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Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

May 2023 Teachings Article:
A Yogi in the World #5

What Kind of Karma?

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You can do things now to change your karma. You can't change your past actions. Those karmic repercussions are in the pipeline, headed your way. But you can create better quality stuff. It's really straightforward. When you want something different than what you've got, change what you do to get it. A friend recently bought a new car, having decided that the cost of frequent repairs was equivalent to buying something new. Now she's enjoying reliable transportation, along with comfort and the convenience of all the new car gadgetry. And saving gas money. Yes, you reap the fruits of your decisions and actions.

No one talks about their karma when life is flowing smoothly, when finances fall together and they're getting what they want. That's called "good karma." But you may complain when things are falling apart and life is hard. That's called "bad karma." However, complaining about it does not help. You already know this. It's like complaining about the weather. No matter what you say, it is what it is.

Where I live, the weather blows in from the Arctic or the Caribbean, sometimes from the Great Plains. Whatever blows through, all I can do is manage myself in the midst of it. Rain gear, snow gear, summery clothes and sunscreen – all are in my repertoire and in my closet.

Similarly, your karma is coming from somewhere – maybe things you did yesterday or last week, perhaps from decades or lifetimes ago. In meditation, I've had clear memories of being a Greek soldier in a prior life. Karma can be nasty stuff! But it's only if you did nasty stuff in the past. And we all have. You have also done good things. Big stuff and even little stuff matters. Sometimes when I'm driving, I let another driver into the lane ahead of me. I'm always delighted when someone returns the favor a few blocks later. Instant karma!

The individual soul, due to Maya's power, is bound by karma and subject to the universal law of transmigration.

E.sa pramaataa maayaandha.h sa.msarii karma-bandhana.h.

— I'svara Pratyabhij~na Karika 3.2.2

Your soul has already transmigrated through many lifetimes, creating karma and reaping its fruits. The goal is to graduate from this earthly school, but you end up repeating the grade. This verse explains that Maya is the energy manifesting the world, which is completely intoxicating and quite confusing. Thus you keep getting lost in it and having to return.

Shaktipat breaks you free from the cycle. How? Shaktipat reveals that there is more to you than Maya shows you. While your worldly experiences are very important, the point is to see the "who" that is experiencing them, called pramata above. Shaktipat reveals your own Self to you, which makes you able to look inward and find the "who" that you really are. That's the ticket to your graduation.

Karmic repercussions are called karmaphala (karma – action, phala – fruit), the fruits of your actions. In this lifetime you will complete all the karmaphala you brought with you. There's no way to prevent it. However, Shaktipat changes how you experience these karmic fruits, plus it changes the karmas you're creating now.

When desire motivates you to perform an action, you get repercussions from it. Like hitting a tennis ball, it bounces back at you. With karmaphala, the bounce back could be in this lifetime or later. It's like the ball can go into a freeze-frame at the wall. In this metaphor, the wall is your spine. All your incomplete karmas, awaiting their fruition are stored in your spine, little contracted bits of energy called samskaras (karmic seeds).

When the conditions are right, the seeds sprout and bear fruit, meaning you have an experience that counterbalances what you did. If you let a driver into your lane, you'll be let in by another driver along the way. If you cut them off, you'll get cut off. From birth to age 15, the bulk of your life experiences were due to karmaphala from prior lifetimes. You've been adding to the load, so now you get a mix of present- and past-lifetime results.

Once you've received Shaktipat, you can complete your karmic fruits in meditation. You don't have to undergo the life events that would otherwise have been required. In the meditations where I realized I'd been a Greek soldier, it was because I was experiencing being killed in a swordfight. I experienced this because I had previously killed others, which I now clearly remember. After the first of these meditations, my body manifested two scars the size and shape of sword wounds. They lasted for years before fading away.

While those meditations were intense, they meant that I didn't have to go through being physically killed in this lifetime. Karmaphala requires only that you feel the experience, not that you go through the events. Shaktipat gave me access to the deep inner levels wherein I could burn up this karma internally without having to live through it externally.

This is possible because Shaktipat awakens the cosmic energy that flows through your spine. The inner arising of this energy clears your samskaras for you. All you have to do is create time for this inner work to happen — that's your meditation time. Meditate less and it will take you longer. Meditate daily and you'll be moved right along.

As important as the clearing of these past karmas is, it's more important that you stop adding to them. If you meditate an hour a day and then, for 23 hours you add to your karmaphala, you're not getting liberated anytime soon.

When desire motivates you to do things, even to say certain words or think thoughts, you get the bounce back. The intensity of your desire creates the intensity of your karmaphala. But when you do things out of pure altruism, motivated by generosity and a desire to help, you get no karmic repercussions. Desireless action is your pathway to freedom.

Everyone loves to give. You love to help others. I learned this when I was recovering from a hip injury and had trouble walking. In the grocery store, again and again strangers turned to help me with things. They made my day easier, but their kindness made their own day brighter. They performed karma-free action. There's a whole branch of yoga focusing on this, karma yoga, which we call seva (service).

Shaktipat makes it easier for you to see how to live this way. This happens because your meditations fill you up inside, so you feel less needy, greedy and fearful. Without these motivations, what's left?

Sometimes yogis ask me about this. Their spiritual progress has freed them from their emotional kneejerk reflexes, and now they don't know how to make decisions. They ask, "If I'm not pursuing a desire, how do I decide about anything?" My answer is, "Intelligence." Look at the situation and use your intelligence to decide what would be the most beneficial thing for everyone involved.

When you live this way, you're not creating new karmas for yourself. You have only to live out the karmaphala from your prior self-centered actions. Some fruits will be pleasurable; some will be painful. Karma (for yogis) are neither good nor bad, but are of three kinds in others (good, bad & mixed).

Karma-a"sukla-ak.r.sna.m yoginis-trividham-itare.sam. – Yoga Sutras 4.7

When your inner state is based in Consciousness, events come and go. Neither your mood nor the quality of your life is determined by the weather or anything else. Others talk about good karma and bad karma, even mixed karma where something is both pleasurable and painful at the same time.

Instead, the knower of Self lives in an open-hearted acceptance of all. Better yet, all that comes and all that goes is Shiva, in the multitudinousness of his many delightful forms. All this, while making intelligent decisions about how to act in the world, and how to best serve others. It's a glorious way to live!

To get a start on it, when you're doing something, ask yourself, "What kind of karma am I creating here?" Even with words and thoughts, ask the same question. You can make a choice, on the spot, to draw from a deeper inner source. You already know that giving makes you happy. Create a happy life. Live with a generous spirit! This is called "doing more yoga."

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