

Karma, Samsara and Moksha

We Are What We Do;
What We Do Affects Others.

Karma, Samsara and Moksha

- On Hinduism, a person is an appearance of Brahman.
- Karma is the way Brahman appears as the person—what the person is.
- A person *qua* maya appears at birth and disappears at death.
- A person *qua* Brahman goes through cycles of death and rebirth.

Karma

- Karma is the way Brahman appears; it is the way a maya is.
- Applied to sentient beings, the word “karma” means “deed” or “action.”
- A person’s karma is the collection of a person’s past and present intentions and actions.
- “We are what we do.”
- Your life is your karma, and your life is you.

Ocean of Karma

- Collectively, karma can be viewed as the web of actions and reactions initiated and maintained by people's intentions and deeds.
- The ocean of life is the ocean of karma.
- What others have done affects us, and what we have done affects others.
- Your pain and sorrow is my pain and sorrow; your joy and happiness is my joy and happiness.
- The ocean of karma is *our life*. We should do our best to increase love and decrease hate.

A Upanishad Teaching on Karma



According as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become.

The doer of good becomes good.

The doer of evil becomes evil.

He becomes as he desires. ...

He who desires comes again to this world to perform actions.

—*Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad*

4.4.5–6

We Are What We Do

- The effects of karma occur not just in the future; they also happens right at the very moment a deed is performed.
- What one does at each instant constitutes who one is.
- Everyone involved is affected by one's action.
- Out of our caring for others, we need to be careful with our deeds.

The Effects of Karma

- The effects are never permanent.
- It means that a person always has another opportunity to become a better person.
- To become a better person is to have a better life.
- This is uplifting and empowering.

Karma and Justice

- In Hinduism, karma is the idea that helps Hindus gain a deeper understanding of love and justice.
- The doctrine of karma constitutes the Hindu view of justice in that one cannot get away with the consequences of one's intentions and deeds.
- There is no escape from who one is.
- My life is my karma; my karma is my life.



With the immersion into the great wisdom comes freedom from merit and demerit.

Vatulanatha-sutra, 12

- If we have to talk in terms of rewards and punishments, then karma itself is the reward and punishment.
- Life itself—every moment of it—is the reward and punishment.
- There is no judge who is in charge of rewards and punishments.
- This is why a bad person can never have a good life.

Karma and Fairness in Life

- Karma helps us address many big questions we have in life:

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Things happen because of what has happened up to now.

Is it fair that a good person has a bad life while a bad person has a good life?

Life is karma. A bad person can never have a good life.

Why me? Why not me?

Try not see it in terms of you and the others. Try to see it in terms of all of us.

Samsara

- ‘Samsara’ means the cycle of appearance and disappearance—the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
- We are in samsara because we are appearances of Brahman.
- As appearances, we forget what we truly are. We forget what is like to be Brahman. This ignorance (*avidya*) leads to our attachment to the world of maya and our desire to cling to life.



At death, his inner and outer bodies are extinguished.
Brahman alone exists and he is That forever, all in All.



Hindus believe that there is no eternal hell, no
damnation. They concur that there is no intrinsic evil.
All is good. All is God.

Rebirth

- Rebirth in Hinduism is the reappearance of Brahman.
- It is Brahman (the Self) that is reborn.
- Rebirth is not metempsychosis—the transmigration of an individual, non-physical soul from an old body into a new body.
- The *phenomenal self* of a person does not come back in the next life. This is why we do not remember our previous lives.
- A person's karma reverberates; her legacy echoes in the ocean of life.

Dualism and Afterlife

- Many people subscribe to a dualistic view that a person is made up of a body and a soul.
- Brahman appears as maya and is the ground of all beings.
- This is why we shouldn't misconstrue rebirth as the transmigration of the soul.
- Which metaphysical view one adopts would affect one's view on afterlife.

What Heaven Is Like

The March 24, 1997 issue of Time magazine published, as part of a special report on *A History of Heaven*, a survey on people's views on Heaven.



Do you believe in the existence of heaven, where people live forever with God after they die?

Yes **81%**
No **13%**

Do you believe in hell, where people are punished forever after they die?

Yes **63%**
No **30%**

Do people get into heaven based mostly on the good things they do or on their faith in God or both?*

Good things they do **6%**
Faith in God **34%**
Both **57%**

From a telephone poll of 1,018 adult Americans taken for TIME/CNN on March 11-12 by Yankelovich Partners Inc. Sampling error is $\pm 3.1\%$. "Not sures" omitted.

*asked of 809 who believe in heaven. Sampling error is $\pm 3.5\%$.

Do you think of heaven as something that is "up there"?*

Yes **67%**
No **29%**

Immediately after death, which of the following do you think will happen to you?*

Go directly to heaven ... **61%**
Go to purgatory **15%**
Go to hell **1%**
Be reincarnated **5%**
End of existence **4%**

Which of the following do you believe are in heaven?*

Angels **93%**
St. Peter **79%**
Harps **43%**
Halos **36%**

Is heaven a perfect version of the life we know on earth, or is it totally different?

Perfect version **11%**
Totally different **85%**

Does only a person's soul live in heaven, or does a person have both a soul and body?

Only soul **66%**
Body and soul **26%**

Do you believe you will meet friends and family members in heaven when you die?

Yes **88%**
No **5%**

Asked of 809 who believe in heaven. Sampling error is $\pm 3.5\%$.



The role of space and time in the concept of heaven is related to the presence of bodies there, which requires that it be in some sense a place. Jewish tradition has always held that life in the other world is life in the body. Further, the much ignored fact is that neither the New Testament nor the early Christian writers ever used the term “immortal soul” or “immortal spirit.” The early Christians, like the rabbis, understood that union with God was union of the whole human, both soul and body, with him. Christian tradition continued to assume this union until, in the third century C.E., Platonic ideas of the soul’s great superiority to the body promoted the idea of the survival of souls apart from bodies.

A History of Heaven, p. 15

Moksha

- ‘Moksha’ literally means “leaping out.”
- It is to leap out of (to free oneself from) samsara so that one no longer sees and experiences life as an individual going through birth, death and rebirth.
- To achieve moksha is to be enlightened and understand the true state of existence—to lose oneself and to exist as Brahman.
- To obtain moksha is to gain Brahman’s perspective—to exist as all.
- To reach moksha, we need to let go of our desires/attachments.



Philosophically, *moksha* means “release from worldly existence or transmigration; final or eternal emancipation.” But moksha is not a state of extinction of the conscious being. Nor is it mere unconsciousness. Rather it is perfect freedom, an indescribable state of nondifferentiation, a proximity to, or a oneness with, the Divine. Moksha marks an end to the earthly sojourn, but it may also be understood as a beginning, not unlike graduation from university. *Apavarga* and *kaivalya* are other apt terms for this ineffable condition of perfect detachment, freedom and oneness.

What Is Hinduism? p. 38



Scripture teaches that “for the great-souled, the surest way to liberation is the conviction that ‘I am Brahman’.

Shukla Yajur Veda, Paingala Upanishad 4.19



The human being is liberated not by effort, not by yogic practices, not by any self-transformation, but only by the knowledge gained from scripture and self-reflection that at its core the being is in fact Brahman.

Four Goals in Life

- According to the Laws of *Manu*, there are four basic goals in one's life:
 1. pleasure (*kama*)
 2. gain (*artha*)
 3. righteousness (*dharma*)
 4. liberation (*moksha*)
- Only the last goal can give a person true release so that he or she would no longer be consumed by desires, anxiety and fear, and thus be free spiritually.