

On the Universal Doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation



William Quan Judge on the universal applications of the doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation, or stellar beacons of Hope and Responsibility.

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DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS in which so much writing has been done in the theosophical field of effort, a failure to make broad or universal applications of the doctrines brought forward can be noticed. With the exception of H.P. Blavatsky, our writers have confined themselves to narrow views, chiefly as to the state of man after death or how Karma affects him in life. As to the latter law, the greatest consideration has been devoted to deciding how it modifies our pleasure or our pain, and then as to whether in Devachan there will be compensation for failures of Karma; while others write upon reincarnation as if only mankind were subject to that law. And the same limited treatment is adopted in treating of or practicing many other theories and doctrines of the Wisdom Religion. After fourteen years of activity it is now time that the members of our society should make universal the application of each and every admitted doctrine or precept, and not confine them to their own selfish selves.

In order to make my meaning clear I purpose in this paper to attempt an outline of how such universal applications of some of our doctrines should be made.

Before taking up any of these I would draw the attention of those who believe in the *Upanishads* to the constant insistence throughout those sacred books upon the identity of man with Brahma, or God, or nature, and to the universal application of all doctrines or laws.

In *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* it is said:

. . . Tell me the Brahman which is visible, not invisible, the *ātman* who is within all . . .

This, thy Self who is within all . . . He who breathes in the up-breathing, he is thy Self and within all. He who breathes in the down-breathing, he is thy Self and within all. He who breathes in the on-breathing, he is thy Self and within all. This is thy Self who is within all.¹

¹ Third Adhyāya, 4th Brāhmana, 1. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. I.

The 6th Brāhmana is devoted to showing that all the worlds are woven in and within each other; and in the 7th the teacher declares that “the puller” or mover in all things whatsoever is the same Self which is in each man.

The questioners then proceed and draw forth the statement that “what is above the heavens, beneath the earth, embracing heaven and earth, past, present, and future, that is woven, like warp and woof, in the ether,” and that the ether is “woven like warp and woof in the Imperishable.” If this be so, then any law that affects man must govern every portion of the universe in which he lives.

And we find these sturdy men of old applying their doctrines in every direction. They use the laws of analogy and correspondences to solve deep questions. Why need we be behind them? If the entire great Self dwells in man, the body in all its parts must symbolize the greater world about. So we discover that space having sound as its distinguishing characteristic is figured in the human frame by the ear, as fire is by the eye, and, again, the eye showing forth the soul, for the soul alone conquers death, and that which in the *Upanishads* conquers death is fire.

It is possible in this manner to proceed steadily toward the acquirement of a knowledge of the laws of nature, not only those that are recondite, but also the more easily perceived. If we grant that the human body and organs are a figure, in little, of the universe, then let us ask the question, “By what is the astral light symbolized?” By the eye, and specially by the retina and its mode of action. On the astral light are received the pictures of all events and things, and on the retina are received the images of objects passing before the man. We find that these images on the retina remain for a specific period, capable of measurement, going through certain changes before fading completely away. Let us extend the result of this observation to the astral light, and we assume that it also goes through similar changes in respect to the pictures. From this it follows that the mass or totality of pictures made during any cycle must, in this great retina, have a period at the end of which they will have faded away. Such we find is the law as stated by those who know the Secret Doctrine. In order to arrive at the figures with which to represent this period, we have to calculate the proportion thus: as the time of fading from the human retina is to the healthy man’s actual due of life, so is the time of fading from the astral light. The missing term may be discovered by working upon the doctrine of the four yugas or ages and the length of one life of Brahma.

Now these theosophical doctrines which we have been at such pains to elaborate during all the years of our history are either capable of universal application or they are not. If they are not, then they are hardly worth the trouble we have bestowed upon them; and it would then have been much better for us had we devoted ourselves to some special departments of science.

But the great allurements that theosophy holds for those who follow it is that its doctrines are universal, solving all questions and applying to every department of nature so far as we know it. And advanced students declare that the same universal application prevails in regions far beyond the grasp of present science or of the average man’s mind. So that, if a supposed law or application is formulated to us, either by ourselves or by some other person, we are at once able to prove it; for unless it can

be applied in every direction — by correspondence, or is found to be one of the phases of some previously-admitted doctrine, we know that it is false doctrine or inaccurately stated. Thus all our doctrines can be proved and checked at every step. It is not necessary for us to have constant communications with the Adepts in order to make sure of our ground; all that we have to do is to see if any position we assume agrees with well-known principles already formulated and understood.

Bearing this in mind, we can confidently proceed to examine the great ideas in which so many of us believe, with a view of seeing how they may be applied in every direction. For if, instead of selfishly considering these laws in their effect upon our miserable selves, we ask how they apply everywhere, a means is furnished for the broadening of our horizon and the elimination of selfishness. And when also we apply the doctrines to all our acts and to all parts of the human being, we may begin to wake ourselves up to the real task set before us.

Let us look at Karma. It must be applied not only to the man but also to the Cosmos, to the globe upon which he lives. You know that, for the want of an English word, the period of one great day of evolution is called a Manvantara, or the reign of one Manu. These eternally succeed each other. In other words, each one of us is a unit, or a cell, if you please, in the great body or being of Manu, and just as we see ourselves making Karma and reincarnating for the purpose of carrying off Karma, so the great being Manu dies at the end of a Manvantara, and after the period of rest reincarnates once more, the sum total of all that we have made him or it. And when I say “we,” I mean all the beings on whatever plane or planet who are included in that Manvantara. Therefore this Manvantara is just exactly what the last Manvantara made it, and so the next Manvantara after this millions of years off — will be the sum or result of this one, plus all that have preceded it.

How much have you thought upon the effect of Karma upon the animals, the plants, the minerals, the elemental beings? Have you been so selfish as to suppose that they are not affected by you? Is it true that man himself has no responsibility upon him for the vast numbers of ferocious and noxious animals, for the deadly serpents and scorpions, the devastating lions and tigers, that make a howling wilderness of some corners of the earth and terrorize the people of India and elsewhere? It cannot be true. But as the Apostle of the Christians said, it is true that the whole of creation waits upon man and groans that he keeps back the enlightenment of all. What happens when, with intention, you crush out the life of a common croton bug? Well, it is destroyed and you forget it. But you brought it to an untimely end, short though its life would have been. Imagine this being done at hundreds of thousands of places in the State. Each of these little creatures had life and energy; each some degree of intelligence. The sum total of the effects of all these deaths of small things must be appreciable. If not, then our doctrines are wrong and there is no wrong in putting out the life of a human being.

Let us go a little higher, to the bird kingdom and that of four-footed beasts. Every day in the shooting season in England vast quantities of birds are killed for sport, and in other places such intelligent and inoffensive animals as deer. These have a higher intelligence than insects, a wider scope of feeling. Is there no effect under Karma for all these deaths? And what is the difference between wantonly killing a

deer and murdering an idiot? Very little to my mind. Why is it, then, that even delicate ladies will enjoy the recital of a bird or deer hunt? It is their Karma that they are the descendants of long generations of Europeans who some centuries ago, with the aid of the church, decided that animals had no souls and therefore could be wantonly slaughtered. The same Karma permits the grandson of the Queen of England who calls herself the defender of the faith — of Jesus — to have great preparations made for his forth-coming visit to India to the end that he shall enjoy several weeks of tiger-hunting, pig-sticking, and the destruction of any and every bird that may fly in his way.

We therefore find ourselves ground down by the Karma of our national stem, so that we are really almost unable to tell what thoughts are the counterfeit presentments of the thoughts of our forefathers, and what self-born in our own minds.

Let us now look at Reincarnation, Devachan, and Karma.

It has been the custom of theosophists to think upon these subjects in respect only to the whole man — that is to say, respecting the ego.

But what of its hourly and daily application? If we believe in the doctrine of the One Life, then every cell in these material bodies must be governed by the same laws. Each cell must be a *life* and have its karma, devachan, and reincarnation. Every one of these cells upon incarnating among the others in our frame must be affected by the character of those it meets; and we make that character. Every thought upon reaching its period dies. It is soon reborn, and coming back from its devachan it finds either bad or good companions provided for it. Therefore every hour of life is fraught with danger or with help. How can it be possible that a few hours a week devoted to theosophical thought and action can counteract — even in the gross material cells the effect of nearly a whole week spent in indifference, frivolity, or selfishness? This mass of poor or bad thought will form a resistless tide that shall sweep away all your good resolves at the first opportunity.

This will explain why devoted students often fail. They have waited for a particular hour or day to try their strength, and when the hour came they had none. If it was anger they had resolved to conquer, instead of trying to conquer it at an offered opportunity they ran away from the chance so as to escape the trial; or they did not meet the hourly small trials that would, if successfully passed, have given them a great reserve of strength, so that no time of greater trial would have been able to overcome them.

Now as to the theory of the evolution of the macrocosm in its application to the microcosm, man.

The hermetic philosophy held that man is a copy of the greater universe; that he is a little universe in himself, governed by the same laws as the great one, and in the small proportions of a human being showing all those greater laws in operation, only reduced in time or sweep. This is the rule to which H.P. Blavatsky adheres, and which is found running through all the ancient mysteries and initiations.

It is said that our universe is a collection of atoms or molecules — called also "*lives*"; living together and through each the spirit struggles to reach consciousness, and

that this struggle is governed by a law compelling it to go on in or between periods. In any period of such struggle some of these atoms or collections of molecules are left over, as it were, to renew the battle in the next period, and hence the state of the universe at any time of manifestation or the state of each newly-manifested universe — must be the result of what was done in the preceding period.

Coming down to the man, we find that he is a collection of molecules or *lives* or cells, each striving with the other, and all affected for either good or bad results by the spiritual aspirations or want of them in the man who is the guide or god, so to say, of his little universe. When he is born, the molecules or cells or lives that are to compose his physical and astral forms are from that moment under his reign, and during the period of his smaller life they pass through a small manvantara just as the lives in the universe do, and when he dies he leaves them all impressed with the force and colour of his thoughts and aspirations, ready to be used in composing the houses of other egos.

Now here is a great responsibility revealed to us of a double character.

The first is for effects produced on and left in what we call matter in the molecules, when they come to be used by other egos, for they must act upon the latter for benefit or the reverse.

The second is for the effect on the molecules themselves in this, that there are lives or entities in all — or rather they are all lives — who are either aided or retarded in their evolution by reason of the proper or improper use man made of this matter that was placed in his charge.

Without stopping to argue about what matter is, it will be sufficient to state that it is held to be co-eternal with what is called “spirit.” That is, as it is put in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: “He who is spirit is also matter.” Or, in other words, spirit is the opposite pole to matter of the Absolute. But of course this matter we speak of is not what we see about us, for the latter is only in fact phenomena of matter: even science holds that we do not really see matter.

Now during a manvantara or period of manifestation, the egos incarnating must use over and over again in any world upon which they are incarnating the matter that belongs to it.

So, therefore, we are now using in our incarnations matter that has been used by ourselves and other egos over and over again, and are affected by the various tendencies impressed in it. And, similarly, we are leaving behind us for future races that which will help or embarrass them in their future lives.

This is a highly important matter, whether reincarnation be a true doctrine or not. For if each new nation is only a mass of new egos or souls, it must be much affected by the matter-environment left behind by nations and races that have disappeared forever.

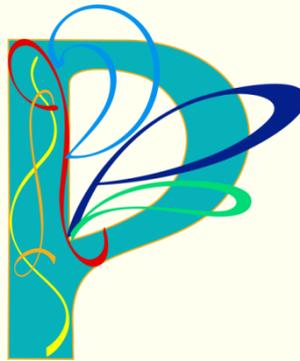
But for us who believe in reincarnation it has additional force, showing us one strong reason why universal brotherhood should be believed in and practised.

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The other branch of the responsibility is just as serious. The doctrine that removes death from the universe and declares that all is composed of innumerable lives, constantly changing places with each other, contains in it of necessity the theory that man himself is full of these lives and that all are traveling up the long road of evolution.

The secret doctrine holds that we are full of kingdoms of entities who depend upon us, so to say, for salvation.

How enormous, then, is this responsibility, that we not only are to be judged for what we do with ourselves as a whole, but also for what we do for those unseen beings who are dependent upon us for light.



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