

The Higher Lines of Karma

THE THIRD movement of mind labours to bring the soul of man out of the tangle of the vital and mental forces and opens to him a field in which the mind raises itself, raises at least the head of its thought and will, above the vital demands and standards and there at that top of its activities, whatever its other concessions to the lower Karma, lives for the sake of the true values, the true demands of a mental being, even though one imprisoned in a body and set to wrestle with the conditions of life in a material universe. The innate demand of the mental being is for mental experience, for the mind's manifold strengths, its capacities, joys, growth, perfections, and for these things for their own sake because of the inevitable satisfaction they give to his nature, — the demand of the intellect for truth and knowledge, the demand of the ethical mind for right and good, the demand of the aesthetic mind for beauty and delight of beauty, the demand of the emotional mind for love and the joy of relation with our fellow-beings, the demand of the will for self-mastery and mastery of things and the world and our existence. And the values which the mental being holds for supreme and effective are the values of truth and knowledge, of right and good, of beauty and aesthetic delight, of love and emotional joy, of mastery and inner lordship. It is these things that he seeks to know and follow, to possess, discover, enjoy, increase. It is for this great adventure that he came into the world, to walk hardily through the endless fields they offer to him, to experiment, to dare, to test the utmost limit of each capacity and follow each possibility and its clue to the end as well as to observe in each its at present discovered law and measure. Here as in the other fields, as in the vital and physical, so in his mental provinces, it is the appointed work of his intelligence and will to know and master through an always enlarging experience the conditions

of an increasing light and power and right and truth and joy and beauty and wideness, and not only to discover the Truth and the Law and set up a system and an order, but to enlarge continually its lines and boundaries. And therefore in these fields, as in life, man, the mental being, cannot stop short too long in the partial truth of an established system and a temporary mistaken for an eternal order — here least, because as he advances he is always tempted still farther forward until he realises that he is a seeker of the infinite and a power of the absolute. His base here plunges into the obscure infinite of life and matter; but his head rises towards the luminous infinite of the spirit.

The third movement of the mental energy carries it therefore into its own native field and kingdom above the pressing subjection to the lowering and limiting claim of a vital and physical Karma. It is true that his lower being remains subject to the law of life and of the body, and it is true also that he must strive either to find in life or to bring into the world around him some law of truth, of right and good, of beauty, of love and joy, of the mind's will and mastery, for it is by that effort that he is man and not the animal and without it he cannot find his true satisfaction in living. But two things he has more and more to feel and to realise, first, that life and matter follow their own law and not, in man's sense of it at least, a moral, a rational, a mentally determined aesthetic or other mind order, and if he wishes to introduce any such thing into them, he must himself here create it, transcending the physical and the vital law and discovering another and a better, and secondly, that the more he follows these things for their own sake, the more he discovers their true form, *svarūpa*, and develops their force to prevail upon and lift up life into an air of higher nature. In other words he passes from the practical pursuit of a serviceable knowledge, morality, aesthesis, force of emotion and will-power, — serviceable for his vital aims, for life as it first is, — to an ideal pursuit of these things and the transformation of life into the image of his ideal. This he is unable indeed as yet to realise and is obliged to rest on balance and compromise, because he has not found the whole reconciling secret of that which lies beyond his ideals. But it is as

he pursues them in their purity, for their own imperative innate demand and attraction, on the line of their trend to their own infinite and absolute that he gets nearer in his total experience to the secret. There is so a chance of his discovering that as the beauty and irrefragable order of life and matter are due to the joy of the Infinite in life and in matter and the fidelity of the Force here at work to the hidden knowledge and will and idea of the Self and Spirit in them, so there is within his own hidden self, his own vast and covert spirit a secret of the Infinite's self-knowledge, will, joy, love and delight, mastery, right and truth of joy and action by which his own greater life rising above the vital and mental limitations can discover an infinite perfection and beauty and delight in itself and spontaneous irrefragable order.

Meanwhile this third movement of mind discovers a law of the return of mental energies, pure in its kind and as certain as the vital and the physical, as faithful to itself, to the self of mind and to mind nature, a law not of vital returns to mental dynamis, but of progression of the soul in the being and force of good and beauty and power — of mind-power and soul-power — and greatness and love and joy and knowledge. Mounting here the ethical mind no longer follows good for a reward now on earth or in another existence, but for the sake of good, and no longer shuns evil for fear of punishment on earth later on in this life or else in another life or in hell, but because to follow evil is a degradation and affliction of its being and a fall from its innate and imperative endeavour. This is to it a necessity of its moral nature, a truly categorical imperative, a call that in the total more complex nature of man may be dulled or suppressed or excluded by the claim of its other parts and their needs, but to the ethical mind is binding and absolute. The virtue that demands a reward for acting well and needs a penalty to keep it walking in the straight way, is no real portion, no true law of the ethical being, but rather a mixed creation, a rule of his practical reason that seeks always after utility and holds that to be right which is helpful and expedient, a rule that looks first not at the growth of the soul but at the mechanical securing of

a regulated outward conduct and to secure it bribes and terrifies the vital being into acquiescence and a reluctant subordination of its own instincts and natural ventures. The virtue so created is an expediency, a social decency, a prudent limitation of egoism, a commercial substitute for the true thing; or, at best, it is a habit of the mind and not a truth of the soul, and in the mind a fabrication, mixed and of inferior stuff, a conventional virtue, insecure, destructible by the wear and tear of life, easily confused with other expediences or purchasable or conquerable by them, — it is not a high and clear upbuilding, an enduring and inwardly living self-creation of the soul. Whatever its practical utility or service as a step of the transition, the mental habit of confusion and vitalistic compromise it fosters and the more questionable confusions and compromises that habit favours, have made conventional morality one of the chief of the forces that hold back human life from progressing to a true ethical order. If humanity has made any lasting and true advance, it has been not through the virtue created by reward and punishment or any of the sanctions powerful on the little vital ego, but by an insistence from the higher mind on the lower, an insistence on right for its own sake, on imperative moral values, on an absolute law and truth of ethical being and ethical conduct that must be obeyed whatever the recalcitrances of the lower mind, whatever the pains of the vital problem, whatever the external result, the inferior issue.

This higher mind holds its pure and complete sway only on a few high souls, in others it acts upon the lower and outer mind but amidst much misprision, confusion and distortion of thought and will and perverting or abating mixture; on the mass of men governed by the lower egoistic, vital and conventional standards of conduct its influence is indirect and little. None the less it gives the clue we have to follow in order to pursue the spiral ascent of the lines of Karma. And first we observe that the just man follows the ethical law for its own sake and not for any other purpose whatsoever, is just for the sake of justice, righteous for the sake of righteousness, compassionate for the sake of compassion, true for the sake of truth alone.

Harishchandra sacrificing self and wife and child and kingdom and subjects in an unswerving fidelity to the truth of the spoken word, Shivi giving his flesh to the hawk rather than fall from his kingly duty of protection to the fugitive, the Bodhisattwa laying his body before the famished tiger, images in which sacred or epic legend has consecrated this greater kind of virtue, illuminate an elevation of the ethical will and a law of moral energy that asks for no return from man or living thing or from the gods of Karma, lays down no conditions, makes no calculation of consequence, of less or more or of the greatest good of the greatest number, admits neither the hedonistic nor the utilitarian measure, but does simply the act as the thing to be done because it is right and virtue and therefore the very law of being of the ethical man, the categorical imperative of his nature.

This kind of high absoluteness in the ethical demand is appalling to the flesh and the ego, for it admits of no comfortable indulgence and compromise, no abating reserves or conditions, no profitable compact between the egoistic life and virtue. It is offensive too to the practical reason, for it ignores the complexity of the world and of human nature and seems to savour of an extremism and exclusive exaggeration as dangerous to life as it is exalted in ideal purpose. *Fiat justitia ruat coelum*, let justice and right be done though the heavens fall, is a rule of conduct that only the ideal mind can accept with equanimity or the ideal life tolerate in practice. And even to the larger ideal mind this absoluteness becomes untrustworthy if it is an obedience not to the higher law of the soul, but to an outward moral law, a code of conduct. For then in place of a lifting enthusiasm we have the rigidity of the Pharisee, a puritan fierceness or narrowness or the life-killing tyranny of a single insufficient side of the nature. This is not yet that higher mental movement, but a straining towards it, an attempt to rise above the transitional law and the vitalistic compromise. And it brings with it an artificiality, a tension, a coercion, often a repellent austerity which, disregarding as it does sanity and large wisdom and the simple naturalness of the true ethical mind and the flexibilities of life, tyrannising over but not transforming it, is not the higher perfection of our

nature. But still even here there is the feeling out after a great return to the output of moral energy, an attempt well worth making, if the aim can indeed so be accomplished, to build up by the insistence on a rigid obedience to a law of moral action that which is yet non-existent or imperfectly existent in us but which alone can make the law of our conduct a thing true and living, — an ethical being with an inalienably ethical nature. No rule imposed on him from outside, whether in the name of a supposed mechanical or impersonal law or of God or prophet, can be, as such, true or right or binding on man: it becomes that only when it answers to some demand or aids some evolution of his inner being. And when that inner being is revealed, evolved, at each moment naturally active, simply and spontaneously imperative, then we get the true, the inner and intuitive Law in its light of self-knowledge, its beauty of self-fulfilment, its intimate life significance. An act of justice, truth, love, compassion, purity, sacrifice becomes then the faultless expression, the natural outflowing of our soul of justice, our soul of truth, our soul of love and compassion, our soul of purity or sacrifice. And before the greatness of its imperative mandate to the outer nature the vital being and the practical reason and surface seeking intelligence must and do bow down as before something greater than themselves, something that belongs directly to the divine and the infinite.

Meanwhile we get the clue to the higher law of Karma, of the output and returns of energy, and see it immediately and directly to be, what all law of Karma, really and ultimately, if at first covertly, is for man, a law of his spiritual evolution. The true return to the act of virtue, to the ethically right output of his energy — his reward, if you will, and the sole recompense on which he has a right to insist, — is its return upon him in a growth of the moral strength within him, an upbuilding of his ethical being, a flowering of the soul of right, justice, love, compassion, purity, truth, strength, courage, self-giving that he seeks to be. The true return to the act of evil, to the ethically wrong output of energy — his punishment, if you will, and the sole penalty he has any need or right to fear, — is its return upon

him in a retardation of the growth, a demolition of the upbuilding, an obscuration, tarnishing, impoverishing of the soul, of the pure, strong and luminous being that he is striving to be. An inner happiness he may gain by his act, the calm, peace, satisfaction of the soul fulfilled in right, or an inner calamity, the suffering, disturbance, unease and malady of its descent or failure, but he can demand from God or moral Law no other. The ethical soul, — not the counterfeit but the real, — accepts the pains and sufferings and difficulties and fierce intimidations of life, not as a punishment for its sins, but as an opportunity and trial, an opportunity for its growth, a trial of its built or native strength, and good fortune and all outer success not as a coveted reward of virtue, but as an opportunity also and an even greater more difficult trial. What to this high seeker of Right can mean the vital law of Karma or what can its gods do to him that he can fear or long for? The ethical-vitalistic explanation of the world and its meaning and measures has for such a soul, for man at this height of his evolution no significance. He has travelled beyond the jurisdiction of the Powers of the middle air, the head of his spirit's endeavour is lifted above the dull grey-white belt that is their empire.

There can be no greater error than to suppose, misled by this absolute insistence of the ethical being, that the ethical is the single or the supreme demand of the Infinite upon us or the one law and line of the higher Karma, and that in comparison with it nothing else matters. The German thinker's idea that there is a categorical imperative laid upon man to seek after the right and good, an insistent law of right conduct, but no categorical imperative of the Oversoul compelling him to seek after the beautiful or the true, after a law of right beauty and harmony and right knowledge, is a singular misprision. It is a false deduction born of too much preoccupation with the transitional movement of man's mind and, there too, only with one side of its complex phenomena. The Indian thinkers had a wiser sight who while conceding right ethical being and conduct as a first need, still considered knowledge to be the greater ultimate demand, the indispensable condition, and much nearer to a full seeing

came that larger experience of theirs that either through an urge towards absolute knowledge or a pure impersonality of the will or an ecstasy of divine love and absolute delight, — and even through an absorbing concentration of the psychical and the vital and physical being, — the soul turns towards the Supreme and that on each part of our self and nature and consciousness there can come a call and irresistible attraction of the Divine. Indeed, an uplift of all these, an imperative of the Divine upon all the ways of our being, is the impetus of self-enlargement to a complete, an integralising possession of God, freedom and immortality, and that therefore is the highest law of our nature.

The fundamental movement of life knows nothing of an absolute ethical insistence, its only categorical imperative is the imperative of Nature herself compelling each being to affirm its life as it must or as best it can according to its own inborn self and way of expression of her, *Swabhava*. In the transitional movement of life informed by mind there is indeed a moral instinct developing into a moral sense and idea, — not complete for it leaves large ranges of conduct in which there is a lacuna or inconscience of the moral sense, a satisfied fulfilment of the egoistic desires at the expense of others, and not imperative since it is easily combated and overthrown by the earlier imposed, more naturally dominant law of the vital being. What the natural egoistic man obeys most rigorously is the collective or social rule of conduct impressed on his mind by law and tradition, *jus, mores*, and outside its conventional circle he allows himself an easy latitude. The reason generalises the idea of a moral law carrying with it an obligation man should heed and obey but may disregard at this outer or that inner peril, and it insists first and most on a moral law, an obligation of self-control, justice, righteousness, conduct, rather than a law of truth, beauty and harmony, love, mastery, because the regulation of his desires and instincts and his outward vital action is his first necessary preoccupation and he has to find his poise here and a settled and sanctioned order before he commences securely to go deeper and develop more in the direction of his inner being. It is the ideal mind that brings into this superficial moral sense, this

relative obligation, the intuition of an inner and absolute ethical imperative, and if it tends to give to ethics the first and most important and in some minds the whole place, it is still because the priority of action, long given to it in the evolution of mind on earth, moves man to apply first his idealism to action and his relations with other beings. But as there is the moral instinct in the mind seeking for good, so too there is the aesthetic instinct, the emotional and the dynamic and the instinct in man that seeks after knowledge, and the developing reason is as much concerned to evolve in all these directions as in the ethical and to find out their right law; for truth, beauty, love, strength and power are after all as necessary for the true growth of mind and of life and even for the fullness of the action as righteousness, purity and justice. Arriving on the high ideal plane these too become, no less than the ethical motive, no longer a seeking and necessity of this relative nature and importance, but a law and call to spiritual perfection, an inner and absolute divine imperative.

The higher mind of man seeks not only after good, but after truth, after knowledge. He has an intellectual as well as an ethical being and the impulse that moves it, the will to know, the thirst for truth is not less divine in its upward orientation than the will to good, not less too in its earlier workings, but even more, a necessity of the growth of our consciousness and being and the right ordering of our action, not less an imperative need laid upon man by the will of the spirit in the universe. And in the pursuit of knowledge as in the pursuit of good we see the same lines and stages of the evolution of energy. At first as its basis there is simply a life-consciousness seeking for its self, becoming more and more aware of its movements, actions and reactions, its environment, its habits, its fixed laws, gaining and enlarging and learning always to profit by self-experience. This is indeed the fundamental purpose of consciousness and use of intelligence, and intelligence with the thinking will in it is man's master faculty and supports and embraces, changes with its change and widens with its widening and increasingly perfects all the others. Mind in its first action pursues knowledge with a

certain curiosity, but turns it mainly to practical experience, to a help that enables it to fulfil better and to increase more assuredly the first uses and purposes of life. Afterwards it evolves a freer use of the intelligence, but there is still a dominant turn towards the vital purpose. And we may observe that as a power for the returns of life the world energy seems to attach a more direct importance and give more tangible results to knowledge, to the right practical workings of the intelligence than it yields to moral right. In this material world it is at least doubtful how far moral good is repaid by vital good and moral evil punished by a recoil, but it is certain that we do pay very usually for our errors, for stupidity, for ignorance of the right way of action, for any ignoring or misapplication of the laws that govern our psychical, vital and physical being; it is certain that knowledge is a power for life efficiency and success. Intelligence pays its way in the material world, guards itself against vital and physical suffering, secures its vital rewards more surely than moral right and ethical purpose.

But the higher mind of humanity is no more content with a utilitarian use of knowledge as its last word in the seeking of the intelligence than with a vitalistic and utilitarian turn and demand of the ethical being. As in the ethical, so in the intellectual being of man there emerges a necessity of knowledge which is no longer its utility for life, its need of knowing rightly in order to act rightly, to deal successfully and intelligently with the world around it, but a necessity of the soul, an imperative demand of the inner being. The pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge is the true, the intrinsic dharma of the intellect and not for the sake primarily or even necessarily at all for the securing or the enlargement of the means of life and success in action. The vital kinetic man tends indeed to regard this passion of the intellect as a respectable but still rather unpractical and often trivial curiosity: as he values ethics for its social effects or for its rewards in life, so he values knowledge for its external helpfulness; science is great in his eyes because of its inventions, its increase of comforts and means and appliances: his standard in all things is vital efficiency. But in fact Nature sees and stirs from the first

to a larger and more inward Will and is moved with a greater purpose, and all seeking for knowledge springs from a necessity of the mind, a necessity of its nature, and that means a necessity of the soul that is here in nature. Its need to know is one with its need to grow, and from the eager curiosity of the child upward to the serious stress of mind of the thinker, scholar, scientist, philosopher the fundamental purpose of Nature, the constant in it, is the same. All the time that she seems busy only with the maintenance of her works, with life, with the outward, her secret underlying purpose is other, — it is the evolution of that which is hidden within her: for if her first dynamic word is life, her greater revealing word is consciousness and the evolution of life and action only the means of the evolution of the consciousness involved in life, the imprisoned soul, the Jiva. Action is a means, but knowledge is the sign and the growth of the conscious soul is the purpose. Man's use of the intelligence for the pursuit of knowledge is therefore that which distinguishes him most from other beings and gives him his high peculiar place in the scale of existence. His passion for knowledge, first world-knowledge, but afterwards self-knowledge and that in which both meet and find their common secret, God-knowledge, is the central drift of his ideal mind and a greater imperative of his being than that of action, though later in laying its complete hold on him, greater in the wideness of its reach and greater too in its effectiveness upon action, in the returns of the world energy to his power of the truth within him.

It is in the third movement of highest mind when it is preparing to disengage itself, its pure self of will and intelligence, the radiant head of its endeavour from subjection to the vital motive that this imperative of nature, this intrinsic need that creates in the mind of man the urge towards knowledge, becomes something much greater, becomes instead more and more plainly the ideal absolute imperative of the soul emerging from the husks and sheaths of ignorance and pushing towards the truth, towards the light as the condition of its fulfilment and the very call of the Divine upon its being. The lure of an external utility ceases to be at all needed as an incentive towards

knowledge, just as the lure of a vital reward offered now or hereafter ceases on the same high level of our ascent to be needed as an incentive to virtue, and to attach importance to it under whatever specious colour is even felt to be a degradation of the disinterestedness, a fall from the high purity of the soul motive. Already even in the more outward forms of intellectual seeking something of this absoluteness begins to be felt and to reign. The scientist pursues his discoveries in order that he may know the law and truth of the process of the universe and their practical results are only a secondary motive of the enquiring mind and no motive at all to the higher scientific intelligence. The philosopher is driven from within to search for the ultimate truth of things for the one sake of Truth only and all else but to see the very face of Truth becomes to him, to his absorbing mind and soul of knowledge, secondary or of no importance; nothing can be allowed to interfere with that one imperative. And there is the tendency to the same kind of exclusiveness in the interest and the process of this absolute. The thinker is concerned to seek out and enforce the truth on himself and the world regardless of any effect it may have in disturbing the established bases of life, religion, ethics, society, regardless of any other consideration whatsoever: he must express the word of the Truth whatever its dynamic results on life. And this absolute becomes most absolute, this imperative most imperative when the inner action surpasses the strong coldness of intellectual search and becomes a fiery striving for truth experience, a luminous inner truth living, a birth into a new truth consciousness. The enamoured of light, the sage, the Yogin of knowledge, the seer, the Rishi live for knowledge and in knowledge, because it is the absolute of light and truth that they seek after and its claim on them is single and absolute.

At the same time this also is a line of the world energy, — for the world Shakti is a Shakti of consciousness and knowledge and not only a Power of force and action, — and the output of the energy of knowledge brings its results as surely as the energy of the will seeking after success in action or after right ethical conduct. But the result that it brings on this higher plane of the

seeking in mind is simply and purely the upward growth of the soul in light and truth; that and whatever happiness it brings is the one supreme reward demanded by the soul of knowledge and the darkening of the light within, the pain of the fall from truth, the pain of the imperfection of not living only by its law and wholly in the light is its one penalty of suffering. The outward rewards and the sufferings of life are small things to the higher soul of knowledge in man: even his high mind of knowledge will often face all that the world can do to afflict it, just as it is ready to make all manner of sacrifices in the pursuit and the affirmation of the truth it knows and lives for. Bruno burning in the Roman fire, the martyrs of all religions suffering and welcoming as witnesses to the light within them torture and persecution, Buddha leaving all to discover the dark cause of universal suffering in this world of the impermanence and the way of escape into the supreme Permanence, the ascetic casting away as an illusion life in the world and its activities, enjoyments, attractions with the one will to enter into the absolute truth and the supreme consciousness are witnesses to this imperative of knowledge, its extreme examples and exponents.

The intention of Nature, the spiritual justification of her ways appears at last in this turn of her energies leading the conscious soul along the lines of truth and knowledge. At first she is physical Nature building her firm field according to a base of settled truth and law but determined by a subconscious knowledge she does not yet share with her creatures. Next she is Life growing slowly self-conscious, seeking out knowledge that she may move seemingly in them along her ways and increase at once the complexity and the efficacy of her movements, but developing slowly too the consciousness that knowledge must be pursued for a higher and purer end, for truth, for the satisfaction, as the life expression and as the spiritual self-finding of the soul of knowledge. But, last, it is that soul itself growing in the truth and light, growing into the absolute truth of itself which is its perfection, that becomes the law and high end of her energies. And at each stage she gives returns according to the development of the aim and consciousness of the being. At first there is the

return of skill and effectual intelligence — and her own need explains sufficiently why she gives the rewards of life not, as the ethical mind in us would have it, to the just, not chiefly to moral good, but to the skilful and to the strong, to will and force and intelligence, — and then, more and more clearly disengaged, the return of enlightenment and the satisfaction of the mind and the soul in the conscious use and wise direction of its powers and capacities and, last of all, the one supreme return, the increase of the soul in light, the satisfaction of its perfection in knowledge, its birth into the highest consciousness and the pure fulfilment of its own innate imperative. It is that growth, a divine birth or spiritual self-exceeding its supreme reward, which for the Eastern mind has been always the highest gain, — the growth out of human ignorance into divine self-knowledge.