

The Laws of Karma

Spiritual Wisdom

Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

One notable concept from ancient eastern philosophies is the law of *karma*. No English translation does justice to this Sanskrit word, although the statements, “Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (from Galatians 6:7), the common saying, “What goes around, comes around,” Newton’s third law of motion, “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction,” and the childhood retort, “I’m rubber, you’re glue. Whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks to you,” give some sense of karmic law.

Here’s another simple definition of karma: Karma is the currency of your life. With the currency of karmic actions, you purchase and create all your life experiences — good, bad, pleasant, and unpleasant. Karma is the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words, and deeds.

According to the theory of karma, you have a cupboard filled with karmas: personal karmas, cultural karmas, and karmas that involve the entire human race. The life you experience is a mesh of all your karmas interacting with one another like a big, unique, karmic thumbprint.

Consider

If you want to see what your karma looks like, just open your eyes right now and look around. Every thought you have, every word you say, and every action you perform ripples out into the world around you. These ripples then reflect back to you, although not always in the most obvious ways, and not always right away. For example, someone who performs bad actions may still become materially successful, appearing outwardly to have good karma, but they may have other unseen challenges to go through now or in the future.

If you're in a body, you have karma

Every human being is constantly performing actions. You can't not act. Even in breathing the air, untold worlds of smaller-than-small creatures and microorganisms are destroyed. Every time I water the little garden area in front of my house, it is obvious from all the ant activity that I've created a full-blown disaster for some of these little creatures. I can imagine the ant headlines: "Flooding in the southwest, hundreds killed, thousands injured!"

If even 1 percent of all the rules, commandments, and injunctions listed in the religious texts of every culture are accurate and true, we all have some serious karmic debts on our hands. For example, one rule from ancient yoga philosophy is to refrain from harming any living creature. Some religious sects, such as the Jain religion from India, even go so far as to cover their mouths with cloth to avoid breathing in small insects and to sweep the ground before each step so that their steps won't harm any unseen creatures. What if, by chance, they're right? Can you imagine how many karmas you have created in your life just from breathing and walking?