

CYCLES, KARMA, REINCARNATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

The Great Journey

If the “Secret Path” is unattainable this “day,” it is within thy reach “to-morrow.” Learn that no efforts, not the smallest—whether in right or wrong direction—can vanish from the world of causes. E'en wasted smoke remains not traceless. “A harsh word uttered in past lives, is not destroyed but ever comes again.” The pepper plant will not give birth to roses, nor the sweet jessamine's silver star to thorn or thistle turn. Thou canst create this “day” thy chances for thy “morrow.” In the “Great Journey,” causes sown each hour bear each its harvest of effects, for rigid Justice rules the World. With mighty sweep of never erring action, it brings to mortals lives of weal or woe, the Karmic progeny of all our former thoughts and deeds.

The Voice of the Silence, p. 37

H.P. Blavatsky

Periodic Emanations

It is an eternal and periodical law which causes an active and creative force (the logos) to emanate from the ever-concealed and incomprehensible one principle at the beginning of every maha-manvantara, or new cycle of life.

The Key to Theosophy, p. 62, footnote

H. P. Blavatsky

The Obligatory Pilgrimage

The Secret Doctrine teaches: The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root, and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul—a spark of the former —through the Cycle of Incarnation (or “Necessity”) in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term. In other words, no purely spiritual Buddhi (divine Soul) can have an independent (conscious) existence before the spark which issued from the pure Essence of the Universal Sixth principle—or the OVER-SOUL—has (a) passed through every elemental form of the phenomenal world of that Manvantara, and (b) acquired individuality, first by natural impulse, and then by self-induced and self-devised efforts (checked by its Karma), thus ascending through all the degrees of intelligence, from the lowest to the highest Manas, from mineral and plant, up to the holiest archangel (Dhyani-Buddha). The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save

those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations. This is why the Hindus say that the Universe is Brahma and Brahmâ, for Brahma is in every atom of the universe, the six principles in Nature being all the outcome—the variously differentiated aspects—of the SEVENTH and ONE, the only reality in the Universe whether Cosmical or micro-cosmical, and also why the permutations (psychic, spiritual and physical), on the plane of manifestation and form, of the sixth (Brahmâ, the vehicle of Brahma) are viewed by metaphysical antiphrasis as illusive and Mayavic. For although the root of every atom individually and of every form collectively, is that seventh principle or the one Reality, still, in its manifested phenomenal and temporary appearance, it is no better than an evanescent illusion of our senses.

The Secret Doctrine i, p. 17–18

H.P. Blavatsky

Karmic Cycles and Universal Ethics

IT is the Spiritual evolution of the *inner*, immortal man that forms the fundamental tenet in the Occult Sciences. To realize even distantly such a process, the student has to believe (*a*) in the ONE Universal Life, independent of matter (or what Science regards as matter); and (*b*) in the individual intelligences that animate the various manifestations of this Principle. Mr. Huxley does not believe in “Vital Force,” others do. Dr. J. H. Hutchinson Sterling's work “Concerning Protoplasm” has made no small havoc of this dogmatic negation. Professor Beale's decision is also in favour of a Vital Principle; and Dr. B. W. Richardson's lectures on the “Nervous Ether,” have been sufficiently quoted from. Thus, opinions are divided.

The ONE LIFE is closely related to *the one* law which governs the World of Being—KARMA. Exoterically, this is simply and literally “action,” or rather an “effect-producing cause.” Esoterically it is quite a different thing in its far-fetching moral effects. It is the unerring LAW OF RETRIBUTION. To say to those ignorant of the real significance, characteristics and awful importance of this eternal immutable law, that no theological definition of a personal deity can give an idea of this impersonal, yet ever present and active Principle, is to speak in vain. Nor can it be called Providence. For Providence, with the Theists (the Christian Protestants, at any rate), rejoices in a personal male gender, while with the Roman Catholics it is a female potency, “Divine Providence tempers His blessings to secure their better effects,” Wogan tells us. Indeed “He” tempers them, which Karma—a sexless principle—does not.

Throughout the first two Parts, it was shown that, at the first flutter of renascent life, Svâbhâvat, “the mutable radiance of the Immutable Darkness unconscious in Eternity,” passes, at every new rebirth of Kosmos, from an inactive state into one of intense activity; that it differentiates, and then begins its work through that differentiation. This work is KARMA.

The Cycles are also subservient to the effects produced by this activity. “The one Cosmic atom becomes seven atoms on the plane of matter, and each is transformed into a centre of energy; that same atom becomes seven rays on the plane of spirit, and the seven

creative forces of nature, radiating from the root-essence . . . follow, one the right, the other the left path, separate till the end of the Kalpa, and yet are in close embrace. What unites them? KARMA.” The atoms emanated from the Central Point emanate in their turn new centres of energy, which, under the potential breath of *Fohat*, begin their work from within without, and multiply other minor centres. These, in the course of evolution and involution, form in their turn the roots or developing causes of new effects, from worlds and “man-bearing” globes, down to the genera, species, and classes of all the *seven* kingdoms **1** (of which *we know only four*). For “the blessed workers have received the *Thyan-kam*, in the eternity” (Book of “The Aphorisms of *Tson-ka-pa*”)

“Thyan-kam” is the power or knowledge of guiding the impulses of cosmic energy in the right direction.

...To make the working of Karma, in the periodical renovations of the Universe, more evident and intelligible to the student when he arrives at the origin and evolution of man, he has now to examine with us the esoteric bearing of the Karmic Cycles upon Universal Ethics. The question is, do those mysterious divisions of time, called Yugas and Kalpas by the Hindus, and so very graphically—Kukloß—“cycle,” ring or circle, by the Greeks, have any bearing upon, or any direct connection with, human life? Even exoteric philosophy explains that these perpetual circles of time are ever returning on themselves, periodically, and intelligently in Space and Eternity. There are “Cycles of matter” **2** and there are “Cycles of Spiritual evolution.” Racial, national, and individual cycles. May not esoteric speculation allow us a still deeper insight into the workings of these?

This idea is beautifully expressed in a very clever scientific work:

The possibility of rising to a comprehension of a system of co-ordination so far outreaching in time and space all reach of human observations, is a circumstance which signalizes the power of man to transcend the limitations of changing and inconsistent matter, and assert his superiority over all unstable and perishable forms of being. *There is a method in the succession of events*, and in the relation of co-existent things, which the mind of man seizes hold of; and by means of this as a clue, he runs back or forward over æons of material history of which human experience can never testify. Events germinate and unfold. They have a past which is connected with their present, and we feel a well-justified confidence that a future is appointed which will be similarly connected with the present and the past. This continuity and unity of history repeat themselves before our eyes in all conceivable stages of progress. The phenomena furnish us the grounds for the generalization of two laws which are truly *principles of scientific divination*, by which alone the human mind penetrates the sealed records of the past and the unopened pages of the future. The first of these is the law of evolution, or, to phrase it for our purpose, *the law of correlated successiveness or organized history in the individual*, illustrated in the changing phases of every single maturing system of results. . . . These thoughts summon into our immediate presence the measureless past and the measureless future of material history. They seem almost to open vistas through infinity, and to endow the human intellect with an existence and a vision exempt from the limitations of time and space and

finite causation, and lift it up toward a sublime apprehension of the Supreme Intelligence whose dwelling place is Eternity.” (“World-Life,” p. 535 and 548.)

According to the teachings, Maya, or the illusive appearance of the marshalling of events and actions on this earth, changes, varying with nations and places. But the chief features of one's life are always in accordance with the “Constellation” one is born under, or, we should say, with the characteristics of its animating principle or the deity that presides over it, whether we call it a *Dhyan Chohan*, as in Asia, or an Archangel, as with the Greek and Latin churches. In ancient Symbolism it was always the SUN (though the Spiritual, not the visible, Sun was meant), that was supposed to send forth the chief Saviours and Avatars. Hence the connecting link between the Buddhas, the Avatars, and so many other incarnations of the highest SEVEN. The closer the approach to one's *Prototype*, “in Heaven,” the better for the mortal whose personality was chosen, by his own *personal* deity (the seventh principle), as its terrestrial abode. For, with every effort of will toward purification and unity with that “Self-god,” one of the lower rays breaks and the spiritual entity of man is drawn higher and ever higher to the ray that supersedes the first, until, from ray to ray, the inner man is drawn into the one and highest beam of the Parent-SUN. Thus, “the events of humanity *do* run coordinately with the number forms,” since the single units of that humanity proceed one and all from the same source—the *central* and its *shadow*, the visible SUN. For the equinoxes and solstices, the periods and various phases of the Solar course, astronomically and numerically expressed, are only the concrete symbols of the eternally living verity, though they do seem *abstract ideas* to uninitiated mortals. And this explains the extraordinary numerical coincidences with geometrical relations, as shown by several authors.

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 net-work 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....

...There is a purpose in every important act of Nature, whose acts are all cyclic and

periodical. But spiritual Forces having been usually confused with the purely physical, the former are denied by, and therefore, have to remain unknown to Science, because left unexamined. 3

....No metaphysician or theosophist could demur to these truths, which are all embodied in esoteric teachings. There *is* a predestination in the geological life of our globe, as in the history, past and future, of races and nations. This is closely connected with what we call *Karma* and Western Pantheists, “Nemesis” and “Cycles.” The law of evolution is now carrying us along the ascending arc of *our* cycle, *when the effects will be once more re-merged into*, and re-become the (now neutralized) causes, and all things affected by the former will have regained their original harmony. This will be the cycle of our special “Round,” a moment in the duration of the great cycle, or the *Mahayuga*...

...But these cycles—wheels within wheels, so comprehensively and ingeniously symbolized by the various Manus and Rishis in India, and by the Kabiri in the West 4 — *do not affect all mankind at one and the same time*—as explained in the *Racial division of Cycles* (See sub-section 6.) Hence, as we see, the difficulty of comprehending, and discriminating between them, with regard to their physical and spiritual effects, without having thoroughly mastered their relations with, and action upon the respective positions of nations and races, in their destiny and evolution. This system cannot be comprehended if the spiritual action of these periods—*pre-ordained*, so to say, by Karmic law --is separated from their physical course. The calculations of the best astrologers would fail, or at any rate remain imperfect, unless this dual action is thoroughly taken into consideration and dealt with upon these lines. And this mastery can be achieved only through INITIATION.

The Grand Cycle includes the progress of mankind from the appearance of primordial man of ethereal form. It runs through the inner cycles of his (man's) progressive evolution from the ethereal down to the semi-ethereal and purely physical: down to the redemption of man from his *coat of skin* and matter, after which it continues running its course downward and then upward again, to meet at the culmination of a Round, when the manvantaric “Serpent swallows its tail” and seven minor cycles are passed. These are the great Racial Cycles which affect equally all the nations and tribes included in that special Race; but there are minor and national as well as tribal cycles within those, which run independently of each other. They are called in the Eastern esotericism the *Karmic* cycles. In the West, since Pagan Wisdom has been repudiated as having grown from and been developed by the dark powers supposed to be at constant war and in opposition to the little tribal Jehovah—the full and awful significance of the Greek NEMESIS (or Karma) has been entirely forgotten. Otherwise Christians would have better realized the profound truth that Nemesis is without attributes; that while the dreaded goddess is absolute and immutable as a Principle, it is we ourselves—nations and individuals—who propel her to action and give the impulse to its direction. KARMA-NEMESIS is the creator of nations and mortals, but once created, it is they who make of her either a fury or a rewarding Angel. Yea—

“Wise are they who worship Nemesis” 5

—as the *chorus* tells Prometheus. And as unwise they, who believe that the goddess may be propitiated by whatever sacrifices and prayers, or have her wheel diverted from the

path it has once taken. “The triform Fates and ever mindful Furies” are her attributes only on earth, and begotten by ourselves. There is no return from the paths she cycles over; yet those paths are of our own making, for it is we, collectively or individually, who prepare them. Karma-Nemesis is the synonym of PROVIDENCE, minus *design*, goodness, and every other *finite* attribute and qualification, so unphilosophically attributed to the latter. An Occultist or a philosopher will not speak of the goodness or cruelty of Providence; but, identifying it with Karma-Nemesis, he will teach that nevertheless it guards the good and watches over them in this, as in future lives; and that it punishes the evil-doer—aye, even to his seventh rebirth. So long, in short, as the effect of his having thrown into perturbation even the smallest atom in the Infinite World of harmony, has not been finally readjusted. For the only decree of Karma—an eternal and immutable decree—is absolute Harmony in the world of matter as it is in the world of Spirit. It is not, therefore, Karma that rewards or punishes, but it is we, who reward or punish ourselves according to whether we work with, through and along with nature, abiding by the laws on which that Harmony depends, or—break them.

Nor would the ways of Karma be inscrutable were men to work in union and harmony, instead of disunion and strife. For our ignorance of those ways—which one portion of mankind calls the ways of Providence, dark and intricate; while another sees in them the action of blind Fatalism; and a third, simple chance, with neither gods nor devils to guide them—would surely disappear, if we would but attribute all these to their correct cause. With right knowledge, or at any rate with a confident conviction that our neighbours will no more work to hurt us than we would think of harming them, the two-thirds of the World's evil would vanish into thin air. Were no man to hurt his brother, Karma-Nemesis would have neither cause to work for, nor weapons to act through. It is the constant presence in our midst of every element of strife and opposition, and the division of races, nations, tribes, societies and individuals into Cains and Abels, wolves and lambs, that is the chief cause of the “ways of Providence.” We cut these numerous windings in our destinies daily with our own 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 so 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 in another life. If one breaks the laws of Harmony, or, as a theosophical writer expresses it, “the laws of life,” one must be prepared to fall into the chaos one has oneself produced. For, according to the same writer, “the only conclusion one can come to is that these laws of life are their own avengers; and consequently that every avenging Angel is only a typified representation of their re-action.”

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. It is a law of occult dynamics that “a given amount of energy expended on the spiritual or astral plane is productive of far greater results than the same amount expended on the physical objective plane of existence.”

This state will last till man's spiritual intuitions are fully opened, which will not happen before we fairly cast off our thick coats of matter; until we begin acting from *within*,

instead of ever following impulses from *without*; namely, those produced by our physical senses and gross selfish body. 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. And if a Brotherhood or even a number of Brotherhoods may not be able to prevent nations from occasionally cutting each other's throats—still unity in thought and action, and philosophical research into the mysteries of being, will always prevent some, while trying to comprehend that which has hitherto remained to them a riddle, from creating additional causes in a world already so full of woe and evil. Knowledge of Karma gives the conviction that if—

. . . virtue in distress, and vice in triumph
Make atheists of mankind,” 6

it is only because that mankind has ever shut its eyes to the great truth that man is himself his own saviour as his own destroyer. That he need not accuse Heaven and the gods, Fates and Providence, of the apparent injustice that reigns in the midst of humanity. But let him rather remember and repeat this bit of Grecian wisdom, which warns man to forbear accusing *That* which—

Just, though mysterious, leads us on unerring
Through ways unmark'd from guilt to punishment . . .

— which are now the ways and the high road on which move onward the great European nations. The Western Aryans had, every nation and tribe, like their Eastern brethren of the Fifth Race, their Golden and their Iron ages, their period of comparative irresponsibility, or the Satya age of purity, while now, several of them have reached their Iron Age, the *Kali-Yuga*, an age BLACK WITH HORRORS. . . .

It is true, on the other hand, that the exoteric cycles of every nation have been correctly made to be derived from, and depend on, sidereal motions. The latter are inseparably blended with the destinies of nations and men. But in their purely physical sense, Europe knows of no other cycles than the astronomical, and makes its computations accordingly. Nor will it hear of any other than *imaginary* circles or circuits in the starry heavens that gird them—

With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er
Cycle and epicycle, orb in orb . . .

But with the pagans, with whom, as Coleridge has it—”. . . . Time, cyclical time, was their abstraction of the Deity . . .” that “Deity” manifesting co-ordinately with, and only through Karma, and being that KARMA-NEMESIS itself, the cycles meant something more than a mere succession of events, or a periodical space of time of more or less prolonged duration. For they were generally marked with recurrences of a more varied and intellectual character than are exhibited in the periodical return of seasons or of certain constellations. Modern wisdom is satisfied with astronomical computations and prophecies based on unerring mathematical laws. Ancient Wisdom added to the cold shell of astronomy the vivifying elements of its soul and spirit—ASTROLOGY. And, as

the sidereal motions *do* regulate and determine other events on Earth—besides potatoes and the periodical disease of that useful vegetable—(a statement which, not being amenable to scientific explanation, is merely derided, while accepted)—those events have to be allowed to find themselves predetermined by even simple astronomical computations. Believers in astrology will understand our meaning, sceptics will laugh at the belief and mock the idea. Thus they shut their eyes, ostrich-like, to their own fate. ⁷

This because their little *historical* period, so called, allows them no margin for comparison. Sidereal heaven is before them; and though their spiritual vision is still unopened and the atmospheric dust of terrestrial origin seals their sight and chains it to the limits of physical systems, still they do not fail to perceive the movements and note the behaviour of meteors and comets. They record the periodical advents of those wanderers and “flaming messengers,” and prophesy, in consequence, earthquakes, meteoric showers, the apparition of certain stars, comets, etc., etc. Are they soothsayers for all that? No, they are learned astronomers.

Selections from *The Secret Doctrine* i, p. 634–646

H.P. Blavatsky

- 1 Vide Stanza VI. (Book I.) and Commentary.
- 2 “The Cycles of Matter,” a name given by Professor Winchell to an Essay of his written in 1860.
- 3 Men of science will say: We deny, because nothing of the kind has ever come within the scope of our experience. But, as argued by Charles Richet, the physiologist: “So be it, but have you at least demonstrated the contrary? . . . Do not, at any rate, deny *a priori*. Actual Science *is not sufficiently advanced to give you such right.*” (“La suggestion mentale et le calcul des probabilités.”)
- 4 This symbolism does not prevent these now seemingly mythic personages from having ruled the earth once upon a time under the human form of actual living, though truly divine and god-like man. The opinion of Colonel Vallancey (and also of Count de Gobelin) that the *names of the Kabiri appear to be all allegorical*, and to have signified no more (?) than an almanac of the vicissitudes of the seasons—calculated for the operations of agriculture” (*Collect. de Reb. Hibern.*, No. 13, *Præf.* Sect. 5) is as absurd as his assertion that Æon, Kronos, Saturn and Dagon are all one, namely, the “patriarch Adam.” The Kabiri were the instructors of mankind in agriculture, because they were the *regents* over the seasons and Cosmic cycles. Hence it was they who regulated, as planetary Spirits or “Angels” (messengers), the *mysteries* of the *art* of agriculture.
- 5 Who *dread* Karma-Nemesis would be better.
- 6 Dryden.
- 7 Not all, however, for there are men of Science awakening to truth. This is what we read: “Whatever way we turn our eyes we encounter a mystery . . . all in Nature for us is *the unknown*. . . Yet they are numerous, those superficial minds for whom nothing can be produced by natural forces outside of facts observed long ago, consecrated in books and grouped more or less skillfully with the help of theories whose ephemeral duration ought, by this time, to have demonstrated their insufficiency, . . . I do not pretend *to contest the possibility of invisible*

Beings, of a nature different from ours and susceptible of moving matter to action. Profound philosophers have admitted it in all epochs as a consequence of the great law of continuity which rules the Universe. That intellectual life, which we see starting in some way from non-being (*neant*) and gradually reaching man, can it stop abruptly at man to reappear only in the infinite, in the sovereign regulator of the world? This is little probable.” Therefore . . . “I no more deny the existence of Spirits than I deny soul while trying to explain certain facts without their hypothesis . . .” “The Non-Defined Forces,” Historical and Experimental Researches, p. 3. The above is written by A. de Rochas, a well-known man of science in France, his work being one of the signs of the time. (Paris: Masson, Boulevard St. Germain, 1887.)

Golden Words

And now a last and parting word. My words may and will pass and be forgotten, but certain sentences from letters written by the Masters will never pass, because they are the embodiment of the highest practical Theosophy. I must translate them for you:

Let not the fruit of good Karma be your motive; for your Karma, good or bad, being one and the common property of all mankind, nothing good or bad can happen to you that is not shared by many others. Hence your motive, being selfish, can only generate a double effect, good and bad, and will either nullify your good action, or turn it to another man’s profit.

There is no happiness for one who is ever thinking of Self and forgetting all other Selves.

The Universe groans under the weight of such action (Karma), and none other than self-sacrificial Karma relieves it.

How many of you have helped humanity to carry its smallest burden, that you should all regard yourselves as Theosophists. Oh, men of the West, who would play at being the Saviours of mankind before they even spare the life of a mosquito whose sting threatens them!, would you be partakers of Divine Wisdom or true Theosophists? Then do as the gods when incarnated do. Feel yourselves the vehicles of the whole humanity, mankind as part of yourselves, and act accordingly.

These are golden words; may you assimilate them! This is the hope of one who signs herself most sincerely the devoted sister and servant of every true follower of the Masters of Theosophy.

“Five Messages to the American Theosophists (Second Message)”

H.P. Blavatsky