

# THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR LAST THOUGHT

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by

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## **Philosophy and Life**

A study of the principles of living is philosophy. When consciousness is able to set itself in harmony with these principles, it becomes a philosophical life. While man is accustomed to regard religion and its practice as a holy act of the spirit or a concentrated effort of the mind which is in no way related to the practical life of the world, the truth of the matter seems far from this popular belief. Man is not a child of God for a few days alone, or only for a few hours of the day. His participation in the nature of reality is not a work that he performs like an employee in a corporation, but it is an affirmation of what is his essential status and very being. The intrinsic significance of the person does not change with vocations or the calls of social engagement.

## **The Theory of Karma**

How does it happen that the human individual, nevertheless, looks only a partial abstraction from reality? The answer to some extent can be had if the doctrine of karma is analysed carefully. The conclusion of the systems of thought in India, except the Charvaka, or the thoroughgoing materialist, is that human individuality is a form assumed by

the effects of karmas done in the past. The personality is itself a bundle of these forces. Karma is a concentrated point of the force of desire-impulsions grouping themselves into a body or an organism. There is a parallel to this thought in the philosophy of Leibnitz, who regarded every individual as a monad, i.e., a centre of force, and not a hard substance closed within itself.

Karma is a term whose meaning has been much misunderstood, and it has been associated with every event or occurrence. The dictionary meaning of it would be 'action', or 'that which is done', or 'what one does'. But, this is not a sufficient coverage of the definition. Karma amounts to an interference with the harmony of Nature, somewhat like one's coming in contact with a high voltage electrical field. The moment one touches it, it gives one a kick, and a jolt follows. Self-contained energies do not brook interference, for the field maintains an equilibrium, a balance of its own.

The universe may be compared to an ocean of force. When individuals are considered as points of force, it would follow that the whole of creation also has to be a mass of this force, a large sea of energy. It is constituted in the nature of an organism so that it successfully struggles to maintain its identity. Physiologists and biologists say that even when one feels a little prick from a thorn in the sole of one's foot, there is an entire disturbance of the whole organism. The forces of the body are at war with this occurrence. There is an effort of the cumulative organism to throw out the enemy that has entered the system. Any interference with the system is not tolerated. The human body is a miniature cosmos. A study of the human system can suggest ways leading to the knowledge of what the universe is made of, and conversely, if the universe is known, one also knows one's self. Man is a microcosm, while the universe is the macrocosm. This balance, which is the universe, is a perfect equilibrium of being.

What is called action, karma, activity, movement, doing, is a kind of interference with this balance, which is the

reason why it sets up a reaction, comparable to the reaction caused by one's own body when a thorn pricks the foot. The thorn coming in contact with the foot is the extraneous action, the activity, or anything that one does or anything that anyone does anywhere. The reaction of the organism to this event is the karma, the nemesis of retribution. The nature of the reaction, its quantity as well as quality, will depend upon the nature and intensity of the interference – even as when an enemy attacks a country, the reaction will depend upon the extent of the invasion. Thus, karma has a cosmic connotation, and it is not merely a little bit of sweeping or washing that one does in daily life. It is a metaphysical reality and not merely a movement of bodily limbs, with which karma, or activity, is generally identified, perfunctorily.

The so-called individuality is known to be ultimately a myth in the light of the structure of the universe which is a self-sufficient whole. Inasmuch as the universe is a completeness, it includes within its existence everything that is substantial in the individual. If anything exists as a reality in the individual, it has to be a part of the universe. There cannot be an individuality outside the universe. The universe is the name given to the totality of being and, therefore, it should include within its comprehension, everything that anything can be, including all humanity and all things.

The assertion of the individuality of a person, or even the notion of the presence of something isolated, is repugnant to the constitution of the universe. There cannot be something redundant hanging on in the human body. Such a thing is resented. We call this foreign matter. A thing that does not actually belong to the body is foreign to it; it is a toxin that has to be rejected, and cannot be tolerated even for a second. Likewise, egoistic individuality stands in the position of an irreconcilable element to the universe; it is foreign matter, and the powers do not tolerate its presence. The ego is an anathema to the cosmos. It is almost like a citizen in the country asserting total independence and defying all laws of the government, as if he does not belong to the nation at all.

He becomes a toxin to the administration and he has to be expelled, because he has not become a part of the organism which is the governmental structure. He is not a citizen, and he cannot be tolerated. A moment's existence of his is a pain to the organism. So does this organism of the administration of the universe not tolerate the presence of such a thing as individuality, which is a myth before it. It is a hobgoblin, and it cannot be there. But this goblin of the individual struggles to maintain its character of an apparition, and interferes with the healthy assertion of the universe.

From this study it would appear that even personal action is a myth; it cannot exist on its own right. If the individual, finally, is a chimera, action also goes with it. It looks that man is in a world of illusions. Do we live in a real world? Man is not permitted to affirm himself in the way he is doing every day, for it is contrary to the law of things. His existence as an isolated individual is against the operating law. Thus it is that nature kicks him back, and this repercussion is the law of karma operating inexorably, and one has to pay for it, indeed, through one's nose.

The situation would reveal that the individual is an abstraction from the whole, in a very special sense. Some of the features of reality are taken into consideration at the time of the formation of individuality, and every other aspect is ignored, just as, when one has an attraction for an object, one sees in its presence only those forms which are conducive to one's relationship with it, and every other characteristic of it is rejected. Anything that belongs to oneself is beautiful, and what one hates is ugly, because those contours which are suitable to the particular mood, or the mode of the mind accepted at that particular moment, are imposed upon the object under the pressure of a psychological exigency. Karma is this reaction of the universe to pay back to any kind of interference with its harmony – which is, thus, a cosmic occurrence and not just an individual affair. From this point of view, the individual would have to be defined as an effect that has been projected by the character of a reaction from reality. The individual can exist

only so long as the momentum of his reaction persists (prarabdha-karma). When the reaction ceases, when the pressure of it is lifted, individuality evaporates, and it attains liberation from the bondage of isolation.

This little bit of an abstraction of force that is extracted from the total of the universe for the formation of the individuality, is called prarabdha-karma. And one can exist as a bodily individual so long as this selective operation continues; and when it is over, one is also no more. What is called physical death is the cessation of the momentum of a given form of the force which created this physical individuality, and then the form ceases, its purpose being fulfilled. But, since its other forms do not always get worked out in one life, there can be rebirth into a newly conceived form. The chain can be an endless one if karma accumulates repeatedly due to freshly formed desires in the subsequent incarnation. If this does not happen due to the rise of knowledge, salvation is attained in eternal life.

### **The Last Thought is Said to Determine the Future**

It has been said that man's future life depends on the path he follows in the course of his present life, and it is also held that the last thought determines the trans-empirical future of the individual. No one can say exactly when this last thought would occur, as no one knows the time when the last moment will come. It is so because the future is severed by the present attachment to the local body and its relations. There would, then, be no point in postponing the spiritual ideal of the meditation of consciousness to a future moment, the point of dying, since the future is unknown. The undecided future would be enough caution instilled into our minds to be prepared for the last moment, as if it is every moment of the day. For a sensible person, every moment is the last moment. It is only the foolhardy go-lucky that can entertain the notion that the last moment is going to be a future occurrence after several years. If it is true that the last thought will decide what man shall be in the future, he

should be careful enough to see what would be the nature of the last thought.

This is, however, one aspect of the matter. The other side of it is that the last thought is not one isolated link in a chain of different kinds of thoughts. The last thought is not a single thought. The object of meditation, as already seen, is not one among the many objects. It is a supreme object which includes the concepts of every other object in the world. Similarly, the last thought is not one among the many thoughts. It is the wholeness which the mind assumes by including within itself all the earlier processes through which it has passed in the sojourn of life. As when a man grows up into a mature adult, he has included in this maturity of his personality all the earlier stages and the mature adult condition is not merely one stage among the many earlier ones – it is all the stages – so is the last thought of all the thoughts. The conduct of man, the way in which he has lived through his life here, will decide the nature of the last thought. As the fruit of a tree is the culminating maturity of the growth of the tree, one's last thought can be said to be the fruit that has ripened through the maturity of the tree of one's life.

### **The Last Moment is like Standing Before the Supreme Judge**

At the time of passing, the last moment, man gets gathered up into a total force, even without his knowing what is happening to him. When one is drowning in the waters and there seems to be no hope of survival, when one has lost everything in this world and life itself is at stake, when one is at the moment of leaving the world, one gets gathered up into a concentrated jet of indivisible focussing of motion. This gathering up of whatever man has been, at the time he leaves this world, would look like his preparation to present himself before the Supreme Judge of creation. One stands alone at that moment, and one stands alone in a literal sense, stripped of every association – a condition which may

be frightening even to imagine. One gets disillusioned at that moment, and one would not know what to think. Many times one becomes unconscious at the time of passing, but it is not always the case. The last thought is that idea which preponderates at the last conscious moment before entering into a state of oblivion. The fear of the severance of all relationship at this moment strikes like a thunderbolt, which is the reason why one becomes unconscious mostly. The snapping of the links of relation is stupefying, for it was the only sustenance of the individual in its life of attachment and revelry.

### **One Should be Always Prepared for the Last Moment**

Anyone could imagine from this circumstance that man mostly leads an unnatural life throughout his social career. The present state of earthly consciousness may safely be regarded as a passing phenomenon, an appearance. The truth comes out when one is about to leave this world. It is sometimes easy to live in a fool's paradise, but that everyone has been living such a life will be shown when one is compelled to stand alone before the aloneness of reality. To live in this world is really a terrible thing. It is not always milk and honey, and it is not such a joy and a satisfaction as the unwise may think. Instead of forcibly getting huddled up into this corner of an unpleasant isolation where one is deprived of every help from outside, anyone endowed with a little discrimination of this true predicament here would do well to prepare oneself for this ordeal, the time of the great trial that one has to face, one day or the other. This preparation of the individual for standing on his own legs one day, to root himself in his own private status without being arrested by a court's order but honourably by education and knowledge, is one of the requirements for a peaceful ascent to higher realms.

Sleep, death, and coma have some resemblance among themselves. In death man is drawn into himself wholly,

though not voluntarily. In sleep also this happens for another reason. In coma the same circumstance supervenes under different causes. They differ from one another in other respects, though there is a feature of similarity in them in the sense that the individual gets withdrawn into himself in these states. In a sense, deep meditation is a state of conscious death, or a conscious sleep, and a conscious dissociation of oneself from every relationship with externals. But no one would be happy to be forced into this circumstance. It would be an honour on one's part to enter into this state deliberately by a consciously operated will and aspiration. In the meditations of yoga, one enters into this state of conscious aloneness which is in consonance with the nature of reality.

It has been noticed that it is doubtful if man is living a natural life today. Inasmuch as he is going to be thrown to the winds, blown off from his feet one day with no connection with anything, one should conclude that the realities man regards as worth-the-while in his present ways of living are only semblances. The Bhagavadgita admonishes one to be perpetually in a state of yoga. While an establishment of oneself in yoga at the last moment will bestow the fruit of Yoga, one cannot always know when the last moment will come. Further, the last moment is not one moment among many others; it is the fruit of what man has done, felt, thought, experienced, or passed through during the course of his entire life. The last thought is the quintessence, the juice, the honey, as it were, squeezed out of what one has lived through in life. Hence, a continual establishment of oneself in yoga is advised. Else, one would be taken by surprise. It is known that wars do not take place always; but everyone is ready for it any moment. One does not start manufacturing weapons when the enemy unleashes attacks. Though there be no apparent danger of that kind, one is prepared for the eventuality as if it is to pounce on oneself now. While death may take place after many years, it can occur the next moment, also. Man is not omniscient; he cannot know his future. Hence, he has to consider the

present as if it is the last moment and, like a good child, be ready by making necessary preparations, lest he should be surprised by unexpected summons.