

[148] Thou canst create this day thy chances for thy morrow. In the Great Journey, causes sown each hour bear each its harvest of effects, for rigid justice rules the world. With mighty sweep of never-erring action, it brings to mortals lives of weal or woe, the Karmic progeny of all our former thoughts and deeds.

[149] Take then as much as merit hath in store for thee, O thou of patient heart. Be of good cheer and rest content with fate. Such is thy Karma, the Karma of the cycle of thy births, the destiny of those who, in their pain and sorrow, are born along with thee, rejoice and weep from life to life, chained to thy previous actions.

B. COMMENT.

With verse 142, Blavatsky begins her interpretation of the “three vestures.” To put on the Dharmakaya vesture is to be united with the absolute, the ultimate reality, the Buddha nature. To be so united is to lose all contact with the limitations of the world, and therefore to be unable to participate in the enlightenment of others. Uniting with the absolute is, of course, the ultimate goal of all beings, but an ultimate goal is not the same thing as a proximate goal, and The Voice of the Silence argues for the desirability of a different proximate goal, one devoted to teaching and helping others to find the Way.

The path of devoting oneself to help others, even at the expense of one’s own immediate freedom from the restrictions and frustrations of life, is the bodhisattva ideal advocated by Northern Buddhism. The path of seeking personal enlightenment, following the teachings of the historical Buddha to that enlightenment and thus to the freedom of nirvana, is the arhat ideal associated with Southern Buddhism.

The arhat (literally “deserving respect” or “honorable”) is thought of as entering that estate by an initiation, for which an initiation robe woven from hemp is worn. “Shangna” or “shana” is literally “hemp” or a cloth made from it; it symbolizes the acquiring of wisdom and the destroying of the separate personality, as HPB’s gloss makes clear: Gloss 22. The Shangna robe, from Shangnavasu of Rajagriha, the third great Arhat or Patriarch, as the orientalist call the hierarchy of the 33 Arhats who spread Buddhism. “Shangna robe” means, metaphorically, the acquirement of wisdom with which the Nirvana of destruction (of personality) is entered. Literally, the initiation