Karma and dependent arising/ conditionality:

the fundamental teaching of the Buddha

Watch an animated video:
"What is karma?" (6 minutes)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DX5oX_8sUM

Dependent arising/conditionality

The Buddha taught that all phenomena – earthquakes, your lunch or a passing thought – come into existence in dependence on conditions. When those conditions change or cease, so does the phenomenon they gave rise to. This realisation, which is beyond words, is described as *paticcasamupada* (Pali) or *pratitya samutpada* (Sanskrit).



A simple example is the germination of a seed, which requires oxygen, moisture and light, etc. In the absence of any one of those conditions, there is a different outcome. This is just the way things are; it does not indicate the existence of a creator or God. This is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, and all other Buddhist teachings stem from it.

More information can be found at https://windowsintobuddhism.com/topics-11-16/dependent-arising-2/.

The source for this teaching

If this is, that comes to be;
from the arising of this, that arises;
if this is not, that does not come to be;
from the ceasing of this, that ceases.

Majjhima-Nikaya I I

The Three Marks of conditioned existence *(lakkhanas/lakshanas)*

It follows from this that everything is **anatta/anatman;** i.e., nothing has any fixed essence, because everything is **anicca/anitya;** i.e., everything *is* impermanence, changing when its supporting conditions change. Being so changeable (however beautiful or enjoyable things are) they are ultimately unreliable and unsatisfactory and cannot provide us with lasting happiness. This is the teaching of **dukkha.**

It also follows that all phenomena are connected in a complex network of interdependence. (Buddhist traditions vary in their analysis of this interdependence. See The five niyamas or orders of conditionality/dependent arising, below.)

More information about the Three Marks can be found at
https://windowsintobuddhism.com/topics-11-16/three-marks-of-existence-2/

Karma/kamma

If everything changes when its supporting conditions change, it follows that everything we do, think or say has an effect on other people, animals and the environment we depend on.

The word *kamma (Pali)/karma (Sanskrit)* is an ancient Indian word which simply means "action." Several religious/spiritual traditions originating in India offer teachings about *karma/kamma;* the Buddha's teaching was that all human 'willed' actions have consequences – which are not random:
ethical actions of body, speech or mind (i.e., motivated by kindness, thoughtfulness, generosity, etc.) will have positive consequences for us and others;
unethical actions (i.e., motivated by greed, selfishness, hatred and thoughtlessness, etc.) will have unpleasant consequences.

The Buddha described ethical actions as ***kusala*** or skillful because they show skill in moving towards the wisdom and compassion of Enlightenment. He described unethical actions as ***akusala*** – unskillful – because they show a lack of such skill.

Karma/kamma is our friend

Although we may find change difficult, the Buddha taught that we can harness the world's inherent changeability to positive effect: as we learn to act, communicate and think with greater wisdom, kindness and care, we will become more deeply contented and have a better and better effect on the world.

Karma/kamma means that we have the power to make a difference: to bring about change, in ourselves and in the world, through developing awareness and changing our own behaviour.
More information about karma/kamma can be found here:
https://windowsintobuddhism.com/topics-16-19/karma/

The Five Niyamas or orders of conditionality/dependent origination

Most Buddhist traditions teach that there are five types or 'orders' *(niyamas)* of conditionality, of which *karma/kamma* is just one; therefore, most traditions would not consider that everything which happens to us is the result of our own actions *(karma/kamma).*

1. The physical order *(utu niyama)* as described by physics and chemistry; for example, the conditions giving rise to earthquakes; the decomposition of organic waste into compost.
2. The organic order *(bija niyama)* as described by biology; e.g., conditions necessary for plants to grow and develop, or for us to catch a cold from a virus; the workings of genetics.
3. The mental order *(citta/mano niyama):* the way a person's habits and past experiences affect their consciousness, conditioning the way they think and respond. This would explain why two people can have the same experience but respond very differently to it.
4. The ethical order *(kamma niyama):* the way our conscious behaviours, ethical or unethical, give rise to positive or negative consequences.
5. The spiritual order *(dhamma niyama):* the Buddha's teachings about the nature of existence (e.g. dependent arising and the lakkhanas/lakshanas), which provide the basis for moving away from greed, hatred and delusion/ignorance and towards the perfect wisdom and compassion of Enlightenment.

The order and interpretation of the Five Niyamas can vary slightly.

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