

Discipleship and Some Karmic Problems

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Discipleship

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MUCH has been said and written on the Qualifications for Discipleship, as they are set down in Eastern Scriptures; they are laid down therein as the ideal according to which the aspirant should try to shape his life, and are intended to help a candidate for discipleship by pointing to the direction in which he should turn his efforts. Among the Eastern Peoples, Hindus and Buddhists, to whom they were given, they have always been so regarded, and men have taken them as guides in self-culture, as pupils may strive to copy, to the best of their ability, the perfect statue set up in the midst of the class for study. As these qualifications have become known in the Western world through Theosophical literature, they have been used in a somewhat different spirit, as a basis for the criticism of others rather than as rules for self-education. Frederic Denison Maurice spoke once of people who — “used the bread of life as [Page 2] stones to cast at their enemies”, and the spirit which thus uses information is not uncommon among us. It may be open to question whether Those who have spread through the world much information that once was kept secret, may not occasionally have felt a twinge of doubt as to the wisdom of pouring forth teaching liable to so much misuse.

Our great Teacher, H. P. Blavatsky, has suffered much at the hands of those who use the qualifications for discipleship as missiles for attack instead of as buoys to mark out the channel. It has been asked — as in the *Vahan* last year — why a person who smoked, who lost her temper, who was lacking in self-control, should have been a disciple, while — this was not said but implied — many eminently respectable people, with all the family virtues, who never outrage conventionalities, and are models of deportment, are not considered worthy of that title. It may not be useless to try to solve the puzzle.

Those who have read carefully the unpublished letters from Those whom we call the Masters must, have been sometimes struck with surprise over the opinions therein expressed, so different is Their envisagement of people and things from the current appreciations in the world. They look at many things that to us seem important with utter indifference, and lay stress on matters that we over-look. So surprising are sometimes the judgments [Page 3] passed that they teach the readers a great lesson of caution in the formation of opinions about others, and make one realise the

wisdom of the Teacher who said: “Judge not, that ye be not judged”. A judgment which has not before it all the facts, which knows nothing of the causes from which actions spring, which regards superficial appearances and not underlying motives, is a judgment which is worthless, and, in the eyes of Those who judge with knowledge, condemns the judge rather than the victim. Eminently is this true as regards the judgments passed on H. P. Blavatsky, and it may be worthwhile to consider what is connoted by the words “disciple” and “initiate”, and why she should have held the position of a disciple and an initiate, despite the criticisms showered upon her.

Let us define our terms. A “disciple” is the name given, in the occult schools, to those who, being on the probationary path, are recognized by some Master as attached to Himself. The term asserts a fact, not a particular moral stage, and does not carry with it a necessary implication of the highest moral elevation. This comes out strongly in the traditional story of Jesus and His disciples; they quarrelled with each other about precedence, they ran away when their Master was attacked, one of them denied Him with oaths, and later on showed much duplicity. The truth is that discipleship implies a past tie between [Page 4] Master and disciple, and a Master may recognise that tie, growing out of past relationship, with one who has still much to achieve; the disciple may have many and serious faults of character, may by no means — though his face be turned to the Light — have exhausted all the heavy Karma of the past, may be facing many a difficulty, fighting on many a battlefield with the legions of the past against him. The word “disciple” does not necessarily imply initiation, nor saintship; it only asserts a position and a tie — that the person is on the probationary path, and is recognised by a Master as His.

Among the people who occupy that position in the world today are many types. For those who are perplexed regarding them it is well that the law should be recalled, that a man is what he desires and thinks, and not what he does. What he desires and thinks shapes his future; what he does is the outcome of his past. Actions are the least important part of a man's life, from the occult standpoint — a hard doctrine to many, but true. Certainly there is a karma connected with action; the past evil desire and thought, which are made manifest in an evil act in the present, have had their evil fruit in the

shaping of tendencies and character, and the act itself is expiated in the suffering and disrepute it entails; the remaining karma of the action grows out of its effect on others, and this reacts later in unfavourable **[Page 5]** circumstance. Action, in the wide sense of the term, is composed of desire, thought and activity; the desire generates thought; the thought generates activity; the activity does not generate directly but only indirectly. Hence the man's desires and thoughts are the most vital elements in the formation of the judgment passed on the man. What he desires, what he thinks, that he IS; what he does, that he WAS. It follows that a man with past heavy karma may, if he become a disciple, expedite the manifestation of that karma, and its fruitage in the outer world may be of actions that do not bring him credit in the eyes of his world. From the occult standpoint such a man is to be helped to the utmost, so that he may be able to pass through the awful strain, the bearing of which successfully means triumph, the succumbing to which means failure.

Moreover, in passing right judgments on actions, not only must we know the actor's past, in which the roots of the actions are struck, but we must know the immediate past, that which immediately preceded the action. Sometimes a wrong action is done, but it has been preceded by a desperate struggle, in which every ounce of strength has been put forth in resistance, and only after complete exhaustion has the action supervened. From outside we see only the failure, not the struggle. But the struggler has profited by the effort that preceded the failure; he is the stronger, **[Page 6]** the nobler, the better, and has developed the forces which will enable him to overcome the difficulty when it next presents itself, perchance even without a struggle. In the eyes of Those who see the whole, and not only a fragment, that man condemned by his fellows as fallen has really risen, for he has won as the fruit of his combat the strength which assures him of victory.

This disciple stands on the probationary path; he is a candidate for initiation. He comes under conditions different from those that surround men in the outer world; he is recognised as pledged to the service of Light, and hence is also recognised as an opponent of the power of Darkness. His joys will be keener, his sufferings sharper, than those experienced without. He has called down the fire from heaven; well for him if he shrinks not from its

scorching. And well too for him, if, like the Red Indian at the torture-stake, he can face an unsympathetic world with a serene face, however sharply the fire may burn.

What of the famous qualifications for initiation which he must now seek to make his own ? They are not asked for in perfection, but some possession of them there must be ere the portal may swing open to admit him. In the judgment passed on him, which opens or bars the gateway, the whole man is taken into account. With some, so greatly, are other qualities developed, that but a small modicum of those specially demanded weighs down **[Page 7]** the scale. With others, more average in general type, high development of these is demanded. It is, so to speak, a general stature that is expected, and the stature is made up in many ways. A candidate may be of great intelligence, of splendid courage, of rare self-sacrifice, of spotless purity, and bringing such dower with him may lack somewhat in the special qualifications. Something of them, indeed, he must have. If he have no sense of the difference between the real and unreal; if he be passionately addicted to the joys of the world; if he have no control over tongue or thought, no endurance, no faith, no liberality, no wish for freedom, he could not enter. The completion of the qualities may be left for the other side, if the beginnings are seen; but the initiate must fill up the full tale, and the more there is lacking the more will there be to be done.

It is not well to minimise the urgency of the demand, for these qualities must be reached some time, and far better now than later. Every weakness that remains in the initiated disciple, who has entered the path, affords a point of vantage to the Dark Powers, who are ever seeking for crevices in the armour of the champions of the Light. No earnestness is too great in urging the uninitiated disciple to acquire these qualities; no effort is too great on his part to compass their achieving. For there is something of pathos in the case of a hero-soul who has “taken the kingdom of heaven by **[Page 8]** violence” and has to pause to give a life-time to the building up of the lesser perfections which in the past he neglected to acquire.

Though the mills of God grind
slowly

Yet they grind exceeding
small;

Though He stands and waits
with patience

With exactness grinds He all.

The lofty initiate who has left some minor parts of human perfection unbuilt must be born into the world of men to lead a life in which these also shall be perfected. And if any chance to meet such a one in the flesh he would do wisely to learn from his best rather than to use his worst as his excuse for his own shortcomings, making it a justification for his own faults that he shares them with the initiate.

Pre-eminently is this true of the criticisms levelled against H. P. Blavatsky. "She smoked". But smoking is not the sin against the Holy Ghost. The use of it to depreciate a great teacher is a far worse crime than smoking, which, at the worst, is only a habit disagreeable to a small minority.

"She had a bad temper". So have a good many of her critics, without a thousandth part of the excuse she well might have pleaded. Few could bear for a week the strain under which she lived year after year, with the dark forces storming round her, striving to break her down, because the breaking down meant a check to the great spiritual movement which she led. In the position she was [Page 9] bidden to hold, the nervous strain and tension were so great, the cruel shafts of criticism and unkindness were rendered so stinging by the subtle craft of the Brothers of the Shadow, that she judged it better at times to relieve the body by an explosion, and to let the jangled nerves express themselves in irritability, than to hold the body in strict subjection and let it break under the strain. At all hazards she had to live, with strained nerves and failing brain, till the hour struck for her release. It is ill done to criticise such a one, who suffered that we might profit.

"She lacked self-control". Outside sometimes, for the reasons above given, but never inside. Never was she shaken within,

however stormy without. It may be said that such statement will be used as an excuse for ill-temper in ordinary people. Let them stand where she stood, *i.e.*, become extraordinary people, and then they may fairly claim the same excuse.

H. P. Blavatsky was one of those who are so great, so priceless, that their qualities outweigh a thousandfold the temporary imperfections of their nature. Her dauntless courage, her heroic fortitude, her endurance in bearing physical and mental pain, her measureless devotion to the Master whom she served — these splendid qualities, united to great psychic capacities, and the strong body with nerves of steel that she laid on the altar of sacrifice, made all else as dust in the balance. Well might her Master [Page 10] joy in such a warrior, even if not free from every imperfection. But where a person has no heroism, little devotion, and but small tendency to self-sacrifice, a strong manifestation of the special qualifications may well be demanded to counter-balance the deficiencies. Man worships the sun as a luminary and not for his spots. In the sunlight of H. P. Blavatsky's heroic figure, the spots are not the things that catch the eye of wisdom. But these spots do not raise to her level those who are nearly all spots, with little gleams of light. It is ill done in these days of small virtue and small vices to criticise harshly the few great ones who may come into our world.

Often, with S. Catherine of Siena, have I felt that intense love for some one even but a little higher than ourselves is one of the best methods for training ourselves into that lofty love of the Supreme Self which burns up all imperfections as with fire. Hero-worship may have its dangers, but they are less perilous, less obstructive of the spiritual life, than the cold criticism of the self-righteous, directed constantly to depreciation of others. And still I hold with Bruno, the Hero-worshipper, that it is better to try greatly and fail, than not to try at all.[Page 11]

SOME KARMIC PROBLEMS

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IN our early Theosophical days we grasped the broad idea of Karma, and it is only as we plunge more deeply into study that we discover the innumerable complexities in the working out of the Good Law; initial difficulties vanish as our vision clears, but new ones ever arise on the mental horizon, so that our ignorance seems to increase more rapidly than our knowledge.

In taking up some of these problems for study, we may assume that all Theosophists are acquainted with the three-fold division of Karma, and with the general workings of desire, thought and action.

The first type we may consider is an action which seems to be entirely out of relation to the character of the actor, as when a man of high character suddenly commits a crime. Such an action may be the result of a cause set going long ago in his past, a cause which has not found its opportunity of acting until many lives after the one in which it was generated. We have here an extreme instance of a general rule, that a man's actions often bear little relation to his present [Page 12] ideas. His actions are mostly the results of his desirings and thinkings in the past, modified but slightly by his desirings and thinkings in the present. A man is at one and the same time the reaper and the creator of Karma, and doing is reaping. As he acts he is sowing fresh seed for the future in his present desirings and thinkings, but the action as such is the harvest of past sowings; it is the outcome of the man as he was, not of the man as he is. To judge a man by his actions is to pass judgment on the man of the past, not on the man of the present; hence "Judge not" has been the maxim of the Teachers. None can judge a man aright, unless he can read his thoughts and desires, the outgrowth of his present character. Wide is the difference between our thoughts and our actions, our aspirations and our achievements. The thought comes from what we *are* at the present time, we create it according to the powers we have evolved; the action is fettered on all sides by its generating causes in the past, and is the manifestation of what we *were*.

The most startling discrepancies between present character and present actions arise in the more highly evolved types, and especially in persons whose evolution has been rapid.

In a far-off past a man has desired and thought an evil thing, and has completed it on the astral and mental planes (we will return to this in a moment). Now behind each man is a mass of **[Page 13]** mixed Karma, and only a certain amount of it can be worked out in any given personality. The Lords of Karma select out of this mixed mass such portions as are sufficiently congruous with each other to be worked out in a single type, within certain limitations of character and circumstances, and having regard to the persons in incarnation at the period of this particular man's life. The evil thing awaiting manifestation as action cannot find its opportunity for many lives — very possibly because the person or persons related to it do not take birth at the time when the man is on earth. Hence it is held over life after life. Meanwhile the man is making rapid progress, develops his character and strengthens all his powers. Yet this veritable sword of Damocles is suspended over his head, ready to fall. The opportunity for action comes at last, and the evil thing takes birth as an action. The saint sins, to the astonishment of himself and of those around him; and all men question: “Why is this ? Surely his present strength should suffice to prevent such an act”.

This brings us to the meaning of the phrase used above: “completed it on the astral and mental planes”. An activity is composed of three stages — desire, thought, act; we wish for a thing (desire), we think how to obtain it (thought), we grasp it (act). During the first two stages we enjoy comparative freedom; as we are desiring, thought, prompted by experience, may step in and wrestle **[Page 14]** with the desire, may conquer and slay it, so that, that activity is stayed and does not pass on into the second stage. Or we may reach the second stage, and be thinking how to accomplish our desire, and other thoughts, again prompted by experience, may wrestle with this thought and overcome it, and the activity is stayed at the second stage. But when the second stage is completed, and the thought is ripe for action, so that only the open door of circumstance is needed for the thought to burst through it into action, then freedom is past, and the moment the door opens the act will be done.

Sometimes a wall of circumstances is built between the completed second stage and the third, and the action waits; death may come, but still the action waits, standing on the threshold until

the door opens. Many lives may pass, and the door may not open; suddenly, in some life, circumstances open the door of opportunity, and the man performs the action without another thought, aye, though fifty or a hundred lives may have intervened. Such an action is inevitable, for its generating causes are complete, and, however incongruous it may be with the tenor of the life in which it occurs, it must come.

It must be remembered that the condition of the inevitableness of an action is that the desire and thought stages are *completed*. If there is a moment in which the man can think before he **[Page 15]** acts, if the action be not instinctive — done without thought — he can resist. There are all grades of difficulty in resisting the impulse to do a particular act, but wherever there is time to think there is power to resist.

It may not be amiss here to note the fact that if a man, who has some evil thing behind him awaiting birth as an act, be a man sufficiently evolved to remember his past, he may then destroy the evil Karma that waits on the threshold, he may burn up Karma by knowledge. For he can send against the completed thought a new current of thought of the opposite character, and destroy the evil ere opportunity has manifested the thought as act. In this way also, where the act is connected with a person, an ancient enemy, the enemy may be turned into a friend by sending to him streams of good will ere the meeting on earth takes place, and the old hatred seeking revenge may be made love seeking to bless.

The great Teachers of the world, knowing this possibility, have ever inculcated universal love and goodwill, and by obedience to Them a man may transform an ancient foe into a friend, even though he knows not of his existence. For, taking it for granted that in his past he has generated some Karma of hatred, he may daily send out a wave of goodwill to all that lives, so that his love, outspreading in all directions, may quench any fires of hatred still fed by long-past wrongs. **[Page 16]**

Some interesting karmic problems arise in connection with World-Teachers, the Divine Men who come into the world for its helping. For instance, let us consider the “working of miracles” by the Founder of Christianity, miracles being, as we know,

manifestations of the subtler forces on the physical plane.

The Karma generated by a miracle is of two kinds. First, there is the good done by it physically and mentally; secondly, there is the effect of the miracle on the minds of the onlookers. Such a manifestation of super-physical power usually convinces a number of the spectators of the authority of the person wielding the power; as time goes on, the miracle becomes more and more of a difficulty in their minds, until in the majority of cases it comes to be regarded as a trick or a hallucination, and resentment too often grows up against the Teacher, who is regarded as a deceiver. This evil thinking grows out of the act of the Teacher, since if He had not performed the miracle, the antagonism would not have been generated.

Yet it may be necessary for the Teacher to gain by such means a hearing for his Message; it may be necessary from the condition of the earth at the time, that there should be an exhibition of occult powers. Then the Messenger of the Great Lodge must, having undertaken the task, use the necessary means to win a hearing, and vindicate **[Page 17]** the reality of the invisible worlds, and hence, He generates this mixed Karma of good and evil, working on for hundreds of years. We can see in the modern revolt against miracles, due to what is called " the scientific spirit", the weapon against Christianity forged by that past necessity. What can the Teacher do ? He must strike the balance between the good and the bad results, and do the action which brings the preponderance of good as its result. He must deliberately take on Himself the evil Karma as part of the sacrifice He makes in helping the world. And the way this Karma works is to bind Him to the movement He has started, and He must remain with His religion, guiding, loving, helping, until the Karma is exhausted that He generated in performing His work of salvation.

Many Messengers of the White Lodge, greater and lesser, have brought such reaction on themselves in the doing of the work — Mme. H. P. Blavatsky is a notable recent example. Out of this we may draw the general principle — one of the greatest practical importance — that no action done, in an imperfect world can be wholly good in its results. "Every action is surrounded with evil as a fire is surrounded with smoke". No action that we can do is wholly

good. All actions generate mixed Karma, because, being done in an imperfect world, the best must cause some friction, and we can only strive to choose the lines of work in which **[Page 18]** the good most preponderates. We must study the Law in order that we may understand its workings, and then in all our activities seek the balance of good, cheerfully bearing the inevitable evil which must accompany all the good we do.

Nor must we forget the goal to which the universe is tending. It bears as fruitage not only Divine Men, but within its matrix a LOGOS is evolving, who will be the builder of a higher universe. Great as a LOGOS is, He has climbed through all the forms — mineral, vegetable, animal, human, superhuman; and it is only because He has done this that He has acquired all-knowledge, and thus can begin a higher universe within the one in which He evolved. All the imperfect stages are necessary for the gaining of perfect knowledge, and what is a passing misery which produces an everlasting power ? All the sufferings round us work to this end, as well as towards the evolution of each individual, and all the friction that occurs is caused by the continual growth. As we all evolve, the friction diminishes, and the Saviours in the later stages of evolution, being surrounded by more highly evolved beings, will have a better field to work in than had Those of the past, and thus less evil Karma will be generated in the doing of Their good work.

When we understand this part of the working of the Law, we can act with cheerfulness, using our best judgment, reason, thought, and all our **[Page 19]** experience, performing actions to the best of our ability , sure that some good and also some evil must result, but striving to maximize the good, to minimise the evil. In proportion as we reach this state of mind will our work be efficient, and we shall be able to see that while the Logos of the universe rules and guides all, among us also a Logos is evolving and we with Him. At every stage there is and must be imperfection, good and evil mixed, and all we can do is to cause as much good and as little evil as possible. To be troubled and regretful is to increase the friction which delays the total evolution, and anxiety can only throw fresh obstacles in the way. Brave cheerfulness is our right attitude, and as we advance we must grow more calm, peaceful, serene, contented, no matter what troubles may surround us. In the midst of the storm we may carry a heart of

peace. If we clear our eyes from personality; if we learn to identify ourselves with the Divine Man who is our Self; if we seek only God and the Law, indifferent to all our own circumstances; then the vision will become clearer and clearer, the mists will disappear, the path of right conduct will shine out, and even if sometimes we fail to tread it, the very failure will teach us to tread better in the future, for “Never doth one who worketh righteousness, O Beloved, tread the path of woe”. [Page 20]

**YOU CREATE YOUR OWN FUTURE:
DEEDS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES**

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THERE is a law in Nature which links together causes and effects. In its most general form it may be stated in the accepted axiom of Science: Action and Reaction are equal and opposite. This law means that when the equilibrium of Nature is disturbed, that equilibrium tends to be restored; this is a universal truth in Nature.

No one who has studied anything of Science will deny the existence of the Laws of Nature. *Those laws are not commands.* They are simply statements of certain successions, or sequences, that have been observed to happen, so that when one thing has happened, another definite thing invariably follows it. This is fundamental for the understanding of what is called Karma, and must be clearly understood. The laws of men are commands to do or to abstain from doing, and the penalty connected with their breach is arbitrary. But with regard to a Law of Nature it is different. Certain conditions are stated, and wherever these are present some other definite conditions will and must follow. Nature leaves you perfectly free to sow [Page 21] whatever you please. But if you want rice it is of no use to sow barley, or thistles. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”. That is Karma; neither more nor less.

You will have no difficulty in extending the idea of Law to the mental and moral worlds. All the worlds are connected, and in all,

Law holds sway. There is nothing of the nature of a command; it leaves you free to choose, but points out that such and such conditions will inevitably follow as the consequence of your choice. The statement of this might make a person think he is not a free agent, and can do nothing. But take the law of gravitation — that bodies tend to move towards the centre of the earth. An ignorant person might think: “How is it possible for you to move upwards? ”. By putting against the force of Nature that draws you to the centre another force of Nature by which you may raise yourself away from it — *i.e.*, muscular force. You do not break the law of gravitation. You feel its working in the exertion by which you lift yourself against gravity. As you go on studying, you find that, because laws are inviolable, therefore a man can move freely among them; but on one condition only — that he knows and understands them; otherwise he is a slave. “ Nature is conquered by obedience”. You cannot fight against Nature, she is too strong for man's puny powers; but you can make her do exactly [Page 22] what you will, if you know the laws within which her forces work.

Man is not commanded by Nature, is not her slave; he is in the midst of discoverable and calculable laws and forces, by knowing which he can rule and use. Nature will neither fail him nor swerve from her changeless road. When man fails, it is because his knowledge is imperfect, and that imperfection has betrayed him.

Ancient religions and some modern religions say that it is possible to transfer the certainty of Law, that changeless inviolable security, to the realms of mind and morals. Then man is indeed the master of his destiny, for he can work in those worlds which shape the future, and make himself what he wills to be.

There are three subsidiary laws under the general Law of action: (1) That thought is the power that builds up character; as you think, you will become. (2) That the force which we call desire, or will, (two forms of the same force) draws together you and the thing you desire. (3) That the effect of your conduct upon others, causing them happiness or misery, brings you happiness or misery in return. If a man understands these three laws and knows how to apply them, he becomes master of his own future, maker of his own destiny.

1) *Thought builds character* .—You may test that statement either by the authority of the “past in the world's great Scriptures; or by your own experience, which is, perhaps, better; because your own experience [Page 23] remains with you as yours and cannot be shaken. If you want to know with absolute certainty that thought makes character, try. The way of trying is very simple. Let us take as an example that you are irritable; this is not a crime, but a very common and ordinary weakness. You recognize that you are very easily annoyed. Having recognized it, never think of it again, because if thought builds character, thinking will put more life into it and make it grow; think about the opposite quality — patience — for some five minutes every morning. Do it regularly, for this is a scientific experiment. Think of it in any way you like; imagine yourself perfect in patience; then think of the most aggravating people you know. There must not be, in your thought, the least giving way to irritability. You must be patient in this mental picture. Repeat this every morning for a week. You will find that the thought of patience comes up in your mind without being summoned in the course of the day. That is the first sign that your morning thought is working. At first it will come up after a burst of irritability. Go on until the thought of patience comes before the provocation. You will find at the end of a few months that you have established patience as part of your character. In that way we can go on eliminating weakness after weakness. We can definitely build up character, build it as certainly [Page 24] as a mason can build up, brick by brick, a wall.

2) *Desire draws together the Desirer and the Desired.* — You see the one motive power in the universe as attraction everywhere. So long as it is drawn out from you by outer objects, we call it Desire. When the same power is directed from within, we call it Will. Everything you desire to possess is drawn towards you by desire, because there is One Life in all, and the lives separated by their different forms are ever trying to rejoin.

3) *As you give Happiness or Misery to others, so shall you reap Happiness or Misery for Yourself.* — According to the effect of our action upon others comes a similar reaction upon ourselves. As by sowing rice you reap rice, so by sowing pleasure you reap pleasure. But if done for a selfish motive, it works out as a selfish character .

Realize those three laws and that you can make your future by applying them. A little knowledge of Karma is often distinctly dangerous, for one of the results is a tendency to sit down and say: "It is my Karma". Like all Laws of Nature, it is not a compelling but an enabling force. Remember that "Exertion is greater than destiny". The thought and desire of the moment is often just enough to balance the opposing forces. You may fail for the moment, but you will conquer tomorrow, or the **[Page 25]** day after, or later. You should help when another suffers under his Karma, for if you do not do your best to help him, then you are making a Karma which will entail absence of help in the hour of your own need. Besides, your duty is always to help. Our duty always is kind action.