

Chapter Two

Karma and Heredity

Karma

Karma is not luck, it is the transmission of past energies into the present with their results.

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All energies put into activity — thought, speech, feeling, act — go to constitute Karma. These things help to develop the nature in one direction or another, and the nature and its actions and reactions produce their consequences inward and outward: they also act on others and create movements in the general sum of forces which can return upon oneself sooner or later. Thoughts unexpressed can also go out as forces and produce their effects. It is a mistake to think that a thought or will can have effect only when it is expressed in speech or act: the unspoken thought, the unexpressed will are also active energies and can produce their own vibrations, effects or reactions.

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If it [*the soul*] goes on with its Karma, then it does not get liberation. If it wants only farther experience, it can just stay there in the ordinary nature. The aim of Yoga is to transcend Karma. Karma means subjection to lower Nature; through Yoga the soul goes towards freedom.

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The bondage to the effects of Karma remains so long as one has not passed out of the ordinary human consciousness which is its field to the higher spiritual consciousness where all bonds are untied. As for peace one can gain it by an entire reliance on the Divine and surrender to the Divine Will.

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In life all sorts of things offer themselves. One cannot take anything that comes with the idea that it is sent by the Divine. There is a choice and a wrong choice produces its consequence.

Karma and Heredity

Karma and heredity are the two main causes [*of one's temperament*]. According to some heredity is also subject to Karma, but that may be only in a general way, not in all the details.

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Many things in the body and some in the mind and vital are inherited from the father and mother or other ancestors — that everybody is supposed to know. There are other things that are not inherited, but peculiar to one's own nature or developed by the happenings of this life.

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You must realise that all human beings are made partly of what is given them by their ancestors (not only father and mother but all the ancestors), partly of what they bring with them. The part they get from the ancestors is called hereditary — it is part (not the whole) of the physical and lower vital consciousness, sometimes a little of the external mind also — it is a small portion of the external being, but although small, it is sometimes very persistent and active. The rest of the being, inner and a great part too of the external, is brought from past lives. This hereditary part has to be got rid of and replaced by the true individuality spreading itself to the whole external nature.

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A very big stamp in most cases¹ — it is in the physical vital and physical material that the stamp chiefly exists — and it is increased by education and upbringing.

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¹ *The correspondent asked whether the influence of heredity, race, caste and family leaves a stamp on one's lower nature. — Ed.*

There is always a hereditary part of the nature which is a large portion of the outward nature — there is also the educational influence of the father which has put a stamp on you.

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Hereditary influence² creates an affinity and affinity is a living thing. It is only when the hereditary part is changed that the affinity ceases.

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It is your own being that seeks for the Divine. The hereditary part is not your true being, but something you have taken up as part of this birth. It can be got rid of or changed.

Evolution, Karma and Ethics

The question as put in your letter seems to me to be too rigidly phrased and not to take into sufficient account the plasticity of the facts and forces of existence. It sounds like the problem which one might raise on the strength of the most recent scientific theories — if all is made up of protons and electrons, all exactly similar to each other (except for the group numbers, and why should a difference of quantity make such an extraordinary difference or any difference of quality?) how does their action result in such stupendous differences of degree, kind, power, everything? But why should we assume that the psychic seeds or sparks all started in a race at the same time, equal in conditions, equal in power and nature? Granted that the One Divine is the source of all and the Self is the same in all; but in manifestation why should not the Infinite throw itself out in infinite variety, why must it be in an innumerable sameness? How many of these psychic seeds started long before others and have a great past of development behind them and how many are young and raw and half-grown only? And even among those who started together,

² *The correspondent asked whether the hereditary influence created by his father had come to an end in him. — Ed.*

why should not there be some who ran at a great speed and others who loitered and grew with difficulty or went about in circles? And then there is an evolution, and it is only at a certain stage in the evolution that the animal belt is past and there is a human beginning; what constitutes the human beginning, which represents a very considerable revolution or turnover? Up to the animal line it is the vital and physical that have been developing — for the human to begin is it not necessary that there should be the descent of a mental being to take up the vital and physical evolution? And may it not well be that the mental beings who descend are not all of the same power and stature and, besides, do not take up equally developed vital and physical consciousness-material? There is also the occult tradition of a hierarchy of beings who stand above the present manifestation and put themselves into it with results which will obviously be just such a stupendous difference of degrees, and even intervene by descending into the play through the gates of birth in human Nature. There are many complexities and the problem cannot be put with the rigidity of a mathematical formula.

A great part of the difficulty of these problems, I mean especially the appearance of inexplicable contradiction, arises from the problem itself being badly put. Take the popular account of reincarnation and Karma — it is based on the mere mental assumption that the workings of Nature ought to be moral and proceed according to an exact morality of equal justice — a scrupulous, even mathematical law of reward and punishment or, at any rate, of results according to a human idea of right correspondences. But Nature is non-moral — she uses forces and processes moral, immoral and amoral pell-mell for working out her business. Nature in her outward aspect seems to care for nothing except to get things done — or else to make conditions for an ingenious variety of the play of life. Nature in her deeper aspect as a conscious spiritual Power is concerned with the growth, by experience, the spiritual development of the souls she has in her charge — and these souls themselves have a say in the matter. All these good people lament and wonder that unaccountably they and other good people are visited with

such meaningless sufferings and misfortunes. But are they really visited with them by an outside Power or by a mechanical Law of Karma? Is it not possible that the soul itself — not the outward mind, but the spirit within — has accepted and chosen these things as part of its development in order to get through the necessary experience at a rapid rate, to hew through, *durchhauen*, even at the risk or the cost of much damage to the outward life and the body? To the growing soul, to the spirit within us, may not difficulties, obstacles, attacks be a means of growth, added strength, enlarged experience, training for spiritual victory? The arrangement of things may be that and not a mere question of the pounds, shillings and pence of a distribution of rewards and retributory misfortunes!

It is the same with the problem of the taking of animal life under the circumstances put forward by your friend in the letter. It is put on the basis of an invariable ethical right and wrong to be applied to all cases — is it right to take animal life at all, under any circumstances, is it right to allow an animal to suffer under your eyes when you can relieve it by an euthanasia? There can be no indubitable answer to a question put like that, because the answer depends on data which the mind has not before it. In fact there are many other factors which make people incline to this short and merciful way out of the difficulty — the nervous inability to bear the sight and hearing of so much suffering, the unavailing trouble, the disgust and inconvenience — all tend to give force to the idea that the animal itself would want to be out of it. But what does the animal really feel about it — may it not be clinging to life in spite of the pain? Or may not the soul have accepted these things for a quicker evolution into a higher state of life? If so, the mercy dealt out may conceivably interfere with the animal's Karma. In fact the right decision might vary in each case and depend on a knowledge which the human mind has not — and it might very well be said that until it has it, it has not the right to take life. It was some dim perception of this truth that made religion and ethics develop the law of Ahimsa — and yet that too becomes a mental rule which it is found impossible to apply in practice. And perhaps the moral of it all is that we must

act for the best according to our lights in each case, as things are, but that the solution of these problems can only come by pressing forward towards a greater light, a greater consciousness in which the problems themselves, as now stated by the human mind, will not arise because we shall have a vision which will see the world in a different way and a guidance which at present is not ours. The mental or moral rule is a stop-gap which men are obliged to use, very uncertainly and stumblingly, until they can see things whole in the light of the spirit.