Reflections on Karma
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# Publisher's Desk: Reflections on Karma

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Modern Western scholasticism puts forth a pervasive attitude about Hinduism that should be corrected. In an attempt to be scientific, it has become clinical. All too often scholars write as if their subject is dead and lifeless, rather than a living, sacred tradition which is ultimately impossible to categorize and label. They relegate everything to obscurity by putting it in the archeological digs of the past. You have seen their writings, which sound something like this: "Look at India's holy men. They're a phenomenon of aboriginal tribes, no doubt-a wonder that they still persist in our modern age." The underlying attitude is that these sadhus are of the past, the subject of museums and on their way out-and perhaps that is the secret wish of many Westerners. It is dangerous to speak in generalities, but I would say there is a definite tendency for scholars to build themselves up by putting others down-namely those they are studying. But Hinduism is as alive today as it was when the Rig Veda was developing. It shall never go away. The past of Hinduism is the present of today. One of today's prevailing concepts is that the West is getting better and better. That is a basic understanding, a given assumption. Yet, it puzzles people that in fact things are not getting better at all. All around us we see more poverty, more violence, more confusion, more problems of all kinds than ever before. Go back 5,000 years and you find fewer problems. Life

was simpler then. In modern Western culture, we know everything, and our ancestors knew so little. Such culture demeans and diminishes its ancestors. Eastern, or Asian, culture says, "Look at our forefathers. They knew so much, and we know nothing." Asian societies elevate the past, not the future. The West brings the past down and elevates the future and the present. When science came in strong and education shifted to science and away from religion, religious leaders took a back seat to scientists. Faith-which is an intangible, spiritual quality of man-lessened, and the animal, instinctive nature grew strong. Now with the great Parliament of Religions in Chicago, a window is open for religious leaders of all faiths to come forward and bring peace out of chaos, transmute contemptuousness into righteousness and transform hatred into love. Scientists have openly admitted they have erred in many respects and changed their opinions too often to be always believable. Religion still rests on the scriptures of the wise, whose revelations made an agreeable society, showing that all the karmas, or experiential patterns, of all individuals could be worked out without resorting to violence. Western scholasticism has too often interpreted the Vedas, the primary scriptural authority of Hindus, in a way that has belittled these ancient scriptures. Western academics have subtlely depreciated the Vedic concepts. Karma, for example, scholars say, is historically an evolving concept in Hindu thought-starting from superstition, progressing into fatalism then later maturing into real understanding. I say this is not so. Karma was understood in its fullest from the very beginning, by the first rishis and sages. Karma is the law ensuring that every mental, emotional and physical act, no matter how insignificant, projected into the psychic mind substance will eventually return to the individual with equal impact. Individuals or groups who act soulfully or maliciously toward you are the vehicle of your own karmic creation. Imagine how

intricately interconnected all the cycles of karma are for our planet's life forms. Many people believe in the principle of karma but don't apply its laws to their daily life. There is a tendency to cry out during times of personal crisis, "Why has God done this to me?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" While God is the creator and sustainer of the cosmic law of karma, He does not dispense individual karma, punishing and rewarding. We create our own experiences. It is really an exercising of our soul's powers of creation. Karma is our best teacher. We spiritually learn and grow as our actions return to us to be experienced and resolved. All karma is neutral and useful. In the highest sense, there is no good or bad karma. There is self-created experience that presents opportunities for spiritual advancement. If we can't draw lessons from our karma, if we resist and or resent it, lashing out with mental, emotional or physical force, we merely postpone lessons to be faced in the future. Karma is often misunderstood as fate, an unchangeable destiny decreed long ago by agencies or forces external to us, such as the planets, stars or Gods. Karma is neither fate nor predetermination. Each soul has absolute free will. Each is responsible for all thoughts, words and deeds.
Sri Chinmoy (pictured above) and 30 of his devotees came to visit us this month at our ashram on Kauai. It was a great pleasure to meet and talk with him. Enjoy our staff's interview with him, which begins on page one. We hope he returns again soon.