

Karma and Reincarnation for Teachers

Caring for Relationships

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In this article I give an overview of Karma and Reincarnation and the way it may be helpful in the realm of education and the working of teachers with their pupils.

Various individuals have known about reincarnation in the past, even if it has not generally been accepted, as is shown by the epitaph that Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself while still at the age of 23.

***The Body
of
Benjamin Franklin
Printer
Like the cover of an old book,
Its contents torn out
And stripped of its lettering and gilding,
Lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be lost,
For it will, as he believed, appear once more,
In a new and more elegant edition,
Revised and corrected
by
The Author***

The idea that we have 'invisible' connections to the people in our lives is expressed by author Herman Melville¹:

"We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along their sympathetic fibres, as actions as causes and return to us as results."

The Law of Karma has been described: 'For every action we perform there will be a reaction (fruit) equal in nature and degree. Do a little good action; this will create joy and happiness to a fellow human being or other creature. Sooner or later, in a few seconds or lifetimes, you will enjoy the fruit of that action and reap the little joy you had sown before. The greater the sacrifice and goodness of the action, the greater the fruit you will

¹ Herman Melville: 1819-1891 (most noted for his Moby Dick novel). As quoted in *Best Thoughts of Best Thinkers: Amplified, Classified, Exemplified and Arranged as a Key to Unlock the Literature of All Ages* (1904) by Hialmer Day Gould and Edward Louis Hessenmueller

receive. Similarly, a bad or mean action, which inflicts pain and suffering to other beings, will bring equivalent results to the doer.’

Or: '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 as its cause was skilful or unskilful.'²

Spiritual research into Karma and Reincarnation was a major goal in Rudolf Steiner’s life but one that he was only able to follow fully in the last few years of his life because he felt that there were not ears to hear earlier.

Threefold Man

As the human being has three aspects to his being: body, soul and spirit, so are three major laws of being.

Body -- Laws of Heredity

Soul -- Laws of Karma

Spirit -- Laws of Reincarnation

Body and Heredity

The Law of Heredity governs the body and the relation between the succeeding generations. The body is subject to birth and death. It is a summary of the past.

Our physical body carries our racial characteristics. It is worth noting that humanity is but one species whereas the animal forms and species are manifold. Our life (etheric) body carries the family characteristics that we inherit from our forebears. Our sentient (astral) body carries the tendencies, dispositions and passions that we inherit from our parents.

In our first seven years of life we strive to make our inherited physical body our own possession and feverish illnesses may arise within and as part of this struggle to overcome inherited tendencies.

In the next seven years, the middle years of childhood between the change of teeth and puberty, we strive to make our inherited life body our own. Similarly in the third seven years we strive to develop our own dispositions and passions and cast off our inheritance, hence the frequent struggle between an adolescent and his/her parents.

Soul and Karma

The Law of Karma works with consequence, cause and effect in the realm of the soul. Our soul, where we experience our thoughts, feelings and will impulses, is the meeting ground of the physical world and the spiritual worlds. Our inner self meets the experiences of the outer world, our environment, in the present moment. Karma is ‘activity that has become destiny’. In each lifetime we develop our personality which is dependent on and held together in our ‘memory’. Our biography is full of meetings, of opportunities, that arise from previous encounters. However we are under no compulsion, indeed we are free in that moment, to act or not act in true fulfilment of the potential of

² <http://www.ncf.carleton.ca/freenet/rootdir/menus/sigs/religion/buddhism/introduction/truths/karma2.html>

these meetings. If issues are not recognised or resolved they stay in our karma for a future date.

Spirit and Reincarnation

The Law of Reincarnation works in the realm of the spirit. The spirit carries our immortal seed for the future, our individuality that encompasses the abilities, faculties and skills acquired through striving, overcoming struggles in life. Our individuality (or entelechy) follows a sequence of earth lives (incarnations) where the faculties of one life are metamorphosed into forces and talents for the next life. Usually the spirit waits until the evolution of mankind and the conditions on the earth have sufficiently changed before seeking another incarnation and the challenges that it will bring.

Sleep

Sleep is sometimes called "the little death". In sleep there is a partial separation of the soul spiritual from the life body. During sleep we work over again the events of the previous day — they may appear in our dreams or cause us restless sleep — and a subconscious adjustment is begun. In the morning we must reconnect with the activities of the previous day as a precondition for continuing.

Memory is essential for establishing one's identity — if one forgets everything and nothing can be recalled then one does not know who one is! Our biography is a sequence of conscious memories interconnected by mysterious periods of unconsciousness/sleep, where perhaps we consult with our guardian angel about our life's aims and tasks.

Death

Death is sometimes called "the big sleep". Gradually our various bodies separate and dissolve into the wider cosmos. On death our physical body breathes its last breath and begins the process of decay as its hallowed substance is passed over to the earth. The etheric body, astral body and ego have separated from the physical body.

Over the next three days (before the funeral, during the wake), as the etheric body separates from the astral body and ego, one experiences a panorama of one's whole life, from birth to death, spread out before one. One's etheric body then dissolves into the world etheric contributing what one has acquired during the sojourn on earth to it.

Kamaloca

Next a much longer process, Kamaloca, takes place — the separation of the astral body from the ego — in the lunar or moon sphere. In this sphere we experience "burning desires" because we no longer have physical organs to satisfy our cravings, urges and passions to which we have become accustomed or habituated during life. We also experience our past life in reverse, unfolding from the moment of death back to our first memories. We also experience all our actions in reverse — as others experienced them. When we once inflicted pain on some person or creature then we now suffer that pain; conversely we also experience the warm appreciation for our kind deeds and love. For those who led a self-centred life and were cruel to those around them this can be truly a time of torment and 'hell', a time to repent and resolve to make amends and improve. This period lasts about as long as the time we slept on earth. We can not change the past

but we can develop impulses for the next life. Here, with our guardian angel's help, we make intentions to make good every thought, feeling and deed that lowered us.

The Spiritual Planetary Spheres

In the realm of Mercury, the Archangels school us, that is our eternal spirit being or ego, in an intimate understanding of why things are as they are, to accept our destiny.

Next in the realm of Venus, the Archai help us to develop a religious attitude towards our future tasks and intentions.

In the supersensible Sun realm, the Elohim connect us with new souls we will meet in the next life. We also discard the spiritual head form of our last incarnation and fashion a new head form by metamorphosing the spiritual forms of the rest of our body. [Rudolf Steiner indicates that our past blood circulation system metamorphoses into our next nervous system, the liver into the brain, the kidney into the eyes, the gall and spleen into the ears, lungs into the scalp.]

As we pass through the outer supersensible planetary realms we receive further schooling from the higher Hierarchies on their plans for human evolution which we are free to adopt in our time of incarnation.

As we pass the spiritual midnight hour and return to earth, drawn to another incarnation we build up the spiritual forces to create the new body and the new situation we need to carry out our intentions in our next life. In the Mars sphere we build the larynx, our organ of speech, of the word. [Note the martial power of Hitler and Mussolini in their ability to harangue crowds.] In the Sun sphere we build our heart forces. In the Venus sphere we connect with our intended specific family. In the Mercury sphere we connect with the race and language of our intended incarnation. In the Moon sphere, nearest to the earth, in the months before our birth, we determine whether we will physically be male or female and gather the appropriate etheric forces out of the world etheric again, enriched by those who have departed the earth since we died. And so we arrive at a new birth.

Evolution

The goals of the guiding spiritual Hierarchies for the evolution of humanity are that we develop and become independent beings freely able to express love to the highest degree. Our ability to become free is dependent on the strengthening opposition of the retarded beings, Lucifer and Ahriman.

Lucifer, or the Devil

Lucifer would like humanity to remain in spirit as half-developed angels, i.e. to not develop any further. He tempts us to stay as we are — to be satisfied with the present moment (cf. Faust), to bask in the glory of past achievements and not strive towards any further stages of evolution. He inspires the beauty and creativity of the Arts.

Each great civilisation begins with Luciferic enthusiasm — Lucifer enters into human souls and out of this springs the wishes and aspirations, ideals, enthusiasm, desire for happiness, the accomplishments of the Arts, but also the injurious desires — egotistical impulses, greed, arrogance, etc.

Ahriman, or Satan

Ahriman would like humanity to remain on the earth and not to return to the spirit worlds for further guidance and development before reincarnating with new impulses. He wishes to create heaven on earth. He would like to regulate, control and define so that the future is pre-defined with no creativity. He thrives on accuracy and exactness, which is the essence of the Sciences.

After each age of civilisation has become established under the guidance of Lucifer, Ahriman, with his cleverness, joins in and spoils Lucifer's handiwork. He destroys it, sets it into systems, laws and regulations so that it grinds to halt. (On a smaller scale, just follow the progress of "Tomorrow's Schools" from grand ideal to bureaucratic regulation.) Eventually Lucifer makes a new start, elsewhere.

Rudolf Steiner said of this: "As death is the karmic fulfilment of birth; so Ahriman is the karmic fulfilment of Lucifer."

Man and Woman

We may notice that women's soul tendencies are towards the emotional and the psychic whilst men's are towards intellectuality and materialism. Women experience life to a more profound depth of soul whereas men may have richer, more scientific experiences, which remain more superficial and do not affect his soul so deeply.

Women retain intuitive spirituality and flexibility. Men's inner being penetrates matter more thoroughly and his brain is more intractable and rigid.

Women's deeper soul experience in one life leads them to seek a deeper penetration into matter in the next life, which is to experience life in a male body. Men seek to incarnate less deeply into matter, which is to find a female incarnation for their next life. Rudolf Steiner indicates that since Lemuria we have alternately taken male then female incarnations. Thus "Man is the karmic fulfilment of Woman" and vice versa so that an overall balancing is achieved.

Illnesses

A soul that in one lifetime is tempted by or permeated with the luciferic element needs to be corrected in the following lifetime. Experiencing a tendency to illness often brings this about.

For example, an excessive inwardness, egotism and brooding, uncharitableness and an unloving attitude towards others in one life leads, in the next life, to pox diseases with skin outbreaks and disfigurement 'representing, as it were, a desire to come out of oneself. The earlier unloving attitude is thus overcome at a physical level and the "I" now receives strength to stand in a new relationship with its surroundings.' Smallpox is such an illness in a severe form. Chicken pox and measles are less severe forms.

In the other direction: 'A life that was powerfully affected by emotions will dispose a person towards an illness, which is wrestled with entirely on the inside of the body. It is as if the forces which previously expressed themselves in explosive outbursts are now compressed within and have to be overcome there.' Diphtheria is such an illness in a severe form that grips into the inner organs thus helping the ego get a grip on the body. Scarlet fever and glandular fever are less severe forms.

Karmic Consequences

What can we as teachers [and parents] do when we become aware of the karmic consequences of certain conditions and attitudes? Rudolf Steiner has indicated:³

Attitude in a Prior Life	Consequence in Next Life
Attentiveness and interest in the world	Well-formed organs, strong physical body, thick bushy hair, choleric temperament.
Lack of interest in the wider world (e.g. being secluded in a nunnery)	Poorly formed organs, rickets, bow legs, baldness, melancholic temperament.
Ability to learn languages (mobile etheric life body)	Ability to make unprejudiced judgements
Excessive acquisitiveness	Tendency to infectious illnesses
Illusionary self image, delusions	Measles, scarlet fever
Uncharitableness	Small pox
Lack of interest in music	Asthma

"Therefore it is a blessing for children to point things to them so that they can look more carefully. Arouse their interest."

Hatred	> life of sorrows	> dulled consciousness, mental illness, clumsiness
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"Therefore give children an opportunity to do deeds out of love."

No sense for facts	> tendency to lies	> defective organs	> frivolousness
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"Therefore develop a sense in the children for facts and the truth."

Difficult Karma can be healed by human love; it does not have to be left for the afflicted one to suffer alone. Indeed, we should not be able to rest in peace when we know another is suffering. It is the task of teacher in continuing and carrying out the work of the third Hierarchy to help remove the obstacles that lie in the children's paths, by recognising the karmic implications of what they observe in the children standing before them and doing what they can to help.

³ **Manifestations of Karma** by Rudolf Steiner. ISBN-13: 978-1855840584