

The Law of Karma

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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[[Master's Teachings](#)]

The Buddha came to this world to teach us, and to guide us to awaken to life's truth. One of his most important teachings is the law of karma. Though we do not feel and see it, karma governs our everyday life; here is a story to illustrate its workings.

Many years ago a designer came to see me. He asked me how it was that some people are able to make money out of a product while others get into debt trying to sell the same product. This was his personal experience.

This designer used to work for a big company. He designed many products and helped this company make good profits. Since many of his designs sold well, he thought of starting his own business. He left the company and devoted a lot of time, effort, and money to designing a very good new product. This product, however, was not successful on the market. He ended up losing all his savings and got himself into debt.

What was he to do? He went back to his former boss and asked him if he was interested in his new product. Knowing how good a designer this man was, after taking a careful look, the boss asked to buy the patent from him. So, he sold the patent.

Having gotten the patent, his former boss started to manufacture the product and put it on the market. Surprisingly, it was very popular with consumers and the company made a lot of money. This designer couldn't figure out why he had lost money over it while his former boss was able to earn so much selling the same thing. He couldn't eat and sleep over this and was on the verge of a mental breakdown. That's how he came to see me.

I shared with him the idea that in order to be successful, one needs to have positive karma and good affinities with people. Positive karma is created by doing good deeds that benefit people, and when people benefit from our help, we form good affinities with them. Take a look at this designer's former boss. He must have created positive karma in his past life and formed good affinities with many people. That's why he's very successful in his business. Because he has good affinities with people, people are fond of him. In turn, they are fond of his products and buy them. This is all because of the positive karma he has created.

It's the same with negative karma. We can see many cases of this. There are people who lead a rugged life. They are born into a poor family, have had a rough childhood, and encounter a lot of hardships in life. There are people who are born and raised in a good family, but a misfortune occurs, forcing them into hardship and poverty. There are also cases where a person decides to go somewhere with friends, but ends up being permanently disabled due to an accident. If they had stayed at home, instead of going out, the accident might have been avoided. Such twist and turns in life are the workings of karma. How our life turns out is sometimes beyond our control, and the workings of karma are truly inconceivable. Positive karma will lead to good

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fortune and a blessed life; negative karma will lead to misfortune and suffering. Yet, people are usually not aware of the influence of karma on their life. The Buddha wants to teach us about the law of karma so that we can create a better life.

In our past lives, we've done numerous deeds, both good and bad. Good deeds create positive karma, and bad ones create negative karma. Together, the positive and negative karma create the ups and downs in our life.

Karma means that we reap what we sow, but it is often difficult for us to understand how this plays out because different karma ripens at different times. When we create karma, we store a karmic seed in our consciousness. This seed can come to fruition in our present life, our next life, or in another future life. For example, around us we may notice there are people who do bad things but still enjoy good fortune. It seems like they don't experience retribution for the bad things they've done. However, their good fortune actually comes from the positive karma they have created in their past lives. It's not that their bad deeds do not create negative karma; rather, the negative karma they are creating in this life has yet to ripen and come to effect. All of us create a mix of both positive and negative karma. Both of these ripen across lifetimes and will one day bear their fruits.

When our karma comes to fruition, it's very hard or even impossible to avoid it. The only way that we can attempt to avoid it is to understand the law of karma and not create negative karma in the first place. Once we've planted a karmic seed, it will eventually bear fruit, no matter how long it lays dormant in our consciousness.

Our karma also does not ever change its characteristics. Although our negative and positive karma are mixed together in our consciousness, the positive karma will still lead to good, the negative will still result in retribution. Positive karma will not give rise to retribution nor negative karma to good fortune. Fruition will take place in time, whether in this present life, in our next life, or in a future life. Karmic seeds will not disappear however long ago they were created. We should understand this. The time when our karma ripens may vary, but its fruition will eventually come.

The Buddha wants people to know how karma works. Positive karma begets good fortune; negative karma begets misfortune. Once we understand this principle, we will know how to conduct ourselves so that our actions create positive instead of negative karma.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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