

LAW OF KARMA

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*You reap what you sow
You get what you grow.
Your karma is your god
That's where ye need to bow.
That cosmic intellect in you,
Keeps the records, you must know.*

Natural Laws never fail. They apply to everything, everywhere, always. When they react on action, we call it a reaction. Laws are made with a purpose; and they are both natural and man-made; and Karma is a natural law-made by nature, governed and controlled by nature. It's as sure and definite as Newton's third law of action. Man-made laws often fail, and they are subject to many things-such as changes, places and people. Natural laws are certain and without any exception. For example, the law of gravity, the law of birth and death, and the law of karma.

That's exactly the crux of my verse mentioned above. Law of karma is popularly known as the theory of karma too. It has been discussed and defined in almost every major religion of the world. And it still needs to be discussed and reviewed here because it has been attributed to many misconceptions such as morality, immorality *paap* and *punya*, good and bad.

To understand the cycle of Karma, we must first understand what is Karma. It is our decisions made in different situations with different expectations. The Karma happens on two levels-physical and mental.

Sometimes, the actions happen on physical level, but the mind is unaware of the action. We call it an accident, where no intention was involved, hence no mind was involved. Such actions are not countable in the memory region of the mind.

When mind makes body do certain actions, the karma wheel turns active and the subconscious begins to keep records. Dr. Brian Wess, the renowned psychiatrist, believes that "Karma is not a punishment; it's simply a means for learning and growth." (Miracles Happen)

What he means is that the record of the karma is kept in the region of our subconscious, then it turns into subconscious memory, and then into destiny that controls our future. The control is absolute and independent of one's selfish mottoes. It travels with one across one's lives.

Therefore, there are many crosses of karmas on one's shoulders that are carried across the lives; and on each cross one is crucified from time to time undoing the cycle of karma.

The concept of Karma is Bharat's unique contribution to the philosophy of the world. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the major religions of the world which originated in Bharat, all acknowledge the universality of the law of karma in their own individual ways. According to Jainism, karma is not just a metaphysical law, but a real substance which flows into people and attaches itself to them like an impurity as they engage in various actions. People are born again and again until they rid themselves of the karmic substance.

According to Buddhism, Karma is an eternal law, which is responsible for the births and deaths and the suffering of beings in the causative world or *samsara*. While no one can really be free from the law of karma, people can minimize its negative impact by leading a righteous life, following the Eightfold Path. According to the three religions, the law of karma is applicable not only to humans but all beings, including plants, animals and microorganisms.

The early Vedic people were not familiar with the concept of karma. However, they had an ethical sense and awareness of *dharma* (divine justice) and righteous actions. They believed that by pleasing the divinities and performing ritual acts in a prescribed manner, men could enter the higher worlds, by the path of the moon or that of the sun according to their deeds. It is difficult to say whether they believed in the rebirth or reincarnation of souls. Probably they did not.

The concept of karma entered Hinduism through ancient non-Vedic sects such as Shaivism and Bhagavatism and the old Samkhya school. Shaivism recognized karma as one of the three impurities responsible for the bondage of individual souls. It emphasized that only by the grace of Lord Shiva or a guru who had realized Him,

individual souls could free themselves from the impurities and attain liberation. For a considerable period of time, ancient religious sects of Bharat debated on the question of whether it was fate or free will which shaped the lives of people upon earth. Those who believed in fatalism, such as the followers of Ajivikas, argued that everything in the world was predetermined and that there was nothing an individual could do other than accepting his lot passively and following the order of things (niyati) as they were. Those who believed in karma argued that man was endowed with free will and that he could change the course of his life, if he wanted, through his actions. They believed that desire ridden and egoistic thoughts and actions were responsible for the suffering of individual souls and their corporeal existence. According to them fate was a product of one's own actions and what might look like the intervention of chance in case of some individuals was actually a result of their previous actions done either in their present lives or in their previous ones.

It was the latter opinion that gained ground through the popularity of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Even Sikhism, which is the most recent of all Bharatiya religions, accepts karma as an inseparable reality of the earthly life. Today if there is one concept that is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of Sanatan followers, and for that matter a vast number of Bharatiyas, and influences their thinking and actions so deeply, it is undoubtedly the concept or the Law of Karma. They may not think of it constantly while they perform their daily chores, but it is there, deep in their subconscious minds, like a self-regulating mechanism, influencing their lives and actions. Hindus believe in the inviolable law of karma and its binding nature. Whether they are literate or illiterate, they honour it and respect it. It makes them feel responsible for their lives and accept their lot rather poignantly.

"Kar" means hands or the organs of action and "ma" means producing or creating. So literally speaking, karma is that which is created or produced by one's physical organs.

However, karma does not mean only physical actions. Mental actions also constitute karma. Hindus believe that thought has the power to create things and impact others. Harmful thoughts directed at others have the ability to hurt not only others but also the person who has unleashed them. Since ancient Hindus used mantras for everything and the mantras had great power and potency to make or break things, the practice of yoga became necessary to stabilize the minds and the thoughts of those who had the knowledge of the mantras and the ability to use them effectively. Ancient rishis had the power to materialize things through their thought power. Their blessings were as powerful as their curses. When they cursed others, they lost a good part of their spiritual powers too and had to spend a great deal of time to regain them by performing severe austerities and penances (tapas).

The karma incurred by a person through his actions determines the course of his life upon earth and his progression into the higher worlds. Since karma is a correcting and regulating mechanism, our actions have the potential to mitigate our suffering or intensify it. Karma is meant to teach us lessons. If we learn quickly, we will make progress towards perfection. If not, we will be presented with much harder options until we realize our mistakes and correct them. Good deeds result in inner peace and happiness while bad deeds result in negative consequences for ourselves and our dependent souls.

Is Inaction Also a Karma? Since both action and inaction have consequences, the law of Karma is equally reticent about what we do or do not do in our lives intentionally. We all are aware of the importance of inaction or non-performance of certain actions in our lives. What we intentionally do in this life is as important for our future as what we do not intentionally do. Both produced positive and negative consequences according to the choices we make. If we shun evil actions, we earn good karma. However, if we shun good actions also or if we do not respond righteously or adequately to evil in our lives and environment for some personal or selfish reasons, we may suffer from the consequences of our passive complicity and cowardice. We have to be very careful about our intentions and sincerity behind our actions and inaction. The Bhagavadgita touches upon this subject in the following verses (Ch. 4:17 & 18).

*"Certainly one should have a clear knowledge of what is action,
what is inaction and what is wrong action,
for mysterious are the ways of action.*

*"He who sees action in inaction and inaction in action,
is wise among all men. He is the accomplished yogi
who has succeeded in performing actions.*

References to the concept of karma is found copiously in the scriptures of Hinduism. Almost all of them identify desires as the root cause of our suffering and caution us against actions that are motivated by desires. The

scriptures leave no doubt that every living being, including gods and celestial beings are bound by the law of karma.

In the Vedas, Karma primarily means any sacrificial action. Hence, the knowledge of the Samhitas and Brahmanas, which deals with the sacrificial rituals is known as Karma Kanda. According to the Vedas, sacrificial rituals are ordained for the householders as their obligatory duties, and by performing, they should uphold Dharma and serve the Creator. Sacrifices should be performed strictly according to the prescribed procedures since those who do not follow them will incur sinful karma and suffer consequences. Accordingly, they recognize three types of karma: Sakarma (good), akarma (inaction), and vikarma (bad). Sakarma means sacrificial actions or obligatory duties that are ordained by the Vedas and performed strictly as prescribed by them. Akarma means not performing or neglecting them. Vikarma means performing actions that are prohibited or not prescribed or performed against the established procedures and injunctions. The Vedas also divide the sacrificial duties into daily (nitya) and occasional (naimittya karmas). The daily sacrifices are meant to nourish gods, ancestors, seers, sages, birds, animals, and those who seek alms or depend upon others. Occasional sacrifices, such as fire sacrifices, horse sacrifices, etc., are meant to be performed on specific occasions. The Bhagavad-Gita cautions people against practicing obligatory duties or sacrificial rituals to fulfill desires since it leads to bondage and prescribes karma-sanyasa in which one has to renounce desires and attachments and perform actions selflessly without desiring their fruit or offering it to the Supreme Lord as a sacrifice.

The Upanishads and some Aranyakas deal with the knowledge of the Self and constitute the Jnana Kanda or the knowledge portion of the Vedas. Although they focus mainly on the transcendental reality and the nature of Atman and Brahman, some of the early texts do contain references to the concept of karma and the importance of doing good deeds. The following passage found in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is perhaps one of the earliest references to the subject of karma in the Hindu scriptures.

*"Accordingly, as one behaves so does he becomes.
The doer of good becomes good,
the doer of evil becomes evil.
One becomes virtuous by virtuous actions.
Others become bad by bad actions."
(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chapter 4, Brahmana 4, Verse 5)*

The next passage in the same verse identifies desire as the root cause of all human activity.

*"Others however say that a person consists of desires.
As is his desire, so is his will. As is his will,
so is the deed he does.
Whatever deed he does that he attains."*

The following verse in the same Upanishad deals with the consequences of actions performed by people out of desire. According to it, deeds attach themselves to the soul and go to the other world upon its departure, where they determine its further existence.

*The object to which the mind is attached,
the subtle self goes together with the deed,
being attached to it alone.
Exhausting the results of whatever works he did
in the world he comes again from that world
to this world for (fresh) work. This is for him who desires.
But he who does not desire...his breaths do not depart.
Being Brahman he goes to Brahman."*

In the Svetasvatara Upanishad there are many passages that deal with the subject of karma such as the following, which declares that the embodied self-wanders in this world and assumes many forms and lives according to its karma.

*"Because of thoughts, touch, sight and passions,
and because of the availability of food and drink*

*there are the birth and growth for the individual soul.
The embodied soul assumes various forms in various
places according to the nature of his deeds.*

(Svetasvatara Upanishad Chapter 5 and Verse 11)

In the Bhagavadgita there is an entire chapter dealing with the subject of Karma Yoga or the Yoga of Action. The scripture repeatedly emphasizes the binding nature of desire ridden actions and how we can free ourselves from the consequences of such actions. It affirms God as the real Doer. In the scripture, Lord Krishna informs Arjuna, His disciple, that our actions arise from our desires, which in turn are caused by the triple gunas or qualities that are inherent in us and in the entire creation, namely sattva, rajas and tamas. Karma binds each soul to the cycle of births and deaths until it manages to find a way out by completely and unconditionally surrendering itself to God and by performing actions without desires and expectations.

*"He who is free from attachment,
who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge,
whose actions are but actions of sacrifice only,
his actions are completely dissolved.*

*"His offering is Brahman, his oblation is Brahman,
his sacrificial fire is Brahman, the sacrificer is Brahman.*

He certainly attains Brahman who finds Brahman situated in all activities.

(Bhagavadgita Ch. 4: Verse 23 and 24)

We cannot fail to notice the symbolic representation of desire in the Hindu Puranas and Hindu mythology and how it motivates people and gods alike in performing various kinds of actions. Desire was the great serpent Vrata that Indra slew. Desire was the dark serpent Kali whom Krishna tamed after a bitter fight and on whose head, He danced, symbolizing His complete mastery. Desire was the mischievous god of lust whom Siva reduced to ashes with His third eye. Desire again was the reason why Kaikeyi decided to insist upon Lord Rama going to the forest. Desire and ambition made Dhritarashtra, the father of the Kauravas, to remain passive while his sons indulged in evil actions to usurp the throne from their cousins, the Pandavas. Desire ruined the life of Ahalya and the wives of Rishis when they succumbed to the temptations of gods. Desire made Varudhini seduce Pravarakhya, her father's sincere disciple. So, it was in case of Yami who approached her own brother Yama with lustful intentions. Even Brahma, the creator, was overcome with desire to marry Saraswathi, the goddess of learning, who was his own creation. It was because of the desire to outdo each other, the gods and demons fought against each other several times. It was out of the desire to achieve immortality the gods and demons churned the ocean and extracted amrita or the elixir of life. Desire is the multi-headed Adishesha on which Lord Vishnu rests, while the Goddess of wealth, whom every one covets, sits at His feet. True to the tradition, it was desire, that Lord Buddha, Mahavira and later Guru Nanak identified as the root cause of all human suffering.

According to the tenets of Hinduism, actions performed out of desires bind all living beings. Actions that are rooted in ignorance also bind us. Even the most natural acts like breathing and sleeping are part of our karma. Our minds and bodies are made of the various principles or tattvas of Nature. Actions arising out of our inborn qualities are also binding.

*"But he who has qualities and is the doer of deeds
that bear fruit, he is the enjoyer,
surely of the consequences of whatever he has done.
Assuming all forms characterized by the qualities,
treading the three paths he, the ruler of the vital*

breaths wander about according to his deeds." (Svetavatara Upanishad V.7).

In the Bhagavad-Gita we see a more detailed description of the nature and manner in which our actions arise and impact our lives individually and collectively. According to the scripture, contact with the sense objects results in attachment. Our attachment is responsible for our desires. From desire comes anger. Out of anger comes delusion. Delusion leads to confusion of memory and confusion of memory in turn leads to the loss of buddhi or discrimination. With the loss of buddhi man perishes. (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter II).

If our actions are responsible for our karmic consequences, it follows logically that by inaction we can resolve the problem of karma and break the chain of cause and effect. However, it is not true. Non-action is not a solution to the problem of karma because firstly it is practically impossible to live without doing something even for a moment. Even when we are seemingly inactive, there are still some activities that take place in us like breathing, thinking, blood circulation, digestion and so on. Secondly as we discussed in the previous paragraphs, deliberate inaction may sometime produce negative and harmful consequences.

Actions by themselves do not cause bondage. It is the attitude with which we perform our actions, which is more important. Good actions do not necessarily always produce good consequences. Our morals and values are relative. Killing a person in the battlefield is valor. But killing him on the street is a mortal sin. Thus, the context and the intention with which we perform our actions are important. Equally important is the reason why do them. Work done with an egoistic attitude, with a desire to enjoy its fruit, results in our suffering and bondage to the cycle of births and deaths. The Bhagavadgita makes this point very clear in the following verse.

*Certainly, one should have a clear knowledge
of what is action, what is inaction and what
is wrong action, for mysterious are the ways of action. (Bhagavadgita Ch.4:17)*

Then what is the solution? Again, we find a clear answer in the scripture:

*"He whose all undertakings are devoid of desires,
whose actions are burnt in the fire of knowledge.
He is declared as a scholar by the wise.
"Renouncing all attachment to the fruits of his actions,
ever satisfied, without seeking shelter or protection,
depending upon nothing, he certainly does nothing,
though he is engaged in actions. (Bhagavadgita Ch.4:19-20)*

We have to realize that actions by themselves do not bind us. God Himself is a dynamic and active Principle. Our world is a world of movements and living within it we cannot remain inactive. We cannot control the world or its myriad things. But we can control our actions and our thoughts and desires behind them. We can change the way we think about ourselves or the way we look for security through material things. We can also relinquish our doer-ship, acknowledging sincerely that we are mere instruments in the hands of the divine and that He is the real Doer.

The law of karma does not apply to God because He is complete in Himself and there is nothing that He desires or does not have. He is all, is in all and around all. Actions do not bind Him as He performs all His actions without desire and without attachment. As the Indweller of everything, He is at the center of all our actions and inaction. His will or intention reigns supreme. All that is here and whatever we have moves according to His inviolable Will. He is also the true enjoyer (bhogi) of the results of our actions. The whole creation exists for His enjoyment. He is the Creator and also the created. He makes the offering, is the offering and also the recipient of the offering. He is the priest who performs the rituals, the things that are offered in the rituals, the divinities who receive the offerings, the people who participate in it and also the mysterious and silent witness watching all these things simultaneously. Therefore, the first and the most important step in freeing ourselves from the consequences of our actions is to acknowledge the supreme Will of God and surrender to Him unconditionally.

Renunciation, detachment and sacrifice go hand in hand with the true virtues of self-surrender, faith and selflessness. The best way to renounce the fruit of our actions is to make an offering of it or to God with humility, devotion and detachment. In the very first verse of the Isha- Upanishad, we come to know why we should live in this world with a sense of sacrifice.

*All this is inhabited by God,
whatever that moves here in this moving universe.
Therefore, by renunciation alone enjoy all things.
Do not covet what belongs to others. (Isa 1.1)*

When the whole universe is inhabited by God and everything belongs to Him, what else is there that we can call as our own? Can we hope to own something that is not ours? True enjoyment, according to the Upanishad, is

possible only when we free ourselves from the burden of ownership and egoism and transfer our problems and responsibilities to God, surrendering ourselves unconditionally to Him. When we detach ourselves from all the bonds, we become free from the compulsion of carrying our burdens entirely upon our shoulders and in that freedom, we begin to enjoy our earthly existence.

Renunciation does not mean that one should leave behind everything physically and live a reclusive and depressed life of self-negation and self-denial. Mental renunciation of things and ownership is much more important than the outward and superficial renunciation. One has to be inwardly free from the encumbrances and burdens of life, without feeling oppressed or intimidated by the suffering that is part of our existence. It means that one should live with the spirit of renunciation and inner detachment and enjoy life as it comes, without any preferences, expectations and the need to own and possess or promote oneself. We find this theme in the next verse of the same Upanishad.

Always performing works here (with the spirit of renunciation) one should wish to live a hundred years. There is no other way by which karma would not adhere to you." (Isa 1.2).

A similar idea is echoed by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavadgita, when He suggests that it is not renunciation of action but renunciation of the fruit of action which is the key to liberation.

"By renouncing mentally all his actions, the self-controlled karma yogi lives happily in the city of nine gates(the body) neither doing anything nor making other do any thing. (Bhagavadgita Chapter 5:13)

Actions performed without desire do not bind man to the cycle of births and deaths. Actions performed without any seeking do not bind.

"He who is free from attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, whose actions are but actions of sacrifice only, his actions are completely dissolved." (Bhagavadgita Chapter 4:22)

Therefore if one wants to remain free from the consequences of ones actions, one should perform them with a sense of detachment, without any desire for their fruit, surrendering oneself completely to God and offering all His actions to Him, acknowledging him as the real doer.

There is no definite time frame in which the karma of an individual bears fruit. The consequences of one's action may manifest immediately or after a certain gap. In the latter case it may happen in this lifetime or in some future birth. This mechanism explain clearly reasons for the sudden and inexplicable ups and downs in our lives.

In the course of its long existence, which may stretch over millions of years, an individual soul carries the burden of its own karma upon its shoulders, like a baggage from its past. This is a baggage which no one can just leave behind. It is something that keeps growing continuously and uninterruptedly during our existence upon earth since we cannot live here without doing something each moment of our lives. And as we have seen earlier, it even follows us in death to the other world.

According to the Sanatan or the Hindu beliefs, when a person of good deeds dies, he goes to the next world through the path of light and enjoys the heavenly pleasures. When his karma is completely exhausted, he returns to the earth to continue his life again. A person of evil deeds on the other hand goes to the darker world through the path of darkness and suffers there till he exhausts his bad karma and returns to the earth.

In either case karma is a binding factor and has to be exhausted. It does not liberate man. It offers no greater rewards except a little relief if the actions are meritorious. It may provide temporary distractions for the embodied souls, but keeps them confined to the illusory world. What leads to their permanent liberation is the renunciation of the doer-ship and detachment from the fruits of their actions.

If you truly believe in the theory of karma you will not lead a passive and irresponsible life. You will live and act with the understanding and the belief that every event and circumstance in your life is your own creation. You will take responsibility for your life and actions. You will become more sensitive and mindful to what you do, whether you live and act ethically, and whether you are on the right side of things. You will listen to your conscience and do things that are good for you and others. You will not blame others for your problems or expect others to come and save you. You will not live and act like a victim of your circumstances. Nor you will try to victimize others as you know the consequences of it. Most importantly, as you begin to look for solutions to the problem of your karma, at some stage in your life you will begin to accept God as the doer of your actions and surrender to Him unconditionally.

A true believer in karma would not blame anyone or anything for his or her difficulties in life. He knows that he creates each and every moment of his life through his own actions and intentions. He also knows that while there is nothing much he can do about his past, he can neutralize the effects of his karma and create a new future for himself through his present actions or by seeking the grace of God. This makes him feel more optimistic about his future and more sensitive about his present life. It also widens his vision and makes him look at himself and his life in a much larger and vaster timeframe encompassing not just this life, but countless lives stretching over millions of years

Mary Jo Meadow suggests karma is akin to "Christian notions of sin and its effects." She states that the Christian teaching on a Last Judgment according to one's charity is a teaching on karma. Christianity also teaches morals such as one reaps what one sows (Galatians 6:7) and live by the sword, die by the sword (Matthew 26:52). Most scholars, however, consider the concept of Last Judgment as different from karma, with karma as an ongoing process that occurs every day in one's life, while Last Judgment, by contrast, is a one-time review at the end of life.

Karma is not a Christian or biblical idea, although it does have some parallels to the Bible phrase "reap what you sow." As Christians, we believe in grace as opposed to karma in Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. Sarah Coleman explains:

The Bible does not teach karma. It teaches grace. Grace is where you get what you don't deserve. Grace is unmerited favor. It is love and mercy bestowed upon us by God because He desires us to have it. As you can see, very different from karma. More like polar opposites.

It was grace, not karma, that rescued the Baby Moses from death. It was grace that allowed Queen Esther to plead for the survival of her people. Grace helped Nehemiah rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Grace appeared face to face with Saul on the Damascus Road.

Grace reached out to you and me while we were sinners deserving death and took our place. Grace. Amazing grace.

And it disappoints me that we have forgotten. It disappoints me we are more inclined to look for karma than we are to look for grace.

In the book, Bono, in Conversation with Mishka Assayas, Bono commented, "I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge... I'm holding out for grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross..." This seems to be an immature approach towards life. Why should Jesus take responsibility for a doer's deeds? And how long will the whole community in a religion crucify Jesus for their misdeeds. Is this why they love seeing him always on cross? Why shouldn't Jesus be worshipped in his happiest postures? Because we want him to crucify himself for our deeds?

On the other hand, karma sounds simple. But in reality, one cause rarely leads to just a single effect. Instead, each cause and each effect are intertwined with many others, causing a long chain of complicated interactions that aren't predictable. So, it's naïve to expect that you can do something good and receive the result you hope for, or that when you do something bad you'll only experience a consequence that you can predict. No matter how hard you may try to control the process of cause and effect, your attempts are in vain in this complicated world where all people are connected in ways that can easily result in unpredictable outcomes.

REALIZE THAT BAD HAPPENS MORE EASILY THAN GOOD IN THIS FALLEN WORLD.

While it's noble to try to do what's right as often as you can, you need to accept the fact that your sinful nature often causes you to make mistakes. Since that's true for all other people, as well, bad things happen more often than good things. You're bound to accumulate more bad karma than good karma, despite your desire to do what's right.

Kishan Pawar, in *T. S. Eliot's Plays and Poems: The Christian Perspective*, says...

The Christianity, in short, believes that human beings are sinners by birth, since they are born after the fall of their parents- Adam and Eve. They must work for their salvation. To redeem oneself, one must travel farther from sin. Those who get stranded at sin, can never travel towards salvation. The journey from sin to salvation is not an easy and simple experience. It is a painful spiritual adventure. They spiritually travel through following pattern.



He further says-

When they commit a sin, they are ignorant of it. Their actual existence in Inferno is not known to them. Then some spiritual guide or some teaching experience of life reminds them of the sin they have committed. And then begins their travel towards Realization. Realization of the sin is the beginning of suffering. The suffering is followed by Repentance. Thus Realization, suffering and repentance are the three steps through which the soul passes. It is the Purgation in Dantean terminology. The soul burns in the fire of Repentance and gets purified. And when the soul is completely cleansed, the salvation is achieved. The value of life is realized. All weight is relieved from the soul. Paradiso is experienced all around.

This interpretation, however, seems to be more rational, than that of Sarah Coleman's.

There is a concept in Judaism called in Hebrew *midah k'neged midah*, which is often translated as "measure for measure". The concept is used not so much in matters of law, but rather in matters of divine retribution for a person's actions. David Wolpe compared *midah k'neged midah* to karma.

Carl Jung once opined on unresolved emotions and the synchronicity of karma.

When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate.

Popular methods for negating cognitive dissonance include meditation, metacognition, counselling, psychoanalysis, etc., whose aim is to enhance emotional self-awareness and thus avoid negative karma. This results in better emotional hygiene and reduced karmic impacts. Permanent neuronal changes within the amygdala and left prefrontal cortex of the human brain attributed to long-term meditation and metacognition techniques have been proven scientifically. This process of emotional maturation aspires to a goal of Individuation or self-actualisation. Such peak experiences are hypothetically devoid of any karma (nirvana or moksha).

Buddhist concept of Karma seems to be maturer than the Christian ideas on the laws of karma.

The Pali term Karma literally means action or doing. Any kind of intentional action whether mental, verbal, or physical, is regarded as Karma. It covers all that is included in the phrase "thought, word and deed". Generally speaking, all good and bad action constitutes Karma. In its ultimate sense Karma means all moral and immoral choices. Involuntary, unintentional or unconscious actions, though technically deeds, do not constitute Karma, because decision, the most important factor in determining Karma, is absent.

The Buddha says:

I declare, O Bhikkhus, that decision is Karma. Having willed one acts by body, speech, and thought." (Anguttara Nikaya)

Every volitional action of individuals, save those of Buddhas and Arahants, is called Karma. The exception made in their case is because they are delivered from both good and evil; they have eradicated ignorance and craving, the roots of Karma.

This does not mean that the Buddha and Arahantas are passive. They are tirelessly active in working for the real well being and happiness of all. Their deeds ordinarily accepted as good or moral, lack creative power as regards themselves. Understanding things as they truly are, they have finally shattered their cosmic fetters – the chain of cause and effect.

Karma does not necessarily mean past actions. It embraces both past and present deeds. Hence in one sense, we are the result of what we were; we will be the result of what we are. In another sense, it should be added, we are not totally the result of what we were; we will not absolutely be the result of what we are. The present is no doubt the offspring of the past and is the present of the future, but the present is not always a true index of either the past or the future; so complex is the working of Karma.

It is this doctrine of Karma that the mother teaches her child when she says "Be good and you will be happy and we will love you; but if you are bad, you will be unhappy and we will not love you." In short, Karma is the law of cause and effect in the ethical realm.

As we sow, we reap somewhere and sometime, in his life or in a future birth. What we reap today is what we have sown either in the present or in the past.

The Samyutta Nikaya states:

"According to the seed that's sown,
So is the fruit you reap there from,
Doer of good will gather good,
Doer of evil, evil reaps,
Down is the seed and thou shalt taste
The fruit thereof."

Karma is a law in itself, which operates in its own field without the intervention of any external, independent ruling agency.

Happiness and misery, which are the common lot of humanity, are the inevitable effects of causes. From a Buddhist point of view, they are not rewards and punishments, assigned by a supernatural, omniscient ruling power to a soul that has done good or evil. Theists, who attempt to explain everything in this and temporal life and in the eternal future life, ignoring a past, believe in a 'postmortem' justice, and may regard present happiness and misery as blessings and curses conferred on His creation by an omniscient and omnipotent Divine Ruler who sits in heaven above controlling the destinies of the human race. Buddhism, which emphatically denies such an Almighty, All merciful God-Creator and an arbitrarily created immortal soul, believes in natural law and justice which cannot be suspended by either an Almighty God or an All-compassionate Buddha. According to this natural law, acts bear their own rewards and punishments to the individual doer whether human justice finds out or not.

There are some who criticise thus:

"So, you Buddhists, too, administer capitalistic opium to the people, saying: "You are born poor in this life on account of your past evil karma. He is born rich on account of his good Karma. So, be satisfied with your humble lot; but do good to be rich in your next life. You are being oppressed now because of your past evil Karma. There is your destiny. Be humble and bear your sufferings patiently. Do good now. You can be certain of a better and happier life after death."

While we are born to a state created by ourselves, yet by our own self-directed efforts there is every possibility for us to create new, favourable environments even here and now. Not only individually, but also, collectively, we are at liberty to create fresh Karma that leads either towards our progress or downfall in this very life.

According to the Buddhist doctrine of Karma, one is not always compelled by an 'iron necessity', for Karma is neither fate, nor predestination imposed upon us by some mysterious unknown power to which we must helplessly submit ourselves. It is one's own doing reacting on oneself, and so one has the possibility to divert the course of one's Karma to some extent.

How far one diverts it depends on oneself.
Is one bound to reap all that one has sown in just proportion?

The Buddha provides an answer:

"If anyone says that a man or woman must reap in this life according to his present deeds, in that case there is no religious life, nor is an opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of sorrow. But if anyone says that what a man or woman reaps in this and future lives accords with his or her deeds present and past, in that case there is a religious life, and an opportunity is afforded for the entire extinction of a sorrow." (Anguttara Nikaya)

Although it is stated in the Dhammapada that "not in the sky, nor in mid-ocean, or entering a mountain cave is found that place on earth where one may escape from (the consequences of) an evil deed", yet one is not bound to pay all the past arrears of one's Karma. If such were the case emancipation would be impossibility. Eternal recurrence would be the unfortunate result.

In Jainism, karma conveys a totally different meaning from what commonly understood in Hindu philosophy and western civilization. Jain philosophy is one of the oldest Indian philosophies that completely separates body (matter) from the soul (pure consciousness). In Jainism, karma is referred to as karmic dirt, as it consists of very subtle particles of matter that pervade the entire universe. Karmas are attracted to the karmic field of a soul due to vibrations created by activities of mind, speech, and body as well as various mental dispositions. Hence the karmas are the subtle matter surrounding the consciousness of a soul. When these two components (consciousness and karma) interact, we experience the life we know at present. Jain texts expound that seven *tattvas* (truths or fundamentals) constitute reality. These are:

1. *Jiva*: the soul which is characterized by consciousness
2. *Ajiva*: the non-soul
3. *Āsrava*: inflow of auspicious and evil karmic matter into the soul.
4. *Bandha* (bondage): mutual intermingling of the soul and karmas.
5. *Samvara* (stoppage): obstruction of the inflow of karmic matter into the soul.

6. *Nirjara* (gradual dissociation): separation or falling off of part of karmic matter from the soul.
7. *Moksha* (liberation): complete annihilation of all karmic matter (bound with any particular soul).

According to Padmanabh Jaini,

This emphasis on reaping the fruits only of one's own karma was not restricted to the Jainas; both Hindus and Buddhist writers have produced doctrinal materials stressing the same point. Each of the latter traditions, however, developed practices in basic contradiction to such belief. In addition to *shrardha* (the ritual Hindu offerings by the son of deceased), we find among Hindus widespread adherence to the notion of divine intervention in one's fate, while Buddhists eventually came to propound such theories like boon-granting *bodhisattvas*, transfer of merit and like. Only Jainas have been absolutely unwilling to allow such ideas to penetrate their community, despite the fact that there must have been tremendous amount of social pressure on them to do so.

The relationship between the soul and karma, states Padmanabh Jaini, can be explained with the analogy of gold. Like gold is always found mixed with impurities in its original state, Jainism holds that the soul is not pure at its origin but is always impure and defiled like natural gold. One can exert effort and purify gold, similarly, Jainism states that the defiled soul can be purified by proper refining methodology. Karma either defiles the soul further, or refines it to a cleaner state, and this affects future rebirths. Karma is thus an efficient cause (*nimitta*) in Jain philosophy, but not the material cause (*upadana*). The soul is believed to be the material cause.

In Sikhism, all living beings are described as being under the influence of the three qualities of *maya*. Always present together in varying mix and degrees, these three qualities of *maya* bind the soul to the body and to the earth plane. Above these three qualities is the eternal time. Due to the influence of three modes of *maya's* nature, *jivas* (individual beings) perform activities under the control and purview of the eternal time. These activities are called *karma*, wherein the underlying principle is that karma is the law that brings back the results of actions to the person performing them.

This life is likened to a field in which our karma is the seed. We harvest exactly what we sow; no less, no more. This infallible law of karma holds everyone responsible for what the person is or is going to be. Based on the total sum of past karma, some feel close to the Pure Being in this life and others feel separated. This is the law of karma in Gurbani (Sri Guru Granth Sahib). Like other Indian and Asian schools of thought, the Gurbani also accepts the doctrines of karma and reincarnation as the facts of nature.

Karma is an important concept in Taoism too. Every deed is tracked by deities and spirits. Appropriate rewards or retribution follow karma, just like a shadow follows a person.

The karma doctrine of Taoism developed in three stages. In the first stage, causality between actions and consequences was adopted, with supernatural beings keeping track of everyone's karma and assigning fate (*ming*). In the second phase, transferability of karma ideas from Chinese Buddhism were expanded, and a transfer or inheritance of Karmic fate from ancestors to one's current life was introduced. In the third stage of karma doctrine development, ideas of rebirth based on karma were added. One could be reborn either as another human being or another animal, according to this belief. In the third stage, additional ideas were introduced; for example, rituals, repentance and offerings at Taoist temples were encouraged as it could alleviate Karmic burden.

The Taoist take on the Karma, however, seems to be superstitious, as it believes in some supernatural elements who take the responsibility to keep records of people's karmas and bring them the fruits for it. Unlike other disciplines that have been referred to above, Tao outsources the recording responsibility to the supernatural elements. Likewise, the Christian ideas on Grace, as the replacement of Karma, too seems to be incomplete. Shifting the weight of one's karmas on Jesus Christ and believing that he had crucified himself for the sins of his followers, is a mere escapism from the responsibility of one's own karmas. That way it becomes easy for one to safeguard oneself from the prospective effects of karmas.

The Sanatan idea, however, is much more logical, scientific and practical, in which one is held responsible for one's own karmas.

But then (on a lighter note), the question still remains, who keeps the records of one's karmas of this life, and the past lives and of the lives to come?

We have references of fetus responding to the outer world from mother's embryo. In the Mahabharata, Arjun tells the reality of *chakravayuh* to his wife, Subhadra, when Abhimanyu, who is yet to be born, too listens to his father from his mother's embryo. While listening, Subhadra doses off and thus Abhimanyu sleeps too. This fact is medically proven that the fetus does listen to, smells and responds from the prenatal state.

We have ample of examples of pregnant women, especially living in the remote areas, eating black soil during their craving period. Most of them have strange cravings of eating unusual things like lime, black soil, pungent fruits like tamarind or unripe mangoes. These things and fruits have properties like iron (black soil), calcium (lime, tamarind and mango). Now the question arises as to who is guiding the uneducated woman to eat those things. We call it cravings, but why the cravings of those things only having the property falling short in the

body-especially in the body of the fetus. The fetus which hasn't seen this world yet is controlling the brain of the mother. The fetus is guiding her to eat those things to which we name as cravings. It's not the mere fetus, the unborn one but there is much more to this. I name it as The Cosmic Intelligence. This Intelligence of the child that dwells in him from his early existence, is helping him control his mother's brain. This is ubiquitous. It dwells in every living organism on the planet. It's as real as gravitational force. The details of this have been discussed in the essay of the same title, but here I can only refer to it as the main driving force behind the child's prenatal controlling behaviour.

How, then, is it related to the law of karma? Well, it's the cosmic intelligence that dwells in and around us, that guides the roots of the trees and creepers to grow downwards in search of water, that teaches a wild beast to take care of its own litter, that makes creepers grow tendrils on its stem, and to catch hold of a solid stick to maintain balance from the swift winds standing against gravity. It's the same cosmic intelligence that holds the whole treasure of the universal knowledge including an individual soul's karmic notes and its footprints.

In short, our karma is a very small chapter of a huge, recorded history of our myriads of births and deaths.

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