

Dharma by Annie Besant

# Dharma

by Annie Besant

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## DIFFERENCES

WHEN the nations of the earth were sent forth one after the other, a special word was given by God to each, the word which each was to say to the world, the peculiar word from the Eternal which each one was to speak. As we glance over the history of the nations, we can hear resounding from the collective mouth of the people this word, spoken out in action, the contribution of that nation to the ideal and perfect humanity. To Egypt in old days, the word was Religion; to Persia the word was Purity; to Chaldea the word was Science; to Greece the word was Beauty; to Rome the word was Law; and to India, the eldest-born of His children, to India He gave a word that summed up the whole in one, the word Dharma. That is the word of India to the world.

But we cannot speak this word, so full of meaning, so vast in its out-reaching force, without making our bow at the feet of him who is the greatest embodiment of Dharma that the world has ever seen - our bow to Bhishma, the son of Gangâ, the mightiest incarnation of Duty. Come with me for a while, traveling five-thousand years back in time, and see this hero, lying on his bed of arrows on the field of [Page 1] Kurukshetra, there holding Death at bay, until the right hour should strike. We pass through heaps upon heaps of the slaughtered warriors, over mountains of dead elephants and horses, and we pass by many a funeral pyre, many a heap of broken weapons and chariots. We come to the hero lying on the bed of arrows, transfixed with hundreds of arrows and his head resting on a pillow of arrows. Far he has rejected the pillows they brought him of soft down, and accepted only the arrowy pillow made by Arjuna. He, perfect in Dharma, had, while still a youth, for the sake of his father, for the sake of the duty that he owed to his father, for the sake of the love he bore to his father, made that great vow of renouncing family life, renouncing the crown, in order that the father's will might be done, and the father's heart be satisfied. And Shantanu gave him his blessing, that wondrous boon, that Death should not come to him until he came at his own command, until he willed to die. When he fell, pierced by hundreds of arrows, the sun was in his southern path, and the season was not favourable for the death of one who was not to return any more. He used the power that his father had given him, and made Death stand aside until the sun should open up the way to eternal peace and liberation. As he lay there for many a weary day, racked with the agonies of his wounds, tortured by the anguish of the mangled body that he wore, there came around him many Rishis and the remnants of the Aryan kings, and thither came also [Page 2] Shri Krishna, to see the faithful one. Thither came the five princes, the sons of Pându, the victors in the mighty war, and they stood round him weeping and worshipping him, and longing to be taught by him. To him, in the midst of that bitter anguish, came the words from One whose lips were the lips of God, and He released him from the burning fever, and He gave him bodily rest and clearness of mind and quietness of the inner man, and then He bade him teach to the world what Dharma is - he whose whole life had taught it, who had not swerved from the path of righteousness, who whether as son, or prince, or statesman, or warrior, had always trodden the narrow path. He was asked for teaching by those who were around him, and Vâsudeva bade him speak of Dharma, because he was fit to teach (*Mâhâbharata*, Shanti Parva, § LIV).

Then there drew closer round him the sons of Pându, headed by their eldest brother Yudhishtira, who was the leader of the host that had brought Bhîshma to his death; and he was afraid of coming near and asking questions, thinking that as the arrows were really his, being shot for his cause, he was guilty of the blood of his elder, and he ought not to ask to be taught. Seeing his hesitation, Bhîshma, whose mind was ever balanced, who had trodden the difficult path of duty without being moved to the right hand or the left, spoke the memorable words: "As the duty of Brâhmanas consists in the practice of charity, study,

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and penance, so the duty of Kshatriyas [Page 3] is to cast away their bodies in battle. A Kshatriya should slay sires and grandsires and brothers and preceptors and relatives and kinsmen, that may engage with him in unjust battle. This is their declared duty. That Kshatriya, O Keshava, is said to be acquainted with his duty who slays in battle his very preceptors, if they happen to be sinful and covetous and disregarding of restraints and vows. . . . . Ask me, O child, without any anxiety". Then, just as Vâsudeva, in speaking of Bhîshma, had described Bhîshma's right to speak as teacher, so Bhîshma himself in turn, in addressing the princes, described the qualities that were needed in those who would ask questions on the problem of Dharma:

"Let the son of Pându, in whom are intelligence, self-restraint, brahmacharya, forgiveness, righteousness, mental vigor and energy, put questions to me. Let the son of Pându, who always by his good offices honors his relatives and guests and servants and others that are dependent on him, put questions to me. Let the son of Pându, in whom are truth and charity and penances, heroism, peacefulness, cleverness and fearlessness, put questions to me." (*Ibid.* § LIV.).

Such are some of the characteristics of the man who may seek to understand the mysteries of Dharma. Such are the qualities which you and I must try to develop, if we are to understand the teachings, if we are to be worthy to enquire. [Page 4]

Then began that wonderful discourse, without parallel among the discourses of the world. It treats of the duties of Kings and of subjects, the duties of the four orders, of the four modes of life, duties for every kind of man, duties distinct from each other and suited to every stage of evolution. Every one of you ought to know that great discourse, ought to study it, not only for its literary beauty, but for its moral grandeur. If we could but follow on the path traced by Bhishma, then would our evolution quicken, then would the day of India's redemption draw nearer to its dawn.

With regard to morality - a subject closely bound up with Dharma, and which cannot be understood without a knowledge of what is meant by Dharma - with regard to morality, some think that it is a simple thing. So it is in its broad outlines. The boundaries of right and wrong in the common actions of life are clear, simple, and definite. For a man of small development, for a man of narrow intelligence, for a man of restricted knowledge, morality seems simple enough. But for those of deep knowledge and high intelligence, for those who are evolving towards the higher grades of humanity, for those who desire to understand its mysteries, for them morality is very difficult: "Morality is very subtle," as the prince Yudhishtira said when he was dealing with the problem of the marriage of Draupadi with the five sons of Pându. And one greater than that prince had spoken of the difficulty; Shri Krishna, [Page 5] the Avâtara, in His discourse delivered on the field of Kurukshetra, spoke on this very question of the difficulty of action. He said:

"What is action, what inaction? Even the wise are hereby perplexed. It is needful to discriminate action, to discriminate unlawful action, to discriminate inaction; mysterious is the path of action" (*Bhagavad Gita*, iv. 16-17.)

Mysterious is the path of action; mysterious, because morality is not, as the simple-minded think, one and the same for all; because it varies with the Dharma of the individual. What is right for one, is wrong for another. And what is wrong for one is right for another. Morality is an individual thing, and it depends

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upon the Dharma of the man who is acting, and not upon what is sometimes called “absolute right and wrong”. There is nothing absolute in a conditioned universe. And right and wrong are relative, and must be judged in relation to the individual and his duties. Thus the greatest of all Teachers said with regard to Dharma - and this will guide us in our tangled path – “Better one’s own Dharma, though destitute of merit, than the Dharma of another, well discharged. Better death in the discharge of one’s own Dharma; the Dharma of another is full of danger” (*Ibid.* iv. 35.).

He repeated the same thought again at the end of that immortal discourse, and He said - but then changed in such a way as to throw fresh light on the subject: “Better is one’s own Dharma, though [Page 6] destitute of merits, than the well executed Dharma of another. He who doeth the Karma laid down by his own nature incurreth not sin” (*Ibid.* xviii. 47.). There He expounds more fully this teaching, and He traces for us one by one the Dharma of the four great castes, and the very wording that He uses shows us the meaning of this word, which is sometimes translated as Duty, sometimes as Law, sometimes as Righteousness, sometimes as Religion. It means these, and more than any of them, for the meaning is deeper and wider than any of these words expresses. Let us take the words of Shri Krishna when speaking of the Dharma of the four castes: “Of Brâhmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shûdras, O Parantapa, the Karmas have been distributed, *according to the gunas born of their own natures*. Serenity, selfrestraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness and also uprightness; wisdom, knowledge, belief in God, are the Brâhmana-Karma, born of his own nature. Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity, and also not flying from battle, generosity, the nature of a ruler, are the Kshatriya-Karma, born of his own nature. Ploughing, protection of kine, and trade are the Vaishya-Karma, born of his own nature. Action of the nature of service is the Shudra-Karma, born of his own nature. Man reacheth perfection by each being intent on his own Karma”.

Then he goes on to say: “Better one’s own Dharma, though destitute of merit, than the well executed Dharma of another. He who doeth the [Page 7] Karma laid down by his own nature incurreth not sin”.

See how the two words Dharma and Karma are interchanged. They give us the key which we shall use to unlock our problem. Let me give you first a partial definition of Dharma. I cannot make the whole definition clear at once. I will give you the first half of it, dealing with the second half when we come to it. The first half is that “Dharma is the inner nature, which has reached in each man a certain stage of development and unfolding”. It is this inner nature which moulds the outer life, which is expressed by thoughts, words, and actions, the inner nature which is born into the environment suited for its further growth. The first idea to grasp is that Dharma is not an outer thing, like the law, or righteousness, or religion, or justice. It is the law of the unfolding life, which moulds all outside it to the expression of itself.

Now in trying to trace out this difficult and abstruse subject, I will treat it under three main divisions. First, Differences, for people have different Dharmas. Even in the passage quoted, four great classes are mentioned. Looking more closely, each individual man has his own Dharma. How shall we understand these? Unless we grasp something of the nature of difference; why they came to be, why they should exist, and what we mean when we speak of differences; unless we understand how each man shows by his thoughts, words, and actions, the [Page 8] stage he has reached; unless we grasp this, we cannot understand Dharma. Then secondly, we shall have to deal with *Evolution*. For we must trace these differences as they evolve. Lastly, we must deal with the problem of *Right* and *Wrong*, for the whole of our study leads up to the answer to the question. “How should a man conduct his life?” It would not be worth while to ask you to follow me, into difficult regions of thought, unless in the end we are to turn our

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knowledge to good account, and try to lead lives according to Dharma, thus giving to the world that which India was meant to teach.

In what does the perfection of a Universe consist? When we begin to think over a universe and what we mean by it, we find we mean a vast number of separated objects working together more or less harmoniously. Variety is the keynote of the universe, as unity is the note of the Unmanifest, of the Unconditioned - the One without a second. Diversity is the note of the manifested and conditioned - the result of the will to become many.

When a Universe is to come into existence, we learn, the First Cause, the Eternal, the Inconceivable, the Indiscernible, the Subtle, shines forth by His own Will. What that shining forth may mean within Himself none may dare to guess. What it means on the side from which we regard it, that to some extent may be grasped. Ishvara comes forth, but He, coming forth, appears enwrapped in the veil of Mâyâ - there are two sides of the Supreme in manifestation. Many [Page 9] words have been used to express that fundamental pair of opposites: Ishvara and Mâyâ, Sat and Asat, Reality and Unreality, Spirit and Matter, Life and Form. These are words which we, in our limited language, use to express that which is well-nigh beyond the grasp of thinking. All that we can say is: "Thus have the Sages taught us, and thus we in humility repeat".

Ishvara and Mâyâ. What is the universe to he? It is the image of Ishvara reflected in Mâyâ - the perfected image of Ishvara, as He has chosen to condition Himself for this particular universe whose birth-hour is come. His image - limited, conditioned. His Self-conditioned image, the universe is in perfection to declare. But how shall that which is limited, that which is partial, image Ishvara? By the multiplicity of parts working together in one harmonious whole; infinite variety of differences, and the manifold combinations of each with each, shall speak forth the law of the divine thought, until the whole thought is expressed in the totality of that perfected Universe. You should try to catch some glimpse of what this means. Let us together seek to understand.

Ishvara thinks of Beauty; at once His mighty energy, all-potent, generative, strikes upon Mâyâ and develops it into myriad forms of objects that we call beautiful. It touches the matter that is ready to be moulded - for example, water; and the water takes on a million forms of Beauty. We see one in the vast expanse of ocean, still and tranquil, where no wind is [Page 10] blowing, and where the sky is mirrored in its deep bosom. Then we catch another form of Beauty, when the wind lashes it into billows upon billows, and abyss beneath abyss, till the whole mass is terrible in its fury and grandeur. Then a new form of Beauty comes forth from it, and the raging and the foaming waters are hushed, and the ocean is changed into myriad-ripples, glittering and glistening under the moon which shines upon them, her rays broken and bent into a thousand coruscations. And this gives us another hint of what Beauty means. And then we look at the ocean where no land limits the horizon and where the vast expanse is unbroken, and again we stand on the shore and see the waves breaking at our feet. With every change of mood of the sea, its waters speak out a new thought of Beauty. Another glimpse of the thought of Beauty thrown into water we see in the mountain lake, in the stillness and serenity of its quiet bosom; and in the stream that leaps from rock to rock; and in the torrent that dashes itself into millions of spray-drops, catching and refracting the sunlight into all the hues of the rainbow. So from water in every shape and form, from the tossing ocean to the frozen iceberg, from the foggy mists to the gorgeously coloured clouds, bursts forth the thought of Beauty impressed upon it by Ishvara, when the word came forth from Him. When we leave the water, we learn new thoughts of beauty in the tender creeper, in its mass of brilliant colours, [Page 11]

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in the stronger plant and the sturdier oak, and the dark obscurity of forest depths. New thoughts of Beauty come to us from the face of every mountain peak, and from the vast, rolling prairie where the earth seems to break into new possibilities of life, from the sand of the desert, from the green of the meadow. If we are tired of the earth, the telescope brings to our view the Beauty of myriads of suns, rushing and rolling through the depths of space. Then the microscope reveals to our wondering gaze the Beauty of the infinitely small, as the telescope does of the infinitely great: and thus a new door is opened to us for the contemplation of Beauty. Around us we have thousands and millions of objects that are all beautiful. From the grace of the animal, from the strength of man, from the supple charm of woman, from the dimples of the laughing children, from all these things we catch some glimpses of what the thought of Beauty is in the mind of Ishvara.

In this fashion we may sense something of the way in which His thought broke into myriad forms of splendour, when He spoke as Beauty to the world. The same is the case with Strength, Energy, Harmony, Music, and so on. You grasp, then, why there should be variety: because no limited thing may fully tell Him, because no limited form may fully express Him. But as each becomes perfect of its kind; all combined may partly reveal Him. Thus the perfection of the Universe is perfection in variety and in the harmony of interrelated parts. **[Page 12]**

Having reached that conception, we begin to see that the Universe can only gain perfection by each part performing its own function, and developing completely its own share of life. If the tree tries to imitate the mountain, or the water to imitate the earth, each would miss its own beauty and fail to show that of the other. The perfection of the body does not depend upon every cell doing the work of the other cells, but in each cell doing its own part perfectly. We have brain, lungs, heart, digestive organs, and so on. If the brain tried to do the work of the heart, and the lungs tried to digest food, then the body would indeed be in a melancholy condition. The health of the body is secured by each organ doing its own part. We thus realize that as the universe develops, each part is going along the road which is marked out by the law of its own life. The image of Ishvara in nature will never be perfect, until each part is complete in itself and in its relations to the others.

How can these innumerable differences arise? How can all these differences come into existence? How does the Universe, as it evolves as a whole, stand in relation to its parts evolving each on its separate line? We are told that Ishvara, expressing himself on the Prakriti side shows forth three qualities - Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. No English words are equivalent to or can satisfactorily translate these. I may however, for the moment translate Tamas as inertia, the quality that does not move, that gives **[Page 13]** stability; Rajas is the quality of energy and motion; and Sattva is perhaps best expressed by harmony the quality of pleasure-giving, as all pleasure springs from harmony and only harmony can give it. Then we learn that these three gunas are further modified in seven kinds of ways, seven great lines, as it were, along which innumerable combinations evolve. Every religion speaks of this sevenfold division, every religion proclaims its existence. In Hinduism, they are the five great elements and the two beyond. These are the seven Purushas of whom Manu speaks.

These three gunas combine and divide, arranging themselves into seven great groups, from which arise vast numbers of things by various combinations; remember that into each separate thing each of these qualities enters in different proportions, modified in one of the seven fundamental ways.

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From this primary difference brought over from a Universe of the past - for world is linked to world and Universe to Universe - we find that the downpouring life divided and subdivided itself as it fell into matter, till, reaching the circumference of the mighty circle, it rolled back upon itself. Evolution begins at the turning-point, where the wave of life begins to return to Ishvara. The previous stage is the stage of involution, during which this life is becoming involved in matter; in evolution it is unfolding the powers that it contains. We may quote Manu where he says that Ishvara placed His seed in the mighty waters. The life which Ishvara [Page 14] gave was not a developed life, but a life capable of development. Everything exists in germ at first. As the parent gives his life to generate the child, and as that life-seed is built up through many combinations, until it reaches birth, and then year after year, through childhood, youth and manhood, until maturity is reached, and the image of the father is seen again in the son; so does the Eternal Father, when He places the seed in the womb of matter, give the life, but it is not yet evolved. Then it begins its up-climbing, bringing out one phase after another of the life that it is gradually becoming able to express.

As we study the Universe, we find that its varieties differ in their age. This is a thought which bears upon our problem. This world was not brought into its present condition by one creative word. Slowly and gradually and by prolonged meditation did Brâhma make the world. One after another living forms came forth. One after another the seeds of life were sown. If you look at any Universe at any point of time, you will find that the variety of that Universe has Time for its chief factor. The age of the developing germ will mark the stage at which that germ has arrived. In a Universe, at one and the same time, there are germs of various ages and stages of development. There are germs younger than minerals, making what are called elemental kingdoms. The developing germs called the mineral kingdom are older than these. Germs evolving as the vegetable world are older than those of the [Page 15] mineral, that is, they have a longer stretch of evolution behind them; the animals are germs with a yet longer past, and the germs we call humanity have the longest past of all.

Each great class has this diversity as to its beginning in time. So also the separated individual life in one man - not the essential life, but the individual and separated life - is different from that of another, and we differ in the age of our individual existences as we differ in the age of our bodies. The life is one - one life in all; but it is infolded at different stages of time, as regards the starting-point of the seed that there is growing. You should grasp that idea clearly. When a Universe comes to its ending, there will be present in it entities at every stage of growth. I have already said that world is linked to world, and Universe linked to Universe. Some units at the beginning will be at an early stage of evolution; some will be ready to expand ere long into the consciousness of God. In that Universe, when its life-period is over, there will be all the differences of growth dependent upon differences in time. There is one life in all, but the stage of unfoldment of a particular life depends upon the time through which it has been separately evolving. There you grasp the very root of our problem - one life, undying, eternal, infinite as to its source and goal; but that life manifesting itself in different grades of evolution and at different stages of unfoldment, different amounts of its inherent power showing forth [Page 16] according to the age of the separated life. Those are the two thoughts to grasp, and then you can take the other portion of the definition of Dharma.

Dharma may now be defined as the "inner nature of a thing at any given stage of evolution, and the law of the next stage of its unfolding" - the nature at the point it has reached in unfolding, and then the law which brings about its next stage of unfolding. The nature itself marks out the point in evolution it has reached; then comes what it must do in order to evolve further along its road. Take those two thoughts together, and then you will understand why perfection must be reached by following one's own Dharma.

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My Dharma is the stage of evolution which my nature has reached in unfolding the seed of divine life which is myself, *plus* the law of life according to which the next stage is to be performed by me. It belongs to this separated self. I must know the stage of my growth, and I must know the law which will enable me to grow further; then I know my Dharma, and by following that Dharma I am going towards perfection.

It is clear then, realizing what this means, why we should each of us study this present condition and this next stage. If we do not know the present stage, we must be ignorant of the next stage which we should aim at, and we may be going against our Dharma and thus delaying our evolution. Or, knowing both, we may work with our Dharma and quicken our evolution. Here comes a great pitfall. **[Page 17]** We see that a thing is good, noble and great, and we long to accomplish in ourselves that thing. Is it for us the next stage of evolution? Is it the thing which the law of our unfolding life demands, in order that that life may unfold harmoniously? Our immediate aim is not that which is best in itself, but that which is best for us in our present stage, and carries us one step onward. Take a child. There is no doubt that if you take a woman-child, she has before her a future nobler, higher, and more beautiful than the present when she is playing with her dolls; she will be a mother with a baby in her arms instead of a doll; for that is the ideal of perfect womanhood - the mother with the child. But while that is the ideal of a perfect woman, to grasp at that ideal before the time is ripe will do harm and not good. Everything must come in its proper time and place. If that mother is to be developed to the perfection of womanhood, and is to be mother of a family, healthy, strong, able to bear the pressure of the great life-stream, then there must be the period when that child must play with her dolls, must learn lessons, must develop the body. But if, thinking that motherhood is higher and nobler than play, that motherhood should be grasped before its time, and a child be born from a child, the babe suffers, the mother suffers, the nation suffers; and this because the season has not been regarded, the law of unfolding life is violated. All sorts of suffering arise from grasping the fruit ere the fruit is ripe. **[Page 18]**

I take that example because it is a striking one. It will help you to see why our own Dharma is better for us than the well executed Dharma of another that is not in the line of our unfolding life. That lofty post may be for us in the future, but the time must come, the fruit must ripen. Pluck it ere it is ripe, and your teeth are set on edge. Let it remain on the tree, obeying the law of time and sequential evolution, and the soul will grow according to the power of an endless life.

That then gives us another key to the problem - function is in relation to power. Function grasped before power is developed is mischievous in the extreme to the organism. So we learn the lessons of patience and of waiting on the Good Law. You might judge the progress of a man by his willingness to work with nature and to submit to the law. That is why Dharma is spoken of as law, and sometimes as duty; for both these ideas grow out of the root-thought that it is the inner nature at a given stage of evolution and the law of the next stage of its development. This explains why morality is relative, why duty must differ for every soul, according to the stage of its evolution. When we come to apply this to questions of right and wrong, we shall find that we can solve some of the subtlest problems of morality by dealing with them on this principle. In a conditioned universe, absolute right and wrong are not to be found, but only relative rights and wrongs. The absolute is in Ishvara alone, where it will for ever be found. **[Page 19]**

Differences are thus necessary for our conditioned consciousness. We think by differences, we feel by differences, and we know by differences. It is only by differences that we know that we are living and thinking men. Unity makes on consciousness no impression. Differences and diversities - those are the



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things which make the growth of consciousness possible. The unconditioned consciousness is beyond our thinking. We can only think within the limits of the separated and the conditioned.

We can now see how differences in nature come to be, how the time factor comes in, and how, though all have the same nature and will reach the same goal, yet there are differences in the stages of manifestation, and therefore in the laws appropriate for every stage. That is what we need to grasp tonight, before we deal with the complex problem, how this inner nature develops. Truly difficult is the subject, yet the mysteries of the path of action may be cleared for us as we grasp the underlying law, as we recognise the principle of the unfolding life.

May He, who gave Dharma to India as her keynote, illuminate with His unfolding and immortal life, with His light effulgent and unchangeable, these dark minds of ours that dimly try to grasp His law; for only as His blessing falls upon the suppliant seeker, will His law be understood by the mind, will His law be engraven in the heart. **[Page 20]**

## EVOLUTION

WE shall deal this evening with the second section of the subject commenced yesterday. You may remember I divided the subject under three heads, for the sake of convenience - Differences, Evolution, and the problem of Right and Wrong. Yesterday we studied the question of Differences - how it came to pass that different men had different Dharmas. I will venture to remind you of the definition of Dharma we adopted; that it means the inner nature, marked by the stage of evolution, *plus* the law of growth for the next stage of evolution. I will ask you to keep that definition in your minds, for without it you will not be able to apply Dharma to what we are to study under the third division of the subject.

Under the head "Evolution", we are to study the way in which the germ of life evolves to the perfect image of God, remembering that we found that that image of God could only be represented by the totality of the numerous objects making up the universe in their details, and that the perfection of the individual depended on the completeness with which he fulfilled his own part in the stupendous whole.

Before we can understand evolution, we must find its spring and motive - a life which involves itself in [Page 21] matter, before it evolves complicated organisms of every kind. We start with the principle that all is from and in God. Nothing in the universe is to be excluded from Him. No life save His life, no force save His force, no energy save His energy, no forms save His forms - all are the results of His thought. That is our fundamental position. That is the ground on which we must stand, daring to accept everything that it implies, daring to recognise everything that it connotes. "The seed of all beings," says Shri Krishna, speaking as the supreme Ishvara, "that am I, O Arjuna! nor is there aught, moving or unmoving, that may exist bereft of Me" (*Bhagavad-Gita*, x. 39.). Do not let us fear to take that central position. Do not, because of the imperfection of the evolving lives, let us shrink from any conclusion to which this truth may lead us.

In another shloka He said: "I am the gambling of the cheat, and the splendour of splendid things I" (x. 36.). What is the meaning of these words that sound so strange? What is the explanation of this phrase which appears almost as profanity? Not only in this discourse do we find this position enunciated, but we find that Manu teaches exactly the same truth: "From Himself He produces the universe". The life coming forth from the Supreme puts on veil after veil of *Mâyâ*, in which that life is to evolve all the perfections that lie latent within it.

Now the first question is: Does not this life, which comes from Ishvara, already contain within itself everything already developed, every manifested power, every possibility realized as actuality? The answer to that question, spoken over and over again, in symbols, allegories, and distinct words, is "No". It contains everything in potency, but nothing at first in manifestation. It contains everything in germ, but nothing at first as developed organism. The seed is that which is placed in the mighty waters of matter, the germ alone is given forth by the Life of the World. Those germs, which come from the life of Ishvara, evolve - step by step, stage after stage, on one rung of a ladder after another - all the powers that reside in the generating Father, the name that Ishvara gives to Himself in the *Gîtâ*. He declares once more: "My womb is the Mahat-Brahma; in that I place the germ; thence cometh the production of all beings, O Bhârata. In whatsoever wombs mortals are produced, O Kaunteya, the Mahat-Brâhma is their womb, I their generating Father" (xiv. 3-4.). From that seed - from that germ containing everything in possibility but nothing as yet in manifestation - from that seed is to evolve a life, stage by stage, rising higher and

higher, until at last a centre of consciousness is formed capable of expanding to the consciousness of Ishvara, while remaining as a centre still, with the power to come forth as a new Logos, or Ishvara, for the production of a new universe.

Let us take this vast sweep of thought in detail. Life involved in matter - that is our beginning. These germs of life, these myriad seeds, or to use the [Page 23] Upanishadic phrase, these numberless sparks, all come forth from the one Flame which is the supreme Brahman. Qualities are now to be brought out of these seeds. Those qualities are powers, but powers manifested through matter. One by one those powers will be brought out - powers which are the life of Ishvara as veiled in Mâyâ. Slow is the growth in the early stages, hidden as the seed underground is hidden, when first it strikes its root downward, and sends its tender offshoot upward in order that later on the growing tree may appear. In silence germinates this divine seed, and the early beginnings are hidden in darkness, like the roots under the ground.

This power in the life, or rather these innumerable powers which Ishvara manifests in order that the universe may be, these myriad powers are at first unapparent in the germ - no sign of the mighty possibilities, no trace of what it is hereafter to become. A word is spoken as to this manifestation in matter, which throws much light on the subject, if we can grasp its inner and subtler meaning. Shri Krishna, speaking of His lower Prakriti, or inferior manifestation, says: "Earth, water, fire, air, ether, Manas and Buddhi also and Ahankara - these are the eightfold divisions of My Prakriti. This the inferior". Then He says what is His higher Prakriti: "Know My other Prakriti, the higher, the life-element, O mighty-armed, by which the universe is upheld" (vii. 4, 5.). Then a little later, separated by many shlokas, so that sometimes the connecting link is missed, other [Page 24] words are spoken: "This divine Mâyâ of Mine, guna-made, is hard to pierce; they who come to Me they cross over this Mâyâ" (vii. 14.). This Yoga-Mâyâ is, truly, hard to pierce; many do not discover Him involved in Mâyâ, so hard to pierce it is, so difficult to discover. "Those without Buddhi think of Me, the unmanifest, as having manifestation; knowing not My supreme nature, imperishable, most excellent. Nor am I of all discovered, enveloped in My Yoga-Mâyâ" (vii. 24, 25.). Then He further declares that by His unmanifested life it is that the universe is pervaded. The life-element, or higher Prakriti, is unmanifested, the lower Prakriti is manifested. Then He says: "From the unmanifested all the manifested stream forth at the coming of day; at the coming of night they dissolve, even in That called the unmanifested" (viii. 18.). This occurs over and over again. Then further on He declares: "Therefore verily there existeth, higher than that unmanifested, another unmanifested, eternal, which, in the destroying of all beings, is not destroyed" (viii. 20.). There is a subtle distinction between Ishvara and the image of Himself which He sends forth. The image is the reflected unmanifest, but Himself is the higher unmanifest, the eternal that never is destroyed.

Realizing that, we come to the drawing out of powers. Here we begin really our evolution. The outpouring life was involved in matter, in order to bring the seed into the matter-surrounded conditions which should make evolution possible. When we [Page 25] come to the first germinating of the seed, our difficulty comes in. For we must throw ourselves, in thought, to the time when there was no reason in this embryonic self, no imaginative faculty, no memory, no judgment, none of the conditioned faculties of the mind that we know of; when all the life that was manifested was that which we find in the mineral kingdom, with the lowest conditions of consciousness. The minerals manifest consciousness by their attractions and repulsions, by their holding together of particles, by their affinities for each other, by their repellings of each other, but they show none of that consciousness that can be called the recognition of the "I" and the "not-I".

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In every one of these lowest forms in the mineral kingdom, Ishvara's life is beginning to unfold. Not only is the germ of life there evolving, but He, in all His might and power, is there in every atom of His universe. His the moving life which makes evolution inevitable. His the force expanding gently the walls of matter, with immense patience and watching love, in order that they may not break under the strain. God, Himself the Father of the life, holds that life within Himself as Mother, unfolding the seed unto the likeness of Himself, never impatient, never hurrying, willing to give as much time from the countless ages as the little germ may require. Time is nothing to Ishvara, for He is eternal and to Him all is. It is the perfection of manifestation that He seeks, and there is no hurrying in His [Page 26] work. And we shall see, later on, how this infinite patience works out. The man, who is to be the image of his Father, shows within him the reflection of the Self with which he is one, and whence he came.

The life is to be awakened, but how? By blows, by vibrations, the inner essence is called into activity. Life is stirred to activity by vibrations that touch it from outside. These myriad seeds of life, not yet conscious of themselves, matter-enveloped, are thrown against each other in the myriad processes of nature; but "nature" is only the garment of God, is only the lowest manifestation in which He shows Himself on the material plane. These forms strike against each other, shaking thus the outer shells of matter in which the life is involved, and the life within gives a quiver as the blow is delivered.

Now the nature of the blow is of no importance. All that is important is that the blow shall be strong. Any experience is useful. Anything which strikes that shell so forcibly that the life within quivers in response is all that is wanted at first. The life within must be made to quiver. That will awaken some dawning power in the life. At first it is only a quiver within itself, and nothing more than a quiver, with no result on its outer shell. But as blow after blow is repeated, and vibration after vibration sends in its earthquake shocks, the life within sends out, through its own enveloping shell, a thrill of answer. The blow has provoked an answer. Another stage is thus touched - the answer comes [Page 27] forth from the hidden life and goes out beyond the shell. This goes on through the mineral kingdom and the vegetable kingdom. In the vegetable kingdom the answers to the vibrations caused by contact begin to show a new power of the life - sensation. The life begins to show out in itself what we call "feeling"; that is, different answers are given to pleasure and to pain. Pleasure is fundamentally harmonious. All that gives pleasure is harmonious. All that gives pain is discordant. Think of music. Rhythmical notes, struck together as a chord, give to the ear a sensation of pleasure. But if you strike your finger on the strings without paying attention to the notes, you make a discord, which gives pain to the ear. That which is true of music is true everywhere. Health is harmony, disease is discord. Strength is harmony, weakness is discord. Beauty is harmony, ugliness is discord. All through nature pleasure means the answer of a sentient being to vibrations that are harmonious and rhythmical, and pain means its answer to those that are discordant and unrhythmical. The rhythmical vibrations make an outward channel through which the life can expand, and this pouring forth is "pleasure"; the unrhythmical close up the channels and frustrate the forth-pouring, and this frustration is "pain". [ The student should work out in detail this fundamental principle; he will thereby much clarify his thoughts] The forth-pouring of life towards objects is what we name "desire"; hence pleasure becomes the gratification [Page 28] of desire. This difference begins to make itself felt in the vegetable kingdom. A blow comes that is harmonious. The life answers to that in harmonious vibrations and expands, feeling in that expansion "pleasure". A blow comes that is a jangle. Life answers to that discordantly, is checked, and feels in that check "pain". The blows are given over and over again, and not until the repetition has occurred a myriad times does a recognition of the distinction between the two begin to arise in that imprisoned life. Only by making distinctions is our consciousness, as at present constituted, able to distinguish objects from each other. Take a very common illustration. Let a piece of money lie in the palm of the hand and close your fingers round it; you feel it; but as the pressure is

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continued, without any variation, the sensation of feeling in the hand disappears and you do not know that your hand is not empty. Move a finger and you feel the money; keep the hand still, and the sensation vanishes. Thus consciousness can only know things by differences. And when difference is eliminated, consciousness ceases to respond.

We come to the next thing which is manifested as the life evolves through the animal kingdom. Pleasure and pain are now acutely felt, and a germ of recognition, connecting objects and sensations, begins; we call it "perception". What does this mean? It means that the life develops the power of forming a link between the object that impresses it [Page 29] and the sensation by which it responds to the object. When that dawning life, contacting an external object, knows it as an object that gives pleasure or pain, then we say that the object is perceived, and the faculty of perception, or the making of links between the outer and the inner worlds, is evolved when that is established; mental power begins to germinate and to grow within that organism; we find it in the higher animals.

Let us take it in the savage man, where we shall be able to pass more rapidly over these early stages. We find the consciousness of "I" and "not-I" slowly establishing itself in him - the two going together. "Not-I" touches him, and "I" feels it; "not-I" gives him pleasure, and "I" knows it; "not-I" gives him pain, and "I" suffers it. A distinction is now being made between the feeling, thought of as "I", and all that causes it, thought of as "not-I". Here commences intelligence, and the root of self-consciousness is beginning to develop. That is, a *centre* is being formed, to which everything goes in and from which everything comes out.

I spoke of repetition of vibrations, and now repetition produces results more rapidly. As repetition causes the perception of pleasure-giving objects, the next stage is developed, the expectation of pleasure before the contact takes place. The object is recognised as one that has given pleasure on previous occasions; a repetition of the pleasure is expected, [Page 30] and that expectation is the dawn of memory and the beginning of imagination, the interweaving of intellect with desire. Because the object has given pleasure before, it is expected to give pleasure again. Thus expectation brings into manifestation another germinating quality of the mind. When we have the recognition of the object and the expectation of pleasure from its return, the next stage is the making and vivifying of a mental image of that object - the memory of it - thus causing an outflow of desire, desire to have that object, a longing for that object, and finally a going forth in search of that object that gives pleasurable sensation. Thus the man becomes full of active desires. He desires pleasure, and is moved to seek it by the mind. For a long time he had remained in the animal stage, when he would never seek for a thing unless the actual sensation in his inner body made him want something that the outer world alone could satisfy. Just for one moment return to the animal; think what stirs the animal to action. A craving to get rid of an unpleasant sensation. He feels hunger, he desires food, and he goes in search of it; he feels thirst, he desires to quench it, and he goes in search of water. Thus he always goes in search of the object that will gratify the desire. Give him the gratification of desire and he is quiet. There is no self-initiated motion in the animal. The push must come from outside. True, the hunger is in the inner body, but that is outside the centre of consciousness. The evolution of [Page 31] consciousness may be traced by the proportion which the outside stimulus to action bears to the self-initiated stimulus. The lower consciousness is stimulated to activity by impulses coming from outside itself. The higher consciousness is stimulated to activity by motion initiated within.

Now as we deal with our savage man, we find that the gratification of desire is the law of his progress. How strange that sounds to many of you. Says Manu: Seeking to get rid of desires by gratifying them is

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like trying to quench the fire by pouring butter over it. Desire must be curbed and restrained. Desire is to be extinguished utterly. This is most certainly true, but only when a man has reached a certain stage of evolution. In the early stages, the gratification of desires is the law of evolution. If he does not gratify his desires, no growth for him is possible. You must realise that at that stage there is nothing which can be called morality. There is no distinction between right and wrong. Every desire should be gratified; when this commencing centre of self-consciousness is seeking to gratify desires, then alone it grows. In this lowest stage the Dharma of the savage man, or of the higher animal, is imposed on him. He does not choose; his inner nature, marked by the development of desire, demands gratification. The law of his growth is the satisfaction of these desires. So that the Dharma of the savage is the gratification of every desire. And you find in him no consciousness of right or wrong, not the [Page 32] faintest dawning notion that the gratification of desires is forbidden by some higher law.

Without that gratification of desires there is no further growth. All that growth must precede the dawning of reason and judgment and the development of the higher powers of memory and imagination. All these things must be evolved by the gratification of desire. Experience is the law of life, it is the law of growth. Unless he gathers experiences of every kind, he cannot know that he lives in a world of Law. Two ways does the law find for impressing itself on man: pleasure when the Law is followed, pain when the Law is opposed. If men did not at that early stage have every sort of experience, how could they learn of the existence of the Law? How can discrimination grow between right and wrong, unless there is the experience of both good and evil? A universe can never come into existence except by the pairs of opposites, and these at one stage appear in the consciousness as good and evil. You cannot know light without darkness, motion without rest, pleasure without pain; so you cannot know the good that is harmony with the Law without knowing the evil that is discord with the Law. Good and evil are a pair of opposites in the later evolution of man, and man cannot become conscious of the difference between them unless he has experience of both.

Now we come to a change. Man has developed a certain power of discrimination. Left to himself [Page 33] utterly, he would come to know in time that some things help him on, that some things strengthen him, that some things increase his life; also that other things weaken him and diminish his life. Experience would teach him all that. Left only to the teaching of experience he would come to know right from wrong, would identify the pleasure-giving that increased life with the right, and the pain-giving that diminished life with the wrong, and would thus reach the conclusion that all happiness and growth lay in obeying the Law. But it would take a very long time for this dawning intelligence to compare together experiences of pleasure and pain, and the confusing experiences in which that which at first gave pleasure became painful by excess, and then to deduce from them the principle of law. It would be a very long time before he could put innumerable experiences together, and deduce from them the idea that this thing is right, and that thing is wrong. But he is not left unaided to make that deduction. There come to him, from past worlds, Intelligences more highly evolved than his own, Teachers who come to help on his evolution, to train his growth, to tell him of the existence of a law determining that which will bring about his more rapid evolution, increasing his happiness, intelligence and strength. In fact, revelation from the mouth of a Teacher quickens evolution, and instead of man being left to the slow teaching of experience, the expression of the law from the mouth of a superior is made to assist his growth. [Page 34]

The Teacher comes and says to this dawning intelligence: "If you kill that man, you are doing an action that I forbid on divine authority. That action is *wrong*. It will bring misery". The Teacher says: "It is *right* to help the starving; that starving man is your brother; feed him; do not let him starve; share with him what

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you have. That action is *right*, and if you obey that law it will be well with you". Rewards of actions are held out to attract the dawning intelligence towards good, and punishments and threats to warn him from wrong. Earthly prosperity is joined with obedience of law, earthly misery with disobedience to law. This announcement of the law that misery follows on that which the law forbids, and happiness on that which the law commands, stimulates the dawning intelligence. He disregards the law, the penalty follows, and he suffers; and he says: "The Teacher told me so". Memory of a command proved by experience makes an impression on the consciousness far more quickly and more strongly than does experience alone without the revealed law. By this declaration of what the learned call the fundamental principles of morality, namely, that certain classes of actions retard evolution and other classes of action quicken evolution - by this declaration intelligence is immensely stimulated.

If a man will not obey the law declared, then he is left to the hard teaching of experience. If he says: "I will have that thing, though the law forbid it," then he is left to the stern teaching of pain, and [Page 35] the whip of suffering teaches the lesson that he would not learn from the lips of love.

How often that happens now. How often a young man, argumentative and self-conceited, will not listen to law, will not listen to the experienced, pays no regard to the training of the past. Desire conquers intelligence. His father is heart-broken. "My son is plunged into vice," says he; "my son is going into evil. I instructed him in right conduct, and see, he has become a liar; my heart is broken for my son." But Ishvara, the Father more loving than any earthly father, has patience. For he is in the son as much as in the father. He is in him teaching him a lesson, in the only way by which that soul is willing to learn. He would not learn by authority or by example. At all hazards that desire for the evil thing which is stopping his evolution must be rooted out of his nature. If he will not learn by gentleness, let him then learn by pain. Let him learn by experience; let him plunge into vice, and reap the bitter pang that comes from trampling on the law. There is time; he will learn the lesson surely though painfully. God is in him, and still He lets him go that way; nay, He even opens the way that he may go along it; when he demands it, the answer of God is: "My child, if you will not listen, take your own way and learn your lesson in the fire of your agony and in the bitterness of your degradation. I am with you still, watching over you and your actions, the Fulfiller of the law and the [Page 36] Father of your life. You shall learn in the mire of degradation that cessation of desire which you would not learn from wisdom and from love". That is why He says in the *Gîtâ*: "I am the gambling of the cheat". For He is always patiently working for the glorious end, by rough ways if we will not walk in smooth. We, unable to understand that infinite compassion, misread Him, but He works on with the patience of eternity, in order that desire may be utterly uprooted, and His son may be perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect.

Let us go on the next stage. There are certain great laws of growth that are general. We have learned to look upon certain things as right and upon others as wrong. Every nation has its own standard of morality. Only a few know how that standard was formed, and where that standard fails. For ordinary affairs the standard is good enough. The experience of the race has found out, under the guidance of law, that some actions hold back evolution while others press it forward. The great law of the orderly evolution that follows the earlier stages is the law of the four successive steps in later human growth. This comes after a man has reached a certain point, after the preliminary training is over. It is found in every nation at a certain stage of evolution, but was proclaimed in ancient India as the definite law of evolving life, as the sequential order of the growth of soul, as the underlying principle by which Dharma may be understood and followed. [Page 37] Dharma, remember, includes two things - the inner nature at the point it has reached, and the law of its growth for the next stage. For every man Dharma is to be

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declared. The first Dharma is that of *service*. No matter in what land the souls may be born, when they have passed through the earlier stages, then their inner nature demands the discipline of service, and that they should learn by service the qualities that are needed for growth into the next stage. At this stage the power of independent action is very limited. At this comparatively early stage, there is more tendency to yield to impulse from without, than to show a developed judgment, choosing a particular course from within. In this class are seen all those who belong to the serving type. Remember those wise words of Bhīshma, that if the characteristics of a Brāhmana are found in a Shūdra and are not found in a Brāhmana, then that Brāhmana is not a Brāhmana and that Shūdra is not a Shūdra. In other words, the characteristics of the inner nature mark out the stage of that soul's growth, and stamp it as belonging to one great natural division or another. When the power of initiation is small, where the judgment is untrained, where the reason is poor and little developed, where the Self is unconscious of his high destiny, where he is chiefly moved by desire, where he is still to grow by the gratification of most but not all desires, that man is one whose Dharma is service, and only by performing that Dharma can he follow the law of growth by [Page 38] which he will reach perfection. And such a man is a Shudra, by whatever name he may be called in different countries. In ancient India, the souls bearing the characteristics of this type were born into the classes that suited them, for Devas guided their births. In this age, however, confusion has supervened.

What is the law of growth in that stage? Obedience, devotion, fidelity. That is the law of growth for that stage. Obedience, because the judgment is not developed. He whose Dharma is service has to blindly obey the one to whom he renders service. His is not to challenge the order of his superior, nor his to see that the commanded action is a wise one. He has received an order to do a thing, and his Dharma is obedience, by which alone he will be able to learn. People hesitate at that teaching, but it is true. I will take an example, that will strike you most forcibly - that of an army, of a private soldier under the command of his Captain. If every private soldier were to use his own judgment as to the orders that came from the General, and if he were to say: "This is not well, for in my judgment that is the place where I shall be more serviceable", what would become of the army? The private soldier is shot if he disobeys, for his duty is obedience. When your judgment is feeble, when you are chiefly moved by impulses from without, when you cannot be happy without noise and clatter and jangle around you, then your Dharma is service, wherever you may be [39] born, and you are happy if your karma leads you to a position where discipline will train you.

So the man learns to prepare for the next stage. And the duty of all those who are in positions of authority is to remember that the Dharma of a Shudra is fulfilled when he is obedient and faithful to his master, and they should not expect one in that grade of evolution to show forth the higher virtues. To demand from him cheerfulness in suffering, purity of thought, and the power to suffer hardships ungrudgingly, is to demand too much; for when we ourselves often do not show these qualities, how can we expect them from those whom we call the lower classes? The duty of the higher is to show forth the higher virtues, but he has no right to demand them from his inferiors. If the servant shows fidelity and obedience, the Dharma is perfectly performed, and other faults should not be punished, but should be gently pointed out by the master, for by so doing he is training that younger soul; for a child soul should be gently led along the path, and its growth should not be stunted by harsh treatment, as we generally stunt it.

Then the soul, having learned this lesson in many births, by learning the lesson has obeyed the law of growth, and by following his Dharma has approached the next stage, in which he is to learn the first use



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of power by acquiring wealth. Then the Dharma of that soul is to evolve all the qualities which are now ready for evolution, and are brought out by leading the life which the inner nature [Page 40] demands, *i.e.* by taking up some occupation which the next stage requires, the stage where it is a merit to acquire wealth. For the Dharma of a Vaishya all over the world is to evolve certain definite faculties. The faculty of justice, just dealing between man and man, the not swerving aside at the mere prompting of sentiment, the working out of the qualities of shrewdness, keenness, and holding a just balance between contending duties, fair payment in fair exchange, acuteness of insight, frugality, absence of waste and extravagance, the exaction from every servant of the service that should be given, the payment of just wages, but only of just wages - these are the characteristics which fit him for higher growth. It is a merit in the Vaishya to be frugal, to refuse to pay more than he should, to insist on a just and fair exchange. All these things bring out qualities that are wanted and will conduce to future perfection. In their early stages they are sometimes unlovely, but from the higher standpoint they are the Dharma of that man, and if it be not fulfilled, there will be weakness in the character, which will come out later and injure his evolution. Liberality is indeed the law of his further growth, but not the liberality of carelessness or of over-payment. He is to gather wealth by the exercise of frugality and strictness, and then to spend that wealth on noble objects and on learned men, to bestow it upon worthy and well considered schemes for the public good. To gather with energy and shrewdness, and to [Page 41] spend with careful discrimination and liberality, that is the Dharma of a Vaishya, the outcome of his nature, and the law of his further growth.

This leads us to the next stage, that of the rulers and warriors, of battles and struggles, where the inner nature is combative, aggressive, quarrelsome, standing on its own ground and ready to protect every one in the enjoyment of what is right. Courage, fearlessness, splendid generosity, throwing away of life in the defense of the weak and in the discharging of one's duties - that is the Dharma of the Kshatriya. His duty is to protect what is given him in charge against all aggression from without. It may cost him life, but never mind that. He must do his duty. To protect, to guard, that is his work. His strength is to be a barrier between the weak and the oppressive, between the helpless and those who would trample them under foot. Right for him the following of war and the struggle in the jungle with the wild beast. Because you do not understand what evolution is, and what the law of growth, you stand aghast at the horrors of war. But the great Rishis, who made this order, knew that a weak soul can never attain perfection. You cannot get strength without courage, and firmness and courage cannot be got without the facing of danger, and the readiness to throw away life when duty demands the sacrifice.

Our sentimental, weak-kneed, pseudo-moralist shrinks from that teaching. But he forgets that in [Page 42] every nation there are souls that need that training, and whose further evolution depends upon their success in attaining it. I appeal again to Bhishma, the incarnation of Dharma, and I remember what he said, that it is the duty of the Kshatriya to slay thousands of his enemies, if his duty in protection lies in that direction. War is terrible, fighting is shocking, our hearts revolt from it, and we shrink before the anguish of mutilated and mangled bodies. To a great extent this is because we are utterly deluded by form. The one use of the body is to enable the life within it to evolve. But the moment it has learned all that that body can give it, let the body break away, and let the soul go free to take a new body that will enable it to manifest higher powers. We cannot pierce the *Mâyâ* of the Lord. These bodies of ours may perish, time after time, but every death is a resurrection to higher life. This body itself is nothing more than a garment which the soul puts on, and no wise men would like the body to be eternal. We clothe our child in a small coat and change it when the child grows. But will you make the coat of iron, and cramp the growth of the child? So this body is our coat. Shall it be then of iron that it should never perish? Does not the soul require a new body for its higher growth? Let then the body go. This is the hard lesson the Kshatriya learns, and so he throws away his bodily life, and, in this throwing away, his soul gains the

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power of self-sacrifice, he learns endurance, fortitude, [Page 43] courage, resource, devotion to an ideal, loyalty to a cause, and he pays his body gladly as the price for these, the immortal soul rising triumphant and preparing for a nobler life.

Then there comes the last stage, the stage of teaching. The Dharma of that stage is to teach. The soul must have assimilated all lower experiences before he can teach. If he had not been through all those previous stages, and obtained wisdom through obedience and exertion and combat, how could he be a teacher? He has reached the stage of evolution where the natural expansion of his inner nature is to teach his more ignorant brethren. These qualities are not artificial. They are inborn qualities of nature and they show themselves wherever they exist. A Brâhmana is not a Brâhmana if he is not a teacher by his Dharma. He has gained knowledge and a favourable birth in order to make him a teacher.

The law of his growth is knowledge, piety, forgiveness, being the friend of every creature. How the Dharma is changed! But he could not be the friend of every creature if he had not learned to throw his life away when duty called, and the very battle trained the Kshatriya to become at a later stage the friend of every creature. What is the law of a Brâhmanas growth? He must never take offence. He must never lose self-control. He must never be hasty. He must always be gentle: otherwise he falls from his Dharma. He must be all purity. He must never lead an evil life. He must detach himself from [Page 44] worldly things, if they have a hold upon him. Do I hold up an impossible standard? I but speak the law as the Great Ones have spoken it, and I but feebly re-echo their words. The law has laid down the standard, and who shall dare to lower it? When Shri Krishna Himself proclaimed that as the Dharma of the Brâhmana, that must be the law of his growth, and the end of his growth is liberation. For him is liberation, but only if he shows out the qualities that he ought to have reached, and follows the lofty ideal that is his Dharma. These are the only justification for the name of Brâhmana.

This ideal is so beautiful that all earnest and thoughtful men desire to reach it. But wisdom steps in and says: "Yes, it shall be yours, but you must earn it. You must grow, you must labour; truly it is yours, but it is not yours until you have paid the price". Important is it for our own growth, and the growth of the nations, that this distinction in Dharmas should be understood as depending upon the stage of evolution, and that we should be able to discriminate our own Dharma by the characteristics which we find in our nature. If we set before an unprepared soul an ideal so lofty that it does not move him, we check his evolution. If you give to a peasant the ideal of a Brâhmana you are placing before him an impossible ideal, and the result is that he does nothing. When you tell a man a thing too high for him, that man knows that you have been talking nonsense, for you have commanded [Page 45] him to perform that which he has no power to perform; your folly has placed before him motives which do not move him. But wise were the teachers of old. They gave the children sugar-plums, and later the higher lessons. But we are so clever that we appeal to the lowest sinner by motives which can stir only the highest saint, and thus instead of furthering, we check his evolution. Place your own ideal as high as you can set it. But do not impose your ideal upon your brother, the law of whose growth may be entirely different from yours. Learn the tolerance which helps each man to do in his place what it is good for him to do, and what his nature impels him to do. Leaving him in his place, help him. Learn that tolerance which is repelled by none, however sinful, which sees in every man a divinity working, and stands beside him to help him. Instead of standing off on some high peak of spirituality, and preaching a doctrine of self-sacrifice which is utterly beyond his comprehension, in teaching his young soul, use his higher selfishness to destroy the lower. Do not tell the peasant that when he is not industrious he is falling from the ideal; but tell that man: "There is your wife; you love that woman; she is starving. Set to work and feed her". By that motive,

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which is certainly selfish, you do more to raise that man than if you preach to him about Brahman, the unconditioned and unmanifest. Learn what Dharma means, and you will be of service to the world. [Page 46]

I do not wish to lower by one tiniest fraction your own ideal; you cannot aim too high. The fact that you can conceive it makes it yours, but does not make it that of your less developed younger brother. Aim at the loftiest you are able to think and to love. But in aiming, consider the means as well as the end, your powers as well as your aspirations. Make your aspirations high. They are the germs of powers in your next life. Through ever keeping the ideal high you will grow towards it, and what you long for today you shall be in the days to come. But have the tolerance of knowledge, and the patience which is divine. Each thing in its own place is in its right place. As the higher nature develops you can appeal to the qualities of self-sacrifice, purity and utter self-devotion, to the will firmly fixed on God. That is the ideal for the highest to accomplish. Let us climb towards it gradually, lest we fail to reach it at all. [Page 47]

## RIGHT AND WRONG

DURING the last two days of our study, we have been giving our attention and fixing our thought on what I may call the theoretical side, to a very great extent, of this complicated and difficult problem. We have tried to understand how the differences of nature arise. We have tried to grasp the sublime idea, that this world is intended to grow from the mere germ of life given out by God into the image of Him who gave it forth. The perfection of that image, we have seen, can only be gained by the multiplicity of finite objects, and perfection lies in that multiplicity; but in that same multiplicity we see is implied necessarily the limitation of each object. We then found that by the law of growth, we must have existing in the universe, at one and the same time, every variety of inner evolving nature. As these natures are all at different stages of evolution, we cannot make on all of them the same demands, nor expect from all of them the discharge of the same functions. Morality must be studied in relation to the people who are to practice it. In judging the standard of right and wrong for a particular individual, we must consider at what stage of growth that individual has arrived. Absolute right existeth in Ishvara alone; [Page 48] our right and wrong are relative and depend for each of us very much on the stage of evolution that we have reached.

I am going to try this evening to apply this theory to the conduct of life. We must see whether we have gained, by the line of study that we have pursued, a rational and scientific idea of morality, so that we may no longer have the same confusion that is seen today. For we see that ideals are held up on one side as those which ought to be reproduced in life, and on the other hand we find that there is an absolute failure even to aim at these ideals; we behold a most unfortunate divergence between faith and practice. Morality is not without its laws; like everything else in a universe that is the expression of divine thought, morality has also its conditions and limitations. In this way it may be possible to bring a cosmos out of the present moral chaos, and to learn practical lessons in morality, which will enable India to grow, to develop, to become again an example to the world, reproducing her ancient grandeur, showing forth once more her ancient spirituality.

There are three recognised schools of morality existing among western people. We must remember that western thought is very largely influencing India, and especially is it influencing the rising generation, on which the hope of India rests. It is, therefore, necessary that we should understand something of these schools of morality, differing in their theories [Page 49] and teachings, that exist in the West, if it be only in order to learn to avoid their limitations, and to take from them whatever of good they may have to offer.

There is one school which says that revelation from God is the basis of morality. The objection raised by opponents to that statement is that in this world there are many religions, and every religion has its own revelation. Looking at this variety of religious scriptures, it is argued, it is difficult to say that one revelation is to be regarded as based on supreme authority. That each religion will regard its own revelation as supreme is natural, but in this conflict of tongues how shall a decision be made by the student?

Then it is said again, that there is an inherent defect in this theory, affecting all moral standards founded on a revelation given once for all. In order that a scheme may be useful for the time for which it is given, it must be of a nature suitable for the time. As a nation evolves, and thousands upon thousands of years pass over the people, we find that that which was suitable for the nation in its infancy, becomes unsuitable for the nation in its manhood; many precepts once useful are no longer useful today under the

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changed circumstances of the time. That difficulty is recognised and met when we come to deal with the Hindu scriptures; for we find there a vast variety of moral teachings, suitable for all grades of evolving souls. There are [Page 50] precepts so simple, so clear, so definite, and so imperative, that the youngest of souls may utilize them. But we find also that the Rishis recognised that these precepts were not meant for the training of a highly developed soul. We find in the Ancient Wisdom that teachings were also given to a few advanced souls, teachings that at the time were utterly unintelligible to the masses. Those teachings were restricted to an inner circle of those who had reached the maturity of the human race. Different schools of morality have always been recognised in Hinduism as necessary for human growth. But whenever, in some great religion, that recognition is not found, you get a certain theoretical morality, not suited to the growing needs of the people, and, therefore, there is a sense of unreality, a feeling that it is not reasonable to permit now what was permitted in the infancy of humanity. On the other hand, you find here and there, in all scriptures, precepts of the loftiest character which few can even strive to obey. When a command, suitable to the almost savage, is made of universal obligation and is given on the same authority and to the same people as the command given to the saint, there creeps in the feeling of unreality, and confusion of thought is the result.

Another school has arisen, which bases morality on intuition - which says that God speaks to every man through the voice of conscience. It alleges that revelation is made to nation after nation, but that we are not bound by any single book; conscience is the [Page 51] final arbiter. The objection made to this theory is that one man's conscience has the same authority as another man's. If your conscience differs from that of another, then who may decide between conscience and conscience, between the conscience of the ignorant rustic and the conscience of the illuminated mystic? If you say that you admit the principle of evolution, and that you should take as your judge the highest conscience in the race, then intuition fails as a solid basis of morality, and the very element of variety destroys the rock on which you intended to build. The conscience is the voice of the inner man, who remembers the experiences of his past, and out of that immemorial experience judges a given line of conduct today. This so-called intuition is the result of countless incarnations, and according to the number of incarnations, the mind is evolved on which the quality of the conscience of the present individual depends; such intuition, pure and simple, cannot be taken as sufficient guide in morality. We want a commanding voice, not a jangle of tongues. We need the authority of the teacher, and not the confused gabbling of the crowd.

The third school of morality is the school of utilitarianism. That school's view is, as generally presented, neither reasonable nor satisfactory. What is the maxim of this school? "That is right which conduces to the greatest happiness of the greatest number." It is a maxim which will not bear analysis. Notice the words "greatest number". It is a maxim which will not bear analysis. Notice the words "greatest happiness of the greatest number. Such a [Page 52] limitation makes the maxim one which the illuminated intelligence must reject. There is no question of majority, when we are dealing with mankind. One life is its root, one God its goal; you cannot separate the happiness of one from that of another. You cannot break up the solid unity, and, picking up the majority, give happiness to them, and leave the minority disregarded. This theory does not recognise the irrefragable unity of the human race, and consequently its maxim fails as a basis of morality. It fails because, in consequence of this unity, one man cannot be perfectly happy unless all men are perfectly happy. His happiness fails in perfection so long as one unit is left out and is unhappy. God does not make distinctions as to units and majorities, but gives one life to humanity and to all creatures. The life of God is the only life in the universe; and the perfect happiness of that life is the goal of the universe.

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Then again, there is a failure in this maxim as an impelling motive because it appeals only to the developed intelligence, that is, to the highly evolved soul. If you go to the ordinary man of the world, to a selfish person, and if you say to that man: "You must lead a life of self-sacrifice and virtue and perfect morality, even though the leading it may cost you your life," what do you think would be his answer? Such a man would say: "Why should I do this for the human race, for people in the future whom I shall never see?" If you take this as [Page 53] the standard of right and wrong, then the martyr becomes the greatest fool that humanity has ever produced, for he throws away the possibility of happiness and gets nothing in return. You cannot take this standard, save by limiting your view to the cases in which you get a noble soul, highly developed, and, though not entirely spiritual, with possibility of dawning spirituality. There are such as William Kingdom Clifford, in whose hands the utilitarian doctrine has become inspired with a sublime loftiness of tone. Clifford, in his essay on Ethics, appeals to the highest ideals and gives the noblest teachings of self-sacrifice. He had no belief in the immortality of the soul; approaching death, he could stand beside his grave, believing that that ended all, and preach that the highest virtue is the only thing that a true man can practice, since he owes it to a world which has given him all. But very few will draw inspiration so noble from a prospect so gloomy, and we need a view of right and wrong that shall inspire all, appeal to all, and not merely to those who need its impulse least.

What has come out of all this quarrelling? Confusion, and something worse. A lip-acceptance of revelation, with a practical disregard of it. We have, in fact, a revelation modified by custom. That is the standard which emerges from this confusion. Revelation is taken theoretically as authority, but is disregarded in practice, because often found imperfect. So that you have this [Page 54] unreasonable position, that that which is declared as authority is rejected in the life, and a life of an illogical kind, a happy-go-lucky life is led, without any logic or reason, without the basis of any definite and rational system.

Can we find in this idea of Dharma a basis more satisfactory, a basis on which the conduct of life may be intelligently built? However low, or however high the stage of evolution occupied by the individual, the idea of Dharma gives us the thought of an inner nature unfolding itself in further growth, and we have found that the world is, as a whole, evolving - evolving from the imperfect to the perfect, from the germ to the divine man, stage by stage, in every grade of manifested life. That evolution is by the divine will. God is the moving power, the guiding Spirit of the whole. It is His way of building the world. It is the method that He has adopted in order that the Spirits that are His children may reproduce the likeness of their Parent. Does not that very statement hint at a law? That is right, which works with the divine purpose in the evolution of the universe, and forwards that evolution from the imperfect to the perfect. That is wrong, which delays or frustrates that divine purpose, and tends to push the universe back to the stage from which it is evolving. It is growing from the mineral to the vegetable, from the vegetable to the animal, from the animal to the animal-man, and from the animal-man to the divine man. That is right, [Page 55] which helps the evolution towards divinity; that is wrong, which drags it backwards, or impedes its progress.

Now if we look for a moment at that idea, perhaps we shall acquire a clear view of this law, and no longer feel uneasy over this relative aspect of right and wrong. Place a ladder with its foot on the platform and let it rise to some place beyond the roof. Suppose that one of you had climbed five steps up, another two steps, while a third was standing on the platform. For the man who had climbed up five steps to stand beside the man who was on the second step would be to descend; but for the man on the platform to stand beside the man on the second step would be to ascend. Suppose that every rung of the ladder represents an action: each would be moral and immoral at the same time, according to the point of view

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from which we look at it. That action which is moral for a brute-man, would be immoral for a highly cultivated man. For a man on the higher rung of the ladder to come down to the lower is to go against evolution, and, therefore, for him such action is immoral; but for a man to rise from the lower stage to stand on that same rung is moral, because it is in the line of his evolution. So that two persons may well stand on the same rung of the ladder, but the one, having gone upwards and the other having come downwards to reach it, the action for the one is moral and for the other is immoral. Realise that and we shall begin to find our law. [Page 56]

You have two boys: one of them is a clever and intellectual boy, but is very fond of the gratifications of the body, very fond of food and of anything that gives him sensuous pleasure. The other boy shows some dawning spirituality, is bright, quick and intellectual. We will take a third boy who shows the spiritual nature unfolded to a considerable extent. Here are three boys. What motive shall we use to help on the evolution of each? We go to the young man who is very fond of sensual pleasure. If I say to him: "My son, your life should be a life of perfect unselfishness, you should lead an ascetic life," he will shrug his shoulders and go away; and I shall not have helped him up a single rung of the ladder. If I say to him: "My lad, these pleasures of yours are pleasures which give you momentary delight but they will ruin your body and shatter your health; look on that prematurely old man, who has led a life of sensual indulgence; that will be your fate if you go on thus; will it not be better to give a part of your time to the cultivation of your mind, to learning something, so that you may be able to write a book or compose a poem, or help on some of the world's work? You may earn money and get health and fame, and by this attempt you will gratify your ambition; give a rupee now and then to buy a book, instead of buying a dinner". By so addressing him, I stir that youth with an idea of ambition; selfish ambition I admit, but there is not there as yet the power to respond to the appeal for self-sacrifice. [Page 57] The motive of ambition is selfish, but it is selfishness of a higher kind than that sensual gratification, and as it gives him something of the intellect, raises him out, of the brute, puts him on the level of the man who is developing the intellect, and thus helps him to rise higher in the scale of evolution, that is a wiser teaching for him than the impracticable selflessness. It gives him not a perfect ideal, but an ideal suited to his capacity.

But when I come to my intellectual youth with dawning spirituality, I shall put before him the ideal of serving his country, of serving India; I shall make this his object and aim, partly selfish and partly unselfish, thus widening his ambition and helping on his evolution. And when I come to the youth of spiritual nature, I will drop all lower motives, and appeal, on the contrary, to the eternal law of self-sacrifice, to devotion to the one Life, the worship of the great Ones and of God. I shall teach Discrimination [Vivekah] and Dispassion [Vairagya], and thus help the spiritual nature to unfold its infinite possibilities. Thus understanding morality as relative, we are able to work effectively. If we fail to help every soul, in its own place, it is because we are ill-trained teachers.

In every nation, there are certain definite things which are marked as wrong, such as murder, theft, lying, vileness. All these are recognised as crimes. That is the general view. But it is not wholly borne out by facts. How far are these things recognised [Page 58] as moral and how far as immoral in practice? Why are they recognised as wrong? Because the masses of the nation have reached a certain stage of evolution. Because the majority of the nation are at about the same level of growth, and at that level they recognise these things as evil, as against progress. The result is that the minority, being below this stage, is regarded as being made up of "criminals". The majority has reached a higher stage of evolution, and the majority makes the law; then those who cannot come up even to the lowest level of the majority are dubbed criminals. Two types of criminals present themselves to our view. One type upon which we

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cannot make any impression by appealing to their sense of right and wrong. They are spoken of by the ignorant public as hardened criminals. But this view is a mistaken one, and leads to lamentable results. They are merely ignorant, ungrown souls, child-souls, infants in the School of Life, and we do not help them to grow by trampling them down and brutalizing them further, because they are scarcely a grade removed from the brute. We should use all the means in our power, all that our reason can suggest, to guide and teach these child-souls, to discipline them into a better life; let us not treat them as hardened criminals because they are mere babies in the nursery.

The other type of criminals is made up of those who feel a certain amount of remorse and repentance after the commission of a crime, who know that they [Page 59] have done wrong. They stand on a higher level, and can be helped to resist evil in future by the very suffering imposed on them by human law. I spoke of the necessity of all experience, in order that the soul might learn to discern between right and wrong. We need experience of good and evil, until we can discriminate the good from the evil, *but no further*. The moment the two lines of actions are distinct before you, and you know that the one is right and the other is wrong, then if you choose the wrong road you are committing sin, you are going against a law that you know and admit. A man at this stage commits sin, because his desires are strong, prompting him to choose the path which is wrong. He suffers, and it is well that he should suffer, if he follows these desires. The moment the knowledge of wrong is present, there at the moment also there is deliberate degradation in yielding to the impulse. Experience of the wrong is only needed before the wrong is recognised as wrong, and in order that it may come to be so recognised. When two courses are before a man, neither of which appears to him to be morally different from the other, then he may take either of those courses and commit no wrong. But the moment a thing is known to be wrong, it is a treason to ourselves to allow the brute in us to overpower the God in us. That is what is really sin; that is what is the condition of most, but not all, wrong-doers today.

Let us pass front that and look at some particular faults a little more closely. Take murder: we find [Page 60] that the common sense of the community makes a distinction between killing and killing. If a man takes up a knife in anger and stabs his enemy, the law calls him a murderer and hangs him. If a thousand men take up knives and stab a thousand men, then the killing is called war. Glory and not punishment is awarded to him who thus kills. The same crowd who hoot the murderer of one enemy, cheer the men who have killed ten thousand enemies. What is this strange anomaly? How can we explain it? Is there anything to justify the verdict of the community? Is there any distinction between the two acts, which justifies the difference of treatment? There is. War is a thing against which the public conscience more and more protests, and in a moment we shall have to look at this fact of the growth of the public conscience. But while we should do all we can to prevent war, should try to spread peace and to educate our children in the love of peace, there is none the less a real distinction in the conduct of one who kills through private malice, and the killing which takes place in war; this difference is so far-reaching, that I shall dilate upon it a little. In the one case, a personal grudge is satisfied, and personal satisfaction is found. In the other case, one man in killing the other man is not gratifying a personal feeling, is serving no personal object, is seeking no personal gain. The men are killing each other as an act of obedience to a command laid on them by their superiors, whose is the responsibility [Page 61] for the righteousness of the war. All my life I have preached peace, and I have striven to show the evils of war. But, none the less, I recognise that there is much in the mere discipline of the military force, which is of vital importance to those who are subjected to that training. What does the soldier learn? He learns obedience to order, cleanliness, quickness, accuracy, promptness in action, and willingness to undergo physical hardship without complaint or murmur. He learns to risk his life, and to give it for an ideal cause. Is not that a training which has its place in the evolution of the soul? Does not the soul profit by this training? When



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the ideal of the country fires the heart, when life is sacrificed for it gladly by rough, common and uneducated men, they may be rude, violent, drunken, but they are passing through a training which, in lives to come, will make them better and nobler men.

Then take a phrase used by an Englishman of somewhat strange genius, Rudyard Kipling, who makes soldiers say that they will fight "for the widow at Windsor". That may sound a little rough, but it is well for the man who starves, who suffers mutilation on the battlefield, if he sees before him his Queen-Empress, mother of millions of people, and offers up his life to her, learning for the first time the beauty of fidelity, of courage and devotion. There is the distinction which, very dimly grasped by the public, marks the distinction between private killing and war. For the interest of the one is personal; [Page 62] that of the other belongs to a wider self - the self of the nation.

In dealing with this question of morality, we fall often practically below that view. There are many cases of theft, of lying, of killing, that the law of man does not punish, but that the law of karma notes and brings back to the doer. Many an act of theft is disguised as commerce; many an act of cheating is disguised as trade; many a fine arrangement of lies is classified as diplomacy. Crime reappears under startling forms, disguised and hidden, and men have to learn self-purification in life after life. Then comes in another consideration, before we come to the essence of sin - one which I cannot entirely overpass - thought and action. There are some actions which a man commits, which are inevitable. You do not understand what you are doing, when you allow yourself to think along a line of wrong. You covet in thought another man's gold; you are grasping with your mind's hands, at every moment, what is not yours. You are building the Dharma of the thief. The inner nature, the interior nature, is Dharma, and if you build that inner nature by thoughts that are evil, you will be born with the Dharma that will carry you to deeds of vice. Those deeds will then be done without thought. Have you any idea how many thoughts in you have already gone towards the making of an action? You may dam up water, and prevent it from flowing along a channel, but the moment a hole is made in the dam, [Page 63] the pent-up water will flow through the hole and sweep the dam away: so is it with thought and action. Thought accumulates slowly behind the dam of absence of opportunity. As you think and think, the stream of thought grows fuller and fuller behind the breastwork of circumstances. In another life that breastwork of circumstances gives way, and the action is committed before any new thought has occurred. Those are the inevitable crimes, which sometimes blast a great career, when the thought of the past finds its fruitage in the present, when the karma of accumulated thought comes forth as action. If the opportunity comes to you, and you have time to pause, time to say: "Shall I do it?" then that action is not inevitable for you. The pause for thought means that you can put the thought on the other side and so strengthen the barrier. There is no excuse for doing an action which you have thought of as wrong. Those actions only are inevitable which are done without thinking, where the thought belongs to the past and the action to the present.

We come now to the great question of separateness: there lies in every deed the essence of wrong. In the past, separateness was right. The great course of the divine life-stream was dividing itself into multiplicity; it was needed to build up individual centers of consciousness. So long as a centre needs strengthening, separateness is on the side of progress. Souls at one period need to be selfish; they cannot do without selfishness in the early stages of growth. [Page 64] But now the law of progressing life for the more advanced is the outgrowing of separateness, and the seeking to realise unity. We are now on the path towards unity; we are approaching nearer and nearer to each other. We must now unite, in order to grow further. The purpose is the same, though the method has changed in the evolution through the ages. The public conscience is beginning to recognise that not in separateness but in unity, there lies

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the true growth of a nation. We are trying to substitute arbitration for war, co-operation for competition, protection of the weak for trampling them under foot, and all this, because the line of evolution now goes towards unity and not towards separateness. Separation is the mark of descent into matter, and unification is the mark of the ascent to Spirit. The world is on the upward trend, although thousands of souls may lag behind. The ideal now is peace, co-operation, protection, brotherhood and helpfulness. The essence of sin now lies in separateness.

But that thought leads us on to another test of conduct. Is the action we are doing one which seeks our own gain, or which helps on the general good? Is our life a self-seeking, useless life, or does it help humanity? If it is selfish, then it is wrong, it is evil, it is against the growth of the world. If you be among those who have seen the beauty of the ideal of unity, and have recognised the perfection of the divine manhood that we seek, then you should kill out this heresy of separateness in yourself. **[Page 65]**

When we look at much of the teaching of the past and see the conduct of the Sages, certain questions in morality arise, which some find it rather hard to answer. I raise this question here, because I may suggest to you the line of thought by which you may defend the Shâstras from carping critics and which may enable you to profit by their teachings, without becoming confused. A great Sage is not always, in his conduct, an example that an ordinary man should endeavour to follow. When I speak now of a great Sage, I mean one in whom all personal desire is dead, who is not attracted to any object in the world, whose only life is in obedience to the divine will, who gives himself as one of the channels of divine force for the helping of the world. He performs the functions of a God, and the functions of the Gods differ much from the functions of men. The earth is full of all kinds of catastrophes - wars, earthquakes, famine, pestilences, plagues. Who is their cause? There is no cause in God's universe save God Himself, and these things which seem so terrible, so shocking, so painful, are His ways of teaching us when we are going wrong. A plague sweeps off thousands of the men of a nation. A mighty war scatters its thousands of dead on the field of carnage. Why? Because that nation had disregarded the divine law of its growth, and must learn its lesson by suffering, if it will not learn it by reason. Plague is the result of disregarding the laws of health and of clean living. God is too merciful to permit a law to be disregarded by **[Page 66]** the whims and fancies and feelings of slowly evolving man, without calling attention to the disregarded. These catastrophes are worked by the Gods, by the agents of Ishvara, who, invisible throughout the world, administer the divine law, as a magistrate administers the civil laws. Just because they are administrators of the law and are acting impersonally, their actions are no more examples for us to follow, than the action of the judge in imprisoning a criminal is an example to show that an ordinary man may take revenge on his enemy. Look, for instance, at the great Sage Nârada. We find him stirring up war, when two nations have reached a point where the higher good of each can only be gained by the struggles of war, and by the conquest of one by the other. Bodies are killed, and it is the best help to the men thus slain that their bodies should be struck away, and that, in new bodies, they may have greater possibility of growth. Gods bring about the battle in which thousands of men are slain. It would be wicked for us to imitate them, because to stir up war for the sake of conquest or gain, or ambition, or for some object where personality comes in, is sinful. But in the case of Nârada it is not so, because Devarshis such as he is are helping the world along the path of evolution by striking away the obstacles. You will understand something of the wonders and mysteries of the Universe, when you know that things that seem evil from the side of form are good from the **[Page 67]** side of life; all that happens is working for the best. "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may." Religion is right when it says that the Gods rule over the world and guide nations, and lead and even scourge them into the right path when they go astray.

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A man, full of personality and attracted by the objects of desire, whose whole self is Kâma, such a man, committing an action instigated by Kama, often commits a crime; but the very same action committed by a liberated soul, free from all desire, in carrying out the divine order, would be rightly done. In the utter disbelief that men have fallen into as to the working of thy Gods, such words may seem strange, but there is no energy in nature, which is not the physical manifestation of a God carrying out the will of the Supreme. That is the true view of nature. We see the side of form, and, blinded by Mâyâ, call it evil; but the Gods, as they break up forms, are clearing away every obstacle that obstructs the way of evolution.

We may here understand one or two of those other questions that are often thrown in our faces by those who take a superficial view of things. Supposing a man, who is longing to commit a sin, is prevented from committing it solely by the pressure of circumstances; suppose that the longing is growing stronger and stronger; what is the best thing for him? To have an opportunity to put his longing into action. To commit a crime? Yes, even a crime is [Page 68] less injurious to the soul than a continued brooding over it in the mind, the growing of a cancer at the heart of life. An action once done is dead, and the suffering that follows it teaches the needed lesson, but thought is generative and living. [ This does not mean that a man should commit a sin rather than struggle against it. So long as he struggles, it is well with him, and he is gaining strength. The case referred to is where there is no struggle, but where the man is longing to do the action and only lacks opportunity. In such case, the sooner the opportunity comes, the better for the man; the pent-up longing breaks forth, the realized wish brings suffering, the man learns a necessary lesson, and is purged of an ever-increasing moral poison] Do you understand that? If you do, then you will also understand why you find in the scriptures a God putting in the way of a man an opportunity of committing the sin that man is longing to commit, and in fact has committed in his heart. He will suffer, no doubt, for his sin, but he will learn by the suffering that falls on the wrong-doer. Had that evil thought been left to grow in the heart, it would have grown stronger and stronger, and would have gradually wrecked the whole moral nature of the man. For it is like a cancer which, if not speedily removed, will poison the whole body. Far more merciful it is, that such a man should sin and suffer pain, than that he should long to sin and be held back by lack of opportunity merely, and thus make inevitable degradation for lives to come.

So also if a man is making rapid progress, and there is a hidden weakness in him, or some past Karma not exhausted, or evil deed not expiated, [Page 69] that man cannot be liberated while that Karma remains unexhausted, while there is a debt still unpaid. What is the most merciful thing to do? To help that man to pay his debt in anguish and degradation, so that the misery following on the fault may exhaust the Karma of the past. It means that there is swept out of his way an obstacle that prevents his liberation, and God puts that temptation in his way to break the last barrier down. I have not time to work out the details of this most pregnant line of thought, but I ask you to follow it for yourselves and see what it means, and how it illuminates the dark problems of growth, the falls of the saints.

If, when you have assimilated it, you then read such a book as the *Mahabharata*, you will understand the workings of the Gods in the affairs of men; you will see the Gods working in storm and sunshine, in peace and in war, and you will know that it is well with the man and with the nation, whatever may occur to them; for the noblest wisdom and the tenderest love are guiding them to their appointed goal.

I come now to the last word - a word I will dare to speak to you, who have been listening to me patiently on a subject so difficult and abstruse. There is a yet higher note: know that there is a supreme goal, and the last steps on the path to it are not the steps where Dharma can any longer guide us. Let us take

## Dharma by Annie Besant

some wonderful words from the great Teacher, Shri Krishna, and let us see how in His final instruction, He speaks of something loftier than anything on [Page 70] which we have dared to touch. Here is His message of peace: "Listen thou again to My supreme word, most secret of all; beloved art thou of Me, and steadfast of heart, therefore will I speak for thy benefit. Merge the Manas in Me, be my devotee, sacrifice to Me, prostrate thyself before Me, thou shalt come even to Me. Abandoning all Dharmas, come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins" (*Bhagavad-Gita*, xviii, 64-66.).

My last words are addressed only to those who lead here a life of supreme longing to sacrifice themselves to Him; they have a right to these last words of hope and peace. Then the end of Dharma is reached. Then the man desires no longer anything save the Lord. When the soul has reached that stage of evolution, where it asks nothing of the world, but gives itself wholly to God, when it has outgrown all the promptings of desire, when the heart has gained freedom by love, when the whole being throws itself forward at the feet of the Lord - then abandon you all Dharmas; they are no longer for you; no longer for you the law of growth, no longer for you that balancing of duty, no longer for you that scrutiny of conduct. You have given yourself to the Lord. There is nothing left in you that is not divine. What Dharma can any longer remain for you, for, united to Him, you are no longer a separated self. Your life is hid in Him, His life is yours; you may be living in the world, you are but His instrument. You are His wholly. Your life is Ishvara's, and [Page 71] Dharma has no longer any claim on you. Your devotion has liberated you, for your life is hid in God. That is the word of the Teacher. That is the last thought I would leave with you.

And now, my brothers, farewell. Our work together is done. After this imperfect presentation of a mighty subject, may I say to you: listen to the thought in the message, and not to the speaker who is the messenger; open your hearts to the thought, and forget the imperfection of the lips that have spoken it. Remember that, as we climb to God, we must needs try, however feebly, to pass on to our brothers some touch of that life we reach after. Forget therefore the speaker, but remember the teaching. Forget the imperfections which are in the messenger, not in the message. Worship the God whose teaching we have been studying, and pardon in your charity the faults of the servant who has given it utterance.

PEACE TO ALL BEINGS. [Page 72]