

Karma - Oct 15, 2019

So the doctrine of Karma, commonly perceived as cause and effect leading to a seeming determinism, is actually much more dependent on the intent of the actor. Understanding the role of intent is essential to the spiritual seeker. It was set forth in teachings recorded by his disciples in India by a great sage named Ramakrishna (1836-1886). He had the good fortune to experience different religions, born a Brahmin, but educated in Christianity and Muslim Sufism. While the common conception of Karma leads toward an inevitable 'fate', Ramakrishna showed in his teachings that this was not really the essence of Karma.

Under his, and now the Hindu conception, individual entities are free, down to the most infinitesimal atom or up to the universe itself, to follow their free will of choice ('paramanu' is a technical term in Jainism designating the smallest and most indivisible particle of matter). Interestingly, this is supported in today's science since we have learned that all tiny particles, or microbes, are quite alive and seemingly independent of the law of probability. While many feel that God runs their personal lives and is the sole architect of their action, 'god made me do this'; the truth is that they have their own choice, as taught by St Augustine. He wrote on Free will of choice *“God foreknows all the things of which himself is the cause, and yet He is not the cause of all he foreknows.”* Even nature itself, which appears to drive each species to protect itself and even destroy other species, is not bound by any determinism. Fate operates for sure, but only in the absence of free will and intent.

Karma is not based just on probability, it follows the heart and most importantly the intent of the actor. In fact, as noted earlier, intent alone, good or bad, without the action having occurred, causes Karma. For instance if you cause an accident, and your first thought is “I hope that person is OK”, the karma intent is essentially good. Finally, the criminal who intends and attempts to commit a crime is guilty even if the action is not concluded. So, don't look at your life passively, as a victim of past causes, but exercise free will. Intent should follow the morality associated with your own society, not just as religious dogma like the 10 commandments, which is at the base level of our western civilization, but that which arises from the heart as an inner truth. So the Kriya yoga involves intent to live morally, and even beyond. At a second level, the sage seeks to escape even the cause itself, to seed actions without any causality or effect, like some plants that can germinate seeds but don't produce another plant. Such sages are beyond Samskara, producing action without any cause or effect.

Therefore the law of Karma universalizes the sense of responsibility, and permits one to consider the creation as naturally responsible for its own evolution by virtue of the collective association of species primary or secondary as with the animal and the vegetative. Each species is responsible for their own Samskara, leading in some cases to

extinction or to the emergence of a new or evolved species. Even the earth has its Karma, and will follow the laws of the universe up to its extinction.

As for individual human entities, they ought to know that they are absolutely free. Although seemingly oblivious of this basic knowledge, they tend to follow the herd mentality, and don't even contemplate their own free will. They follow the general consensus even though it might be in opposition to their own belief. The Karma is like all creation, a concept of Maya, 'illusion' which has only a sensible existence in the material world.

All the great teachers were able to annihilate their own Karma and their actions in this world were only acts without 'seed', that is, totally outside the law of Karma. Under the umbrella of mortality, the doctrine of Karma gives the thinking individual the full responsibility for their actions (active or passive), but places 'intention' well above all as the final real Karmic imprint. The important teaching here, which religions need to adopt and emphasize, is stating that intent is the real cause of karma, well above the physical actions. With this understanding, Patanjali taught that one person could reabsorb his Karma completely in an instant. Of course many sages, like Ramakrishna himself, and Gandhi, and Ramana Maharshi dies of illnesses which seems to indicate a last and final exhaustive action of Karma.