

## On Gossip: a Harmful Practice



Watchful Jealously\*



Angry Jealousy\*\*

Compiled by Pedro Oliveira

‘Casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true; idle talk.’

*Oxford English Dictionary*

‘Conversation or reports about other people’s private lives that might be unkind, disapproving, or not true.’

*Cambridge Dictionary*

‘A person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts about others.’

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

Etymology: “idle talker, tattler, tittle-tattle, easy talk.”

*Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*

One of the important contributions of H. P. Blavatsky to the understanding of human nature and of the human mind is her concept of *kama-manas*, a Sanskrit expression that can be translated as the ‘desire-mind’. Our mind is pervaded by many and diverse desires and all desires seek self-satisfaction. Another strong form of desire is repulsion: not only to maintain separateness towards those we feel repelled but also to actively give expression to it. Not surprisingly, one desire that lurks in many minds is the desire to oppose and put down the other who is *seen* as an enemy or opponent. Gossip acts as one of the strategies of the desire-mind in this regard.

Gossip in the world today is a multi-million dollar industry, involving magazines, television programmes, websites, blogs, etc. The dark but sharp microscope of gossip scrutinizes many personal lives in the minutest details. The gossip industry acts as an appeal to our basest nature: the normalization of vilification and character-assassination. It leaves many human lives in tethers, with some succumbing to despair, depression, self-harm and even to suicide

\* \*\* From *Thought-Forms* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, TPH Adyar, Madras, 1971.

Gossip was also one of the historical methods used to attempt to destroy the Founders of the Theosophical Society and their successors. Katherine Tingley, for example, the leader of 'Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society', targeted both Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater in an international and vicious campaign based on gossip and character assassination. Her supporters used to distribute defamatory pamphlets in venues where they were scheduled to speak and even in the hotel lobbies in which they were staying.

Madame Blavatsky also suffered under the effects of gossip as the following passages from Countess Wachtmeister's book show:

The quiet studious life that I have tried to describe continued for some little time, and the work progressed steadily, until, one morning, a thunderbolt descended upon us. By the early post, without a word of warning, H.P.B. received a copy of the well-known Report of the Society for Psychical Research [published in 1885]. It was a cruel blow, and, in the form it took, wholly unexpected. I shall never forget that day nor the look of blank and stony despair that she cast on me when I entered her sitting-room and found her with the book open in her hands.

"This," she cried, "is the Karma of the Theosophical Society, and it falls upon me. I am the scapegoat. I am made to bear all the sins of the Society, and now that I am dubbed the greatest impostor of the age, and a Russian spy into the bargain, who will listen to me or read *The Secret Doctrine*? How can I carry on Master's work? O cursed phenomena, which I only produced to please private friends and instruct those around me. What an awful Karma to bear! How shall I live through it? If I die Master's work will be wasted, and the Society will be ruined!"

In the intensity of her passion at first she would not listen to reason, but turned against me, saying, "Why don't you go? Why don't you leave me? You are a Countess, you cannot stop here with a ruined woman, with one held up to scorn before the whole world, one who will be pointed at everywhere as a trickster and an impostor. Go before you are defiled by my shame."

Letters came in containing nothing but recrimination and abuse, resignation of Fellows, and apathy and fear on the part of those who remained. It was a trying time; the very existence of the Theosophical Society seemed threatened, and H.P.B. felt as if it were crumbling away from under her feet.

... Every post only increased her anger and despair, and for a long time no useful work could be done.<sup>1</sup>

### **Gossip as an effective vehicle for the Powers of Separateness**

Clara Codd, in her book *Theosophy as the Masters see It*, presents a number of how gossip and negativity towards others become vehicles for the Powers of Separateness which work towards preventing humanity to attain the noble objective of Universal Brotherhood without distinction. What follows are two quotes from the book *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*:

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<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine"* by The Countess Constance Wachtmeister, F.T.S. and Others, Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1893, pp. 25-26.

He . . . is under a baneful influence, and may become your enemy. You do right to try to rescue him from it, for it bodes ill to him, to you and to the Society. His greater mind fumed by vanity and charmed by the pipings of a weaker but more cunning one, is for the time under a spell of fascination. You will easily detect the *malign power* that stands behind *both* and *uses them as tools* for the execution of its own nefarious plans.<sup>2</sup>

But there are persons, who, without ever showing any external sign of selfishness, are intensely selfish in their inner spiritual aspirations. These will follow the path once chosen by them with their eyes closed to the interest of all but themselves, and see nothing outside the narrow pathway filled with their own personality. They are so intensely absorbed in the contemplation of their own supposed “righteousness” that nothing can ever appear right to them outside the focus of their own vision distorted by their self-complacent contemplation, and their judgment of the right and wrong . . .<sup>3</sup>

Miss Codd adds:

Suspicion stirs the imagination and when it is harboured in the mind, will build the most convincing and towering superstructures upon the slenderest, or no, foundation. So the Master K.H. wrote:

Imagination as well as will creates. Suspicion is the most powerful provocative agent of imagination.<sup>4</sup>

She continues:

Once we open our minds and hearts to the poison of doubt and suspicion, we are liable to attack from the unseen enemies of the Work, and their influence will mean the temporary cessation of the evolution of our *higher* vehicles. As the Master K.H. once described the state of a once prominent and promising member whose rather weak character made him easily the prey of suspicion and doubt:

His mind is clouded with black doubt, and his psychological state is pitiable. All the brighter intentions are being stifled, his Buddhic (not Buddhistic) evolution checked. Take care of him, if he will not—of himself!<sup>5</sup>

The Sanskrit expression *stithā-prājñā*, ‘stable mind’, contains the best response to gossip. Sri Krishna taught Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* in this way:

When a man abandoneth, O Pārtha, all the desires of the heart, and is satisfied in the SELF by the SELF, then is he called stable in mind. He whose mind is free from anxiety amid pains, indifferent amid pleasures, loosed from passion, fear and anger, he is called a sage of stable mind. He who on every side is without attachments, whatever hap of fair and foul, who neither likes nor dislikes, of such a one the understanding is well poised.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Third and Revised Edition, edited by Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1972, p. 264.

<sup>3</sup> *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Third and Revised Edition, edited by Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Third and Revised Edition, edited by Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1972, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> Codd, Clara, *Theosophy as the Masters See It*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1977, p. 304.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>6</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Annie Besant, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1977, Second Discourse, pp. 27-28.

The Karmic consequences of gossip, as an action that seeks to directly harm another, are bound to be ominous. Dr I. K. Taimni has suggested, in his book *The Science of Yoga*, that we are more strongly linked to the people for whom we express hate than for those we express love as the latter can transform itself into altruistic love, suffused with goodness for all. The same does not happen to hatred and the dark links created by it tend to last a long time, possibly into other lives. It is not difficult to envision that those who in this life incur in an attitude of hate, having gossip as their vehicle, will be without doubt at the receiving end of it sometime in the future, even if it is in another life. The Law of Karma never errs nor forgets.

## Contemporary Approaches

“Gossip serves a similar function to social grooming, but more efficiently. It takes up less time, given that communication (unlike social grooming) can be achieved while engaged in other activities; and it is not necessarily a one-to-one exchange, thereby allowing larger social networks to form and thus confer more strength to the group. Through gossiping, humans keep au fait with what is going on in their social networks, enjoy the opportunity to promote themselves and to manipulate information and other people’s reactions for their own advantage, as well as policing those who fail to abide by the explicit and implicit rules of the group. If things seem to get a bit Machiavellian here, there is a positive side to this policing: especially in small communities, the person who spreads malicious gossip (like a liar or a thief) would be soon ‘found out’, and ostracism in such circumstances would have such a high price that it serves as a deterrent.”

(Source: *The Psychologist* ..., a Journal of the British Psychological Society, January 2009)  
<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-22/edition-1/gossip-tales-human-condition>

### “Why people gossip and how to avoid it

Gossip is unconstrained and often derogatory conversation about other people, and can involve betraying a confidence and spreading sensitive information or hurtful judgments.

Research shows that people who gossip the most have very high levels of anxiety. They are generally not particularly popular because they cannot be trusted. Spreading private information or negative judgments is painful to others and reflects poorly on the gossiper.

### Why do people gossip?

- To feel superior

People who don’t feel good about themselves temporarily feel better when they judge others negatively.

- Out of boredom

When people can’t generate interesting discussions based on knowledge or ideas, gossip can rouse people’s interest.

- Out of envy

People gossip in order to hurt those whose popularity, talents, or lifestyle they envy.

- To feel like part of the group

People gossip to feel as though they belong to the group. Yet, when acceptance is based on being “in on a secret,” it is not based on a person’s identity, but on exclusion or maliciousness.

- For attention

A person gets to be the center of attention temporarily while divulging a piece of gossip. Yet, spreading gossip or rumors is like buying attention; it’s temporary and has little foundation.

- Out of anger or unhappiness

A person can derive a sense of retribution with disparaging remarks.”

(Better Communication Better Relationships. “So what I really meant...”© 2010-2021)

(Source: <https://www.sowhatireallymeant.com/articles/personality-traits/gossip/>)

## Madame Blavatsky Speaks

‘Groundless condemnation on hearsay of others, theosophists or not, must be refrained from, and charity to each other’s faults widely practiced within, as well as without, the theosophical area.’

(*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, vol. 12, p. 494)

Enq. What do you consider, then, to be the chief of these negative Theosophical duties?

Theo. To be ever prepared to recognize and confess one's faults. To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbour's efforts. Never to backbite or slander another person. Always to say openly and direct to his face anything you have against him. Never to make yourself the echo of anything you may hear against another, nor harbour revenge against those who happen to injure you.

(*The Key to Theosophy*, Section 12, What Theosophists Ought Not to Do)

A Card from Madame Blavatsky

[The World , New York, May 6, 1877]

To the Editor of The World:

Sir, Since the first month of my arrival in America I began, for reasons mysterious but perhaps intelligible, to provoke hatred among those who pretend to be on good terms with me, if not the best of friends. Slandorous reports, vile insinuations, innuendo, have rained

about me. For more than three years I have kept silent, although the least of the offenses attributed to me was calculated to excite the loathing of a person of my disposition. I have rid myself of a number of these retailers of slander, but finding that I was actually suffering in the estimation of friends whose good opinion I valued, I adopted a policy of seclusion. For two years my world has been in my apartments, and for an average of at least seventeen hours a day I have sat at my desk with my books and manuscripts as my companions. During this time many highly valued acquaintances have been formed with ladies and gentlemen who have sought me out without expecting me to return their visits. I am an old woman, and I feel the need of fresh air as well as any one, but my disgust for the lying, slanderous world that we find outside of “heathen” countries has been such that in seven months I believe I have been out but three times.

But no retreat is secure against the anonymous slanderer who uses the United States mail. Letters have been received by my trusted friends containing the foulest aspersions upon myself. At various times I have been charged with (1) drunkenness; (2) forgery; (3) being a Russian spy; (4) with being an anti-Russian spy; (5) with being no Russian at all, but a French adventuress; (6) of having been in jail for theft; (7) of being the mistress of a Polish count in Union Square; (8) with murdering seven husbands; (9) with bigamy; (10) of being the mistress of Colonel Olcott; (11) also of an acrobat. Other things might be mentioned, but decency forbids.

*(H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol. 1, p. 247)*

‘Men slander only those whom they hate—or fear.’

*(H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol. 2, p. 98)*

‘We wish to show how basely personal character is traduced without the slightest provocation, unless the fact of one’s being brighter in mind, and more versed in the secrets of natural law can be construed as a sufficient provocation to set the slanderer’s pen and the gossip’s tongue in motion.’

*(H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol. 3, p.125)*

‘From Addison we pass to Sterne’s treatment of the same subject. He seems to continue this picture by saying:

So fruitful is slander in variety of expedients to satiate as well as to disguise itself, that if those smoother weapons cut so sore, what shall we say of open and unblushing scandal, subjected to no caution, tied down to no restraints? If the one like an arrow shot in the dark does, nevertheless, so much secret mischief, this, like pestilence, which rages at noonday, sweeps all before it, levelling without distinction the good and the bad; a thousand fall beside it, and ten thousand on its right hand; they fall, so rent and torn in this tender part of them, so unmercifully butchered, as sometimes never to recover either the wounds or the anguish of heart which they have occasioned.

Such are the results of slander, and from the standpoint of Karma, many such cases amount to more than murder in hot blood. Therefore, those who want to lead the “higher life” among the “working Fellows,” of the Theosophical Society, must bind themselves by this solemn pledge, or, remain droning members. It is not to the latter that these pages are addressed, nor would they feel interested in that question, nor is it an advice offered to the F.’s T.S. at large. For the “Pledge” under discussion is taken only by those Fellows who

begin to be referred in our circles of “Lodges” as the “working” members of the T.S. All others, that is to say those Fellows who prefer to remain ornamental, and belong to the “mutual admiration” groups; or those’  
(*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 10, p. 205)

‘To become a true theosophist—i.e. one thoroughly imbued with altruistic feelings, with a willingness to forget self, and readiness to help his neighbour to carry the burden of life—is to become instantaneously transformed into a public target. It is to make oneself a ready thing for heavy “Mrs. Grundy” to sit upon: to become the object of ridicule, slander, and vilification, which will not stop even before an occasional criminal charge. For some theosophists, every move in the true theosophical direction, is a forlorn-hope enterprise. All this notwithstanding, the ranks of the “unpopular” society are steadily, if slowly increasing.

For what does slander and ridicule really matter? When have fools ever been slandered, or rich and influential men and women ostracised, however black and soiled in their hearts, or in their secret lives? Who ever heard of a Reformer’s or an orator’s course of life running smooth? Who of them escaped from being pelted with dirt by his enemies? Gautama Buddha, the great Hindu Reformer, was charged by the Brahmins with being a demon, whose form was taken by Vishnu, to encourage men to despise the Vedas, deny the gods, and thus effect their own destruction.’  
(*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, pp. 31-32)

In these days of wholesale slander:—

“. . . that worst of poisons (which) ever finds  
An easy entrance to ignoble minds,”

(*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 10, p. 133)

### **The Besant and Leadbeater Literature**

**But if thou look not for him, if thou pass him by, then there is no safeguard for thee. Thy brain will reel, thy heart grow uncertain, and in the dust of the battle-field thy sight and senses will fail, and thou wilt not know thy friends from thy enemies.**

All that is described here does occur when the personality does not look for the higher guidance. He does not know his friends from his enemies; he is carried away by the swirl of passion, and under its influence will believe what is said by someone who is not in the least a real friend. One sees that often in daily life; if a person is excited or angry or jealous, he will listen to the ridiculous gossip of those who call themselves friends but in reality are not friends at all.

A gossip, a mischief-maker, is no one’s friend; he is the worst enemy to those to whom he speaks. It is a very sad thing indeed for one who contacts a person of that sort, and believes what is said by him. As soon as we hear a person beginning to speak censoriously about someone else it is best to avoid him as soon as possible, because we may be quite sure that we shall learn nothing of any good, and also that the person who speaks wrongly about another to us will speak in the same way about us to the next person whom he or she happens to meet. Therefore it is better to have nothing whatever to do with these gossiping people, and not to

be in the least influenced by anything that they say. Often when a person hears what they say he replies, "I do not believe it; I will not pay attention to it," but all the same he is somewhat affected by it; he lets it recur to his mind again and again, and wonders whether what was said could have had any foundation in fact, instead of at once treating it with contempt, which is the only reasonable attitude to take.

*(Talks on the Path Occultism, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. III, Light on the Path, Rules 1 to 4, TPH Adyar)*

People do all kinds of strange things. Sometimes they fall into ecstasies of jealousy over nothing in particular. At others, one sees people acutely affected by what somebody else says about them. You apply reason, and say that it does not in the very least matter what other people say, because it does not do them any harm. But the fact remains that they are very strongly and seriously affected. We ought to understand why, to some extent, if we can. I quite admit it is out of the question in many cases; still manifestly it is our business to try to understand our fellow-men.

*(Talks on the Path Occultism, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. III, Light on the Path, Rules 9 to 12, TPH Adyar)*

**First, to do no hurt. Three sins there are which work more harm than all else in the world – gossip, cruelty, and superstition – because they are sins against love.**

From these instances alone we see that immeasurable harm may be done by spiteful and foolish gossip. This form of selfishness also very much hurts the feelings of the person at whom it is aimed. That the person can be hurt shows a weakness in his character, but that does not excuse the gossip, or relieve him from the evil karma which he has made. Our President is quite impervious to gossip about her, though if she is abused for more than the usual time along one particular line she does sometimes say: "This is getting very monotonous; I wish they would find something else to discuss." I also have been much abused, but it has never cost me a night's sleep. Thus karma falls back from us. But the harm done to others by the gossip brings its karma to those who started it and passed it on. It is more difficult not to care what is said about somebody else, and I confess I still find it hard not to be angry when some one speaks ill of our President, for example, or when unworthy thoughts, which to us who know Them are nothing less than blasphemous, are directed to the Masters.

Gossip is not real criticism. Unfortunately the very word criticism has come to mean picking holes. It is derived from the Greek *krinein*, to judge, and should mean a judicial attitude, but now it does not. Justice is one of the manifestations of God; therefore to judge a man's words or actions without their context is wrong and leads to evil. I suppose there is not a scripture in the world, no matter how holy and beautiful, which could not be made ridiculous by taking some words away from their context and putting them by themselves. We are always doing that with the thoughts of other people. We find a man to be irritable; he speaks sharply, perhaps roughly, and we at once assume that this indicates his character. But we do not know the reason for his irritability. Possibly he has been sitting up



all night with a sick child; somebody else may have jarred him or annoyed him intensely in some way and we get the reflex action of that, although he is not really annoyed with us. If he were a great Adept he would not be annoyed, but we are not all great Adepts yet, and so these things happen.

(*Talks on the Path Occultism*, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. I, *At the Feet of the Master*, Love in Daily Life, TPH Adyar)

**Your thought about others must be true; you must not think of them what you do not know.**

C.W.L. – If we think of other people what we only suppose about them, the thought is probably the merest speculation. We really know remarkably little even about those who are very near to us, still less about casual acquaintances; and yet there is constantly much profitless babble about the doings and sayings and supposed thoughts of other people, and most of it, fortunately, is hopelessly untrue.

A.B. – Opinions about other people are mostly untrue. We can only think truly of another when we really know him, when we can see his thought and understand it. That knowledge is impracticable to most people, yet they have very definite opinions about others; they constantly judge them and think unkindly of them.

A little further on the Master says: “Never attribute motives to another.” That is an enormously important piece of advice which, if carried out in the world, would do away with at least half the trouble that exists. If a person does a thing which you do not understand, leave it at that; do not invent possible motives. A person does something, for what reason you cannot know; but you hunt round for a possible motive, generally an unworthy one, and fasten it on to the act; then you blame him for what you have thought and done yourself. By thus attributing motives men add to any evil force that may possibly exist in’ the mind of the person criticized, or they supply it if it is not already there, Christ said: “Resist not evil”; this is a case where that applies; it is not our business to search in people’s minds for evil to battle against; leave the thing alone and it will die. (*Talks on the Path Occultism*, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. I, *At the Feet of the Master*, Be True All Through, TPH Adyar)

**If you hear a story against any one, do not repeat it; it may not be true, and even if it is, it is kinder to say nothing.**

A.B. – If, having heard this, you go and tell a story against someone, you are disobeying the Master’s direct command, because it has been passed on to you, and so is directed to you personally. It is easy enough to hold your tongue; it may be difficult to control your thought, but surely you can control your body! The story that you tell may not matter much, but if it is untrue and you repeat it, you are telling a lie, and that matters very much for those who are striving to prepare themselves for Initiation. It sounds hard to call it lying, perhaps, but it is a fact, and we have to face facts.

It is obvious that we cannot spend our lives in enquiring into the truth of such stories, so the only safe course is never to repeat them at all. Quite apart from the question of injuring ourselves and our own prospects and even supposing you know such a story to be true, it is kinder to say nothing. Why should you wish to harm any

person? Why should you wish to repeat anything which shows another in an unfavourable light?

Of course, if we happen to find out that a man is a rogue or a swindler and is bent upon doing injury to unsuspecting persons, it is our duty to expose him, or at least to warn those who are in danger from him; but that is a matter altogether different from those which form the pabulum of common gossip. This is, however, a duty which should be exercised only with the greatest care and forethought, and certainly without the slightest ill-feeling or indignation.

*(Talks on the Path Occultism, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. I, At the Feet of the Master, Be True All Through, TPH Adyar)*

**First, to do no hurt. Three sins there are which work more harm than all else in the world – gossip, cruelty, and superstition – because they are sins against love.**

C.W.L. – When one hears of sins which work more harm than all others one is apt to think of murder and robbery and such crimes, and perhaps is surprised to find such comparatively ordinary things as gossip, cruelty and superstition at the head of the list. The Master is taking into account the quantity of these sins, and their far-reaching effect. Murder and robbery are universally recognized as serious sins, and consequently respectable people avoid them, unless you dignify them by the name of war. But gossip is universal; and if one thinks of the harm it does in any individual case, of the great amount of mental suffering which it may cause, of the depreciation of ideals which it often brings about, then multiplies that by the millions of cases which are going on all the time, one will very soon see that it does vastly more harm than the other. It is a terrible thing to destroy a person's ideal, to cheapen it and lower it, and make him feel that after all it is not so good or high or noble as he had thought. Sometimes there is talk of the destruction of idols as a good thing. The destruction of a person's idol may be the most serious injury one can do him. If he idealizes something which to us is low and mean, we may, perhaps, be able to lead him to some higher ideal, but it is a most evil and wicked thing to take away his ideal without leaving him something higher and better to take its place. It is not for us to point out the flaws or to try to belittle anyone under any circumstances.

*(Talks on the Path Occultism, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. I, At the Feet of the Master, Love in Daily Life, TPH Adyar)*

## GOSSIP

*(Talks on the Path Occultism, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, vol. I, Chapter 3, 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.**

C.W.L. – The Master speaks of evil thought as a crime. When we remember how exceedingly careful and balanced is the speech of the Master always, we realize that that against which He speaks so strongly must be evil indeed.

An attempt to understand the motives of another man, to follow his line of reasoning, is very likely to be incorrect; therefore the least we can do is to give him the benefit of the doubt. Most people are on the whole quite respectable and well-meaning, therefore we should give them the credit of good intentions. If we are wrong, our slightly higher thought about the person will act upon him and actually do him good. When you hear something to the disadvantage of another, ask yourself whether you would repeat that piece of gossip and send it on to be magnified if it were about your own son or brother? No, emphatically you would not. You would combat it in the first place, and in any case you would not circulate it. Why should you act differently with regard to somebody else's son or brother?

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

C.W.L. – The world is very much to us what we make it and as we take it. If a man is pessimistic, bent upon finding evil and darkness, looking for a chance to be offended or hurt, he can find it. There is evil in the world and much sorrow in these lower planes, as the Lord Buddha pointed out. We can magnify these things into serious difficulties, or we can approach the world optimistically, in a cheery spirit of determination to make the best of everything. In the latter case we shall find that there is a great deal that is bright, and shall also be making the world more cheerful for others by our outer life and our thought-power.

There are many people who have been practising regular meditation for many years. They must inevitably have learnt to think a little more definitely than those who have made no such attempt; their thoughts are therefore more powerful. If these people should think evil of others, it is very much worse in a great number of ways than if the ordinary person did it. First, because they know better, they are, as it is expressed in the Church, “sinning against light”. Secondly, their thought produces definite and relatively permanent forms, which often have considerable influence in the astral and mental atmosphere. Use your power, therefore, to make the world brighter and happier. You have no idea how much that can be done, simply by putting away all sorrowful and selfish thought, and filling yourself with love that will radiate all around you.

**(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.**

C.W.L. – The clairvoyant can see the thoughts of one person going to another and buzzing round him like a crowd of mosquitos. They cannot get in while the man is busy with some other matter, but when his thoughts for the moment slacken, when he

is meditative or tired, or absent-minded for a moment, they take their opportunity. The thought-form then fastens on his aura like a burr, and by its vibrations gradually colours the part on which it has impinged, and from there its influence spreads. Thus it suggests the bad or good idea, and if there be something in him that is akin to it, as is usually the case, it sets that in motion.

A little impetus given to another might not matter so much sometimes, but in some cases it makes all the difference in the world. School boys running about often push one another; cases have been known in which a boy has quite unintentionally pushed another over the edge of a precipice. You never know when a man's thought may be on the verge of some wrong course of action, and one evil thought about him may just push him over. On the other hand, when a man is in that way balanced between the good and the evil, one strong, helpful, good thought may push him definitely on the good side and set him going on a career which may mean for him rapid development.

I have seen cases in which an evil thought about a man led to a course of evil action on his part the result of which would last for many lives; it was near the surface, but it had not materialized itself in action; there came an evil thought from someone else, which gave just the push which sent him over from thought into action, and committed him to a course of crime. Till you see that clairvoyantly you will scarcely be able to realize it; but see it once, and you will be careful forever, with a care born of horror. It gives you a new sense of responsibility, sometimes rather overwhelming. Remember how the poet Schiller wrote about clairvoyance, how he desired the welcome blindness of the senses again; "Take back your cruel gift; take back this dreadful gift," was what he said.

**(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.**

C.W.L. – Many people take much trouble about their physical personal appearance, and the grace and gentleness of their manners, not merely because they are anxious to appear at their best and to be thought well of, but also because it is recognized to be a duty to society in general. In ancient days it was understood to be every man's duty to make himself as perfect and as beautiful as possible in every way; in attire, appearance, speech and action, he was to learn the right, the graceful, the proper way to do everything. Not only one's personality but one's surroundings also were to be not merely useful but also beautiful. If a man built a house it was his duty to his neighbours to put up something that would be graceful and beautiful, though not necessarily costly; and his pottery, as well as his statues and pictures, was to be good. In these days many think only of building as cheaply as they can, regardless of the hideous effect produced. A man builds a great ugly house or factory, and everybody who is sensitive shrinks back from it at once, and all who look at it are the worse for doing so. The man who is responsible for the building actually makes bad karma. Some think such things do not matter, but they do. Our surroundings are of very great importance. True, the strong soul can conquer, but why should we not have things which would help us instead of those which hinder us? Everybody who builds a beautiful house deserves well of his fellow-citizens, because he has put up something

the sight of which will benefit everyone who sees it. The touch of pleasure that you get when you see something beautiful is no light thing. I always feel that our gratitude is due to anybody who wears a beautiful colour, because of the effect that colour produces in this terribly grey civilization of ours.

All that is true of beauty physically is even more evident on other planes. The man who makes for himself a radiant and beautiful astral body, full of love and devotion, which he pours out on all around him, deserves the gratitude of his fellows. The audience on the astral plane is generally larger than that on the physical. If we allow ourselves to appear badly in the astral world, a far greater number of people are scandalized by our appearance or annoyed by it, than could possibly be the case on the physical plane. Not only do the inhabitants of the astral world see the beauty of it, but everyone, even those who do not see, feels it. These vibrations act upon them, and the people are helped thereby. The man who yields himself to ugly, selfish, evil thoughts is spreading unpleasantness about him, besides being a horribly disagreeable and unpleasant sight. In the physical plane people hide their loathsome diseases, but the astral leper carries his sores in full view.

**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 any one; refuse to listen when any one 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."**

C.W.L. — It requires a certain amount of courage to say this, but it should be done, in kindness to the gossip, as well as to the person who is being criticized. One may do it gently by using the first person plural: "Perhaps we had better not say any more about it." Then you have not appeared to assume superiority, which is both unoccult and irritating, and probably the man will agree with you, and let the matter drop.

A grumbling and fault-finding attitude towards others is unfortunately sadly common at the present day, and those who adopt it never seem to realise the harm that they are doing. If we study its result scientifically we shall see that the prevalent habit of malicious gossip is nothing short of wicked. It does not matter whether there is or is not any foundation for scandal; in either case it cannot but cause harm. Here we have a number of people fixing their minds upon some supposed evil quality in another, and drawing to it the attention of scores of others to whom such an idea would never otherwise have occurred.

Suppose they accuse their victim of jealousy. Some hundreds of people at once begin to pour upon this unhappy sufferer streams of thought suggesting the idea of jealousy. Is it not obvious that if the poor man has any tendency towards that unpleasant quality, it cannot but be greatly intensified by such a cataract? And if, as is commonly the case, there is no reason whatever for the spiteful rumour, those who so eagerly spread it are

at any rate doing their best to create in the man the very vice over the imagined presence of which they gloat so savagely.

(*The Inner Life*, C. W. Leadbeater, vol. 2, The Mental Body, TPH Adyar)

The phenomena of mental cure show how powerful thought may be even on the physical plane, and since it acts so much more easily on the astral and the mental we may realize how tremendous a power is ours if we will but exercise it. Let us remember always to think of a person as we wish him to be; the image we thus make of him will act powerfully upon him and tend to draw him gradually into harmony with itself. Let us fix our thoughts upon the good qualities of our friends, because in thinking of any quality we tend to strengthen its vibrations and therefore to intensify it. It can never be right to endeavour to dominate the thought and will of another, even though it may be for what seems a good end; but it is always right to hold up before a man a high ideal of himself, and to wish strongly that he may presently be enabled to attain it. In this way our steady train of thought will always act upon those whom we love; and we should remember that at the same time it is acting upon ourselves also, and we can utilize it to train thought-power within ourselves so that it will become ever stronger and more definite. If we know of certain defects or vices in a man's character, let us send to him strong thoughts of the contrary virtues, so that these may by degrees be built into his character.

Never under any circumstances should we dwell upon that which is evil in him, for in that case our thought would tend to intensify that evil.

That is the horrible wickedness of gossip and of scandal, for there we have a number of people fixing their thought upon the evil qualities of another, calling to that evil the attention of others who might otherwise not have observed it; and in this way, if the evil already exists, their folly increases it, and if, as is often the case, it does not exist, they are doing their best to produce it. When we reach a more enlightened state of society people will learn to focus their connected thought upon others for good instead of for evil; if a man suffers from the domination of a vice, they will endeavour to realize strongly the opposite virtue, and then send out waves of that thought toward him; they will think of his good points and try by concentrating attention upon them to strengthen him and help him through them; their criticism will be of that happy kind which grasps at a pearl as eagerly as our modern criticism pounces upon an imaginary flaw.

(*The Inner Life*, C. W. Leadbeater, vol. 2, The Mental Body, TPH Adyar)

The astro-mental images caused by desires affect others as do those generated by thoughts. They, therefore, also link us with other souls, and often by the strongest ties of love and hatred, for at the present stage of human evolution an ordinary man's desires are generally stronger and more sustained than his thoughts. They thus play a great part in determining his human surroundings in future lives, and may bring into those lives persons and influences of whose connection with himself he is totally unconscious.

Suppose a man by sending out a thought of bitter hatred and revenge has helped to form in another the impulse which results in a murder; the creator of that thought is linked by his karma to the committer of the crime, although they have never met on

the physical plane, and the wrong he has done to him, by helping to impel him to a crime, will come back as an injury in the infliction of which the whilom criminal will play his part. Many a “bolt from the blue” that is felt is utterly undeserved is the effect of such a cause, and the soul thereby learns and registers a lesson while the lower consciousness is writhing under a sense of injustice.

*(The Ancient Wisdom, Annie Besant, Karma, TPH Adyar)*

Possessing this tremendous power, we must be careful how we exercise it. We must remember to think of a person as we wish him to be, for the image that we thus make of him will naturally act powerfully upon him, and tend to draw him gradually into harmony with itself. Let us fix our thoughts upon the good qualities of our friends, because in thinking of any quality we tend to strengthen its vibrations, and therefore to intensify it.

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 Hidden Side of Things, C. W. Leadbeater, chapter XIX,  
The Responsibility of Thought)*

### **The Buddha’s Teaching on Gossip**

“And how, householders, are there four kinds of verbal conduct not in accordance with the Dhamma, unrighteous conduct? Here someone speaks falsehood; when summoned to a court, or to a meeting, or to his relatives’ presence, or to his guild, or to the royal family’s presence, and questioned as a witness thus: ‘So, good man, tell what you know,’ not knowing, he says, ‘I know’, or knowing he says, ‘I do not know’; not seeing, he says, ‘I see’, or seeing, he says, ‘I do not see’; in full awareness he speaks falsehood for his own ends, or for another’s ends, or for some trifling worldly end. He speaks maliciously; he repeats elsewhere what he has heard here in order to divide [these people] from those; he repeats to these people what he has heard elsewhere to divide [these people] from those; thus he is one who divides those who are united, a creator of divisions, who enjoys discord, rejoices in discord, delights in discord, a speaker of words that create discord. He speaks harshly; he utters such words as are rough, hard, hurtful to others, offensive to others, bordering on anger, uncondusive to concentration. He is a gossip; he speaks at the wrong time,

speaks what is not fact, speaks what is useless, speaks contrary to the Dhamma and the Discipline; at the wrong time he speaks such words as are worthless, unreasonable, immoderate, and unbeneficial. That is how there are four kinds of verbal conduct not in accordance with the Dhamma, unrighteous conduct.”

Sāleyyaka Sutta, 41.9 in ‘The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya’, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2009, pp. 380-381.

## **Appendix: Theosophy and Defamation** (previously published in CWL World)

‘The action of damaging the good reputation of someone; slander or libel.’  
Oxford English Dictionary

‘A person has a single cause of action for defamation in relation to the publication of defamatory matter about the person even if more than one defamatory imputation about the person is carried by the matter.’

(Defamation Act 2005 No 77, New South Wales Legislation)

‘In August 1890 H.P. Blavatsky decided to bring a suit for libel against Elliott Coues and the New York *Sun*, a leading American newspaper, for defamatory statements published about herself.’

*(Witness for the Prosecution: Annie Besant’s Testimony on Behalf of H. P. Blavatsky in the N.Y. Sun/Coues Law Case, with an Introduction by Michael Gomes, Theosophical History, Fullerton, California, 1993.)*

Madame Blavatsky also wanted to sue her detractors in Madras in connection with Richard Hodgson’s investigation for the Society for Psychic Research. She had in mind particularly the French couple M. and Mme. Coulomb, whom she had earlier saved from starvation and poverty, but also the Christian Missionaries in Madras. However, the administration of the TS at Adyar did not agree to this as, in their view, it would have dragged the name of the Mahatmas into the Court proceedings. HPB left Adyar in March 1885, never to return.

C. W. Leadbeater was the target of many defamatory statements in different countries, both in the period of 1906 to 1908, particularly in the United States and in England, but also in Australia from 1921 to 1923. He was the target of two professional police investigations by the New South Wales Police Department. During the second one a number of people presented statements to the police.

One particular publication, the *O. E. Literary Critic*, published by H. N. Stokes in the United States, had so much defamatory content in its different issues that, for those viscerally against Leadbeater it ‘normalized’ defamation and the publication became a champion among theosophical historians.

Fritz Kunz, an associate of Leadbeater, wrote to him in 1913 regarding initiating a law suit against Mrs Katherine Tingley, head of ‘Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society’, who had been waging a highly defamatory campaign against both Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater around the world. Although that the latter had agreed in principle no action was taken.



Although the student of Theosophy is encouraged to seek that stability of mind that ultimately becomes imperturbable, it is nonetheless very legitimate to seek redress for personal attacks through the anti-defamation laws. The laws provide a proper education for those who make their business to tarnish another person's reputation. As Madame Blavatsky would have done in 1885 if she had been given an opportunity.