

Karma, Skandhas, and The Lipika

FROM THE WRITINGS OF H. P. BLAVATSKY

“Every action, good or bad, is a prolific parent, saith the Wisdom of the Ages.”
(“The Key to Theosophy” p. 141)

OPENING READING

“... THEN THE SECOND SEVEN, WHO ARE THE LIPIKA, PRODUCED BY THE THREE (*Word, Voice, and Spirit*). ...” (Stanza IV, shloka VI, from the Book of Dzyan, on Cosmogogenesis or cosmic evolution)

“Mystically, these Divine Beings are connected with Karma, the Law of Retribution, for they are the Recorders or Annalists who impress on the (to us) invisible tablets of the Astral Light, “the great picture-gallery of eternity” – a faithful record of every act, and even thought, of man, of all that was, is, or ever will be, in the phenomenal Universe. As said in “*Isis*,” this divine and unseen canvas is the BOOK OF LIFE. As it is the Lipika who project into objectivity from the passive Universal Mind the ideal plan of the universe, upon which the “Builders” reconstruct the Kosmos after every Pralaya, it is they who stand parallel to the Seven Angels of the Presence, whom the Christians recognise in the Seven “Planetary Spirits” or the “Spirits of the Stars;” for thus it is they who are the direct amanuenses of the Eternal Ideation – or, as called by Plato, the “Divine Thought.” ...

“The forty “Assessors” who stand in the region of *Amenti* as the accusers of the Soul before *Osiris*, belong to the same class of deities as the Lipika, and might stand paralleled, were not the Egyptian gods so little understood in their esoteric meaning. The Hindu *Chitra-Gupta* who reads out the account of every Soul’s life from his register, called Agra-Sandhani; the “Assessors” who read theirs from the heart of the defunct, which becomes an open book before (whether) Yama, Minos, Osiris, or Karma – are all so many copies of, and variants from the Lipika, and their Astral Records. Nevertheless, the Lipi-ka are not deities connected with Death, but with Life Eternal.

“Connected as the Lipika are with the destiny of every man and the birth of every child, whose life is already traced in the Astral Light – not fatalistically, but only because the future, like the PAST, is ever alive in the PRESENT – they may also be said to exercise an influence on the Science of Horoscopy. We must admit the truth of the latter whether we will or not.”
(“The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. 103-105)

INTRODUCTION

Karma is the highest law in the Theosophical construct of metaphysical reality. It determines the outcome of every interaction in the manifested world, from the atomic scale to stars, with the automatic action of balancing and re-balancing the harmony of the divine plan inherent in Greater Nature. But how are all the events of the history of the Universe recorded? And by what agency?

We have assembled some of the most relevant quotations to try to tell the story of Karmic Law and at least some of the secrets of its operation.

* The science of modern astrophysics is now able to look into space and see back into the earliest times and view the universal records of evolution.

“... “the *Lipika* and the four Maharajas,” the agents of Karma.” (“The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. 294)

“*Mr. A. Keightley*: . . . Have the four Maharajahs and the four elements a special terrestrial application, as well as a kosmic one?

“*Mme. Blavatsky*: Except in karma, nothing at all. The four Maharajahs produce karmic effects, certainly, because there the *Lipika* Maharajah is a title they have, simply.”

“At the four corners of the world, these *Lipikas* are posted just to put down on the superior Astral Light the record of all our actions, deeds, words and everything.”

“The *Lipika* are a division of the four degrees taken from the septenates that emanated from Mahat. . . . They are workers on their own plane. If you ask me what relation the *Lipika* have with humanity, with men, then I have just told you what it was: they are the recorders.” (“The Secret Doctrine Dialogues” p. 367, 326, 327)

“There are three chief groups of Builders and as many of the Planetary Spirits and the *Lipika*, each group being again divided into Seven sub-groups. It is impossible, even in such a large work as this, to enter into a minute examination of even the three principal groups, as it would demand an extra volume. . . . The *Lipika* (a description of whom is given in the Commentary on Stanza IV. No. 6) are the Spirits of the Universe, whereas the Builders are only our own planetary deities. The former belong to the most occult portion of Cosmogogenesis, which cannot be given here. Whether the Adepts (even the highest) know this angelic order in the completeness of its triple degrees, or only the lower one connected with the records of our world, is something which the writer is unprepared to say, and she would incline rather to the latter supposition. Of its highest grade one thing only is taught: the *Lipika* are connected with Karma – being its direct Recorders.” (“The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. 127-128)

KARMA

“For us, no adjective or qualification could describe that which is impersonal and no entity, but a universal operative law. If you question me about the causative intelligence in it, I must answer you I do not know. But if you ask me to define its effects and tell you what these are in our belief, I may say that the experience of thousands of ages has shown us that they are absolute and unerring equity, wisdom, and intelligence. For Karma in its effects is an unfailing redresser of human injustice, and of all the failures of nature; a stern adjuster of wrongs; a retributive law which rewards and punishes with equal impartiality. It is, in the strictest sense, “no respecter of persons,” though, on the other hand, it can neither be propitiated, nor turned aside by prayer. . . .

“What we believe in, is strict and impartial justice. Our idea of the unknown Universal Deity, represented by Karma, is that it is a Power which cannot fail, and can, therefore, have neither wrath nor mercy, only absolute Equity, which leaves every cause, great or small, to work out its inevitable effects. The saying of Jesus: “With what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again” (Matth. vii., 2), neither by expression nor implication points to any hope of future mercy or salvation by proxy. This is why, recognising as we do in our philosophy the justice of this statement, we cannot recommend too strongly mercy, charity, and forgiveness of mutual offences. . . . what is Karma? . . . we consider it as the *Ultimate Law* of the Universe, the source, origin and fount of all other laws which exist throughout Nature. Karma is the unerring 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. Though itself *unknowable*, its action is perceivable. . . .

“We describe Karma as that Law of re-adjustment which ever tends to restore disturbed equilibrium in the physical, and broken harmony in the moral world. We say that Karma does not act in this or that particular way always; but that it always *does* act so as to restore Harmony and preserve the balance of equilibrium, in virtue of which the Universe exists.”

(“The Key to Theosophy” p. 197-217, excerpts)

THE SKANDHAS

“KARMA, TANHA and SKANDHAS, are the almighty trinity in one, and the cause of our re-births. The illustration of painting our own present likeness at death, and that likeness becoming the future personality is very poetical and graphic, but we claim it as an occult teaching. At the solemn moment of death no man can fail to see himself under his true colours, and no self-deception is of any use to him any longer. Thence the following thing happens. As at the instant of drowning man sees marshalled past his mind’s eye the whole of his life, with all its events, effects and causes, to the minutest details, so at the moment of death, he sees himself in all his moral nakedness, unadorned by either human flattery or self-adulation, and, as he is; hence, *as he* or rather, as his astral double combined with his *Kama* principle – *shall be*. For the vices, defects and especially the passions of the preceding life become, through certain laws of affinity and transference, the germs of the future potentialities in the *animal* soul (*Kama rupa*), hence of its dependent, the astral double (*linga sharira*) – at a subsequent birth. It is the *personality* alone which changes; the real reincarnating principle, the EGO, remains always the same; and it is its KARMA that guides the idiosyncracies and prominent moral traits of the *old* “personality” that was (and that the EGO knew not how to control), to re-appear in the *new* man that will be. These traits and passions pursue and fasten on the yet plastic third and fourth principles of the child, and – unless the EGO struggles and conquers – they will develop with tenfold intensity and lead the adult man to his destruction. For it is they who are the tools and weapons of the Karmic LAW OF RETRIBUTION. . . . the *new* man is invariably the son and progeny of the old man that was.” (“Theosophical Articles and Notes” p. 201-202)

“The “old being” is the sole parent – father and mother at once – of the “new being.” It is the former who is the creator and fashioner, of the latter, in reality; and far more so in plain truth, than any father in flesh. And once that you have well mastered the meaning of *Skandhas* you will see what I mean. It is the group of *Skandhas*, that form and constitute the physical and mental individuality we call man (or any being). This group consists (in the exoteric teaching) of five *Skandhas*, namely:

“*Rupa* – the material properties or attributes;

“*Vedana* – sensations;

“*Sanna* – abstract ideas;

“*Sankhara* – tendencies both physical and mental; and

“*Vinnana* – mental powers, an amplification of the fourth – meaning the mental, physical and moral predispositions. We add to them two more, the nature and names of which you may learn hereafter.”

(Mahatma K.H.)

Note: The above are the Pali names, the Sanskrit names being generally written as *Rupa*, *Vedana*, *Samjna*, *Samskara* (translated as “mental deposits” in William Judge’s rendition of Patanjali’s *Yoga Aphorisms*), and *Vijnana*.

“**Skandha** or *Skhanda* (*Sk.*) *Lit.*, “bundles”, or groups of attributes; everything finite, inapplicable to the eternal and the absolute. There are five – esoterically, *seven* – attributes in every human living being, which are known as the *Pancha Skandhas*. These are (1) form, *rûpa*; (2) perception, *vidâna*; (3) consciousness, *sanjnâ*; (4) action, *sanskâra*; (5) knowledge, *vidyâna*. These unite at the birth of man and constitute his personality. After the maturity of these Skandhas, they begin to separate and weaken, and this is followed by *jarâmarana*, or decrepitude and death.”

(“Theosophical Glossary” p. 301-302)

THE FOUR MAHARAJAHS

“**Mahârâjahs**, *The Four* (*Sk.*). The four great Karmic deities with the Northern Buddhists placed at the four cardinal points to watch mankind.” (“Theosophical Glossary” p. 201)

“FOHAT [i.e. Cosmic Electricity] TAKES FIVE STRIDES (*having already taken the first three*) (*a*), AND BUILDS A WINGED WHEEL AT EACH CORNER OF THE SQUARE FOR THE FOUR HOLY ONES AND THEIR ARMIES (*hosts*).” (Stanza V, shloka V, from the Book of Dzyan, on Cosmogogenesis or cosmic evolution)

“Four winged wheels at each corner for the four holy ones and their armies (hosts)” These are the “four Maharajahs” or great Kings of the Dhyân-Chohans, the Devas who preside, each over one of the four cardinal points. They are the Regents or Angels who rule over the Cosmical Forces of North, South, East and West, Forces having each a distinct occult property. These BEINGS are also connected with Karma, as the latter needs physical and material agents to carry out her decrees, such as the four kinds of winds, for instance, professedly admitted by Science to have their respective evil and beneficent influences upon the health of Mankind and every living thing. There is occult philosophy in that Roman Catholic doctrine which traces the various public calamities, such as epidemics of disease, and wars, and so on, to the invisible “Messengers” from North and West. . . . Belief in the “Four Maharajahs” – the Regents of the Four cardinal points – was universal and is now that of Christians, who call them, after St. Augustine, “Angelic Virtues,” and “Spirits” when enumerated by themselves, and “Devils” when named by Pagans. . . . it is not the “Rector” or “Maharajah” who punishes or rewards . . . but man himself – his deeds or Karma, attracting individually and collectively (as in the case of whole nations sometimes), every kind of evil and calamity. We produce CAUSES, and these awaken the corresponding powers in the sidereal world; which powers are magnetically and irresistibly attracted to – and react upon – those who produced these causes; whether such persons are practically the evil-doers, or simply Thinkers who brood mischief. Thought is matter, we are taught by modern Science; and “every particle of the existing matter must be a register of all that has happened,” as in their “*Principles of Science*” Messrs. Jevons and Babbage tell the profane. . . .

“In the Egyptian temples, according to Clemens Alexandrinus, an immense curtain separated the tabernacle from the place for the congregation. The Jews had the same. In both, the curtain was drawn over five pillars (the Pentacle) symbolising our five senses and five Root-races esoterically, while the four colours of the curtain represented the four cardinal points and the four terrestrial elements. The whole was an allegorical symbol. It is through the four high Rulers over the four points and Elements that our five senses may become cognisant of the hidden truths of Nature; . . .

“If the student would know more of them, he has but to compare the Vision of Ezekiel (chap. i.) with what is known of Chinese Buddhism (even in its exoteric teachings); and examine the outward shape of these “Great Kings.” In the opinion of the Rev. Joseph Edkins, they are “the Devas who preside each over one of the four continents into which the Hindus divide the world.” Each leads an army of spiritual beings to protect mankind and Buddhism. With the exception of favouritism

towards Buddhism, the four celestial beings are precisely this. They are the protectors of mankind and also the Agents of Karma on Earth, whereas the Lipika are concerned with Humanity's hereafter. At the same time they are the four living creatures "who have the likeness of a man" of Ezekiel's visions, called by the translators of the Bible, "Cherubim," "Seraphim," etc.; and by the Occultists, "the winged Globes," the "Fiery Wheels," and in the Hindu Pantheon by a number of different names. . . . Ezekiel plainly describes the four Cosmic Angels: "I looked, and behold, a whirlwind, a cloud and fire infolding it . . . also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures . . . they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces and four wings . . . the face of a man, and the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle . . ." ("Man" was here substituted for "Dragon." Compare the "*Ophite Spirits*."). . . "Now as I beheld the living creatures behold one wheel upon the Earth with his four faces . . . as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel . . . for the support of the living creature was in the wheel . . . their appearance was like coals of fire . . ." etc.

(Ezekiel, ch. i.)" ("The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 1, p. 122-127)

"*Let every lord of the Dazzling Face (an adept of the White Magic) cause the Vivân [i.e. flying vehicle] of every lord of the Dark Face to come into his hands (or possession), lest any (of the Sorcerers) should by its means escape from the waters, avoid the rod of the Four, (Karmic deities) and save his wicked' (followers, or people). . .*

'The hour has struck, the black night is ready, etc., etc.

'Let their destiny be accomplished. We are the servants of the great Four.' ‡

"‡ The four Karmic gods, called the Four Maharajahs in the Stanzas." ("The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 2, p. 427, excerpt from HPB's translation of a secret manuscript which she says on p. 423 "is said to have been copied from stone tablets which belonged to a Buddha of the earliest day of the Fifth Race, who had witnessed the Deluge and the submersion of the chief continents of the Atlantean race.")

"As already stated, that which Mr. G. Massey calls the four genii of the four cardinal points; and the Chinese, the Black Warrior, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Azure Dragon, is called in the Secret Books, – the "Four Hidden Dragons of Wisdom" and the "Celestial Nâgas." ("The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 1, p. 408-409)

THE LIPIKA

"**Lipikas** (*Sk.*). The celestial recorders, the "Scribes", those who record every word and deed, said or done by man while on this earth. As Occultism teaches, they are the agents of KARMA – the retributive Law." ("Theosophical Glossary" p. 190)

"The *Lipi-ka*, from the word *lipi*, "writing," means literally the "Scribes." [Footnote: "These are the four "Immortals" which are mentioned in *Atharva Veda* as the "Watchers" or Guardians of the four quarters of the sky (see ch. lxxvi., 1-4, *et seq.*)." ("The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 1, p. 103-104)

"The Lipika proceed from Mahat [defined in the "Glossary" on p. 201 as "The first principle of Universal Intelligence and Consciousness"] and are called in the Kabala the four Recording Angels; in India, the four Maharajahs, those who record every thought and deed of man; they are called by St. John in the Revelation, the Book of Life. They are directly connected with Karma and what the Christians call the Day of Judgment; in the East it was called the Day after Mahamanvantara, or the "Day-Be-With-Us." Then everything becomes one, all individualities are merged into one, yet each knowing itself, a mysterious teaching indeed. But then, that which to us now is non-consciousness or the unconscious, will then be absolute consciousness.

“Q. What relation have the Lipika to Mahat?”

“A. They are a division, four taken from one of the Septenates that emanates from Mahat. Mahat corresponds with the Fire of Simon Magus, the secret and the manifested Divine Ideation, made to witness to itself in this objective Universe through the intelligent forms we see around us, in what is called creation. Like all other emanations, they are “Wheels within Wheels.” The Lipika are on the plane corresponding to the highest plane of our chain of globes.” (“Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge” p. 148-149)

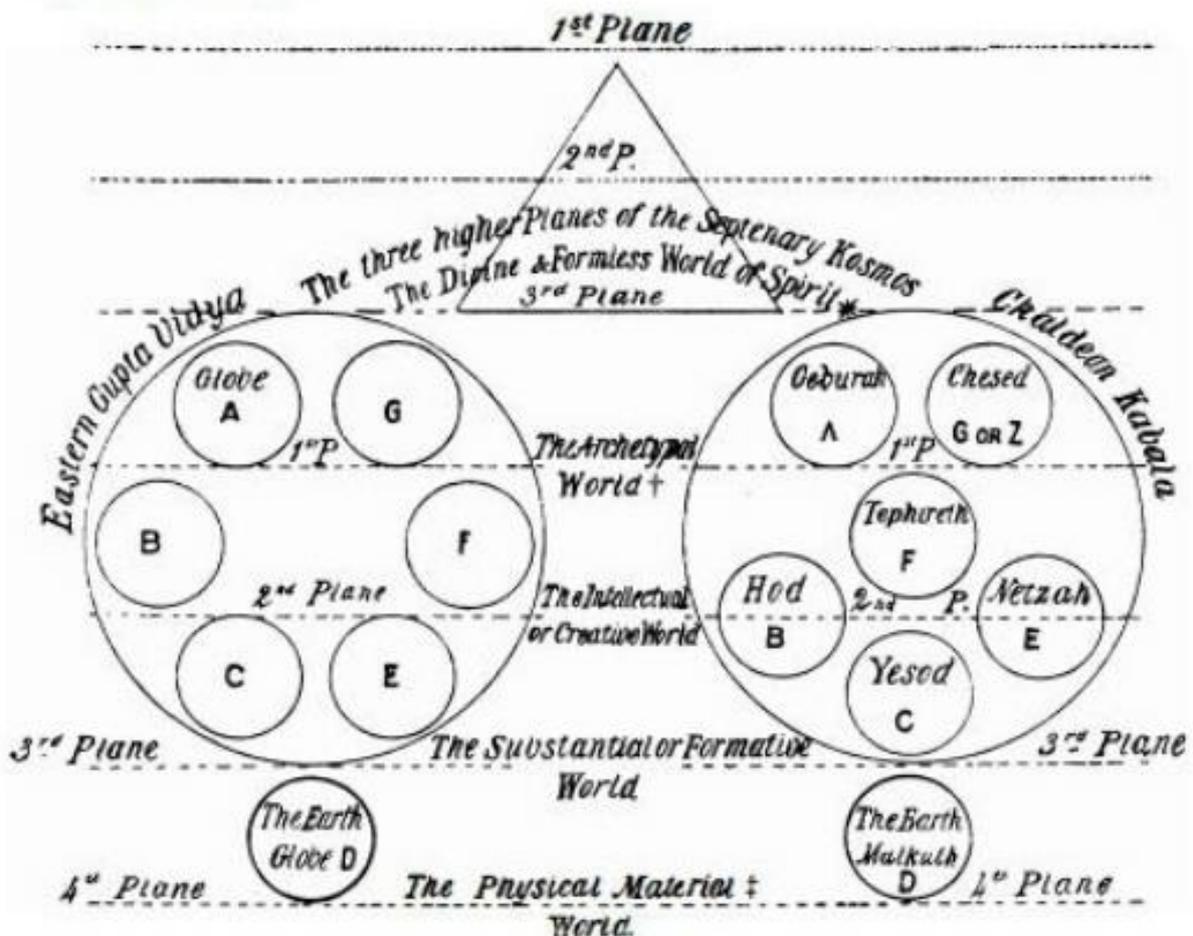


Diagram from “The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. 200

“Mr. A. Keightley: Then the Lipika are on the same plane as Mahat.

“Mme. Blavatsky: They are the sons of Mahat, as they call them. Certainly, they are immediately under the absolute plane of divine ideation, but even that is a very risky thing to say, because immediately it suggests to you that it is like a staircase, and there are stories in the house, one below and the other above. But it is not so at all; it would be a very erroneous conception. It is everywhere and nowhere, just as when we were speaking about the circle and the point and circumference and all that, because it is not a thing above or below, and the right or the left; it is as I have been explaining many times, something which is – well, it may be in one place and yet they are the seven planes, they are states, and being states other than ours, of course they are invisible and perfectly incomprehensible to us, and each state does not know the people of the other state.”

“The President: But still, it would not be right to describe them as being on the same plane as Mahat.

“*Mme. Blavatsky*: Certainly not.

“*The President*: Mahat is the synthesis of the plane above the Lipika.

“*Mme. Blavatsky*: Certainly, and the Lipika are in the middle of the plane on the four quarters, that is to say, the higher ether or the higher Astral Light and the lower Akasha. Akasha certainly goes beyond the seventh.

“*The President*: Can you tell us exactly how they would correspond with the archetypal worlds of the Kabalists? Is it between that and the next?

“*Mme. Blavatsky*: The Kabalists have only four worlds and we have seven, because they leave out entirely the three upper ones and begin counting simply the archetypal world, which is the highest Astral Light, just the four, there it is; but the others are left in silence, and they are not spoken about.

“*The President*: The Lipika really are on the plane which is above the archetypal world.

“*Mme. Blavatsky*: Together they are on that plane, because their world begins where our globe A begins. And if you take *The Secret Doctrine*, you find there the division of the four planes; you see four planes; it begins there just above our sphere. . . .

“*Mr. B. Keightley*: That places, so to speak, the Lipika in relation to the kabalistic conception and to the evolution perfectly. They are on the highest plane corresponding to the highest plane of our chain of globes.

“*Mme. Blavatsky*: What is the use of talking a language no one would understand and cannot even conceive of?” (“*The Secret Doctrine Dialogues*” p. 327-329)

“The fundamental doctrines of Theosophy are of no value unless they are applied to daily life. To the extent to which this application goes they become living truths, quite different from intellectual expressions of doctrine. The mere intellectual grasp may result in spiritual pride, while the living doctrine becomes an entity through the mystic power of the human soul.” (William Q. Judge, “*Friends or Enemies in The Future*” article)

1,400 year old Japanese Buddhist statues of the Four Guardian Kings (Maharajahs)

Although this is obviously an anthropomorphisation, it is one of many surviving examples throughout the Buddhist world of the importance, recognition, and veneration, given historically to these great “BEINGS” who HPB calls the “great Kings of the Dhyana-Chohans.”

