Karma: the Unseen Source of Stress
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HEALTH

Karma: the Unseen Source of Stress

Coping with stress is easier when it's seen as the present manifestation of past actions

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Most of us, when it comes to stress, have some difficulty in being able to handle it. We react with frustration, anxiety, a sense of powerlessness and feelings of being overwhelmed. Although I have never pronounced myself to be a Hindu, it amazes me how influential Hinduism has been in managing stress in my life, as the influence of my upbringing still exists. To my awe, the Hindu concepts of karma and reincarnation have profoundly affected my attitude towards managing the stress in my life. Pondering the concept of karma and how the soul transmigrates as needed in order to encompass lessons within itself has, over a period of time, resulted in a clear understanding of stress which works for me and may well be beneficial to others.

The concept of karma includes the premise that energy is circular. What I give, I receive, there is a cause-effect relationship to my actions. When I have an attitude of negativity due to stress, this comes back to me in some way.

Here then is the first way karma can help shift one's understanding of stress: if one does not expend energy into worrying or fostering other overwhelming feelings, then this negative energy cannot return. This means we don't need to react to stress with those negative feelings of frustration, powerlessness and tension. The energy expended reacting to stress is neither necessary nor productive.

Karma also encompasses the understanding that things are happening for a reason: the energy returning to me was once given from me. Here is the second way we change our understanding: in some way, the stress that is occurring to me is simply energy that I once emitted for some reason. Implicit in the concept of karma is also the concept that the things that are happening provide an opportunity to grow, so that in the future one will not have to discharge unnecessary energy. That's the third way understanding karma's part helps us deal with stress.

Stress is one way to create human bondage. If one considers this, one can perceive how stress cultivates worry, frustration, procrastination and other aspects of negative energy for many. In doing this, we are choosing to create karma which, when it returns, will continue this cycle of negativity. We have landed in bondage because we do not understand that what is happening to us is because of us. The law of karma states that we're responsible for our fate. We also have the choice of generating positive energy to emit and return to us. But if I choose to succumb to the stress and react with negativity, I become a slave to it. By understanding that the law of energy is attempting to balance itself, I can see that what I have perceived as stress is really an opportunity for growth to occur

and positive energy to flow. Worry, passivity and frustration are choices that will not allow that balance to be achieved, and thus they continue the cycle of stress.

If things happen for a reason, the soul needs to attain the level of understanding that the experience may unfold. I can then view the stress that I have faced through my life in this way. What am I stressing over and why? These questions have often led me to understand why I have allowed stress to affect me in the way it had. If karma is the balance of energy, then the negative energy of stress can only be balanced by the positive energy of understanding. As a consequence of my understanding better why I am stressed over certain things in my life, I have observed that karma tends to circulate in the opposite direction.

For example, when I experienced the stress and death of a dearly loved one several years ago, my father suggested that perhaps there was a reason for this experience. Grieving alone encumbers a person with a great amount of stress. Upon hearing what my father said, I suddenly realized that up to that point, most of my karma had been extremely negative. I was not in school, I had involved myself with the wrong people and didn't in general have much to show for my life. This was the turning point. Suddenly, things made sense. If this person was a part of my life to help me turn my life around, somehow the energy was balancing out. Her death was the balancing act. I realized, because of this understanding of the balance of karmic energy, that what had happened was negative energy returning to me. At this point I had a choice. Understanding that a balance had occurred on some level changed my perspective on the stress I was experiencing. Although I

grieved, I had an unusual perspective on the situation in my life. I applied the stressful energy I felt from the grief into my studies, and I concentrated on working and cultivating healthier relationships. Things became positive. Good things began happening. It was as though the universe had begun, for me, the transition of karma from a downward to an upward path.

From this I have realized that one way I lessen stress in my life is by questioning the meaning of my stress. There exists a lesson in stress, and the soul is trying to bring that lesson to consciousness in a way that the human mind can comprehend. By understanding the source of my stress, I can evaluate if it is something that I need to deal with, or if it exists as a means of obtaining a lesson I must learn. For example, while being a doctoral student, a certain amount of stress naturally occurs, as that is part of the energy of being a student. However, the additional stress I place on myself is not. If I experience additional stress, it is because I place it there or somehow am allowing the energy that I have previously expended to take over. By my understanding that the stress that is occurring naturally is merely the balance of the energy I put into my education, this allows me to embrace what is existing without it negatively affecting my life.

But how can one implement this notion within one's perception? How does one apply the notion of energy transforming in daily life? Although this is not an easy task, with time it can occur. A sense of being overwhelmed or feeling negative can signify the first sign. When this happens, one needs to step back and look at the sources of stress. Why are these particular events or situations stressful? Is there

some energy being negatively returned to me by this situation or event? If so, this understanding can shift the attitude. Knowing that this negative energy is being returned allows one to realize that it is nothing more than a balance of energy. The worrying, frustration and procrastination that one adds perpetuates more negative energy, which continues the cycle of debilitating stress.

Recognizing that stress is only a shift in energy can assist one in handling the stress more effectively. Recognizing that the stress is signaling that incoming energy is negative can allow a person to prepare for this and to develop positive ways of dealing with it.

Understanding the law of karma is essential in order to apply the concept to one's life. Recognizing that energy is passing and taking this attitude tames the stressfulness from becoming an overwhelming sense of fate. Understanding and adopting the mind frame that one does not have to dramatize the situation allows one to witness the flow of energy and the natural way in which this energy becomes balanced.

Earlier I mentioned that when things appear stressful, it may be an opportunity to grow. In a sense, the energy is coming back to provide a chance of learning how to handle the situation, so that in the future, it doesn't occur in the same pattern. Additionally, the sense of being stressed may also be karma signalling that a change needs to occur. Perhaps there are things that one must let go of at that particular moment. Perhaps there is an easier way of doing something. Perhaps, karma is providing an opportunity for one to ask for help from

another. In each of these situations, karma is stating that something is being given back.

What is done with this opportunity is an individual's choice. However, if the person doesn't choose or chooses unwisely, karma will bring the negative energy back at a different time in this life or another. Choosing wisely at the time, understanding that energy is balancing and that an opportunity has arisen to be a growing spiritual person, meets the stress that is occurring in a person's life, not with reaction, but rather with action. Action allows the energy to flow and goes with it in a positive rather than a negative way

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