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## HOW KARMA WORKS

Learning How to Design Your Ideal Life



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## I. THE LAWS OF KARMA

A. From the *Yoga Sutra* by Master Patanjali:

ते ह्लादपरितापफलाः पुण्यापुण्यहेतुत्वात् ॥

te hlādaparitāpaphalāḥ puṇyāpuṇyahetutvāt॥

There is a connection of cause and effect. The seeds ripen into experiences refreshingly pleasant or painful in their torment, depending on whether you have done good to others, or done them wrong instead. (2.14)

B. From Lord Krishna's teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।

nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate।

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥

svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt॥

No action in this world goes for nought or brings about a contrary result. Even the smallest religious practice protects against great fear. (2.40)

C. From a commentary on Je Tsongkapa's *The Three Principal Paths (Lam-gtzo rnam-gsum)* by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941):

This contemplation is done by considering, very carefully, the four principles of action which the Buddha enunciated:

- 1) Actions are certain to produce similar consequences.
- 2) The consequences are greater than the actions.
- 3) One cannot meet a consequence if he has not committed an action.
- 4) Once an action is committed, the consequence cannot be lost.

Once a person has gained a well-founded belief in these principles, he will automatically in his daily life avoid doing wrong things and begin doing right things. . . .

So this brings us to the four most general principles in our contemplation of actions and their consequences:

1) If the cause involved is a virtuous act, then the consequence it produces can only be pleasure, and never pain. If the cause involved is a non-virtuous act, then the consequence it produces can only be pain, and never pleasure. Thus the first principle is that *actions are certain to produce similar consequences*.

2) The causes involved may be virtuous or non-virtuous acts which are relatively minor, but the consequences they each produce—the pleasure or the pain—will be of tremendous power. The second principle then is that *the consequences are greater than the actions*.

3) If one never performs the virtuous or non-virtuous action to act as a cause, he will never experience a consequence of either pleasure or pain. Thus the third principle: *One cannot meet a consequence if he has not committed an action*.

4) The fourth principle states that once a person has collected a virtuous or non-virtuous action to act as a cause, *once an action is committed, the consequence cannot be lost*—so long as the power of a good deed, for example, is not destroyed by an emotion like anger, or a bad deed by applying an appropriate antidote.

## II. THE CHAIN OF PAIN

A. From the *Yoga Sutra*:

अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः पञ्च क्लेशाः ॥

avidyāsmītārāgadveṣābhiniveśāḥ pañca kleśāḥ ||

The five negative thoughts are ignorance, selfness, liking, disliking, and grasping. (2.3)

अविद्या क्षेत्रम् उत्तरेषां प्रसुप्ततनुविच्छिन्नोदाराणाम् ॥

avidyā kṣetram uttareṣāṃ prasuptatanuvicchannodārāṇām ॥

Ignorance is the field for the ones that come after it, whether they are dormant, dwindling, interrupted, or flourishing. (2.4)

अनित्याशुचिदुःखानात्मसु नित्यशुचिसुखात्मख्यातिरविद्या ॥

anityāśuciduḥkhānātmasu nityaśucisukhātmakhyātirvidyā ॥

In ignorance we misunderstand our world. Things that cannot last, things which are unclean, and painful, and which are not themselves, seem to us as if they will last, and as if they were clean, and pleasant, and very much themselves. (2.5)

दृग्दर्शनशक्त्योरेकात्मतेवास्मिता ॥

ḍṛgdarśanaśaktyorekātmatevāsmitā ॥

Selfness is where the strong impression of someone seeing something and the something someone sees make is seem as if each one were itself. (2.6)

सुखानुशयी रागः ॥

sukhānuśayī rāgaḥ ॥

Assailed by what feels good, we begin to like things. (2.7)

दुःखानुशयी द्वेषः ॥

duḥkhānuśayī dveṣaḥ ॥

Assailed by what feels bad, we begin to dislike things. (2.8)

स्वरसवाही विदुषोऽपि तथारूढोऽभिनिवेशः ॥

svarasavāhī viduṣo'pi tathāruḍho'bhiniveśaḥ ॥

Grasping is a thought that comes on all of its own, even from those who understand, and then grows ever stronger. (2.9)

### III. WORKING THE SYSTEM

A. From the *Yoga Sutra*:

हेयं दुःखम् अनागतम् ॥ १६ ॥

heyam duḥkham anāgatam॥

The pain that we are ridding ourselves of is all the pain that would have come to us in the future. (2.16)

B. From the *Bhagavad Gita*:

यं संन्यासमिति प्राहुर्योगं तं विद्धि पाण्डव ।

yam sannyāsamiti prāhuryogam taṁ viddhi pāṇḍava ।

न ह्यसंन्यस्तसङ्कल्पो योगी भवति कश्चन ॥

na hyasannyastasaṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana॥

You should know, Arjuna, that yoga is what they call renunciation. No one becomes a yogi who has not renounced expectation of selfish advantage.

(6.2)