

# The many myths of *karma*

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Have you ever caught yourself in a position where you want to do something, but you end up not doing it fearing the outcome of the action? A few days ago, I met an acquaintance who is a dog lover. She was sharing how her friend



wants her to adopt his pet dogs. My acquaintance refused the offer. Her reason was — “What if something happens to the dogs or they fall ill while they are with me? I will be held responsible and it will also add to the account of my deeds. I will get caught in the web of *karma* because of them, so it is better not to take the responsibility.” While she shared her simple reason for refusing with me, I got thinking, “Is this what *karma* is?”

In my conversations with people from different walks of life, I have realised that a lot of them believe that the principle of *karma* is only a manifestation of guilt and the fear of being punished in some way by someone. The belief is that there is an external source somewhere keeping a ledger of all your deeds, good and bad, like maintaining a balance sheet of your accounts. In the end there will be a calculation, the credits (good deeds) and debits (bad deeds) will be measured and

that will decide the quality of your future life. There is God up there. That supreme power is the judge of right and wrong, and based on his judgment, we will get our rewards or punishments.

In my opinion, *karma* does exist. There may also be rewards, punishments, redemptions, and atonements but the myth is that the accounts are external and who maintains them is also an external entity (God). The judgment of our deeds is being done somewhere else by God.

Actually this judgment is always an internal process. We judge our deeds and intentions; we decide their outcomes and impacts. There is never an external entity keeping an account, the punishment is also not decided by that entity nor is our quality of our lives. It is we who decide what's wrong and what's not. It is we who decide what punishment we deserve for a particular deed, if at all.

It is we who have the power to forgive ourselves, learn from the situation and move on, without the baggage of *karma*. All of us are the creators of our own lives and destinies. As stated in the *Yajur Veda* the God is within; ‘*Aham Brahmasmi*’. I am the *Brahma*, the creator of my universe. I decide what goes on in my universe as I am the centre of my universe. It is from me that the universe originates, and it is as much internal, as it is external. The ‘*Aham Brahmasmi*’ philosophy says that we are our own God, hence we ourselves

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decide our cycle of *karma*.

In fact, just like we all understand God differently and our understanding as well as our relationship with God is completely dependent on our interpretations and perspectives, so is *karma*. What He is for you is not what He is for me or anyone else. Similarly, what deeds are good for you may be not good for someone else. Hence, our *karma* boils down to how we interpret our actions and intentions. If our analyses is based on guilt and fear; we will accumulate a lot of *karma* to deal with.

In the case of my acquaintance, the entire situation was being judged with a fear of what uncontrollable event might occur in the future and how it might prove her guilty. What it led to was not carrying out actions that could have been very good for her and the dogs that she loved in any case.

As Buddhism points out, ‘For every event that occurs,

there will follow another event whose existence was caused by the first and this second event will be pleasant or unpleasant according to its cause. The reaction was the first event which took away many moments of unconditional love and happiness that the pets could have given my acquaintance and the many years of care and comfort that she could have given the pets.

All of us at some point decide whether to take an action or not based on our fear of the outcome. At that point we fail to understand that the outcome is not only a result of our action itself, but also of our intention behind that action. When we carry out an action based on fear or when after the action we feel guilty, we create negative *karma*. For this action, we keep punishing ourselves directly or indirectly. Little do we realise that we always have a simple choice — to eradicate the guilt and fear. If we realise that our action has hurt someone, we can simply apologise and work towards not repeating the same action or intention again. It is easier to learn from a mistake, forgive ourselves and become better persons in the process.

*Karma* is what we make of it. We all have our own versions of truth, reality, right and wrong. Your version might be true for you and false for me and vice versa. All I share here is my version and understanding of *karma*.

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