



## Laws of Karma: Simple and Complex

### Karma-Fruit: Rational and Mysterious

To accomplish any task we need action or *karma*. To maintain our own wellness we need to know how we should exercise, how we should eat and rest, and how we should cope with stresses of life. When we are sick we need to know what to do in order to heal. We all have some idea of the relation between an effort and the fruit it gives. In some cases the relation between fruit and *karma* is quite linear and easy to understand. The fruit is pretty much guaranteed if the *karma* is done. Someone hires you and you are given a job contract. You put in the hours and get a paycheck as fruit. You exercise regularly and you can see your body getting more muscular and strong. We have called such relations *rational karma-fruit*. Then there are instances where the relation between *karma* and fruit is seemingly random. You are born in a rich family and have all the material things given to you. Another person is born in a poor family and spends his life just surviving. Or a person who has led an exemplary life eating and exercising properly gets cancer.

In a society which embraces advances in science (especially medicine) and, in civil society, a greater part of our life falls under the rational category. Thus the share of karma-fruit that is rational is continually increasing, while the share of the *mystery* karma-fruit is decreasing. In the past many diseases, infertility, eclipses, floods, etc., were explained as elaborate punishments from gods. Advances in medicine science now explain many of these afflictions using *rational* karma-fruit.

However, in spite of scientific advances, many important outcomes in our life cannot be explained rationally.

### How do we live with lack of predictability?

How do we cope with situations when bad things happen for no reason? Or when great things happen for no reason? As we encounter *mysterious* karma-fruit relations we employ a variety of reasons, some based on religion, some based on what the culture has taught us. Sometimes we depend on doctors or healers or shamans or priests to explain things for us. Consider the following events that seem to defy any rational explanation:

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- *You exercise, eat properly and rest, yet you get cancer.*
- *You work hard and do your job responsibly, but you get fired.*
- *You go out of your way to help a stranded motorist and he robs you.*
- *You save money all your life and build a beautiful home. A storm destroys it.*
- *You goof off in school, party all day and then win a million dollars in a lottery.*

One needs to develop an understanding of how to accept and deal with such issues without falling prey to hustlers and con artists who may make our situation even worse.

## The Life Game

Dozens of explanations were offered as almost all of the predictions made by war experts started to fail in Iraq. An amazing statement was made by Mr. Donald Rumsfeld: "Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know." In this remarkable statement, lampooned by comics and ridiculed by his opponents, Mr. Rumsfeld captures the great confusion of life's drama.

In any game there are rules of the game. If you don't know the rules of the game you will constantly be surprised, befuddled and anxious. Everything will appear to be haphazard. Your actions and their effect will appear unrelated, at least much of the time. Sometimes you will make a tremendous effort and the outcome may be a penalty. Other times you may just be standing around and get applauded. You definitely will want to figure out the rules of the game as soon as possible. If you look at the game of American football, soccer, cricket, basketball, baseball, rugby, chess, Greco-Roman wrestling, on-line world of warcraft, etc. you can see that while each game is exciting and fun to play, the rules are quite different and somewhat arbitrary. Sometimes the rules are changed to make the game more interesting. Just as important as training for a game is knowing and playing by the rules. You may have seen outstanding players being ejected from games for too many fouls or un-sportsman-like conduct.

- Life itself is a game on a much larger scale. Of course, the end point for our physical body is always death, but in between most of us would agree the goal is to be 'well'. The rules that control our lives fall into a number of categories:

- *the laws of the Natural world described by physics and chemistry;*
- *the rules of biology which are more complex;*
- *the rules of the society we live in which range from legal rules to cultural rules;*
- *rules between societies that could impact our lives through treaties, trade and war.*

To learn about all of the rules of our life-game one would need to spend years digesting texts of physics, law, biology, religion, philosophy, etc. While it is not possible to learn everything, it is important to develop some *basic sets of rules for facing the mystery of karma.*

Human life is enormously complex and ever since humans could think they have been trying to figure out the laws of karma. Humans have also tried to figure out the laws of the physical universe in which we live. Physicists and chemists have, for centuries, tried to understand the laws that govern planetary motion, the trajectory of a cannon ball, and the chemical reactions that convert one material into another. While science may never be able to answer the deeper questions of human existence and purpose, it does provide ONE model for approaching complex problems through experiments, logical thinking, and discarding logic where experiments demand so. It is not clear whether issues of love, hate, greed, anxiety, depression, etc., can be approached and resolved through this rational empirical method. We will describe in brief some of the other techniques used to figure out the karma-fruit relations later in this chapter.

We can see that most of life's rules are fuzzy and they cannot be put in the form of soccer rules or traffic rules. You cannot say with certainty, "Eat healthy meals, exercise and you will never get sick." Neither can anyone predict how long you will live and how your life will come to an end. One cannot say with certainty that someone living a *good* life will have a *good* death. Very few important transactions in life have a predictable outcome. So the first thing for us to learn is to live with lack of certainty i.e., understand the concept of probability. The important focus is not how one can predict, but how one will cope with uncertainty. When your expectations don't come true, when your efforts don't bear the fruit you expected, how will you react? Will you become bitter from betrayal? Or will you stay loving and light?

### **Probability: Small and Big Problems**

The main reason karma-fruit relation continues to mystify us is that in complex problems that involve lots of interactions, there are many outcomes to an action. In large, complex problems the number of choices are so enormous that even if the rules are known the

outcome cannot be figured out. *One can only assign a probability that a particular outcome will occur.* Consider, for example, a coin being flipped 30 times (or 30 coins being flipped). The possible number of choices is over a billion. We can only say that the probability that all flips will lead to heads is one in a billion. If you go to Las Vegas and ask the losers and the winners why they lost or won, they may have all kinds of theories. But, on average, we know Las Vegas spits out losers because that's how the probabilities are set up.

We can now predict with precision when the next eclipse of the sun will occur, even decades or centuries into the future. But, put a dozen multi-colored marbles in can, shake the can, and throw the marbles out—we cannot predict how the marbles will settle on the floor. *In large problems we cannot make predictions about individual events with certainty. Thus, it becomes frustrating if we try to predict the cause-effect relationship for individuals. We can only talk about the cause-effect for the entire system.* This is an important realization for all large systems and a lack of this understanding can lead to belief in superstitions and being hoodwinked by con artists. *Con artists exploit probabilities and present a situation that has a remote probability of occurring as something that will occur with certainty.*

## **Wellness and The Laws of Karma**

Our mind-body wellness is an area where much is unknown. There are simple rules of wellness that work most of the time. For example, if you eat small portions of primarily a plant-based diet, sleep regularly, and exercise a total of an hour or so everyday you will be quite healthy (exercise done in small portions through chores, walks, few minutes of intense effort, ... gives the benefit of an hour of exercise). However, even a person following these rules may get cancer because he has inherited some genes that make him vulnerable to the toxicity in the air or water or in the culture. There are so many variables in our wellness that one can only say with a finite probability that a certain way of living will help you stay healthy. If the probability is more than 50% the rule is worth pursuing.

The laws of karma-fruit in general are very much like the rules of finance and banking. Some things are quite predictable and others are uncertain. If you watch an investment program on TV you can see experts give their tips on how to get rich. They tell you which stocks to pick, whether gold investment is a good idea, or if you should buy real estate. The collapse of the financial markets and the accompanying loss of people's jobs and wealth suggest that the experts need to learn more.

If you are totally isolated from others, you can apply a simplistic law of karma —I reap what I sow. In more complex situations you can only understand and therefore use the laws of karma by expanding your sense of self. Thus if you get a disease unrelated to your diet and exercise it may be related to the bad karma of pollutants in the city you live in or the bad karma of the food industry you depend upon.

Various religions have provided reasons for the mystery of the karma-fruit relation. The Creation stories of religions provide the basis for the explanations to why people suffer and get unexpected rewards. Events like diseases and infertility are explained and remedies are offered. Every religion seems to have differing explanation, but in essence all world religions do suggest that to deal with suffering one needs humility and love. To deal with rewards also one needs humility and love.

### **Staying Well and Healing: How?**

Money and health are two areas that involve complexities that cause unexpected surprises. Few will argue that the best way to stay well is to avoid getting unwell. Through simple living, we can be well in body and mind. But, in spite of our best efforts there are situations where we become unwell. There are any number of healers who want to come to our rescue. In fact, the healing profession, by definition, depends on people getting unwell and not being able to become healthy on their own. How do you know if the solutions offered are going to work?

If you pick up a wellness-themed magazine, you will see a number of articles and ads from healers. Healers range from the traditional doctors who heal through Western medicine to those who use energy healing, healing by prayers, healing through acupuncture, healing through herbs and natural potions, healing through diet changes, cleansing treatments, and so on. Some claim they have special healing powers and can, by placing their hand on your belly, cure your tumors. How do we know what works and what is hocus-pocus? Depending on how bad our health is, it becomes difficult to figure out what path to pursue. Your approach has to be figured out before the crisis hits.

We can identify several approaches that are used to establish the karma-fruit relation in general and what healing techniques work. Some of these approaches contradict each other:

- *Scientific or based on empirical evidence:* In this approach carefully planned experiments are done and observed. Experts interpret the outcome and build

models for how things work. This approach works for simple problems where there are few independent and unknown parameters. Technology works on this basis. For example, the use of ultrasound machines to follow the health of the baby in the womb or X-Ray or other scanning techniques are based on such an approach.

- *Common-sense based:* Some things seem to work on the basis of general common sense even if there are no scientific studies to prove them. Sometimes scientific studies are done to verify the commonly-held beliefs. Common sense can also fail. Consuming chicken soup or a light lentil-rice meal to cure a cold is one such healing method.
- *Large studies done under blind or double-blind conditions:* In complex problems, especially those related to human health, studies are done on a large number of people. These studies are often done to establish benefits and side effects of drugs and other therapies. To isolate the placebo effect the participant does not know what they are taking (blind study). Sometimes the administrator or experimental experts are also unaware of what is being given (double-blind studies). In addition to the actual drug, placebos are used and sometimes nothing is given (the receiver thinks something is given).

If done properly and with no interference from entities that plan to profit from the therapy, double-blind studies can provide useful healing mechanisms. Most of the drugs and therapies used in Western medicine undergo such studies before being adopted. Double-blind studies provide a high probability that a therapy will work. However, there is no therapy with 100% guarantee, since human beings and their histories are so complex.

- *Therapies that could work, but the probability of working is not known:* Some therapies have originated in old cultures and are based on trial and error or intuitive minds of special healers. Often there are no double-blind studies) for such therapies (due to lack of resources or lack of desire among the healers. Eastern medicine techniques often fall in this category.

Here is a very simplistic overview of the Indian and Chinese approach:

In the Indian Ayurvedic medicine, therapy is based on the belief that everyone has *doshas* (literally flaws) which could fall in the categories of *vita*, *pitta* and *kapha*. Balancing these doshas is the key to wellness. The diagnosis of illnesses is also different from what one sees in Western medicine. Often answers to detailed questions and the pulse is used to diagnose complex illnesses. Herbs and a diet that avoids certain products, like garlic or onions etc., is used for therapy.

Chinese medicine is based on the belief that there is a flow of chi or life energy through the body and any blockage or imbalance in chi causes ill-health. Chi is not something that Western diagnostic tools, like MRI or CT scan etc., can observe. Among other things, like herbs and diet, Chinese medicine also uses needles placed on the surface of the skin during acupuncture practice to balance chi. Since Western medicine diagnostic techniques cannot observe chi like they can observe tumors, blood chemistry, viruses etc., the Chinese system is not coherent with Western medicine.

Western style double-blind studies are being done in many medical centers and some studies show promise of Eastern approaches. However, some treatments seem to work due to the placebo effect, or not at all.

### **How do we decide?**

When you are unwell you want to be well. If the illness is debilitating you are desperate to get well. Often in this vulnerable situation you may find yourself manipulated by healers. Whether it is Western medicine, Ayurvedic system, Chinese system or homeopathic system, each system wants you as a customer. Even with the best of intentions the healers are part of a business model.

*Western Medicine:* The western system is largely based on studies that are rigorous and there is a high probability that the therapy will work. However, the medicine has a business model that needs people to enter therapies as long-term customers. It is a rare doctor who takes the time to discuss lifestyle changes with you when you have a bad headache that doesn't go away. It is easier and more profitable to prescribe a drug. Diagnostics, drugs and surgery are the main tools and the life-blood of Western medicine. The drugs are often strong and can be addictive or have unwanted side effects. The diagnostics are also expensive and can sometimes be harmful, since radiation of various types is used. The desire to survive in the business world has encouraged those practicing Western medicine to approach many *abnormal* life situations as disease. Thus, sleep, sex, anxiety, etc., are all now treated as something that needs to be fixed with drugs. But there is little question that Western medicine has healing powers, even though the focus has not been on healing through lifestyle. A look at doctors or nurses above 50 shows that lifestyle is not a strong emphasis in Western medicine. Many of the healers are not very healthy.

Given the enormous cost of western-style medicine, many societies are finding that the system is becoming *unsustainable*. It is being recognized that the approach mainly based on technology of diagnostics, drugs and the knife, need to be complemented with lifestyle-based healing. More studies are being done on how lifestyle choices impact health and these studies follow the usual western style rigor in their study. Studies are also showing that a very large fraction (ranging from 30% to 80%) of western healthcare expenses can be avoided through lifestyle changes.

*Chinese and Indian Medicine:* From diagnosing an illness to treating the illness the Chinese or Indian medicine is quite distinct from Western medicine. Proponents promise cures for all sorts of illnesses. Western medicine rejects the diagnostics used in Indian or Chinese styles.

Western medicine rejects the idea that by examining the pulse or looking at the tongue or eyes you can tell anything about complex problems. You may be able to tell if the person is unwell but not the details of the illness. Nevertheless in many western medicine centers studies are being done to examine the benefits of the therapies suggested by Eastern medicine. Certain benefits of acupuncture for pain seem to be validated, and benefits of Ayurvedic-based approaches, such as the use of turmeric (injury healing, perhaps memory benefits), ginger (nausea), garlic, etc., seem to be verified.

Observe the outcome of any therapy. Are the Chinese or Indians (who are most likely to have followed the therapies) healthier or more full of vitality than others? Are those who follow western medicine more vital than those who don't? It is also important to see how the proponents of a therapy make choices when they are themselves in crisis. It may be noted that the well-known spiritual leader Dalai Lama was ill at least twice recently and he chose the Indian Institute of Medicine in New Delhi for his treatment. The institute is based on western medicine. It appears that at least under acute conditions the spiritual leader trusted western medicine.

**IkOn Kar, Pratyahar and Dharan: Developing your inner and outer eye for a holistic view**

Mind-body wellness has been a challenge to humanity since millennia. The healing professions have primarily been based on the assumption that to heal requires expertise and this expertise is acquired by a group of highly trained people. They may have MDs behind their names or they may be specialists in Chinese or Indian medicine. These people are smart and have devoted time and effort understanding their craft. However, the focus of this wellness is not on teaching everyone to learn to stay well, but on fixing ill health. However, as mass education is now available it is possible for all of us to learn how to maintain our wellness without intervention from specialists except in acute cases. Given the difficulty of healing an unhealthy body it is essential to use the concept of *IkOnKar*, *pratyahar* and *dharan* to stay healthy and to guide one's wellness.

*IkOnKar* (One Source): When applied to mind-body wellness the concept of *IkOnKar* encourages one to look at a seemingly small issue's connection to the bigger picture. How is my sleep related to what I ate for dinner? How is my anxiety related to my relationships and my job? How is the cold I keep getting related to my inability to rest? In this approach instead of intervening into every minor problem with western or eastern medicine, one pauses to reflect and develop insight.

*Pratyahar* in *ashtang* refers to the inner eye or awareness of oneself. The mind's eye is awake so one can observe the physical and emotional state. If there is a sense of ill health or injury the *pratyahar* allows one to observe and correct.

*Dharan* in *ashtang* is the awareness of the external world so one can use the nourishment the outside provides while avoiding the toxicity from the outside.

Imagine three people who are stranded on an island and each has the same amount of food and water. A person poor in *pratyahar* and *dharan* may run of the food and water in two days. One who has a highly developed *pratyahar* and *dharan* may make the food and drink last a week. A third person may have such a well developed *IkOnkar*, *pratyahar* and *dharan* that he may be able to find a source of nourishment in the island to sustain himself and others stranded with him indefinitely.

Person A with highly developed awareness will eat the same food and be healthier than person B who has poorly developed awareness. This could occur because A

would know when to stop eating, while B gorges himself to the point where he cannot get up.

### **Can We be in-charge of our wellness?**

Wellness models, whether western or eastern, expect experts or gifted people to take care of our wellness. These people may be MDs or shamans, but they are special. They may be needed for acute illnesses, but the rapid escalation in healthcare costs are overwhelming this system. Also, who has decided that you cannot be smart enough to keep yourself healthy? What is needed is the desire to take charge of your wellness and then learn the tools to be competent. *IkOnKar* and *ashtang* provide the tools.

Two decades ago only experts were able to use computers, publish documents, use drawing programs, ... The advent of the personal computer has made all of us into experts at publishing. The advent of the internet allows us to blog and put our thoughts out there. In the same vein it is important to recognize that we are the most interested party in our wellness and, therefore, we need to develop what it takes to stay well. When crisis hits, as it will, we will be prepared to face it.