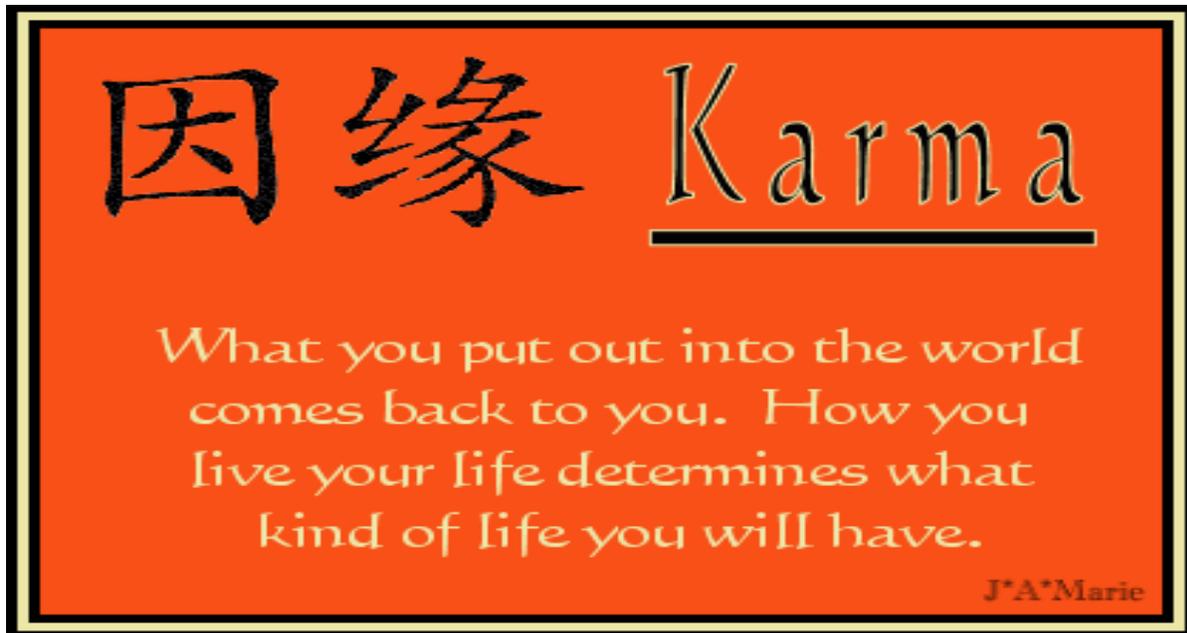


KARMA



The KARMA means 'action' and in Buddhist doctrine refers to any intentional mental, verbal or bodily act. The effect or consequence of Karma is called vipàka. The Buddha said: 'I say that intention is Karma, because having first intended one acts with body, speech or mind'. Every intentional action modifies our consciousness, thus building our character and thereby influencing our behavior, our experience and our relationship to the world around us. Positive intentional actions (motivated by generosity, kindness, love and wisdom) tend towards consequences that are experienced as positive, while intentional negative actions (motivated by greed, hatred and delusion) tend towards consequences that are experienced as negative.

The Buddha made it clear that Karma is a function or characteristic of consciousness when he defined it as intention. He highlighted this point again when he said: 'Psychological phenomena are preceded by mind, have mind as their leader, they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts

with an evil mind, suffering follows that one as the wheel follows the ox...If one speaks or acts with an a pure mind happiness follows one as does a shadow'.

The Buddha said that the belief that everything a person experiences is due to their past Karma is a false and pernicious view leading to fatalism. In fact, Buddhism recognized at least five broad causes of why things happen, of which Karma is only one, the others being the operation of natural laws, biological laws, physical laws and psychological laws.

Karma is sometimes seen in simplistic and polarized terms; i.e. it is either good or bad, its results are either positive or negative, etc. The Buddha was a good enough psychologist to know that human consciousness and motives are often much more complex and nuanced than this and thus will have much more nuanced results. He spoke of karmic consequences that are 'neither unpleasant nor pleasant', that is to say, which are the effect of actions that are ethical neutral. At other times, he mentions action that 'ethically mixed'.

What Buddhism does teach is that several strong intentional good actions may very well modify or even cancel out a bad action and vice versa. Thus, it is correct to say that we are conditioned by our Karma rather than determined by it.

Our experiences in the present life are due to what we did in our last life and what we do now will have an effect in the future life. Contrary to this idea the Buddha said: 'The result of Karma, I say, is threefold; that to be experienced in this life, or in the next rebirth, or on some subsequent occasion'. It is likely that many of our actions have a result immediately or soon after we have done them, i.e. in the present life

The fourth common misunderstanding is what might be called 'karmic naivety', i.e. if you kick a monk in this life you will be reborn with only one leg in your next life, if you swear in this life you will have bad breath in the next life, or if you are generous in this life, you will be rich in your next life. This, of course, is rather silly. Because Karma is primarily psychological intention, its manifestation is primarily psychological. It only affects our physical form and circumstances to the degree that the mind can have an influence on the physical, as, for example, when prolonged worry can cause or aggravate physical illness. The main effect Karma has upon us is how we feel (happy, neutral or unhappy) and which realm we will be reborn into.