

Karma and Calder

Distributive Karma and Alexander Calder

In *The Key to Theosophy*, H. P. Blavatsky talks about something she calls “distributive karma.” Most of us have a fairly simple and straightforward view of Karma — what we might call the Santa Claus view. We think of karma as something like St. Nick, a force or power that knows whether we have been naughty or nice, and punishes or rewards us accordingly. But karma is a good deal more complex than that. Part of its complexity lies in the way we influence one another karmic ally.

Because all living beings are interconnected, we all influence one another by our actions, that is, by our karma. That term is from a Sanskrit word, *karman*, meaning “action, effect.” There are, however, no karmic hermits. We do not live in isolation from one another, but rather in a vast network of mutual effects. Whatever one person does affects all other beings, and the way we are linked together through our actions and their results is what HPB called “distributive karma.” It can be illustrated by an analogy.

The artist Alexander Calder (an American sculptor, 1898-1976) created sculptures of a kind called “mobiles.” They consist of metal plates of various shapes suspended by chains from rods that are connected with one another. The construction is very carefully balanced, so if any part of the structure is pushed or even moved by a breeze, the resulting motion is transmitted to the whole construction. Its parts swing and rotate, moving up and down until the energy of the initial push is exhausted and the mobile returns to a balanced position of equilibrium. That position will, however, be different from the one the parts had before the motion began.

The mobile is a representation of distributive karma. You and I are the plates linked together by karmic ties, which are like the chains and rods of the mobile. When one of us is moved by a karmic impulse, the effect of that motion is transmitted to the rest of us until all of us are swinging and rotating, moving up and down, from the energy of that original cause. When at last the