

Karma

A frequent translation of the word *karma* is "fate" - a fate determined by our actions whose long-term consequences - good or bad - affect our future lives.

Karma should not be confused with fatalism which is a rigorous mechanism akin to determinism - the doctrine which teaches that all events, including human choices, are absolutely dependent upon and conditioned by their causes which may be God or anything else. Karmic consequences can indeed be modified, or completely vanish by the play of human will and action, with few exceptions.

When *karma* refers to the contents of our lives, it usually defines a fair allocation of happiness or suffering, as a measure of cosmic justice. On the other hand, *karma* as a triggering force, refers to a dynamic manifestation of mental and physical energies in the form of thoughts, speech or action which automatically triggers good, evil or neutral effects, depending on what we say, think or do. Generally speaking, it is the sum of the effects of the cause and effect chain that determine a human being's future lives.

In India, the homeland of the Yoga doctrine, *karma* is sometimes referred to as the metaphysical reality that each human being carries within him or herself in his inborn store of *samskaras* ("seeds" to action). The karmic mechanism acts then as a kind of retribution rule which registers all willful, deliberate activity to later determine the reincarnation terms.

Samskaras usually fall into three categories:

1. *Parabdha samskaras* - which determine a fixed framework for future conditions.
2. *Samcita samskaras* - whose consequences either are expiable, neutral or can be ignored.
3. *Agami samskaras* - the ongoing consequences that determine the future.

The *Dictionary of Mysticism* edited by Frank Gaynor (Philosophical Library, New York) gives another definition of the term *karma*:

- a) Action-energy, past, present, latent or manifested.
- b) A self-operating law of cause, effect and retribution.
- c) The entity of the individual or of the universe carried along in the series of the Wheel of Life.

In the Bhagavad Gita, one of India's most venerated pieces of writing, Yoga is defined as "skill in action". Those who, during the course of their Yoga *sadhana*, realize the Supreme are able to come to exist in relation to a unique transcendental cosmic will (*shankalpa*) that enables them to modify their karmic repository.

For us less advanced spiritual seekers, the Yoga masters recommend that we should live in such a manner as to refrain from harming ourselves and our entourage until the time we're able to introduce those specific documents which can completely dissolve the existing seeds to potential activities.

In our tragi-comical lives, we constantly move between two poles in an unceasing search for happiness. One of these poles (*raga*) attracts us constantly to various forms of pleasure while the other (*dvesha*) moves us away from anything uncomfortable.

This polarity is intimately linked to life itself. In fact, it is even found in the biological process where cells continuously take up nutrition and reject waste.

What is it that first motivates and then, with the help of our will, triggers an action under the auspices of the self?

According to Yoga, this catalytic factor is called *kama*.

Kama is Life's primordial law, the pristine need, our inner desire and the driving force that is at the core of *karma*.

Kama is influenced by two opposing currents - *dharma* and *adharma*.

These two forces can have a positive or a negative impact on our actions. They may act in a close interaction. When *dharma* dominates, we experience joy, pleasure, satisfaction and anything else which we use to call positive. However, where *adharma* prevails we feel sorrow, pain and so forth.

The remarkable research work that lasted centuries in India has resulted in a precise mapping of human beings' subtle essence, its upper structure along with an identification of five different substrates (*karana*), sometime called *koshas*.

The experiments of those Indian scientists, rishis and yogis have allowed us to determine the direct or indirect impact of the inner mental instrument - our mind - when we perceive something, express our feelings, interpret what we perceive or when we use our will.

Our activities always result in a subtle accumulation (*karmasaya*), a repository of latent actions (*samskaras*) which in turn, are located in an area designated as *hridaya*. For simplicity's sake, we may call *hridaya* the subconscious, although *hridaya* indeed differs from the common subconscious we know, for example, from Sigmund Freud.

From this concealed repository and with the help of memory (*smriti*) we use to retrieve various data that are presented to the I (*ahang*) in a new, virtual version of what we previously experienced tangibly.

These experiences will become the new seeds, which, in turn, determine future actions (words, thoughts and other activities), all being tinged by the *raga-dvesha* factors. They become the building blocks of a triple framework for our next life in determining human beings' gender (*jiyoti*), life-span (*ayu*) and life contents and its characteristic features and direction (*bhoga*). But, even with such a framework, the karmic receptacle *karmasaya* does not exclude the free will, albeit with limited opportunities.

However, under the space for our latent actions, there is a concealed factor -*klesha* - which stands at the basis of the subtle - but is easily subject to influences - building activities that determines, triggers and stain all our actions.

Klesha is an important element which, in later times, was adopted in Buddhism as a key factor. In yogic scriptures, *klesha* is described with three unequivocal terms: pleasure - suffering - fear (of death, disappearing from this world, being destructed).

Accompanied by countless "cronies", the negative *klesha* factor has always been considered a stumble-block in Yoga sadhana.

Klesha includes the following elements:

The desire (to action) - *kama*

Anger - *kroddha*

Greed - *lobha*

Confusion - *moha*

Jealousy / envy - *matsarya*

Hubris - *mada*

In conclusion, we note that new actions are governed by our *samskaras* as an outcome of a strong desire (*kama*) and an inner need for new mental and physical activities, while the positive and negative factors (*dharma-adharma*) arise from the repository of latent actions (*karmasaya*). With the help of memory (*smriti*) the mind recalls past experiences from the subconscious (*hridaya*) to initiate a new cycle of activities, which in turn creates new sensorial expressions etc.

Yoga adepts distinguish between the actions that aim at keeping alive the repository of latent actions (*karmasaya*) and those actions which have an opposite effect.

Bhutan-samskaras are, figuratively, white, black or black and white recorded mental impressions, while *niroda samskaras* are deemed to have the strength to eliminate all existing *samskaras*.

Such an elimination occurs when the yogi has conquered the next highest state of awareness called *samprajñata samadhi*.