference.

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Any man can understand justice. He can understand that merit is the only thing that can bring merit, and he can understand enough to do his duty to his family and to all others. Generally speaking, men think the world owes them a living, opportunity, education. All that we need to consider is that we owe the world our service. The situation of every man depends on what his nature actually is. If a man is good and just and noble in his mind, he doesn't require better conditions to bring it out. The mere living under educational advantages does not mean knowledge, or understanding of the causes of oppression. Moreover, no person, with the disposition to learn will fail to find a way to learn, regardless of conditions.

Q. What, then, prevents men from understanding right and wrong, and this justice we call Karma!

A. They take the position of irresponsibility, by resentment at supposed injustice; they expect to reap where they did not sow; they are looking for some thing for themselves. So

they are ready to listen to any or all of the various panaceas offered, and go after whatever promises something for nothing. They do not look within; they are not humble; they do not ask what is the purpose of the Inner Man; how is it they are as they are, and not in some other place under other conditions.

Q. Do you feel that the understanding of these ideas of Karma and Reincarnation alone can save the nation from internal troubles?

A. It is the only way out. Until men understand that they are here not for once, that whatever they receive they have merited, we shall have just as much and worse trouble than that we have already had, for the longer it goes on the more intense will be the reactions. But, perhaps men will listen to these obvious self-evident truths only when there has been such an absolute subversion and destruction that they have to stop and think.

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How the Masters would if They could, save humanity! They have done all they can. The Message is here, and it is our only hope. Jesus said, "O, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered thee under my wing as a hen doth her chickens, but ye would not." And Jerusalem was destroyed. We need not think there is not the same danger for us. There is nothing in our civilization that is enduring—of railroads, books, buildings—not a single relic would be left after a hundred years. So if there are those who have eyes to see, who have ears to hear and who can understand, let them work in sea son and out of season to put these ideas before their fellow-men, that the ideas may spread and make others think.

Q. Then the understanding of a comparatively few individuals would make for right conditions?

A. Let them try it out. Right conditions can only come where individuals will "follow the Path." Who, then, is going to do it? There is no one holding any one back from exhibiting a true Theosophic life. But what is first needed is the understanding of the Theosophic life. It can be lived anywhere, alone or in crowds, for it is a life of right ideas. The only way to better conditions is through better ideas. Bettering conditions without bettering ideas merely puts men in a place more favorable for acting on wrong ideas and gives them opportunity for exploiting their selfishness.

Q. Would not the mere desire to aid suffering humanity finally open a door for action?

A. If we really desire to help humanity and forget our selves, working for others with no thought of success or failure or reward, the doors will open to us as soon as we are ready. That is Law.

Q. If one desires benefit for the whole, he him self benefits by that desire?

A. We should remember that a desire is not a condition. A mere desire does not go very far unless we

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establish the conditions that cause the desire to be potent or active. If we desire to benefit humanity, the question is, What are we doing to produce that benefit? What we have to do is to stop thinking about ourselves, stop figuring for ourselves, stop thinking how we are going to come out. For this "we" is personality, which is always changing, from year to year, month to month, from day to day.

Q. When our Karma does not permit us to take any active part in ameliorating the stress of world conditions, what should be our attitude of mind toward them ?

A. It is to maintain a cheerful, calm, confident attitude, realizing that the mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small; that Karma is causing adjustments to come about which must bring a realization, in some degree at least, of universal brotherhood, not possible under any other conditions. But if we sit despondent and say there is nothing to do and no use in doing anything, because people are selfish and never will see, nothing can be done. We must always be confident in the greatest determination to hold the right attitude on the basis of thought which Theosophy presents, working always for right, for principle, for freedom of Soul.

Q. Yet working on that basis does not bring good Karma, as judged by the Karma of Jesus on the cross.

A. The question is not whether we are working for good Karma or bad Karma, but are we trying to do the right thing. In the case of a Being like Jesus, it is necessary at times to take a body of the race, that He may communicate with the people, teach them and help them as only can be done through a body similar to their own. He takes the body of a family, necessarily, and fulfils his Karma as a member of that family, physically considered. He mitigates the family or the race Karma, merely by experiencing their bodily Kar-

ma, and in correcting family defects lifts so much the higher that family Karma.

Q. He ended that Karma. then and there?

A. So far as that body was concerned. But even the highest Being who enters into a physical body to deliver a message, by His very attitude and by His very action, and by the Message He is to bring, finds Himself at variance with the established order of things, and reaps insult, slander, vilification, and mal treatment from all those who oppose Him. Does He earn this? No; it is not His Karma, but the Karma of those who persecute, slander and maltreat Him.

Q. Would a Theosophist fear to do evil on account of the bad Karma coming to himself ?

A. He would fear to do evil, not because of the bad Karma that would come to him, but because he knows better than to do evil. He knows only to do good, and if he does evil he must necessarily fear, for the consequences are sure, and the fact is before him that the evil is not only at his own expense, personally considered, but must reproduce itself upon other unsuspecting persons who are inclined that way. Was it not Jesus who said, "As ye mete unto others, so shall it be meted unto you, so measured unto you again, heaped up, pressed down and running over?" If we are Theosophists, then we know how to count the cost, and we are able to figure up beforehand the compound interest that goes with evil actions. Nor, on the other hand, should we be looking for protection for our selves against evil doing, but so think and act that no protection is needed; nothing but right can touch us if we think right, act right, and feel right. Wrong comes to us in no other way than by our thinking evilly and selfishly.

Q. The spiritual nature of man is never affected by Karma ?

A. No; the Unchanging Spirit in man is not affected in its nature, or changed by anything it may ex-

perience, but it has its increase of power and knowledge through various phases of evolution and advancement. Let us not make the mistake of looking for any finality but rather from the point of view of continuous progression. A state of perfection as a finality would be stagnation. In an infinite universe there are infinite opportunities, and whatever heights of knowledge or power may be attained, there must always be further fields

beyond.

Q. Is it the tendency of Karma to always restore equilibrium, so that at the end of a Mahamanvantara the whole of the Karma between beings would be adjusted, or equilibrium absolutely restored?

A. There is not so much a complete readjustment, in the sense that all beings are individually readjusted, as there is a stoppage of interaction of the whole mass. Just so, when our physical action ceases by reason of the death of the body, Karma is not yet readjusted, but awaits our return into a body again where we may go on with it. There must always be for any evolution effects not yet adjusted. The rate of progress of any being is in accordance with the progress of the whole mass during the manvantara; so his progress is shared or controlled by the universal Karma of which he is a Part. At the end of a manvantara, then, there may be said to be a period of assimilation, rather than one of entire adjustment, which, however, enables an other basis to be taken by the whole mass of beings involved.

Q. Then Karma is just suspended for the time?

A. Yes; for time is not a factor in the adjustment of Karma. It is a question of conditions.

Q. But is it not possible to find the time of reaction from a cause previously set up?

A. Purely physical reactions can, of course, be so checked up, but when we come to mental reactions, the time involved is affected by the conditions in which we put ourselves or find ourselves. We make the fa-

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avorable condition for reaction. Karma may be existent, in the sense that the causation has gone forth and the effect felt by others, but we may not yet be in that condition where we can make the adjustment, because other Karma is operating so strongly as to hold this particular reaction back.

It is said that he who understands Karma understands the limits of time, and he who understands the limits of time understands Karma, but that understanding will not be ours until we understand the Operation of causes, nor is it necessary. If we could now know exactly when the rebound of an action would come, we should probably spend all our time figuring just what we could do to dodge it, to improve it, or to arrange just the right condition in which to receive it. The thing to do is to meet anything and everything

exactly as it comes. We should not take the position of providing money for a rainy day, which is just a figuring for ourselves. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Take care of today. Never mind the next hour. Take care of this one. Take care of every moment, every hour, as it comes along, fearing nothing, doubting nothing, in full confidence, relying on the Law of our own natures. If we feel our responsibility and acquit ourselves as best we can for the good of all with out taking any thought as to what the effect will be to ourselves, then we shall be adjusting and working out Karma in the best pos way.

Q. Can not very good Karma quickly overcome the effects of evil?

A. No, it cannot ; the effects of each must run their course, although two classes of Karma, equally strong, if of opposite nature, would neutralize for the time being and permit the operation of a weaker class of Karma. But if we are talking of the effects felt through a body, we may know that they are only a small portion of Karma. No matter what the Karma, however bad or detrimental, however good, if the attitude of

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the one going through it is right, it comes as an opportunity. The only way we can lessen the effects of bad Karma is to take the right attitude toward it. When good times come, we can sow good causes; when bad times come, we still can try to sow good causes, using the opportunity to gain strength, courage, and under standing of life. We seem to be always trying to avoid evil Karma, and get good Karma for ourselves, where as what we should do is to make use of everything as it comes. In this way, we pay our debts to a debtor we cannot avoid—ourselves. We don't put effort into trying to avoid anything, but go right to work on what is before us. Then the soul begins to act, the will begins to act, and the power of the will is increased. There is no will operating with a shifting, veering personality, afraid of this, and of that, fearful that it won't be able to stand this or that. Only the feeling of responsibility will lift us out of those personal considerations.

Q. The very best Karma would be working off bad Karma, then ?

A. Well, let us say nothing is good and nothing is had, but all is opportunity,—the very best opportunity, because the soul knows what it needs for increasing its powers and keeping its energy. We sometimes do not recognize our opportunities, for they are occurring every moment of the time. Every single event is an opportunity—even the passing of people on the street and the thoughts and feelings they stir up in us; what ever we feel toward others, our relations with them, our touch with them, our family relations, our social, our business, and our national relations,—all these are opportunities to be taken

advantage of in every way; every one of them constitutes Karma. Our touch with Theosophy is a Karmic opportunity.

Q. It seems to be possible to distribute Karma over a long period of time?

A. Again, that is dependent upon the attitude we

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hold. We may distribute Karma over a long period of time, or we may hurry it, because we are self-conscious beings, and that fact always means we have the power of choice. Our very different attitude to wards life because of our study of Theosophy has the tendency to hasten Karma; or we may say, as we hasten, we meet Karma.

Q. Can Karma be precipitated too heavily?

A. No one of us, perhaps, would have either the disposition or the courage to push so far ahead that we should be unable to bear the burden of Karma. We shall never have a burden we can not carry, al though it may seem too heavy. We must clear up that in us which is not righteous, which is not just, and which does not permit us to act as we ought to act. The faster we do that, the better, but we hasten only just as much as we can take care of. We hasten beneficial as well as bad Karma, of course, but the man who won't trust his past Karma for either good or evil can not make very fast progress.

Q. Does unexpended Karma remain inherent in the being in the form of mental deposits?

A. It is impressed or burned into his own imperishable nature. That is why we say a man brings his own conditions with him, whatever they may be. How could he come forth from his rest in Devachan, or after a manvantara, and go on with evolution again, if there was nothing to go forth with? Karma, it must be remembered, is cause, as well as effect.

Q. When returning to earth-life, does the ego thoroughly understand the justice of reincarnation and undertake the task willingly?

A. Certainly. After leaving Devachan, and before rebirth, the ego has an opportunity by his own nature to perceive exactly what the results of the coming birth must of necessity be. Then he plunges in to work it out through the conditions in which Karma has placed him; he can not work it out from the egoic condition.

It is bad Karma to be thrown into the Care of people whose ideas are absolutely erroneous, but if our intent has been to do the right thing, and we hold to that course, then always something within us will prevent our receiving anything as truth which is not self-evident.

Q. Is not, then, fate closely connected with Karma?

A. It depends on how you look at it; that is, if you put your finger in the fire, the "fate" is to have a burn. The time to have decided the fate was before you put your finger in the fire. The only "fate" is that which comes from our own decisions.

Q. Does not all Karma start on the mental plane, no matter where the effects are felt ?

A. Karma begins and is felt on the Manasic plane, as is easily seen by considering that no matter what happens to one, physically or in any other way, unless he thinks about it, it makes no difference to him by way of happiness or unhappiness. If felt at all, then, Karma starts and ends on the Manasic plane, and therein lies the reason for maintaining the right attitude; for seeing that Karma brings us what we need to remedy defects in our nature and strengthen our efforts. And it is the efforts that count. Success or failure is of no consequence, but the effort stays with us, a part of ourselves; the energy put into the effort never leaves us.

Q. Do we not shift the Karma from lower to higher planes?

A. We do not shift Karma, but we shift our personal thought; that is, we get Karma in the place where we stand. It Cannot hit us in the place where we are not. We ourselves are the variants, not the things that occur.

Q. Is it not a man's duty to comply with the laws of his country, whether he approves them or not? Is not that duty Karma?

A. Born under those laws and compelled by them, since they are made according to the ideas of our fellow-men, we should have nothing to worry about but doing our duty to our fellow-men. Why should we claim a superiority over our fellow-men which we have not, since we are dependent upon them for our very existence? Even though they have

determined to move in a certain direction not in accord with our thinking, and we cannot come out of the crowd, yet all the time each one can be the spiritual being. A soldier may do whatever his superiors tell him to do, but that cannot prevent his thought, will, and feeling from working in the right direction, and so he has his opportunity—a greater one, perhaps, in war than he would have had in peace, because of the very difficulties presented him to conquer. It matters not whether we work in war or in peace, for all things, if we look at them aright, work for good and for righteousness to those who fulfill the law.

The present war has thrown us out of the hard ruts of thinking. If by the destruction of millions of men, other millions are brought to think as they never thought before, if they are made to sacrifice, to see the use and benefit of sacrifice, then much will be gained for the world. If, too, a new basis is established, then those who have died as a vicarious atonement for us will come again at a time infinitely more favorable than it has ever been before for mankind. There is nothing lost; no labor is in vain.

Q. What is the significance of the "Guardian Wall" spoken of in the 'Voice of Silence'?

A. The Masters are the great Guardian Wall. While those great Beings have no control over the choice of human beings, They have control over the minor beings and the minor forces of nature, and can hold back catastrophes which would crush us, coming on us unchecked from the kingdoms below us, visible and invisible, where in our ignorance we have aroused

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many inimical forces. While the Masters as a matter of reason and fact take no active part in the war now going on, in so far as They can control climatic conditions and other material interferences, which might affect badly the right side, that They do.

Karma is the key-note to all conditions, for it governs the smallest atom as well as the highest spiritual being; it governs men, animals, worlds, and periods of evolution, in their individual actions and in their collective interactions. In its broadest sense, Karma is action; every effect flows from some action, from some cause precedent, and the reaction is but the continuance of that action. Karma is the basis of evolution; the ocean of life separating into its constituent drops, after pralaya, is action, in continuance of past actions which entered into that assimilative period, and go forth from it as a cause. Karma is the means by which evolution proceeds. The benefit of understanding Karma, however, is not to be experienced so much from following the world, race, or national Karma, as in the study of our own personal lines and lives, and the application and relation to them of

universal laws. We are Karma; we represent Karma; as we think, we are the creators of Karma. There is no Karma unless there is a being to make it or feel its effects, and as each being in its degree has the power to act, to perceive and receive the effects of action, it must be realized that Karma is not a law imposed on man by gods, devils, men or beings of any kind, but is inherent in all beings; hence, it is the law of absolute justice, and each man is responsible for his own external affairs, conditions, and circumstances, for his character, qualities and tendencies, for his mental, moral, psychic and spiritual nature, upon every plane of consciousness. He is likewise responsible for the effects of his thought and action on his fellow-men, and on the kingdoms below man; he cannot save himself at the expense of any other being, nor can he have true

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happiness so long as any of his fellow-men suffer. As he is a self-conscious being with the power of acquiring qualities, and of manipulating the lower natures, it devolves upon him to understand the nature of all things that he may use them beneficently. Only when the feeling of responsibility which is the beginning of selflessness moves men to clarification of their minds, and to conformity of feeling, thought, and act with the true rationale of life, can this understanding be had.

The laws and principles of existence—the true rationale of life—are presented by Theosophy; hence, each man's contact with it is alike an opportunity and a responsibility, to which he has been brought under Karma. He can make the most of it, or he may neglect it so as to fail to obtain or extend benefit. His refusal to take advantage of it now will make him less determined in some other life to carry out the purpose of his nature, which is defeated presently if he neglects, under any circumstances or pressure, that which he sees to be leading him in the right direction. But always there are those who will test Theosophy out in their own lives, and learn what it is, and will carry on the work to the last end. They in their good time must come to be the leaders and pioneers of humanity, which must learn, even though the learning takes centuries of suffering. If the light of pure Theosophy is kept burning clear, it will be the saving light of the whole world. That must be. But the question is, who will be the light-bearers?