



THE FREE INDOLOGICAL COLLECTION

WWW.SANSKRITDOCUMENTS.ORG/TFIC

FAIR USE DECLARATION

This book is sourced from another online repository and provided to you at this site under the TFIC collection. It is provided under commonly held Fair Use guidelines for individual educational or research use. We believe that the book is in the public domain and public dissemination was the intent of the original repository. We applaud and support their work wholeheartedly and only provide this version of this book at this site to make it available to even more readers. We believe that cataloging plays a big part in finding valuable books and try to facilitate that, through our TFIC group efforts. In some cases, the original sources are no longer online or are very hard to access, or marked up in or provided in Indian languages, rather than the more widely used English language. TFIC tries to address these needs too. Our intent is to aid all these repositories and digitization projects and is in no way to undercut them. For more information about our mission and our fair use guidelines, please visit our website.

Note that we provide this book and others because, to the best of our knowledge, they are in the public domain, in our jurisdiction. However, before downloading and using it, you must verify that it is legal for you, in your jurisdiction, to access and use this copy of the book. Please do not download this book in error. We may not be held responsible for any copyright or other legal violations. Placing this notice in the front of every book, serves to both alert you, and to relieve us of any responsibility.

If you are the intellectual property owner of this or any other book in our collection, please email us, if you have any objections to how we present or provide this book here, or to our providing this book at all. We shall work with you immediately.

-The TFIC Team.



**DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY**

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Cl. No. $\Delta 2487$

H7

Ac. No. 107273.

Date of release for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped
below. An overdue charge of 0.6 nP. will be charged for each
day the book is kept overtime.

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

*A STUDY IN THE
PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF WORK*



DOCTRINE OF KARMA

*A STUDY IN THE
PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF WORK*

By
SWAMI ABHEDANANDA



CALCUTTA
RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH
19-B, RAJA RAJKRISHNA STREET.

SECOND EDITION MARCH 1944

THIRD EDITION JULY 1947

~~All~~ rights reserved

PUBLISHED BY SWAMI PRAJNANANANDA
RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH, 19B, RAJA
BAJAKRISHNA STREET. CALCUTTA AND
PRINTED BY R. N. MITRA AT THE NALANDA
PRESS, 159-160, CORNWALLIS ST. CALCUTTA.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

The present volume contains Swâmi Abhedânanda's lectures on *Doctrine of Karma* and *Philosophy of Work*, delivered in America. In these illuminating lectures the Swâmi expounds the philosophy of work in that lucid and vigorous style which characterizes all his writings. The two pieces appended to the book were in the nature of two short lectures given by the Swâmi by way of a reply to questions which will help the readers in forming a clear idea of the subject. New references, detailed contents and an index have also been added for the convenience of the readers.

Râmakrishna Vedânta Math
19B, Râjâ Rajkrishna Street
Calcutta

The Publisher

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Law of Causation	I—II
The phenomena of the world are linked together in the chain of cause of effect— Everything has a definite cause behind it— The law of cause and effect is the most universal of all laws— It is the only law which governs all phenomena— Every event is the effect of some invisible force— The illustration of the murder of the Austrian Archduke in the Great World War I— One event can be both a cause and an effect— Every action is conditioned by the law of causation— The law of <i>Karma</i> — The word <i>Karma</i> includes both the cause and the effect—Under the sway of law of <i>Karma</i> , there is no room left for a chance or accident— Chance or accident is the product of some unknown but definite causes— It is an outcome of the unscientific mind and ignorance— Everything is governed by the law of causation— What do we mean by the terms good, evil and mixed— It is impossible to find any action absolutely good or evil— Works are followed by their defects and demerits.	

CHAPTER II

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Page</i>
Law of Action and Reaction ...	13—21
<p>'Law of causation' includes the law that the like produces the like— All the mental activities determine the character of the individual ego— Each character of personality is the grand total result of previous mental action— Each effect is latent in the cause and <i>vice versa</i> — It is our own <i>Karma</i> that produces joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain— Our present character is determined by the past— Neither God nor Satan is responsible for our pleasure or pain— No room left for the hypothesis of predestination and grace— What do they signify— A believer in the law of <i>Karma</i> is a free agent— Reward and punishment given by God are nothing but the reactions of our own mental and physical actions— The doctrine of <i>Karma</i> denies the arbitrary Ruler— God never rewards the virtuous nor punishes the wicked.</p>	

CHAPTER III

Law of Compensation ...	21—30
<p>The doctrine of <i>Karma</i> includes the 'law of compensation' and the 'law of retribution'— There is an counter-balance between a cause and its effect— All the laws of <i>Karma</i> work together— There is neither increase nor decrease anywhere— The same 'law of compensation' manifests itself in all the planes, mental, intellectual and moral with equal regularity— There cannot</p>	

be bargaining in the realm of nature— The law of compensation governs both the sentient and the insentient— No man can defy it— A man may reap the result of compensation for his work either in this life or after— Pre-existence and reincarnation of the soul cannot be denied— Justice and compensation at every step of the eternal life— The law of compensation covers the whole chain of our individual lives— The widest view of the soul-life really brings the perfect balance of causes and effects.

CHAMPER IV

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Law of Retribution	31—42
Every good act brings its own reward by the law of compensation— Evil act brings its own punishment by the law of retribution— Action and reaction are like the flower and its fruit— The law of retribution brings its reward first in the inner nature, and then in the external— Virtue, wisdom, truth and love proceed from God— They are spiritual qualities— Virtue and vice are produced by people's own thoughts and deeds— The sayings of Emerson and St. Bernard— Hindus believe not in the hell-fire doctrine— They believe in the eternal law of <i>Karma</i> — What the Buddhists do— The difference between the Buddhistic and Vedântic interpretation of the doctrine of <i>Karma</i> — The <i>Karmas</i> , <i>Sanchita</i> , <i>Prarabdha</i> , <i>Kriyamana</i> and <i>Agâmi</i> — The	

same idea was conveyed by St. Paul— Christ also referred to it— Heredity cannot unveil the mystery of good and evil— The opinion of the theologians about it—What the Vedânta explains—The doctrine of *Karma* can explain the problems of good and evil— It predestines nothing or no one— It shows the way out of the world— It is the solace to men in their world of woe and misery.

CHAPTER V

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Philosophy of Karma	43—72
Philosophy of work is called <i>Karma Yoga</i> — Three other paths— The characteristics of the choosers of these paths— Karma Yoga means dexterity in work— What the <i>Bhagavad Gîtâ</i> says of it— Five essential conditions for mental or physical labour— They are of three kinds—There cannot be absolute rest of body or mind— The practice of philosophy of work makes us rise above all laws— There is one thing unmoved amidst the unceasing movement the <i>Karma Yoga</i> explains it— <i>Atman</i> , the Knower is beyond all activities— A higher discrimination is necessary to realize the Knower— What is meant by the terms, changeable and unchangeable— What do the 'time' and 'space' mean— The identification of the Knower with the body and mind is due to our imperfect knowledge— Three kinds of knowledge— The scientific explanation of the five objects of knowledge— The un-	

dercurrent of the primordial energy correlates all the phenomena— The knowledge of oneness is realized by inevitably arriving at the eternal energy— How the men of most limited knowledge live— Training of mind is necessary first— Perfection through work comes when the *Atman* is realized— The body is not an end of life— Wise men work ceaselessly seeking no return of their work— The passionate are unhappy— True workers obtain unbounded happiness.

CHAPTER VI

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Secret of Karma	73—99
This world is a stage— Each without exception plays his rôle— Life is a drama— Men pass from one rôle to another— The cause of the world-play is not outside— It is the latent powers that are slumbering in each human soul— This latent or dormant state is called <i>Tamas</i> — It can be better examined in deep sleep— It wakes up as a mental activity— Each germ of life possesses infinite potentialities— The stages of evolution— The first glimmering of it is in the lower animals— It reaches its climax in a human being— It is called then <i>Rajas</i> — Every action has three states— We are impelled by our inner nature— The character of action and reaction must be the same— By the wheel of action and reaction each individual soul is led from one point to another— What the scriptures say about the law of	

causation— The soul is not created for nature— The witness-like self is beyond nature and its laws— The causes of our action are the motives within— Motives all proceed from selfishness— In India every individual life is divided into four periods— Selfishness is the result of ignorance— The wise ones never make the mistake— A man who knows the secret of work, works for work's sake.

CHAPTER VII

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Duty or Motive in Karma ...	101—126
Activity of mind and body is the condition of life—	
Activity can be divided into three classes— How the	
moral nature awakens in a man— There can be no	
absolute standard of duty for all— Life is divided into	
different stages— Each stage has its obligations— The	
sense of duty is a kind of bondage— The mere fulfil-	
ment of duty in itself cannot produce any good results—	
What is the real duty of life— What the Bible, Qurân,	
and the Zend-Avesta say about it— The word 'duty' is	
an abstract term— Any action which directs us Godward	
is good— To be unselfish is our sole duty— The way of	
rising above the narrow self— The examples of Jesus	
the Christ and Buddha— The climax of unselfishness	
is identical with divine love— The love or feeling of	
oneness makes a man rise above all duties— Wherever	
there is true love, there is freedom— Duty is seldom	
sweet when not accompanied by love— The final end	

of duty is freedom and divine love— Divine love and wisdom lead to Godconsciousness— Sorrow and suffering etc. exist where the idea of duality prevails— Realization of oneness with God is the highest aim of the doctrine of *Karma*— Bound by the law of *Karma* each individual is playing his part— The present life is the result of our past and the future must be the result of our present— The cause is inherent in the effect, and the effect, in the cause. Absolute freedom is the ultimate purpose of every human life— All work done through selfish motives is the cause of bondage— The debt which we owe to the higher self can be paid by realizing our true nature— We should no longer work through attachment to the fruits of our labour— The one universal Energy is manifesting through the universe— The moment we realize ourselves one with the universal body or Energy we make ourselves free from the bondage of ignorance— Freedom is attained by cutting ourselves loose from the chain of cause and sequence.

APPENDIX A

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Delusion	127—133
Delusion does not mean non-existence— It means relative reality— It has no permanent existence— It is like a mirage— It is more like a dream— An awakening from the state of dream means superconsciousness— Truth is the background of all— We see only the	

appearance of Truth— An example of a table and colour— Our appearances of qualities only change, not the Truth— Delusion is a false knowledge— It is indiscrimination or undifferentiated consciousness— Truth is within us— The better knowledge or realization illumines the delusion— Spirit is never sick— Delusion is a kind of perplexing problem— We should go through it and transcend it.

APPENDIX B

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pages</i>
Heart and Mind	137—137
Heart refers to the mind or feeling— The mind includes a lot of other activities and functions— The heart and the mind are not the same thing according to Vedānta philosophy— They are same according to the Christian Science and New Thought— What psychology says— We call the heart <i>Chitta</i> — Impressions are the causes of future desires— The mind is like a mirror— Impressions will not die out unless they are forced out— Impressions remain in the subconscious mind— Habit is a series of impressions— Impressions are obstacles in the path of realization— Purification of the heart is necessary— Purification of the heart means removal of the <i>Samskāras</i> from it— We can reduce the number of desires by discrimination.	
Index	139—142

न हि कश्चित् क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।

कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सचः प्रकृतिज गुणैः ॥

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

असक्तो ह्याचरन् कर्म परमाप्नोति पुण्यः ॥

No one can remain absolutely inactive even for a moment. Propelled by the power of nature, one is forced to work.

Therefore, do thou always perform actions which are obligatory, without attachment; by performing action without attachment, one attains to the highest.

—Bhagavad Gītā, Ch. III, 5 & 19.

"The doctrine of Karma alone, can explain the mysterious problem of good and evil and reconcile man to the terrible and apparent injustice of life.

Any action that is not done through the attachment to the result of action, is for the purification of the soul, and as soon as the soul is purified the knowledge comes and the law of Karma ceases to exist. That is, the law of Karma is transcended. Thus one goes beyond that law. The Karma Yoga teaches that by performing all the obligatory works, without seeking any return for the individual, that is, through non-attachment, we gain the purification of the heart, and when the purification of the heart comes, it reflects the Divine wisdom, and that Divine wisdom kindles the fire of knowledge, which burns out all the Karma, good or bad, and the individual soul becomes absolutely free. That is the goal of the Karma Yoga."

Swâmi Abhedânanda

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

CHAPTER I

LAW OF CAUSATION

A careful study of nature reveals to us that the phenomena of the world are linked together in the universal chain of cause and effect. No event can occur without having a definite cause behind it. Whatever we see, hear or perceive with our senses is but the effect of some cause whether known or unknown. To trace the causes of events and to become familiar with the conditions under which an effect is produced have always been the aim of the various branches of science and philosophy.

All science and all philosophies of the world unanimously declare that the law of

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

cause and effect is the most universal of all laws. It is the one law which governs all phenomena however gross or fine they may be. All the forces of nature whether physical or mental obey this law and can never transcend it. From the vibrations of electrons to the revolution of the earth round the sun, from the falling of an apple on the ground to the raising of an arm by the will-power, every event is the effect of some invisible force working in harmony with the law of causation.

Similarly, every action of our body or mind is the result of some force or power which is its cause; but at the same time that which is the effect of some cause becomes in turn the cause of some grosser result, and that again produces some other still grosser effect, and that again a finer one, and so on and on the chain of cause and effect continues to spread without stopping anywhere, without coming to an absolute end. For instance, a murderer shoots

the Austrian Archduke and drives a bullet into his body and the Archduke dies of blood-poisoning. Here, shooting is an action which is the effect of the mental and physical activities of the murderer. But the same action is again the cause of driving the bullet in the Archduke's body; this is the cause of the wound, which brings fever and other organic disorder, which results in his death. The death of the Archduke causes his wife to become a widow which produces changes in her life and in her whole family. The effect of this single act of murder did not stop here. It brought on the European war and caused destruction of life and property of millions and affected the whole world. It is needless to describe the horrors of the last war. The German Emperor lost his throne and empire. The Czar was assassinated. People are still reaping the effects of this war which will last for generations to come. Furthermore, it reacted upon the murderer, brought to him incal-

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

culable misery and untimely death. It left an impression upon his mind which he carried with him and perhaps his suffering will continue even after his death in another life.

Thus, we can see, how one event can be both a cause and an effect at the same time, and how it can affect the whole world producing various kinds of effects on the plane of the living as also on that of the dead. From this endless chain of cause and effect we can neither separate one single link nor call it useless or unnecessary. In the same manner, it can be shown that every action however minute or trivial it may appear to us, being conditioned by the universal law of causation, produces different effects visible and invisible and affects the whole world of phenomena either directly or indirectly. No action can escape this law, that every cause must be followed by an effect, that every action is bound to react upon the actor with similar force and effect.

This universal law of causation is called in Sanskrit the law of *Karma*. The word *Karma* is now almost naturalized into English. It comes from the root *Kri* to act and means action, or deed. Any action, physical or mental is called *Karma*; and as every action is bound to produce its reaction or result it is also *Karma*. Moreover, secondarily as an action is both a cause and an effect at the same time, the word *Karma* includes both the cause and the effect. In this universal sense, motion, attraction, gravitation, repulsion, moving, walking, talking, seeing, hearing, thinking, willing and desiring nay, all the actions of body, mind and senses are all *Karma*. They produce results being governed by the irresistible law of causation.

Under the sway of this all-pervading law of *Karma*, there is no room left for a chance or accident. What we call happening by chance or accidental is in reality the product of some definite causes which we may not

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

know or cannot trace on account of our limited knowledge. The causes might be on the moral or spiritual planes, but we seek only on the physical plane. In ancient times when the range of the known causes was extremely limited, the uncultured people used to explain the accidental event or events produced by unknown causes, by attributing them to some supernatural powers or agencies. Even today there are many who believe in accidents. Gradually, when all the supernatural powers were unified into one personal God the effects of unknown causes were called Providential. But in reality all accidents have natural causes whether we know them or not. That which appears to be supernatural or Providential to an unscientific mind, is natural to a scientist or a philosopher whose conception of nature is larger and more universal. Therefore, all chance-events or so-called accidental occurrences are just as much governed by the law of causation or

LAW OF ACTION AND REACTION

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

नादत्ते कस्यचित् पापं न चैव सुकृतं विभुः ।

*God never rewards the virtuous nor punishes
the wicked.*

—*Bhagavad Gītā, Ch. V, 15*

CHAPTER II

LAW OF ACTION AND REACTION

The law of causation or of *Karma* includes the law that the like produces the like, or that every action must be followed by a reaction of similar nature. If I strike a blow on the table, the table will react upon me with similar force. If I strike harder, I shall receive harder blow in return. As on the physical plane, so on the finer mental plane, all mental actions produce similar reactions. Motives, desires, thoughts and other mental functions being subject to the same law, produce *good*, *bad* or *mixed* results according to the nature of those mental activities. As all the mental activities determine the character of the individual ego, or the worker, we can easily classify the workers as *good*, *bad* or *mixed*. The character of an individual is again

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

subject to the law of *Karma* because, it is the aggregate of a large number of minute activities of the mind-substance to which we give different names such as desires, tendencies, thoughts, ideas and impressions; everyone of which is governed by the law of action and reaction. Each character or personality is the grand total result of previous mental actions, and is also the cause of future changes in the character.

In the chain of cause and effect, it can be shown that each effect is latent in the cause and each cause is latent in the effect, applying the same law we can understand that every form of character is in itself a cause as well as an effect. The law of *Karmā* inculcates this grand truth of nature, that cause lies in the effect and effect is also latent in the cause. For instance, a seed contains the whole tree potentially and produces the tree, and the tree produces the seed again. With the help of this great truth we can easily explain why a character is good or bad,

LAW OF ACTION AND REACTION

why one individual behaves in this way or at, or why one suffers and is miserable, while another enjoys his life and is happy. We do not have to blame our parents for our misery and sufferings. It is our own *Karma* that produces its results in the form of joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, happiness or unhappiness. It is compensation. Everything that we possess in this life, is the effect of our previous *Karma* or action, both mental and physical. Our present character is the resultant of our past and our future will be determined by our present acts. Neither God nor Satan is responsible for our pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. Thus, all the inequalities and diversities of characters can be scientifically explained by this law of *Karma*.

In the face of this universal law of *Karma*, there is no room for the hypothesis of predestination and grace which is accepted by the majority of orthodox Christians. The hypothesis of predestination and grace

teaches that God, the Creator of all, set the destiny of man before his birth. He preordains before the birth of each man a woman what he or she will be in future. The whim of the Creator makes one sinful or virtuous, before the time of one's birth. But this hypothesis destroys our moral responsibility and personal freedom. If we are all predestined by God to be sinful or virtuous, to be happy or unhappy, we can neither undo our destiny nor act against the Divine decree. It makes us absolute automata bound hand and foot by the chain of slavery. Furthermore, it makes God partial and unjust. Why should He make one innocent creature destined to suffer and another to enjoy? Why is it that one obtains His grace before one's birth and another does not? If a sinner be destined to sin even before his birth, why should he be responsible for his works, and why should he suffer for the whim of the omniscient and almighty Creator? If God be merciful to all of

creatures why should he not make all equally good and virtuous, moral and spiritual? These questions remain unanswered by the theory of predestination and grace. But they do not rise in the doctrine of *Karma*. If we can once understand that each individual soul reaps the results of its previous acts and deeds then we can never advocate the theory of predestination and grace. Every effect is measured by its cause.

A believer in the law of *Karma* is a free agent and is responsible for all the good and bad results of his own actions that attend to his life. He knows that he creates his own destiny, and moulds his character by his thoughts and deeds. He never blames another for the suffering and misery which come to him. He learns by experience the true causes of events and removing the bad or evil, he performs such actions which produce good to all as well as to himself. He who obeys the law of *Karma* is more

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

moral and more virtuous than one who blindly obeys the Ten Commandments. He stands on a more rational ground than one who fears the punishment of God. He shrinks from doing any thing wrong, not because it is written in a book or scripture, but because he knows that every wrong action will sooner or later react upon himself and will make him unhappy and miserable. He performs good deeds for the reason that they will bring good reaction in the form of happiness, peace, tranquility and higher enlightenment. What we call rewards or punishments of God are nothing but the reactions of our own mental and physical actions. The doctrine of Karma denies the arbitrary Ruler and teaches that God never rewards the virtuous nor punishes the wicked- नादत्ते कस्यचित् पापं न चैव सुकृतं विभुः ।¹

Bhagavad Gītā, Ch V, 15.

LAW OF COMPENSATION

न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा ।
इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिर्न स बध्यते ॥

*Actions do not bind Me, nor have I any
longing for the result of action. Whoever
knows Me thus is not fettered by action.*

—Bhagavad Gītā, Ch. IV, 14

CHAPTER III

LAW OF COMPENSATION

The doctrine of *Karma* includes the *law of compensation* and the *law of retribution*. These are the fundamental verities of nature. As every effect must have a cause, every consequence must have an antecedent, so also there must be equal balance between a cause and its effect, between an antecedent and a consequence. A cause must always produce an effect of similar nature both in quality and quantity and a reaction must be similar to action. The forces of nature operate neither for profit nor for loss but for a perfect balance or harmony. If there be a surging of a high wave in the ocean there must be a deep hollow at its sides. If there be a flow of waters here, there must be an ebb somewhere. If there be tremen-

dous heat in one place, extreme cold will be found in another place. When it is day here it is night in America. A long peace is followed by a long war, and *vice versa*. In this manner, we can show that polarity exists in every department of nature and brings in the end a perfect balance, equilibrium, harmony and justice; in short, it produces what we understand by the word *compensation*. The *law of compensation* is as irresistible as the law of causation and as relentless as the law of action and reaction. In fact, these three as well as the *law of retribution* work together. They represent merely the different phases of nature's purpose in producing diverse phenomena, each opposing the other. Take for an example H_2O produces water. H_2O is the cause, the antecedent, and water is the effect, the consequence. It is also the reaction and perfect compensation. There is neither increase nor decrease anywhere. A molecule of water contains two atoms of

रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् ।

आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥

A wise man moves about among the objects of senses free from love and hatred keeping the tranquil state of mind absolutely controlled by his true Self.

—Bhagavad Gītā, Ch IV, 14

CHAPTER IV

LAW OF RETRIBUTION

As every good act brings its own reward by the *law of compensation*, so every crime or wrong act brings its own punishment by the *law of retribution*, whether it is found in this life or in the next. When a robber robs another, he robs himself first. He who cheats another is in reality cheating himself. No one can do wrong without suffering evil effect in the end. Wicked act and its result or reaction which we call punishment grow on the same stem. The former is like the flower and the latter is the fruit.

The *law of retribution* is the inexorable necessity in nature. Every action reacts and brings its own reward or punishment first in the inner nature or soul, and then in the external circumstances in

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

the form of gain or loss, prosperity or adversity, health or disease. The soul perceives the causal retribution, but the people call the change of external circumstances as retribution which comes after sometime. This law manifests itself in the soul long before the external changes appear. We have to pay the penalty for wrong doing, but not for good deeds. Virtue, wisdom, truth and love are real good; they proceed from God and therefore no one pays penalty for practising them. They are spiritual qualities; the more we practise them, the more they increase. He who seeks material good must pay taxes, but there is no tax on spiritual good.

The law of *Karma* teaches that the virtuous reward themselves and the sinners punish themselves by their own thoughts and deeds. Emerson says: "Every act rewards itself first in our own soul then in circumstance. People call the circumstance retribution."

St. Bernard said: "Nothing can work me damage except myself; the harm that I sustain, I carry about with me and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault." It is for this reason that the Hindus although do not believe in the hell-fire doctrine and do not fear the punishment of God, still they hesitate to commit wicked deeds and struggle hard to live virtuous lives simply fearing the eternal law of *Karma*. The Buddhists who do not believe in a personal God and who deny the existence of the permanent entity of the soul, have founded their ethics and religion upon this universal law of *Karma*, or of cause and sequence.

The doctrine of *Karma* is the fundamental principle of the philosophy and religion of Vedânta. But there is a difference between the Buddhistic and Vedântic interpretation of this doctrine. The Buddhists deny the existence of a soul entity as doer, performer of acts, thinker, enjoyer

or sufferer. They say, that there is no duality of a doer and his doings, a thinker and his thoughts, an enjoyer and enjoyments. The words doer, thinker, enjoyer, sufferer are mere modes of speech. The realities of our soul-life, according to Buddhism, consist in doings, thoughts, sufferings, enjoyments and aspirations. These actions are called *Karma*, out of these a man is made, but he has no permanent soul. These *Karmas* constitute one's personality which is preserved beyond death. The Buddhists maintain that the eye sees, the ear hears, and thoughts think, that all mental and physical actions of an individual produce *Sanskâras* or subtle forms such as deed-forms, thought-forms etc., which continue to exist even after his death and reproduce similar actions through another body in future, being guided by the law of causation (*Karma*). Vedân on the contrary, admits the existence of a soul entity. The same intelligent and

conscious self is called doer, thinker, enjoyer or sufferer. There is neither intelligence nor consciousness in the nature of physical or mental actions. As actions they are insentient. Vedânta refutes the Buddhistic interpretation by pointing out its fallacy that if there be no permanent soul entity the doer of an action or the sower of a seed will not be the reaper of its fruit. If there be no identity of the doer and the reaper, there will be a great confusion in the world of actions. It will be like one person eating the food and another getting the effect and not the eater, which is perfectly absurd. Moreover, it will be against the 'law of action and reaction' which teaches that all reaction comes back to the source from where the action started or proceeded. Otherwise, a sinner after committing sinful acts will reap the result of the virtuous deeds of another man. There is nothing to prevent this anomaly. Therefore, Vedânta

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

says that the law of *Karma* necessitates the identity of the thinker or doer and enjoyer or sufferer. As this chain of *Karma* is beginningless and endless the soul entity which is the source of all thoughts and actions is therefore, beginningless and endless. It existed before the present birth. The results of the previous actions, each individual soul is reaping now and at the same time sowing the seeds of future results by performing good and bad deeds. The *Karma* that is stored is called *Samchita*. *Prârabdha Karma* is that which has been the cause of the present birth, body and character. *Kriyamâna Karma* is what we are sowing now; and *Agâmi Karma* are future actions. The same idea was conveyed by St. Paul when, he wrote in the 6th Chapter of his epistle to the Galatins, (*verse 7th*): 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' 'And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not' (*verse*

9th). Perhaps, Christ also referred to the law of *Karma* when he answered the question of his disciples: 'Who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' Jesus answered: 'Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents.' Of course a man who was born blind could not sin in that incarnation and when it was not the result of his parent's sin, where was the cause of his blindness? Heredity cannot explain it. The theologians say, it was the will of God because they believe in the theory of predestination which as I have already said makes God partial and unjust. The only rational explanation that can be found is through the doctrine of *Karma*, that is, the previous actions of the same man were the cause of his blindness. Applying the law of *Karma*, Vedânta will explain that he was reaping the result of his evil action which he did in his previous incarnation. There cannot be any other satisfactory and scientific explanation of such cases. Thus, if the law of *Karma* is so universal as

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

to govern all phenomena of the world as well as of our thoughts and deeds, if it is so inexorable as to make every individual soul reap the results of actions either in this life or in the next, and if it be true that every reaction, being similar in nature as the action itself, is bound to return to the centre of action or in other words, to react upon the actor making him or her happy or miserable, how important it is for every one of us to remember this law at every moment of our life; and how necessary it is for every one of us to be extremely cautious in performing the duties of daily life so that we shall not sow the seeds which will bear unpleasant and disagreeable fruit and which will make us unhappy and miserable either in this life or hereafter.

The doctrine of *Karma* alone, can explain the mysterious problem of good and evil and reconcile man to the terrible and apparent injustice of life. Those who believe in this noble doctrine are never disturbed in their

minds at the sight of the inequalities of birth and fortune or of intellect and capacities around them. The knowledge of this universal truth prevents them from cursing life or human beings or from blaming their supposed Creator when they see fools and profligates are honoured in society, when they find their neighbours possessing neither intellect nor any of the noble virtues are prosperous and enjoying all the comforts and pleasures of life on account of their births in wealthy families. The doctrine of *Karma* tells us the reason why people suffer although they might not have done any wrong in this life, although they apparently seem not to deserve any kind of suffering. It is the *law of compensation*. The law of *Karma* eternal as it is, predestines nothing and no one; but on the contrary, making every one free agent for action, shows the way out of the world of misery, through good thoughts and good deeds. *Karma* creates nothing, nor does it plan or design anything. We create by our

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

actions the causes of good and evil and receive reward or punishment as the reactions of our thoughts and deeds by the *law of compensation*. The poor and suffering classes will find no consolation anywhere but in this one doctrine of *Karma*. It is for this reason, there is so much of contentment among the poverty-stricken people of India who can hardly earn enough to keep their body and soul together. If this noble doctrine be preached among the innumerable discontented and wretched people in Christendom, they would find a ray of hope for their future, they would try to live better lives, they would be more moral, more virtuous and more spiritual than they are today. They would be able to bear the burden of misery upon their shoulders with more calmness, with more patience, contentment and peace.

PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।

तत्ते कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥

Even wise men are deluded on this point, what is action and what is inaction. I shall tell thee the philosophy of work, by knowing which thou shalt attain to absolute freedom from all imperfections.

—Bhagavad Gītā, Ch IV, 16.

CHAPTER V

PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA

Those who understand the philosophy of *Karma* and act accordingly, are pure in heart and enter into the life of Blessedness.

In Sanskrit this philosophy of work is called *Karma Yoga*. It is one of the methods by which the final goal of Truth may be realized. There are three others: that of love, that of wisdom, and that of concentration and meditation; but all these paths are like so many rivers which ultimately flow into the ocean of Truth, and each is suited to the mental and physical conditions of different individuals. One in whom the feeling of worship is predominant will naturally choose the path of love and devotion; another, more philosophical, will take that of discrimination; a third will prefer the practice of concentration and meditation; while those who

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

have an instinctive tendency to work, who are neither philosophical nor able to concentrate or meditate, and who find it difficult to believe in a personal God, may, without worship or devotion, reach realization through the knowledge of the secret of right action.

Karma Yoga means literally 'skill or dexterity in work', and it deals with all activity whether of body or mind. Recognizing that activity is an inevitable condition of life, that no human being can live without performing some kind of work, either mental or physical, it seeks through its teaching to show how this constant output of energy may be utilized to acquire the greatest spiritual enlightenment and to attain to perfection and absolute freedom. This can be accomplished as we are told in the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gitâ*, by seeing in the midst of activity that which is beyond all action.† "He who sees activity in inaction as well as that which is above all

action in the midst of the activities of mind, body, and senses, is wise among mankind, is a true *Karma Yogî*, and a perfect doer of all actions."¹ †

Ordinarily we identify ourselves with the work that we are doing, and being driven on by the relentless necessity to act, we make ourselves like machines, labouring without cessation until at last we grow weary, discouraged, and unhappy. When, however, we realize that there is within us something which transcends all activity, which is unchanging, immovable, and eternally at rest, then we accomplish our daily tasks without discouragement or loss of strength, because we have learned the philosophy of work. There are five conditions necessary for the accomplishment of all mental or physical labour. First, we must have a physical body,

1. कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्मजा च कर्म यः ।

स बुद्धिमान् मनश्चिद स युक्तः कृतकर्मकृतः ॥

—*Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. IV, 18

for it is the storehouse of energy. If we are without a body, we can do nothing on the physical plane. This body, furthermore, must be in good condition. If there is disease of any kind, it is unfit for right work. Second, there must be present the sense of the *Ego* as the doer or actor. We must be conscious of the 'I' who feels the impulse to work and proceeds to follow that impulse. Third, we must have the instruments with which to work; these are many: there are the sense organs—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and sense of touch; the five instruments of physical work—the hands, feet, etc.; and the internal instrument, the brain or mind-substance, with all its faculties—the power of will, cogitation, determination, memory. Fourth, we must have the desire or motive to work; and fifth, there must be some sort of environment. Without this last, senses, external instruments, and brain would avail us little. To hear a sound with our ears we must have the air; to see, there

must be light and a medium to transmit its waves; while the body cannot move without space. These five conditions are essential to every kind of work, whether good or bad; and in the practice of *Karma Yoga* we must be perpetually mindful of them, never confounding one with the other, but holding ever before us the body, its instruments, and the knower or self-conscious actor as distinct one from the other.

The results of actions performed under these five conditions are of three kinds: those that are desirable because they help us to fulfil our aims in life, and bring us comfort and pleasure; second, those which are not desirable; and third, those which are partly desirable and partly undesirable. It is not possible to escape some one of these results at every moment of our existence; since, as has already been said, the activity of our organism never ceases. Practically speaking, there cannot be absolute rest of body or mind. Even when the body seems

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

at rest, the mind substance continues in a state of vibration; and when here, again, all conscious activity apparently stops, as in the case of deep sleep, subconscious activity still goes on in the organic actions of the system, such as unconscious cerebration, digestion, breathing, circulation; for we are learning through the investigations of science that the unconscious mind extends over a much larger area than the conscious mind; also that all conscious activity first rises there. Each of these activities of mind, furthermore, is bound to produce some kind of result.

If, therefore, activity is inevitable and each action must produce its result, what can we do to make all such results harmonize with the highest ideal of life? By searching for that which, in the midst of our varied activities of mind and body, remains always inactive. When we have found that and recognized it, we have understood the purpose of the philosophy of work, and can make our every effort lead us to the final

goal of all religion, to the realization of Truth, and to the attainment of Blessedness. If we cannot do this, we shall be forced to go on reaping the fruit of our actions and continue in the suffering and misery which we now endure. By practising the teachings of the philosophy of work, on the other hand, we shall not only bring freedom to the soul, but shall rise above all law and live on a plane above motion. From the minutest atom up to the grossest material form, there is constant motion. Nowhere is there rest. One thing, however, moves not; one thing is at rest, and *Karma Yoga* explains what that is, how we may realize it and make ourselves one with it.

That something which is beyond all activity is called in Sanskrit *Atman*. It is the Knower in us. If we use a higher discrimination and try to understand the nature of the Knower, by observing our internal processes while we are doing anything, we shall discover that the Knower

is constant. ¶The reader knows that he is sitting and also that he is reading. In other words, he distinguishes two distinct objects of knowledge; but the consciousness with which he perceives them, remains the same. ¶In like manner, the Knower of all these different activities of mind and body is always identical. When we hear a sound, we know that we hear; when we see a light we know that we see; but is the knower of sight different from knower of sound? No. That which knows the object of sight or the object of sound is always the same; it does not change. It was the same ten years ago and will be the same tomorrow. ¶The Knower of all the experiences of our childhood is just the same as the one who knows what we are doing now. If we study and realize this, we shall find that the Knower is unchangeable and not bound by the conditions which govern the changeable. If it were otherwise, and if changeable and unchangeable were subject to the same con-

ditions, not only would it be contrary to the established order of things, but must cause great confusion, since there would be no way of differentiating changeable from unchangeable.

[That which is subject to time, space, and causation is changeable;] while that which is beyond these is unchangeable. Time, for instance, means *succession*, which is a condition of thought; and space means *co-existence*. The activities of mind, being either in succession or simultaneous, produce the ideas of time and space; they are conditions, or, as Kant calls them, 'forms of thought.' One thought following another gives us a conception of intervals which we call *time*; while, when two ideas rise simultaneously, that which separates them is what we call *space*. Thus, that which exists between the idea 'me' and the idea 'sun' we classify as space; yet it is purely a mental concept, having no existence outside the mind; for who knows any concrete thing

designated space? Hence, since these ideas of time and space are merely conditions of thought, they must be subject to change, because our thought is continually changing. Any thing which takes form in the mind and is conditioned by time and space must change; but the Knower, not being a condition of mind or limited by time and space, does not change. A certain thought rises in our minds and passes, then another takes its place, to be followed again by still another; yet the witness or Knower of all these thoughts, whether of gross objects or of abstract ideas, remains the same. The Knower, when identified with the changes of the mind, becomes knower and thinker. Thinking is an activity of the mind substance; it is a vibratory condition of this substance; and when the Knower takes upon itself that condition, it becomes knower and thinker. When it identifies itself with sense powers, and sense perceptions, it becomes knower and perceiver; and it

becomes the conscious mover or the physical man when it is one with the conditions and activities of the body.

In this way, if we analyse our mental activities and study the nature of the Knower, we find that it is the permanent source of intelligence, above mind and beyond thought, that it is in reality neither thinker nor actor. The *Atman* or Knower can have neither desires nor passions, for they are purely mental conditions. When the Knower is identified with any mental activity, we feel, it is true, that we have desires and passions, but in reality we are only the Knower of desire. ¶When we are angry, the mind is put into a certain state of vibration which is unpleasant. At first we perceive that anger is rising in us; then gradually, as it gains strength, it covers the whole mental plane and reflects on the Knower. ¶Lacking the power to separate ourselves from the mental condition, we become identified with the wave of anger

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

an hour, but our speed will be increased a thousandfold in another direction when we take into consideration the diurnal motion of the earth and its annual revolution round the sun. Furthermore, it can be shown that from the standpoint of the universe we are not moving at all. Since the whole universe is in reality a unit, where will it move? It cannot move anywhere. Therefore as a part of it we are not moving and can go nowhere. Thus by proper analysis we have been carried from the first to the second kind of knowledge—from the limited knowledge of the conditions under which the body seems to be moving, to the higher knowledge of the conditions as they actually are, and not as they merely appear to be. From this we may pass to the third or highest kind of knowledge, which reveals to us the unity of existence. With the help of this knowledge we learn to look at things from the standpoint of one absolute Reality which is the eternal Knower of the universe. The

moment that we think that our body is a part of the universal body, our mind not separate from the cosmic mind, and that our souls, being parts of one universal Soul, are most intimately connected with one another, all activity assumes a new meaning for us, and it becomes impossible for us to act from selfish motives or to do wrong. It is when, on account of our imperfect knowledge, we identify our true Self, the Knower, with the limitations of mind and body, that we become selfish and are ready to do the things which bring us suffering and misery. If, however, we remain conscious of the oneness of the universe, of the laws that govern mind and body, of the relation which one soul bears to another, and of the various planes existing in the universe, we cannot make any mistake whatever. The light of true knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance which is the cause of selfishness, and reveals the true nature of the Knower which is above all activity.

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

That knowledge is the highest which brings us into conscious harmony with the universe, which makes us realize that the Knower is separate from the object known, and that nothing in the universe can ever exist without depending upon the existence of one universal Knower, which manifests through each individual form. This highest knowledge of oneness kills the idea of separateness and resolves the multiplicity of phenomenal objects into that underlying Reality which is one. The phenomenal objects of the universe, such as sun, moon and stars, are in truth like so many eddies in the vast ocean of matter in motion. Apparently they are separate from one another, but they are closely connected each with the other by the undercurrent of that primordial energy, which manifests itself as the various forces of nature. The sum total of this energy in the universe is neither increased nor diminished, but is eternally one. It is also inseparable from the infinite

Being, which is the source of existence and consciousness. Being deluded by appearances, we get the idea of separateness and see one body as distinct from another; but when we go below the surface and seek that which produces variety, tracing it back to its final cause, the eternal energy, we inevitably arrive at the knowledge of oneness. This is the problem which every individual will have to solve. It has been solved already thousands of times by the best thinkers and philosophers of the world, but their solution cannot bring satisfaction to others. If one person has realized the oneness of existence, he will possess true wisdom, freedom from all delusions, and unbounded peace of mind; another, however, cannot gain the same result until he has risen to a like realization. With the attainment of this highest knowledge of oneness all questions will be answered, all doubts will cease; but it is impossible to make the unawakened mind grasp what this means, for

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

that they, themselves, have selected the rôles which they are impersonating, that by their own choice they have assumed these characters. They fancy, on the contrary, that some invisible being has forced them to fill these parts; and whenever they achieve a gratifying result, they imagine that that unseen being is pleased; while, if the result be painful, they weep and wail and blame the same invisible power.

Occasionally some of the actors or actresses, disliking their own parts, try to change with others whose parts seem more attractive, because they show a little merriment in their play; so they pass from one rôle to another. Always, however, they continue to act on this world stage, gaining experience at every step, as they move onward toward the fulfilment of the purpose of the drama. This purpose is the emancipation of the soul from slavery to the laws of nature and from the bondage of ignorance, selfishness, ambition, and all imperfections which hold it down on

the plane of phenomena. Those who attain the goal retire from the stage and appear no more. They live in bliss and happiness in the higher realm of Divinity.

The cause of all these different parts which the individual souls are playing, lies within the actors and actresses themselves and not outside of them. In their own inner nature is it to be found; and as the power of growth, which is latent in the seed buried beneath the surface of the earth, gradually bursts forth and manifests itself in the form of plants, trees, and shrubs, each showing the peculiarities contained in the original seed, so these powers that are slumbering in each human soul, wake up in time, stir it to action, and force it to assume some particular part in the play. It is these latent powers when roused to activity that we know as our desires and motives. So long as these desires and motives are perfectly dormant, there is no sign of activity; and this latent or dormant state is called in

Sanskrit *Tamas*. We can understand its character better if we examine the condition of deep sleep. In that state the power of walking, of hearing, speaking, is latent and finds no outward expression. It is a state of inertia or inactivity; but when this power wakes up, it produces a vibration in the mind substance, and this vibration we call mental activity. This again, when manifested on the external plane, appears in the form of physical activity. All physical activity, however, necessarily presupposes mental activity.

Each germ of life possesses infinite potentialities stored up within it; and these, as they pass from the condition of *Tamas* to that of active desire, drive it on through the various stages of evolution—from the vegetable into the animal kingdom and on to that of man. The first glimmering of mental activity appears in the lower animals; and it reaches its climax when the germ of life manifests as a human being. In the

human form the mind attains its highest state of activity, and this active state of mind is called in Sanskrit *Rajas*, the meaning of which is activity. This impels the individual to express itself in mental and physical action, which produce certain impressions on the mind, and these impressions become the seed of future activities and desires. Thus every action, whether physical or mental, has three states: First, activity or desire; second, outward action; third, impression. After this it remains dormant for a time, then wakes up, appears in the form of desire, expresses itself in some action, of mind or body, and again produces an impression. Each individual is bound by these three conditions: activity or desire, work, and impression. We cannot arrest our external work so long as there is mental activity. We are impelled to some kind of exertion by our own inner nature. For this reason it is said in the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*.
 "None verily, even for an instant, ever

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

without desire for return, and they are the salt of the earth. They work as if they were paying off a debt which they owe to society, to parents, to humanity. If we can labour with this idea, that all we do is merely to cancel our debt to the universe, then we can work for work's sake. When we pay off a debt, do we think of getting something in return? No; we do our work, cancel our obligation, and think no more about it. Every individual, on account of his birth, owes something to state and country, to family and neighbours; to his spiritual teachers, and to his higher Self. While he lives in society, he owes a duty to society. So long as he is guarded and protected by social conditions, he is in debt to the social body which maintains them. How can he pay that debt? By being a good member of society, by doing what he can to help all other members, and by making every effort to fulfil his obligation to the community and to mankind. We must recognize the rights of others and

not perform any act which may infringe upon those rights. We must not injure our neighbour, since we do not wish to be injured by him; and at the same time we must remember that our motive in working is not to get some return, but to pay off the debt which we owe to the world. By being good members of the family, and by bringing up our children in the right way, we pay our debt to parents and forefathers. By studying the works of great men and by learning all the wisdom which has been gathered by the wise ones, we cancel our debt to them; while we daily pay our debt to our spiritual teachers by following their example and precepts, and by helping mankind in the path of spiritual progress

In India every individual life is divided into four periods, each of which is fixed for paying off debts to some portion of the world—to parents, society, spiritual teachers, or to our own higher Self. The debt which we owe to this higher Self, can be paid by realizing

our true nature, by knowing who and what we are in reality, and by emancipating the soul from the bondage of nature as well as from the irresistible law of *Karma*, which keeps it on the phenomenal plane. This debt should be cancelled before the time of departure comes, and in India this conviction is very strong. The ultimate aim of life will be served if we can discharge the debt which we owe to our own selves. If we keep this idea ever in our minds as we work in the family, in society, in the state, we shall work without seeking any result, whether personal glory, wealth, or even moral satisfaction; and all work performed in this spirit will purify our souls from selfishness, hatred, jealousy, and anger. Then we shall go to our round of daily tasks, eating, drinking, talking, not with the motive of preserving our bodies, but of creating the conditions necessary for the cancelling of all our debts. We shall no longer work through attachment to the fruits of our labour, and

shall, in consequence, play our parts without reaping the results of sorrow, suffering, and disappointment, which too often come when the motive of our effort is a selfish one. Then also shall we be in no danger of wrong doing.

Another thing must be considered before we can work for work's sake. All the forces which we are using in our minds and bodies do not really belong to us. We claim them as our own, but in reality they are not ours. Can we say that the air in our lungs is ours? No; we are only making use of it for a certain purpose. Neither is the force of attraction which holds the molecules of our bodies together ours; it is in the universe. So when we understand our entire organism, physical and mental, we find that all the forces which we are using, belong not to any particular person, but to the universe. Looking at ourselves from the standpoint of the universe, we perceive that our bodies are like so many whirlpools in the sea of matter,

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

must assume the duties of the student life; when he marries, the duties of the married life begin; and when he becomes a father, duties to his children bind him. When, again, he remembers that he bears a definite relation to his country or state, he awakens to a sense of duty towards the nation and the government.

So, in the case of every individual, it will be found that what was duty at one moment ceases to be such at another; while new duties come up to take the place of the old ones. We all had certain duties at school, but where are they now? Gone! We do not think at present in the same way as we did when we were students; other duties have arisen and crowded out those of that time. Life is divided into different stages, and each stage has its obligations. It is a continuous process of evolution and progression, in which higher duties are evolving out of lower ones and binding the soul for the time being. When we go to our office,

official duties claim us; when we return home, we are met by household duties. Our whole existence is a series of occupations, each of which brings with it a feeling of *ought*; and this feeling is the sense of duty in us. *There is no such thing as duty in an objective sense*; we cannot get it from outside. It is purely subjective. When we perform certain acts under certain circumstances, and are conscious that we ought to do them, that feeling of obligation is duty. But who tells us that we should? Our own inner self. Impelled by natural tendencies and partial knowledge, we begin to think that under specific conditions we should perform these acts; and so long as we hold to this belief, we are forced to do them. *The feeling which binds us to these special acts of body and mind is the sense of duty. Duty creates a kind of bondage between the individual and his environment.* If we do not have the sense of duty, we do not feel this bondage. It is, in fact, a condition

which makes us slaves while it lasts. In our daily lives we discharge our many duties like bond-servants; yet we keep imagining that in doing them, we shall be happy through the satisfaction which will arise from the consciousness of having done them; but the next instant conditions change, our environment shifts, and we are confronted by another set of duties and a new feeling of *ought*.

Nothing can make us free so long as we are fettered by this sense of duty. *It is the greatest bondage of our lives.* We may look upon it as eminently commendable to be perpetually constrained by the idea of *ought* and to force ourselves to do that which seems to us duty for the moment; but it is absolutely necessary for us to realize that *this will never lead to happiness.* We have only to go back in our own experience to find that although we have performed numberless duties, we have not gained any lasting happiness from their

accomplishment. If we should ask an old man of eighty or ninety, who has fulfilled all his obligations to family, society, and country, if he is happy, will his answer be in the affirmative? No; he will almost surely say: 'Although I have done all that was required of me as father, husband, and citizen, yet am I not happy.' Then we stop and put the question each to himself: 'If I do my whole duty, shall I be any more at peace?' And we are forced to admit: 'Most probably not.' The mere fulfilment of duty in itself cannot be productive of permanently good results. We must know, among the multiplicity of duties that surround us, which is the most important; and finally we must face the problem: 'What is the highest, the one real duty of life?'

Some people say that helping others is the highest duty. But why should we help others? Because some one has said so, or because it is written in some book? Why should we not kill everybody and enrich

ourselves? The Bible declares: 'Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.' The Qurân says: 'Follow the teachings of Mohammed; this is the whole duty of man.' Zoroaster tells us: 'Follow the teachings of the Zend-Avesta and obey the commands of Ahura Mazda; in this lies the whole duty of man.' But why should we fear God? The answer comes: 'Because if we do not, He will punish us.' But why does He command in one way for one nation and in a different way for another? How, when the scriptures all vary, can each lay claim to supreme authority? In the Qurân we read that a man may marry twenty times—Mohammed himself had eighteen wives—and this is one of the commands of God under the social conditions prevailing in that particular country; but it would scarcely do in America. Variation, indeed, is a salient feature of

1. *Eccles. Ch. xii., v. 13.*

so-called divine commands, and when a man has read all the scriptures of the world, he does not know which to follow. Why, then, should we obey the decrees of God? There are many who do not believe in punishment; what is left for them? They will not be impelled to observe God's commands, since they have no fear of His wrath; therefore such persons will have no duty.

The word *duty* is an abstract term, and, like all abstract terms, it cannot be defined. We can, however, get some idea of what is meant by it if we study the different scriptures and reduce their teachings to their simplest forms. In the commands of God, we observe that all those which say: 'Do not do this or that,' may be summed up in the admonition: 'Do not be selfish, be unselfish.' Let any divine command be analyzed, and this will be found to be its basis. Any action that leads one from selfishness to unselfishness, that broadens

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

and elevates the character, that brings freedom to the soul and directs it Godward, is good, and therefore becomes the highest duty of every individual. On the other hand, that which shuts one within the narrow walls of one's limited lower nature, is selfish and should be avoided. When a man has realized this, his idea of duty will no longer be confined to the sayings of any book or of any person, but will be founded upon the universal law of unselfishness. His standard will be: 'That which uplifts the character is right, that which degrades is wrong.' The particular line of action, however, which will elevate or degrade an individual will vary according to his nature and his environment. Elevation and degradation should not be measured by the standard of any one particular person in one particular stage of development, but by the loftiest ideal of all individuals, of all sects, and of all religions. The highest common standard is the absolute freedom

of the soul from every bondage. That which leads to such freedom is elevating, that which keeps one in bondage is degrading. Therefore it is said by Hindu philosophers: 'That which elevates the soul, which brings prosperity and absolute freedom, both here and hereafter, is true duty.' This ideal of duty is like the pole-star which points the way to the ship of the human soul in the troubled waters of the ocean of activity, gradually guiding it across the deep sea to the land of perfect freedom.

We have only to be constantly mindful of this one fact, that to be unselfish is our sole duty, and apply it to our daily round, to be sure that our highest duty is being accomplished. In ordinary life we are confronted by various kinds of duties—towards ourselves, towards our family, our neighbour, towards society, country, humanity, and finally, as the culmination, towards all living creatures; for the one idea which is universal and common to all in every country

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

and in all ages is the non-injuring, either mentally or physically, of any living being. First we start from the lower self, from the '*I*' or '*Me*,' then by degrees we come to recognize the self of others. When we begin to feel for others in the same way as we do for ourselves, we commence to rise above the limitations of this narrow self; and at that very moment we have taken our first step towards unselfishness. The end is reached when we realize that all living creatures are equal to ourselves. Jesus the Christ said: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' and 'Love your enemies;' but He did not preach: 'Love all living creatures,' as did Buddha. When a goat was going to be killed, Buddha came forward and offered his own life for that of the goat. The goat's life was saved, and the man who would have killed it, afterwards became Buddha's disciple. When we begin to cherish all living creatures as we cherish ourselves, we have reached the state of development where the sense of '*I*,' '*Me*,'

and 'Mine,' vanishes; where we see all creation as one on the spiritual plane. Therefore it is said in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "He who sees the same divine Self equally abiding in all, doth not kill himself by his Self and so attaineth the supreme goal."¹ This realization of oneness of spirit is the highest ideal of life. It is the climax of unselfishness, and becomes identical with Divine love, because God loves all creatures equally. His love, indeed, shines alike upon all, as does the light of the sun upon man and beast without distinction of kind.

When this love or feeling of oneness awakens in the soul, we rise above all duty, and work, not through a sense of obligation, but through love. Which is the higher of these two motives? Love must be higher than duty, and where there is love, there can be

1. समं पश्यन् हि सर्वत्र समवस्थितमौत्तरम् ।
न हिनस्तात्मनात्मानं ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥

—*Bhagavad Gītā*, Ch. XIII, 29.

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

no thought of duty. We observe in ordinary life how, when one person falls in love with another, he loses all feeling of duty towards friends, relatives, and society; because love has annihilated all consciousness of other duties and freed the soul. *While we are bound by duty, we are slaves;* but if in this condition of slavery we are carried away by a strong feeling of love, all the sense of duty to family or society, which previously held us in bondage, melts away, and at that moment we become free. So we see that wherever there is true love, there is freedom, and no vestige of duty can remain. God has no duty towards any living creature, but He has love for all. We should try, then, to distinguish between love and duty; since duty puts us in bondage, makes us slaves; while love brings freedom and emancipation to the soul.

When the feeling of love towards every living creature comes to any one, that person

is free from all duties, from all bondage, from all attachment to his physical nature. He does not seek sense pleasure, neither does he care to preserve the lower self nor to protect the body, because he realizes that he is not the body but soul. Even when the body is torn in pieces, he is not moved, but holds to the consciousness of his spiritual nature, his *Atman* or divine Self, which cannot be cut in pieces, cannot be burnt by fire, moistened by water or dried by air.¹ In realizing this, he also works without thought of return. Even those who do their duty with the hope of return, cease to think of results when they begin to be actuated by love; and *all work performed through this higher motive of love takes the form of acts of worship of the supreme Spirit.*

1. नैनं हिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।

न चैनं क्लेदयन्तापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥

अच्छेद्योऽयमदाह्नोऽयमक्लेद्योऽशीष्य एव च ।

—*Bhagavad Gītā, Ch. II, 23-24.*

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

know this, life becomes worth living here and now. Otherwise, we may perform duties forever without finding peace and happiness; but when we realize our oneness with Divinity and reach that state of superconsciousness, or Godconsciousness, all our desires and duties are fulfilled, all the knots of our hearts are rent asunder, all doubts cease forever, all questions are answered,⁴ and the individual soul passes all laws. He who has understood the one supreme duty and fulfilled that, has reached freedom and gained Divine love and Divine wisdom on this earth. He transcends all the law of *Karma*, the law of compensation and of retribution, and enters into the abode of everlasting existence, intelligence and bliss.

4. भिद्यते ब्रह्मसिद्धिं लब्धे सर्वसंशयाः ।

चैव ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परापरे ॥

—*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2 2 8.

APPENDIX

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

APPENDIX A

DELUSION

If all that we see and sense are delusions, what is the Truth? We have to understand the meaning of the word *delusion*; Delusion does not mean 'non-existence.' It means *relative reality*, that is, it exists for the time being, and has no permanent existence. Very few people know the meaning of delusion. They think that it is just like the mirage. You cannot realize that as a mirage so long as you are in it. I should say it is more like a dream. Dreams are real so long as we are dreaming, but when we wake up they become unreal. If all these things that we are doing be transitory, that is, exist for the time being, and we consider them as real, it is the same thing as if we are dreaming. But there is an awakening

from this state of dream, and that is called 'superconsciousness.' It is Godconsciousness. Then it appears like a dream, but not at present. At present they are all real, and we must go on doing just as we are doing.¹

We cannot find the Truth here under these conditions, but the Truth is behind all these appearances. It is the background. From the Truth we have come into existence, in the Truth we live, and into the Truth we return at the time of dissolution. The whole universe is pervaded by Truth, but we do not see it.² We see only *the appearance of Truth*.

1. सर्वव्यवहाराणामिव प्राग्ब्रह्मात्मताविज्ञानात् सत्यत्वोपपत्तेः । स्वप्नव्यवहारस्येव प्राग्प्रतीतिर्वा । यावद्धि न सत्यात्मैकत्वप्रतिपत्तिस्तावत् प्रमाण-प्रमेयफललक्षणेऽपि विकारेष्ववृत्तत्वबुद्धिर्न कस्यचिदुपपद्यते । * * तस्मात् प्राग्ब्रह्मात्मताप्रतिबोधादुपपन्नः सर्वो लौकिको वैदिकश्च व्यवहारः ।

—Sankara Vāsyam, 2. I. 14.

2. यः सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन् सर्वेभ्यो भूतेभ्योऽन्तरः, यं सर्वाणि भूतानि न विद्मः, यस्य सर्वाणि भूतानि शरीरम्, यं सर्वाणि भूतान्यन्तरो यमयति, एष त आत्मान्तर्ग्राम्यमृतः ।

—Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad, 3, 7, 17.

Take, for example, a table. The table cannot remain for ever. If you burn it, it is gone. Where does it go? What remains then? If our body is destroyed, what remains then? We do not see it. So, from the unmanifested we have come into manifestation. We can perceive with our five senses. We can see, hear, smell, taste and touch. But what we see we do not know. You see colour, for instance. You see a beautiful colour in a flower. If you analyze it and study carefully, physiology will tell you that you do not see any colour there. There is no colour. There is some kind of vibration of ether. It is a play of light, and light is nothing but vibration. But an ignorant person says: 'I see it, here it is; how can I deny it?' It is true that he cannot deny it. But what he sees and feels is not just exactly what it is in reality. There is a certain kind of vibration which comes from the flower and produces a kind of inverted image on our retina. And that image even we do not

see, but that image produces a molecular change in the optic nerve and in the cortex of the brain at the back of our head, and then it is translated into feeling or sensation. Then we try to trace the cause of that sensation, and by the law of causation we see it is there. That flower has caused this sensation, and we call it red or yellow or whatever colour you may call it. The colour could not exist if you did not have the optic nerve, the retina and the brain. It is a conditional existence, and that is the meaning of delusion. The real vibration we could not see or perceive with the senses, but it is there just the same. You may call it X. So, the real table, the foundation, the noumenon of this table, we do not see. We see only the colour, the form. Then we have the sensation of thinness or thickness, or roughness or smoothness. These are the qualities. But real substance we do not see. And therefore these qualities are the appearances. The substance is the permanent reality.

In the same way, there is a permanent reality in each one of us, but only our appearances of qualities which make up our personality are seen, and that personality is constantly changing. You are not the same person of the past when you were a boy or a girl. But you do not take into consideration all these changes. You think you are the same person, although you have a new body and brain. You are creating the brain anew all the time, and the nervous system. The whole organism has gone through a complete change, but still you are the same person. What is not changing there? What is unchangeable in you? That which is unchangeable in you has given the foundation of that identity that makes you feel that you are the same person. But you do not know that thing at present. That is the most important thing, but yet we do not know it. We are deluded that we are the same person, we are going to live here for ever, and this is our home. That is a kind

of delusion we have. *It is a false knowledge (mithyâ-pratyaya).* It is indiscrimination. It is what is called 'undifferentiated consciousness'. And that is the meaning of delusion.

But we can get out of this the moment we realize who we are in reality. That is our immortal Self. That is the Truth. Truth is not far away from us. We are part and parcel of the Truth, *because we are eternal.* But not this body, not our personality is eternal. It will go. Our senses are not eternal, they will go. The real foundation of our being, our life, is eternal, is a life-force. But we do not know what life is any more than we know what electricity is, and yet we are using electricity all the time. So, the manifestation of electricity is an appearance, but the force itself is unknown and unknowable to us. It is unknown and unknowable to the ordinary mind. But when we have better knowledge, when we have realization of the source of

all forces, then we know what it is. It is the expression of one force. The whole universe is living. There is no such thing as dead matter. But still we see it is dead matter, which is a delusion. You think that you are sick, you have a disease, an indigestion, or some kind of ache or pain. That is a delusion. You know, if you are spirit, you cannot have sickness. Spirit is never sick, and dead body is never sick. Then who is sick? If the dead body does not catch cold or have any indigestion, then where is the indigestion? That is a delusion. It is a kind of perplexing problem. But we have to go through it and transcend it.

the heart does not mean physical heart, but it refers to the feeling property of percepts and concepts; that is, after perceiving an object an impression is left in the mind. And all these impressions that we have gained must be purified. These impressions are the causes of future desires. If we wipe away these impressions that are stamped upon the mind substance, then the mind substance becomes pure. Then it gets the power of reflecting.

That idea is not given in any other philosophy except the Râja Yoga. The mind is regarded as the mirror, and if the mirror is covered with mud and dirt or dust, its reflecting power would be subdued. So, the mind of a worldly man or woman, who has all kinds of desires for the physical body and material world, has received all these impressions of material nature and they have formed like dirt or dust upon the mirror of the heart. These impressions will not die out unless they are forced out, but they

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

will retain the germs of future desires. The future desires are the resultant of our impressions of previous experiences. As for instance, if you eat a new dish that is very delicious, after you have finished the particular act of eating, the impression of the taste will remain in the subconscious mind, and that impression will sooner or later create a desire for that kind of enjoyment of the same thing once more. And then, next time when you enjoy it, it will create another impression, and then the previous impression will be strengthened by the next impression. So, every time you enjoy anything or experience anything, your subconscious mind is stamped, and that gets into a habit. *What we call 'habit' is but a series of impressions.* And it becomes so strong that it moulds our whole character and that is our second nature. The first nature was also produced in the same way. A person becomes a drunkard or a drug addict in the same way. But these impressions or *Samskâras* are the

obstacles that are holding us down on this plane, and we cannot get the knowledge of the supreme Truth. To get this supreme knowledge we must purify our hearts. By the purification of the heart we mean that we should rub it off with discrimination. Instead of indulging in desires, some say, you should kill them out. But *you cannot kill them out*. There are certain cults that teach: 'Kill out all the desires and make your mind blank.' We cannot do that. It will be absolutely impossible to do that. *We can reduce the number of desires by discrimination and not allowing indulgence. In that way we can purify our heart or mind.* So, the heart means the same thing as the mind, or feeling, or percept, or concept, which we have within us.

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

- Ego, cosmic, 94.
 Egoism, 86, 92, 96.
 Electricity, 25, 132.
 Electrons, 4.
 Emerson, 34.
 Emperor, German, 5.
 Energy, 25, 70, 86.
 ,, primordial, 62, 63.
 ,, universal, 20, 85, 92.
 Enlightenment, 46, 65.
 Environment, 109, 110, 114.
 European war, 5.
 Eye, spiritual, 104.
 Freedom, absolute, 114, 115.
 Galatians, 38.
Gita Bhagavad, 10, 14, 20, 22, 32, 44, 46, 47, 74, 79, 85, 92, 95, 96, 97, 98, 102, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123.
 God, 8, 17, 18, 20, 34, 39, 46, 112, 113, 117, 118, 122, 134.
 Godconsciousness, 121, 122, 124, 128.
 Godward, 114.
 Grace, 17, 19.
 Heredity, 39.
 Hindu, 35, 71, 84, 115.
 Hydrogen, 24, 25.
 Ideal, highest, 9.
 Identity, 131.
 Ignorance, 61, 65, 66, 68, 76, 93, 94, 98.
 Impressions, 79, 135, 136.
 Incarnation, 39, 121.
 India, 42, 84, 89, 90.
 Indiscrimination, 132.
 Intellect, 41, 67, 67, 93, 96.
 ,, cosmic, 93.
 Intelligence, 37, 55, 124.
 Jesus, 39, 116, 120, 122, 134.
 Kant, 53.
Karma, 7, 9, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 36, 38, 41, 80.
 ,, doctrine of, 19, 20, 23, 35, 39, 40, 41, 42.
 ,, law of, 7, 15, 16, 17, 19, 34, 35, 38, 39, 41, 83, 84, 85, 87, 90, 95, 124.
Karma, Agami, 38.
 ,, *Kriyamāna*, 38.
 ,, *Prārabdha*, 38.
 ,, *Sanchita*, 38.
 Knower, 49, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 66, 67, 68, 69, 86.

INDEX

Krishna, Lord, 95, 96, 99.

Law, all-pervading, 7.

„ universal, 7, 114.

Life-force, 132.

Matter, 64,*91, 104, 133.

Meditation, 45.

Mind, cosmic, 6, 92, 94.

Mohammed, 112.

Multiplicity, 62, 123.

Mundaka Up, 124.

Noumenon, 130.

New Thought, 134.

Ones, 63, 65, 122, 124.

Oxygen, 25.

Peace, eternal, 98.

Percept, 135, 137.

Personality, 16, 36, 131, 132.

Predestination, 17, 19.

„ Theory of, 39.

Pre-existence, 27.

Principle, underlying, 134.

Providential, 8.

Qurân, 112.

Rajas, 79.

Râja Yoga, 135.

Râmakiishna 99

Reality, 62, 64.

Reality, absolute. 60.

Realization, 46, 66, 72, 98,

117, 123, 132.

Reincarnation, 27.

Retribution, 34.

„ law of, 23, 24,

33, 124.

Samskâras, 36, 136.

Satan, 17.

Saviour, 98.

Self, 37, 61, 68, 69, 70, 71,

85, 88, 93, 94, 104, 105,

106, 107, 117, 118, 119,

121, 122, 123, 132.

Sensations, 56, 58, 64, 130.

Sleep, deep, 50, 78.

Soul, 29, 34, 36, 40, 61, 76,

85, 90, 92, 115, 122.

Soul-life, 29, 30, 36.

Soul, universal, 61.

Space, 53, 54.

Spirit, 64, 66, 71, 91, 97,

104, 120, 133, 134.

Spirit, universal, 99.

St. Bernard, 35.

St. Paul, 38.

Succession, 53.

Superconsciousness, 124, 128.

Subconscious mind, 136.

DOCTRINE OF KARMA

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Tamas</i> , 78. | Work, philosophy of, 45, 50; |
| Theologians, 39. | 57, 65, 70, 71. |
| Time, 53, 54. | |
| Truth, 45, 51, 71, 123, 127, | <i>Yoga, Karma</i> , 45, 46, 49, 51- |
| 128, 137. | 51. |
| <i>Vāsya Samkhara</i> , 128. | Yogi, .. 47. |
| Vedanta, 35, 36, 37, 39, | |
| 134. | Zend-Avesta, 112. |
| Will, divine, 97. | Zoroaster, 112. |
| .. power, 4. | |

