



The laws of karma and the Wheel of Life

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In the Buddhist view, the laws of karma account for the way beings take rebirth in particular circumstances and with particular mindsets. There are two types of karma: propelling karma and conditioning karma. Propelling karma is produced by powerful intentions and actions motivated by afflictions that are very dominant, and it is the cause of rebirth in a specific realm of samsara. Propelling karma helps to perpetuate rebirth in the Wheel of Life as follows:

- Pride leads to rebirth in the god realm
- Jealousy leads to rebirth in the demi-god realm
- Desire leads to rebirth in the human realm
- Confusion leads to rebirth in the animal realm
- Greed leads to rebirth in the hungry ghost realm
- Aggression and hatred lead to rebirth in the hells.

The second kind of karma, conditioning karma, is produced by the secondary afflictions that are present in the mind when one engages in action; they are the cause of the particular circumstances into which one is born. For example, dominant desire might propel us to rebirth as a human being but conditioning karma will determine whether we are born wealthy or poor, intelligent or dull, in a country that is at peace or a country that is at war, and so on.

The laws of karma mean that Buddhists feel a sense of personal responsibility for their own suffering and their life circumstances. Ultimately, there is nobody and nothing else to blame. This does not engender feelings of shame or guilt, or any sense that one is trapped by fate; rather, it brings acceptance of suffering as a fact of life and it motivates one to act more carefully and mindfully so one creates a better future.

Discussion

How do you understand the reason some people are born rich and others poor, some people are surrounded by friends and others live in hostile environments, and so on. How do you account for the diversity of life situations and experiences?



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