

Cleaning up your karmas

Spiritual Wisdom

Each man takes care that his neighbor shall not cheat him. But a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well — he has changed his market-cart into a chariot of the sun.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

One way to act without creating karma is to act without any attachment to the good or bad fruits of your actions. Withdraw the importance you place on things of the ephemeral, physical world, and begin to deposit your energy toward the eternal, spiritual realm.

Another way to clean up your karmas is through intense devotion and complete surrender to God's will. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna, a representational form of the universal Lord, says, "Whatever you do, make it an offering to me — the food you eat, the sacrifices you make, the help you give, and even your suffering. In this way, you will be freed from the bondage of karma, and from its results, both pleasant and painful. Then, firm in renunciation and yoga, with your heart free, you will come to me."

According to the theory of karma, you also have to balance your checkbook of action and reaction before you get to graduate from this cycle of *samsara*, this wheel of birth and death, rebirth and redeath, through which you are said to come and go over and over again — until one day your soul becomes free from the noose and bondage of your karmas and rises into greater realms.

Analogies of what clearing karmas is like

Here are some metaphors to help you understand how to become free from the burdensome weight of karmas:

- **Burning karmas is like burning fat.** When you start to burn karma, it's like when you stop eating too many calories so that your energy system has a chance to burn some of your body's old stored fat. When your karma furnace isn't being constantly stuffed with countless actions, and more importantly, constant interpretations of actions (for example, I did this great thing, I shouldn't have said that, and so on), then the karmic furnace has a chance to begin to burn the stored karmas that hold you down just as surely as excess fat does.
- **Cleansing karmas is like washing dishes.** You can wash each dish right after using it, or you can let them pile up a bit and then have an occasional big "dish cleansing" with a full tub of hot suds. However, if you don't know how to clean your dishes (karmas) or don't even know that they're dirty or that they *can* be cleaned, then the dishes may pile up in your sink, and eventually all over your entire kitchen.

- **Keeping your karmas clean is like keeping your house clean.** Your house may start out clean, but then it gets messy and you have to clean it again. After guests come for a visit, you may have some extra cleaning to do, just as when certain people come into your karmic life. It is also necessary to continually clean here and there, because dust inevitably builds up.

Don't Forget

This analogy isn't just about dishes or house cleaning, but about the karmic residues that accumulate in everyone's life, creating all kinds of unwanted situations.

You can clean your karmas with practices such as contemplation, higher knowledge, meditation, devotion, selfless service, and by letting go of limited desires.

Consider

Just as when you clean your house, cleanliness inspires cleanliness. You can keep your karmic house clean with little cleanings or a massive clean up — or you can live with it being not-so-clean.

Two good signs

Here are two signs that together may indicate that you're acting without creating karma:

1. Your actions bear greater fruit (results).
2. You don't care so much about the fruits anymore.

Ramana Maharshi, a great sage from India, has said, "If the fruits of action do not affect the person, he is free from action."

Picture your accumulated karmas as being like a spider web, with you in the center. The people and things in your life all have threads going to and from them like the web of a spider. Part of your job is to cut the harmful threads while strengthening your connection with good, powerful threads and the divine source energy behind the whole web.

Spirituality in Action

Here is an inner process that can help clear your web of karmas from within, without your having to take any actions outwardly:

1. Think of a person who creates obstacles in your life. It can be someone you are currently involved with or someone from your past. It can be someone you're not speaking to or someone you love. Or both! Bring up all the feelings you have toward this person and evoke memories of things they may have said or done that hurt or upset you.
2. Cut the subtle, unhealthy, karmic threads going from you to that person, using your mind and intention. Depending on your preference and circumstances, you can even shout, inside or outwardly, "Cut the karmas!" Take back your energy like tendrils coming back into yourself. "I take back my energy! I cut these karmas!"

Improving your karmas through mindfulness

Mindfulness means being completely focused on the present moment. Whatever you're doing, you do it while being fully present right here and right now. If you're planning what to do tomorrow or next year, that's okay, too. Just make your plans consciously and in the present moment.

Consider

Being focused on the present moment is a kind of meditative state. The ripples and thoughts of your mind calm down and create an opening for you to see more clearly into the waters of spirit. With this focus and openness, you open the door to receiving and experiencing "new and improved" karmas.

Two more ways to clear karmas

Here are two more paths you can take to clean up old, unwanted karmas:

- You can clean up old bad actions by balancing them with new good ones. If you've caused some harmful actions to someone, you can make efforts to balance that harmful action out by doing something helpful to that person or to another person. In fact, looking for ways to be helpful in general is a great idea because your kind actions may balance out negative karmas you didn't even know existed!
- You can clear old bad actions with a deep process captured by the Catholic sacrament of confession — by humbling yourself at the feet of the Lord and asking for forgiveness, redemption, and grace. A more eastern approach to this method would be to use spiritual practices to raise your awareness into a higher consciousness view of universal creation, from which you can look upon yourself and your actions with compassion and forgiveness (while still committing to behave better in the future.)

Here's a formula for bringing more positive karmas to all your actions:

1. **Before you do something, stop and feel the energies of the moment.** Become focused on the present moment as you approach the threshold of beginning an action.
2. **Invoke positive energies in yourself and the action.** You can add your own touches to this practice, such as speaking a devotional phrase or using a ritual to solidify your positive intention.
3. **Become so completely focused in the present moment that your limited sense of individuality disappears.** According to spiritual vision, the experience of yourself as a limited being has its roots in the past and future. In the present moment, there can be no roots, because the present moment is pure freedom, pure clarity, pure light, and pure spirit. Being completely present allows your actions to flow from a greater place than your usual levels of self-effort (not that there's anything wrong with a good dose of self-effort!)
4. **When you've completed the action, pause again and feel good about the action you've done.** Faith and gratitude can bless your action even after you've completed the action, because grace and spirit exist beyond time.

Examples of karma in action

Here are some examples Buddhist scriptures use to explain the way actions can manifest as karmic circumstances in your current or future lives:

To be free from want in food is the result of your providing food to the poor in your previous life.

To be miserly and unwilling to help the needy gives rise to future starvation and clothlessness.

To have ample housing is a reward for donating food to monasteries in your past life.

To abstain from eating meat and to pray constantly to Buddha will assure that you'll be born a very intelligent child in your next incarnation.

To have good parents is a reward for your respecting and helping those who were lonely and desolate in your past life.

Being short-lived is the result of your committing too many killings in your previous life.

To distort truths habitually will cause you to suffer blindness in your next life.

To be pretty and handsome is the reward for your respecting and offering flowers to Buddha's altar in the past.

To have committed evil with your hands in your past life is the cause for you having disabled hands now.

To be struck by lightning or burned by fire will be the punishment for dishonest trade dealings.

To build temples and public shelters will give you future prosperity and happiness.

Consider

One way to stay centered in divine grace and positive actions is to offer every action to the divine. When you understand that the divine exists in everything, large and small, you respect every moment as equally significant and precious. Then, cleaning your house, watering your garden, washing your clothes, filling your car's tank, and feeding your children or pets can become just as spiritually potent a ritual as bowing before an altar, lighting a candle flame, or closing your eyes and praying.