

Harming Someone by Thought? An Essay on Theosophical Fiction

Remembering thoughts are things —
have tenacity, coherence, and life,
— that they are real entities —
the rest will become plain.
The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett

Prologue

Fiction:
a type of literature that describes imaginary people and events,
not real ones.
Oxford English Dictionary

In the real world, gossip, wishing that someone does not succeed – or does not recover – or that someone meets with an untimely end, are part and parcel of the ordinary mind, the mind for which to seek advantage and to defeat others are part of that which many call ‘myself’.

Those who indulge in such a frame of mind do not really believe that their hurtful thought-forms could ever hurt someone. They don’t see thoughts and feelings as discrete entities, invisible projectiles, that could cause real physical, emotional and mental harm to others, particularly to those who are frail.

However, even if the perpetrators may not see it the Esoteric Tradition does say that there is a perennial archive of every action – physical, emotional, and mental – committed by human beings all the time. It cannot be erased and will provide elements for a future Karmic response, thus ensuring due justice for the targets of such apparently ‘undocumented’ aggression. The footprints of thought warfare are easily traceable for those who can see as well as for the Karmic Law.

Below are excerpts from studies about the power, impact, and responsibility (or otherwise) of thought. Although they may come across as fiction for some, they are based on the experiences of those who could see the harm done by irresponsible, self-centred, and power-driven thoughts. As it has been said, only an Adept does not leave footprints.

Annie Besant

Let it be remembered that we are continually using these powers, unconsciously, spasmodically, feebly, affecting ever for good or ill all who surround our path in life. It is here sought to induce the reader to use these same forces consciously, steadily, and strongly. We cannot help thinking to some extent, however weak may be the thought-currents we generate. We must affect those around us, whether we will or not; the only question we have to decide is whether we will do it beneficially or mischievously, feebly or strongly, driftingly or of set purpose. We cannot help the thoughts of others touching our minds; we can only choose which we will receive, which reject. We must affect and be affected; but we may affect others for their benefit or their injury, we may be affected by the good or by the evil. Here lies our choice, a choice momentous for ourselves and for the world:

Choose well; for your choice is brief and yet endless. (*Thought Power – Its Control and Culture*, TPH Adyar)

C. W. Leadbeater



Plate XIII: Intense Anger

From this consideration it follows that the habit of gossip and scandal, in which many people thoughtlessly indulge themselves, is in reality heinous wickedness, in condemning which no expression can be too strong. When people are guilty of the impertinence of discussing others, it is not usually upon the good qualities that they most insist. We have therefore a number of people fixing their thought upon some alleged evil in another, and calling to that evil the attention of others who might perhaps not have observed it; and in this way, if that bad quality really exists in the person whom they are so improperly criticising, they distinctly increase it by strengthening the undulation which is its expression. If, as is usually the case, the depravity exists only in their own prurient imagination, and is not present in the person about whom they are gossiping, then they are doing the utmost in their power to create that evil quality in that person, and if there be any latent germ of it existing in their victim, their nefarious effect is only too likely to be successful. (*The Inner Side of Things*, TPH Adyar)

Plate XIII is perhaps the most striking in appearance of the whole series, and even without any explanation it would of itself be an eloquent warning against the folly of yielding to a fit of passion. As in the previous cases, the ordinary background of the astral body is temporarily obscured by the rush of feeling, but now the strong and vivid thoughts are unfortunately those of malice and ill-will. They express themselves once more as coils or vortices, but this time as heavy, thunderous masses of sooty blackness, lit up from within by the lurid glow of active hatred. Less defined wisps of the same dark cloud are to be seen defiling the whole astral body, while the fiery arrows of uncontrolled anger shoot among them like flashes of lightning.

A tremendous and truly awful spectacle; and the more fully it is understood the more terrible it appears. For this is the case of a man who is absolutely transported and beside himself with rage – a man who for the time being has utterly lost control of himself. Even should the discipline of education and custom still withhold him from outward violence, those terrible flashes are penetrating other astral bodies like swords, and the man is injuring those about him just as really as, though less visibly than, if he assaulted them on the physical plane.

While he is thus a source of danger to others, he is utterly defenceless himself. For the moment passion has entirely controlled him; the desire-elemental is supreme, and the true man has temporarily lost hold of his vehicle. Under those circumstances another and stronger will may seize that which he has allowed to be wrested from him. In other words, at such a moment, when a man is transported with rage, he is liable to be seized and obsessed either by a dead man of similar nature or by some evil artificial elemental whose vibrations synchronize with those which are dominating him. Not only is he a danger to his fellows, but he is in appalling danger to himself.

The case selected for illustration is of course an extreme one, and such a condition does not usually last more than a few minutes. But everyone who falls into a passion exhibits these characteristics to some extent; and one cannot but feel that if men only knew how they appeared in the eyes of those

who can see, when they yield themselves to those outbursts of anger, they would surely take far greater care to avoid them.

The gust of passion passes away, but it leaves its mark behind. In the astral body of the average man there is always a certain amount of scarlet, which shows the capacity for anger, the possibility of being irritated; and each outburst of rage adds something to this, and predisposes the matter of the entire vehicle to respond somewhat more readily than before to these very undesirable vibrations.

It must also be remembered that though the passion may be impermanent, the record of it remains for ever in the memory of nature; though the elemental created by an evil wish will cease to exist after a period proportioned to the strength of that wish, yet the living photograph of every instant of its life remains, and all the wide-spreading results of its actions during that life are arched with absolute justice to the karma of its creator. (*Man Visible and Invisible*, TPH Adyar)

The Mahatma Letters

The lower world of effects is the sphere of such distorted Thoughts; of the most sensual conceptions, and pictures; of anthropomorphic deities, the out-creations of their creators, the sensual human minds of people who have never outgrown their brutehood on earth. Remembering thoughts are things — have tenacity, coherence, and life, — that they are real entities — the rest will become plain. Disembodied — the creator is attracted naturally to its creation and creatures; sucked in — by the Maelstrom dug out by his own hands. . . . (ML # 9, p. 49, third edition, TPH Adyar)

There is always that danger if one has neglected to ascertain whether the words and sentences rushing into the mind have come all from *within* or whether some may have been impressed from *without*. (Idem, letter # 55, p. 319.)

It is but when standing face to face with his inner Self that he realizes the truth that there is something higher and nobler than the prittle-prattle of pseudo Spirits. It was at such a moment that he heard for the first the voice of Imperator, and it was, as he himself puts it: “as the voice of God speaking to his inner Self.” That voice has made itself familiar to him for years, and yet he very often heeds it not. A simple query: Were Imper. what he believes, nay — knows him to be, he thinks, — would not he have made S.M.’s will completely subservient to his own by this time? Alone the adepts, i.e. the embodied Spirits — are forbidden by our wise and intransgressible laws to completely subject to themselves another and a weaker will, — that of free born man. The latter mode of proceeding is the favourite one resorted to by the “Brethren of the Shadow,” the Sorcerers, the Elementary Spooks . . . (Idem, letter # 9, p. 40.)

. . . if we remember, moreover, the direct hostility of the Brethren of the Shadow always on the watch to perplex and haze the neophyte’s brain, I think we shall have no difficulty in understanding how even a definite spiritual advance may to a certain extent lead different individuals to apparently different conclusions and theories. (Idem, letter # 9, p. 49.)

And we will go on in that periodical work of ours; we will not allow ourselves to be baffled in our philanthropic attempts until that day when the foundations of a new continent of thought are so firmly built that no amount of opposition and ignorant malice guided by the Brethren of the Shadow will be found to prevail. (Idem, letter # 9, p. 51.)

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

... if you let negative emotions and thoughts arise inside you without any sense of restraint, without any mindfulness of their negativity, then in a sense you are giving them free reign. They can then develop to the point where there is simply no way to counter them.

(from the 'Eight Verses of Training the Mind', and commentary by His Holiness the Dalai Lama that was given on November 8, 1998 in Washington D.C.)

At the Feet of the Master

See what gossip does. It begins with evil thought, and that in itself is a crime. For in everyone and in everything there is good; in everyone and in everything there is evil. Either of these we can strengthen by thinking of it, and in this way we can help or hinder evolution; we can do the will of the Logos or we can resist Him. If you think of the evil in another, you are doing at the same time three wicked things:

1. You are filling your neighborhood with evil thought, instead of with good thought, and so you are adding to the sorrow of the world.

2. If there is in that man the evil which you think, you are strengthening it and feeding it; and so you are making your brother worse instead of better. But generally the evil is not there, and you have only fancied it; and then your wicked thought tempts your brother to do wrong, for if he is not yet perfect you may make him that which you have thought him.

3. You fill your own mind with evil thoughts instead of good; and so you hinder your own growth, and make yourself, for those who can see, an ugly and painful object instead of a beautiful and lovable one.

Not content with having done all this harm to himself and to his victim, the gossip tries with all his might to make other men partners in his crime. Eagerly he tells his wicked tale to them, hoping that they will believe it; and then they join with him in pouring evil thought upon the poor sufferer. And this goes on day after day, and is done not by one man but by thousands. Do you begin to see how base, how terrible a sin this is? You must avoid it altogether. Never speak ill of anyone; refuse to listen when anyone else speaks ill of another but gently say: 'Perhaps this is not true, and even if it is, it is kinder not to speak of it.' (Chapter on Love)

Light on the Path

Intelligence is impartial: no man is your enemy: no man is your friend. All alike are your teachers. Your enemy becomes a mystery that must be solved, even though it take ages: for man must be understood. Your friend becomes a part of yourself, an extension of yourself, a riddle hard to read. Only one thing is more difficult to know — your own heart. Not until the bonds of personality are loosed, can that profound mystery of self begin to be seen. Not till you stand aside from it will it in any way reveal itself to your understanding. Then, and not till then, can you grasp and guide it. Then, and not till then, can you use all its powers, and devote them to a worthy service.

(Note to Rule no. 10. TPH Adyar)

The Voice of the Silence

Sow kindly acts and thou shalt reap their fruition. Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin. (Fragment I)

Shalt thou abstain from action? Not so shall gain thy soul her freedom. To reach Nirvâna one must reach Self-Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child. (Idem)

“A harsh word uttered in past lives, is not destroyed but ever comes again.”* [Precepts of the Prasanga School] (Idem)

To perish doomed is he, who out of fear of Mâra refrains from helping man, lest he should act for Self. The pilgrim who would cool his weary limbs in running waters, yet dares not plunge for terror of the stream, risks to succumb from heat. Inaction based on selfish fear can bear but evil fruit. (Idem)

The Selfish devotee lives to no purpose. The man who does not go through his appointed work in life — has lived in vain. (Fragment II)

Be humble, if thou would'st attain to Wisdom.

Be humbler still, when Wisdom thou hast mastered. (Idem)

But Path the Second is — renunciation, and therefore called the “Path of Woe.”

That Secret Path leads the Arhan to mental woe unspeakable; woe for the living Dead, and helpless pity for the men of Karmic sorrow, the fruit of Karma Sages dare not still. (Idem)

Before thou canst approach the foremost gate thou hast to learn to part thy body from thy mind, to dissipate the shadow, and to live in the eternal. For this, thou hast to live and breathe in all, as all that thou perceivest breathes in thee; to feel thyself abiding in all things, all things in SELF. (Fragment III)

Thou shalt not let thy senses make a playground of thy mind. (Idem)

Thou shalt not separate thy being from BEING, and the rest, but merge the Ocean in the drop, the drop within the Ocean. (Idem)

So shalt thou be in full accord with all that lives; bear love to men as though they were thy brother-pupils, disciples of one Teacher, the sons of one sweet mother. (Idem)

Disciples may be likened to the strings of the soul-echoing Vînâ; mankind, unto its sounding board; the hand that sweeps it to the tuneful breath of the great world-soul. The string that fails to answer 'neath the Master's touch in dulcet harmony with all the others, breaks — and is cast away. So the collective minds of Lanoo-Śrâvakas. They have to be attuned to the Upâdhyâya's mind — one with the Over-Soul — or, break away. (Idem)

The Dhammapada

119. It may be well with the evil-doer as long as the evil ripens not. But when it does ripen, then the evil-doer sees (the painful results of) his evil deeds.

121. Think not lightly of evil, saying, “It will not come to me.” Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the fool, gathering it little by little, fills himself with evil.

125. Like fine dust thrown against the wind, evil falls back upon that fool who offends an inoffensive, pure and guiltless man.

127. Neither in the sky nor in mid-ocean, nor by entering into mountain clefts, nowhere in the world is there a place where one may escape from the results of evil deeds.

235. Like a withered leaf are you now; death's messengers await you. You stand on the eve of your departure, yet you have made no provision for your journey!

318. Those who imagine evil where there is none, and do not see evil where it is — upholding false views, they go to states of woe.

https://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/scrndhamma.pdf

Madame Blavatsky

You asked me if we are punished for our thoughts. Not for all, for some are still-born; but for the others, those which we call “silent” but potential thoughts—yes. Take an extreme case, such as that of a person who is so wicked as to wish the death of another. Unless the evil-wisher is a Dugpa, a high adept in black magic, in which case Karma is delayed, such a wish only comes back to roost.

M.C. But supposing the evil-wisher to have a very strong will, without being a dugpa, could the death of the other be accomplished?

H.P.B. Only if the malicious person has the evil eye, which simply means possessing enormous plastic power of imagination working involuntarily, and thus turned unconsciously to bad uses. For what is the power of the “evil eye”? Simply a great plastic power of thought, so great as to produce a current impregnated with the potentiality of every kind of misfortune and accident, which inoculates, or attaches itself to any person who comes within it. A jettatore (one with the evil eye) need not be even imaginative, or have evil intentions or wishes. He may be simply a person who is naturally fond of witnessing or reading about sensational scenes, such as murder, executions, accidents, etc., etc. He may be not even thinking of any of these at the moment his eye meets his future victim. But the currents have been produced and exist in his visual ray ready to spring into activity the instant they find suitable soil, like a seed fallen by the way and ready to sprout at the first opportunity.

(H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol. 10, p. 225.)

The Yoga Sutras

The First Yama: Ahimsa. The first yama is perhaps the most famous one: ahimsa, usually translated as “nonviolence.” This refers not only to physical violence, but also to the violence of words or thoughts. What we think about ourselves or others can be as powerful as any physical attempt to harm.

<https://www.yogajournal.com/yoga-101/philosophy/beginning-journey/#>

Ahimsā (अहिंसा) refers to “non violence”, but more specifically, it means not to be vindictive towards anybody. It forms an important part in the concept of value. It is the opposite of violence, hurting (*himsā*). (Dharmashastra [Religious Law], The Wisdom Library)

Ahimsa really denotes an attitude and mode of behaviour towards all living creatures based on the recognition of the underlying unity of life. As *Yogic* philosophy is based on the doctrine of the One Life it is easy to see why our outer behaviour should be made to conform to this all-embracing Law of Life. (*The Science of Yoga* by I. K. Taimni, TPH Adyar)

Classic Quotes on Criticism

“No one gossips about other people’s secret virtues.”

— Bertrand Russell, *On Education* (Routledge Classics): *On Education*

“Rumour is a pipe

Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures

And of so easy and so plain a stop

That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,

The still-discordant wavering multitude,

Can play upon it.”

— William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two*

“The fault I find with our journalism is that it forces us to take an interest in some fresh triviality or other every day, whereas only three or four books in a lifetime give us anything that is of real importance.”

— Marcel Proust

“Gossip is insecurity dressed up like power.”

— Alexandra H. Solomon, *Love Every Day: 365 Relational Self-Awareness Practices to Help Your Relationship Heal, Grow, and Thrive*

Postscript

Madame Blavatsky left behind her a number of warnings against dogmatism, orthodoxy, and sectarianism in our attitude towards Theosophy. Here is one of them:

‘Every such attempt as the Theosophical Society has hitherto ended in failure, because, sooner or later, it has degenerated into a sect, set up hard-and-fast dogmas of its own, and so lost by imperceptible degrees that vitality which living truth alone can impart.’ (*The Key to Theosophy*, Conclusion)

Col. Olcott, in his lifetime, had already identified two sects within the TS: the Blavatsky sect and the Besant sect [*Old Diary Leaves*, for the year 1892]. The first took HPB’s position an agent of the Masters to an absolute level, maintaining that only her writings should be emphasized within the Society. The second held that as Annie Besant had attained to perfection within herself she could do no wrong. There is no evidence that HPB or Dr Besant ever endorsed such dogmatic views.

From time to time, one encounters members with an obsession with progress on the spiritual path and the ensuing occult statuses (discipleship and initiations). Such members

maintain, for example, that the last Theosophical leader to have had conscious contact with the Masters was C. Jinarājadāsa. As a result, they hold a practical contempt towards every subsequent leader. On the other hand, a well-known European Theosophist once wrote in a letter to Radha Burnier, then President of the TS, that there was no other Initiate in the Society after HPB. Fortunately, the response of the TS to these and other similar claims is enshrined in its Resolution on Freedom of Thought: ‘No teacher, or writer, from H.P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members.’

Another claim of such members is that they wish ‘to bring the Masters back into the Society’, as if by talking about Them would do so. This is what They wrote in a letter to Annie Besant in 1900, nine years after HPB had passed away:

The cant about “Masters” must be silently but firmly put down. Let the devotion and service be to that Supreme Spirit alone of which each one is a part. Namelessly and silently we work and the continual references to ourselves and the repetition of our names raises up a confused aura that hinders our work. (*Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, letter # 46.)

Any imagined occult or spiritual superiority to others has in it an element of contempt. Some definitions of it follow:

‘A strong feeling of disliking and having no respect for someone or something.’

(Cambridge Dictionary)

‘Lack of respect or reverence for something.’

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

‘The feeling that someone or something is without value and deserves no respect at all.’

(Oxford Learners’ Dictionaries)

Such an attitude, maintained over a period of time, even years, is bound to negatively affect its recipient, besides empowering a deep-seated separateness on those holding it, which is the antithesis of real Occultism or Theosophy, as Madame Blavatsky reminded us:

‘Let them know at once and remember always, that *true Occultism or Theosophy* is the “Great Renunciation of SELF”, unconditionally and absolutely, in thought as in action. It is ALTRUISM and it throws him who practises it out of the calculation of the ranks of the living altogether.’

The teachings of Theosophy have made clear that to *seek* spiritual progress is not only a mistake; it can be dangerous as it strengthens the personal nature in us, what HPB called *kama-manas*. Progress only comes to those who are worthy. When the young C. W. Leadbeater, who was still a Curate of the Church of England, asked Master K.H. how he could become his disciple, this was the answer:

‘To accept any man as a chela does not depend on my personal will. It can only be the result of one’s personal merit and exertions in that direction. Force any one of the “Masters” you may happen to choose; do good works in his name and for the love of mankind; be pure and resolute in the path of righteousness (as laid out in our rules); be honest and unselfish; forget your Self but to remember the good of other people – and you will have forced that “Master” to accept you.’

(*Letter from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, letter #7)