

Aphorisms on Karma

*The manas (mind) is the knot of the heart, when that is untied from any object, in other words when the mind loses its interest in any object, there will no longer be a link between the Karma connected with that object and the individual.*

*Path,*

December, 1886

The teaching of Karma is ancient. It is to be found in each of the world's great spiritual traditions and indigenous cultures. Despite this, it has come to be misunderstood. Many think of Karma as "the law of cause and effect." This can be quite misleading. Karma also has a moral dimension leading to normative terms of "good" and "bad."

All action arises within the mind. Action upon any plane results from desire. Thus, the actions of Karma reflect the mental activities of mankind. That which manifests is necessary in the sense of being the effect of causes. The Law of Karma rules on every plane of being from the minute to the cosmic, from the lowest planes to the highest, including even the gods.

Karma is an unerring, undeviating tendency to restore equilibrium and to balance cause and effect. The universe is law-governed. This admits to no exceptions. Nothing is random, accidental, or miraculous. There are no events without causes. Causes themselves are the effects of prior causes. Incarnating in human form is to become enmeshed in a complex chain of causes and effects. We are bound by these

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chains. The quest for freedom from them constitutes the spiritual path. This freedom comes only through careful consideration of Karma in its various aspects.

“There is no Karma unless there is a being to make it or feel its effects.” The actions of Karma presuppose beings, although not in a physical sense. Its operations are contingent upon a consciousness imagining it to be an individual, separate unit, i.e., a being. It is the mind which imagines such. Karma results from this fundamental ignorance. Sages and “perfect Seers” experience no karmic effects, create no individual Karma. They do not imagine themselves to be beings at all: They are Karma-less.

Karma is the adjustment of effects to causes, individual or collective, producing—within the beings involved—either pleasure or pain. Within the three planes of karmic operation—physical, mental and emotional—any apparent stoppage of restoration to equilibrium is due to the necessary adjustment of effects to causes: In some other place or focus visible only to Sages. There is, thus, no stoppage, only “hidden from view.”

While Karma manifests in time, it is not subject to it. Only those aware of “the ultimate divisions of time” can know, understand Karma. For others Karma remains essentially unknown, unknowable. Its actions, however, can be calculated from cause to effect. Such calculations are possible because

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the effect is wrapped within the cause, is not succedent to it. This teaching appears to call into question the existence of time itself. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Karma is not subject to time. The Karma of the earth and its inhabitants originates in an unknowable period and it is thus pointless to probe into its beginnings.

Karmic causes previously set in motion must be allowed to run their course. Krishna teaches, “It is better to do one’s own duty poorly than to do another’s duty well. The duty of another is full of danger.” This, however, permits no one from refusing to help one’s fellows, other sentient beings. Karmic effects can be counter-acted or lessened through one’s own thoughts or those of another. The resulting effects are, thus, a function of the interplay of a particular combination of forces.

There are three major aspects of Karma, operative on all three planes. Unexpended Karma: Accumulated Karma over lifetimes, not presently having a suitable vehicle for its expression. Currently manifesting Karma: The Karma, in the case of individuals, governing the physical, mental and moral circumstances of this incarnation. Accumulated Karma: Causes now being made, the effects of which will accrue in the future.

Unexpended Karma loses neither its intensity of force nor its nature during the period in which it cannot manifest. These are not diminished in any manner by the passage of time,

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anymore than the force and intensity of sunlight are diminished during the night. A student may inquire, “What is my unexpended Karma?” The teacher replies, “Only a Sage can know the Karma of another.” Rather than needlessly pondering unexpended Karma, the student can learn to appropriately transmute effects while simultaneously understanding how to make causes which will benefit the whole. To think of making causes relevant to one’s own future is itself a cause which binds. Only learning to make causes on behalf of all can lead to the reality transcending causes and effects.

While a certain class or classes of Karma may be primarily operative in an incarnation, it is possible to modify them so as to allow for manifestation of a higher, different class of Karma. This is affected either “through intensity of thought and the power of a vow” or through alterations due to the exhaustion of old causes. The former embodies the heart of the spiritual path.

We consist of both a higher spiritual nature and a lower astral-physical nature. We become attached only to the objects of our thoughts. If, as in most cases, the predominant line of thought concerns the world as presented through the five senses, the energies necessary to maintain this focus must be drawn from the higher nature. If this continues, the higher nature becomes depleted, cut off from the incarnated self. On

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the other hand, when the mind is focused upon spiritual ideas, the energies are drawn upward leading to an increase in spirituality. In both cases, we are speaking of causes currently being set into motion, creating karmic effects. In the former, the karmic effects will, necessarily, flow towards increasing ignorance and darkness. Focusing the mind—with increasing continuity—upon noble ideas will result in increasing light, greater wisdom.

Raghavan Iyer teaches, “In most cases, one’s current incarnation manifests Karma from three previous lives.” Judge indicates the same, except in cases “when measures of repression, elimination, or counter-action are not adopted.” To become willing to consciously take such measures is to commence the spiritual path. In a law-governed universe, there can be no other way. No teacher, god, savior, ritual or ceremony can transmute one’s Karma on any plane. To understand this is to assume responsibility for one’s thoughts, feelings, words and deeds. Any perception of an external being or force responsible for one’s happiness or unhappiness will, when properly understood, be recognized as reaping the effects of one’s previous causes. In this sense externalities are vehicles through which our Karma manifests.

The aspirant not only must recognize, accept and transmute individual Karma, but also, to an extent known only to Sages, do the same with reference to family, national

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and global Karma. Why is this? Because, in reality, each of us is an integral aspect of a vast inter-dependant whole.

The occurrence of natural catechisms—earthquakes, floods, fires, hurricanes—while being scientifically explained with precision, result from disharmonies within collective human thought. All phenomena result from the activities of minds.

*To the worldly man Karma is a stern Nemesis; to the spiritual man Karma unfolds itself in harmony with his highest aspirations.*

*Good Karma is that which is pleasing to the Ishwara (God) within.*

Barrett Culmback

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