Karma and Reincarnation
Category : May 1999
Published by Anonymous on May. 01, 1999

INSIGHT

Karma and Reincarnation

It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating.Life after life, we are the makers of our own destiny.

Just before the turn of the Twentieth Century, Swami Vivekananda, a brilliant young Hindu monk from India, preached about the great law of karma in the Western United States to all who drew near. He explained, "Any word, any action, any thought that produces an effect is called karma. Thus, the law of karma means the law of causation, of inevitable cause and effect. Whatever we see or feel or do, whatever action there is anywhere in the universe, while being the effect of past work on the one hand, becomes on the other, the cause in its turn and produces its own effect. Each one of us is the effect of an infinite past. The child is ushered into the world not as something flashing from the hands of nature, as poets delight so much to depict, but he has the burden of an infinite past. For good or evil, he comes to work out his own past deeds. This makes the differentiation. This is the law of karma. Each one of us is the maker of his own fate."

"Through the ripening of the fruits of his actions he does not attain any rest, like a worm caught within a whirlpool. The desire for liberation arises in human beings at the end of many

births, through the ripening of their past virtuous conduct."

Yajur Veda, Paingala Upanishad 2.22

Moment by moment, we create our own destiny...

"The idea of rebirth runs parallel with the doctrine of the eternity of the human soul. How is it that one man is born of good parents, receives a good education and becomes a good man, while another comes from besotted parents and ends on the gallows? How do you explain this inequality without implicating God? Then, too, what becomes of my freedom if this is my first birth? If I come into this world without experience of a former life, my independence would be gone, for my path would be marked out by the experience of others. If I cannot be the maker of my own fortune, then I am not free. But if this is not my first birth, I can take upon myself the blame for the misery of this life, which is the result of the evil I have committed in another, and say I will unmake it. This, then, is our philosophy of the migration of the soul: We come into this life with the experience of another, and the fortune or misfortune of this existence is the result of our acts in a former existence, and thus we are always becoming better, till at last perfection is reached."

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda' spiritual ardor was set ablaze by the great Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji (1863?1902) is best known for his electrifying address to the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, to which he traveled without invitation to represent Hinduism but was invited to speak through a chance meeting

with a Harvard professor. Thus began two years of inspired lectures that have influenced millions of seekers. Returning to India, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, which thrives today internationally, with over 100 centers and nearly 1,000 sannyasins. Swamiji is credited, along with Tagore, Aurobindo, S. Radhakrishnan and others, with sparking the modern Hindu revival.

"According to one's deeds, according to one's behavior, so one becomes. The one who does good becomes good, the one who does evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action and evil by evil action. That to which the heart is attached, toward this, the subtle body moves together with its action, which still adheres. Attaining the goal of whatever actions he performed here on Earth, he goes once more from that world to this world of action."

Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.5-6