

Karma

The word “karma” has come into our language and we find it used everywhere. People talk about “good karma” and “bad karma”. Most of us relate it to the Biblical injunction “as ye sow, so shall ye reap”. Many of us believe that thoughts or feelings affect the action of karma. A large number of people believe that karma is “inevitable”, while an equally large number believe that it can be changed through the action of prayer or through surrendering our lives and actions to an intermediary who takes on our sins for us and purifies us. Quite a few believe that regardless of our actions in life, an act of “confession and repentance” or a “death-bed redemption” can purge the impacts of karma. Many believe that acts of kindness and good will help us create “good karma” and we look on it to some degree as a type of “karmic bank account” in which our good actions store up good karma, and our bad actions reduce it or create a balance of “bad karma” to be worked out.

For a word that has so many and varied shades of significance and meaning, we spend very little time actually trying to understand what karma is in its essence, how it really “functions” and what, if anything we can do to modify or change it. Is karma a form of fatality? Are we doomed to live out and receive the results of past karma? Is karma something that can be transmitted from parent to child as a form of inheritance? Is it something that can affect communities or societies with some form of “collective karma”? Do past actions in a society inevitably visit their karmic consequences on future generations? Connected to the concept of karma is the question of rebirth. Do we live just one life on earth or is there some process of rebirth? If there is a process of rebirth, what is it that is actually reborn—an individuality that I identify with myself in this life, or something other? If there is rebirth, do we carry the karma of one life with us into another life? Or does our karma in this lifetime simply lead us to an ending in a heaven elsewhere if our deeds are good, or a hell if otherwise.....

The great philosophers, religious leaders, seers, sages, rishis and thinkers throughout history have reflected on these questions. Those who investigate things such as after-death experience and past-life regression experiences, astrological determination, as well as questions of salvation and resurrection all eventually take up the question of karma. The balancing of our lives in the scales of justice before the throne of God is one such review of karma—there have been numerous formulations of this concept from the ancient Egyptian, to the Greek, the Hindu and Buddhist and the Christian view among others. The importance of this question lies in the essential nature of karma and whether we can actually “do anything about it”. If our destiny is fixed based on past karma, then we become fatalistic and simply hear the footsteps of our doom. The seers and sages, while recognizing the validity of the “law of karma”, the chain of “cause and effect”, also provide us various methods to modify, ameliorate and change karma. The effect of past karma influences the present moment; but we may, through our present energy, focus and action, modify the line of energy that moves into the future.

Karma is also not simply individual. We see everywhere consequences that visit themselves on families, societies and entire cultures. Many of the complex situations in the world, such as the Palestinian/Israeli conflict are bound up in knots of karmic chains that frame the situation and the potential lines of resolution. The question of climate change impacted by human activity is another question of karma and what, if anything, can be done to modify or ameliorate it.

In order to move beyond the formulaic understanding of the word “karma”, it is eventually necessary to reflect on the above questions (and potentially many more) and observe, correlate and draw conclusions so that we may, at some point, understand how the law of karma actually functions, and

begin to develop lines of action that can influence its impact in our lives, for our descendants and heirs, and in our societies.

At the same time, we can look at the various modalities that have been recommended and begin to understand how they actually work with respect to karma, what their actual impact is or can be, and how to employ them for modifying karma. Thought, wish, prayer, devotion, action—all of these are said to impact karma. We see the work of Emoto on how thought can change the water ice crystal formations, and the concepts of quantum physics that imply that the present can change the past. The question then arises for us, what we can actually do, how to implement and have a real consequential effect, whichever of these modalities we choose to take up and put into action in our lives.

None of our actions occur in a vacuum. As with the laws of physics in material nature, there is the energy, the intensity and amplitude of the energy, the persistence of the energy, and the substrate upon which the energy works that have to be accounted for. In the case of modifying karma, we then have to understand the energy we are employing with the very same questions of amplitude, intensity, persistence and substrate. Are we working on the physical level, or the vital, emotional, mental, psychic or spiritual levels? Are we concentrating the energy in a proper form and with sufficient intensity to actually have an impact? Can we identify a concrete change in the direction and action of our thoughts, emotions and actions? Can we see an impact in the way this change works itself out in the world?

There are no simple answers, but by following up the various questions and suggested solutions, we begin to gain an appreciation for how the law of karma actually impacts our lives, how it shapes our present, how it provides us opportunities for the future and how we may finally begin to effect changes that can have a real and meaningful impact on our souls, our lives and the world around us.

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