

being kind to others will result in kindness coming to you. This is the most basic and practical moral principle, one that is the subject of the opening chapter of the Dhammapada: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon. ... If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.”

Immediately after that observation about karma as the fruit of action, the *Voice* considers the nature of action and inaction — a false dichotomy because “inaction,” as a decision not to act, is in fact a kind of action. The *Voice* tells us that negative virtues have little to recommend them. If we have the opportunity to do good, the failure to respond to that opportunity has bad consequences. The second sentence in verse 135, “Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin,” resumes the theme of verse 126 and echoes the plight of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. Being confused about what he should do, Arjuna decided he would do nothing. But Krishna pointed out to him that the very decision not to act was an action, and thus he had committed himself by seeking to avoid commitment.

Verse 136 continues the examination of this subject by looking on the positive side. If we do not become free by avoiding action, but only more entangled, how do we become free? Verse 136 says that freedom depends on Self-knowledge, that is, on knowing who we really are. When we are ignorant of our true nature, we are bound by all the limitations of the personality and its conditioning. Only when we know the real Self within are we free. And how do we achieve that knowledge? Not, as we might suppose, by study or meditation (good as those are), but rather by a third thing: service or, as the *Voice* calls it, “loving deeds,” that is, right action — action prompted by love.

When we act out of love, we discover who we are. When we know who we are, we are free of the bonds that tie us to this world. What the world regards as success or failure is irrelevant to that freedom, which is the only thing that really matters. Verse 137 goes on to compare our real Self to a star, of which our personal identity is only a ray of light. In the Theosophical tradition, it is said that when a disciple becomes an adept, the Star of Initiation blazes forth. That is a symbol of the discovery of who we really are — the blazing star that shines through our personality, or as HPB puts it in a gloss: