

Karma

The Ancient Science of Cause and Effect

By

Jeffrey Armstrong (Kavindra Rishi)

Chapter One

What you Do Comes Back to You

"Cause is effect concealed,
Effect is cause revealed"

The Vedic concept of *karma* is based upon the existence of three eternal realities. The first is a transcendental or non-material realm that is not currently visible to us. That place is described in the Vedas as existing eternally without the need for Sun, Moon or electricity. It is self-luminous, completely conscious and full of all the beauty we experience here but without the presence of birth, death, old age or disease. Naturally, from where we stand at the moment, we are inclined to doubt the existence of this other realm, since we do not have direct experience of its existence. But the Vedic literature is very explicit and detailed in its descriptions of that transcendental abode.

The Unconscious Realm

The second eternal reality is the material world where we currently reside. It is called *prakriti*, the dark unconscious energy, and is real but temporary. Everything here within matter is transitory; it is created, exists for a while and is then destroyed. Unlike the transcendental abode, which is made of a conscious energy, the material world is made of an unconscious energy. In this world, everything is subject to birth, death, old age and disease or dissolution. The world we view through our senses is fraught with limitation. The beauty we experience, although real, is mixed up with the temporary qualities of matter. In simple terms, this is the cause of our frustration with life. Life is a struggle to get the things we want within matter, and then there is a struggle to keep them, often leading to conflict or war. Eventually we all lose that struggle at the final moment of the death of our body. Therefore, the material world is known as the place

where everything dies. In spite of this transitory nature, matter itself is also described as an eternally existing reality, yet it is temporary in the sense that the soul can be freed from it.

Many Eternal Souls

The third eternal reality is us, the many eternal souls, some of whom have come to visit the material world. According to the Vedas, many more like us have remained in the transcendental world. The name for these countless individual souls is *atma*. The *atmas* are eternal, conscious, joyful and individual in nature, but each soul eternally has the choice to reside in either the transcendental or material realms. If we choose to explore matter, as we have, then the natural result is that we go on a long journey exploring the material world. In the process, we forget our transcendental origin. The *atmas* who come to the material realm are then called *jiva-atmas*, since they are in touch with material life (the word *viva* and *live* come from the Sanskrit *jiva*). Since by nature we are eternal, conscious, joyful and unique, our visit to matter does not remove our original nature—it merely covers it over with layers of the dark and unconscious matter.

Unlike some traditions, the Vedas do not say that the souls coming into matter are bad or evil for doing so. Coming here is a part of our education as souls and we each personally chose to come on this material adventure. If you like, think of the material world as a grand amusement park. A long time ago, we lived in the eternal realm. Then, at a certain point we chose to enter the park, slid down a great long tunnel and began the slow and very interesting exploration of the realm of matter. Once inside, all souls need an appropriate suit to function within the park's atmosphere. This suit is the material body. Think of it is a kind of diving suit made of matter. In Sanskrit, that matter is also called "*gu*," which is humorously close to the English word "goo." We come to the park as eternal souls, go from one body of goo to another, temporarily forgetful of our origin and true nature. Once in the goo or *prakriti* we are convinced that our material body is our self. This is necessary in order for us to feel we are the enjoyer, which is the reason why we entered the park in the first place. We identify self with matter from that point onward until we learn otherwise. As we will see, that step of radical evolution is only possible once we reach human life.

8,400,000 Species of Life

According to the Vedic scriptures, there are 8,400,000 different species of life throughout the material realm. 8,000,000 are sub-human, while 400,000 are varieties of human beings. The word *atma* is the origin of the English word atomic. Once the atomic particle of eternal consciousness enters into matter it starts at the bottom of the evolutionary hierarchy and takes on a body. In that sense the Vedas would agree with Darwin that we do indeed evolve but our evolution is not from matter, it is within matter. Our eternal soul climbs up the staircase of life,

experiencing every species as a kind of learning by being and doing. From the smallest microbe up to insects, plants, birds, mammals, we climb the ladder of the species until we finally reach the lowest rung of human consciousness.

The Amusement Park in the Sky

Try to picture the whole process as a walk through an immense cyber-amusement park, where you put on a different body to go on each ride. For the soul it is the same. It is just like the way we change clothes yet remain the same person. The Vedas describe the universe as a grand school for gradual evolution of our consciousness, a “universe-ity” where all the *atmas* are in different grades (bodies) learning all the lessons (or going on all the rides) in the beautiful material park. Of course, in between each new birth, the last body must die. This process is called *samsara* in Sanskrit, or the wheel of birth and death. Think of it as a kind of Merry-go-round or Ferris wheel, in the amusement park of material life. This wheel of repeated birth and death promises pleasures; delivers some but with them come many pains, disappointments and sufferings of all description.

The Difference Between Humans and Animals

You have probably noticed that one of the differences between animals and humans is the amount of free will or choice that they can exercise. As beautiful as they are, animals and the beings below them are not able to exercise free will and self-awareness at the same level as humans. It is interesting to note that the word mankind comes from a Sanskrit word "*manusha*". It does not mean male, as you might think. It comes from the word *manas*, meaning mind. In this context it refers to humans as “having a mind of their own.” Humans have a reflexive and moral mind that can distinguish between good and bad. The difference between the reflective mind of humans and the instinctual mind of animals and the species below them is that they do not generate *karma* through their actions. They live and die in a life of instinctual experience with no future consequences. But at the human stage, as we begin to reawaken to our true nature, we enter into the *karma* generating stage of the evolutionary process. Once we are human, it is our actions and not our instincts that direct our evolutionary progress.

Old Souls and Young Souls

Newly arriving humans are not always certain whether they are animals or humans or some mixture of both. They have just spent many lifetime in the various animal species, so it takes some time for the human qualities to become stronger than the animal characteristics. There are four activities that we as humans share with animal, eating sleeping mating and defending ourselves. If those four activities occupy most of our mental energy, we are more animal than human in temperament. When our human side emerges it is accompanied by questions about who we are, such as: Why was I born? Why do I get sick? Why do

I age? and Why must I die? If you think again of the amusement park, the question for humans is what do you want to experience in the park? Our visit to the park and which rides we choose is driven by our desires. You have no doubt heard of the term: "old souls and young souls". Even though all souls are eternal, if a soul has many desires to fulfill within matter, they are likely to be relatively young or new to the park. If they are bored with the park and ready to move on, then chances are that they are older souls who have been around for many lifetimes. "Been there, done that" would be their motto and you would see them looking for the exit to the park rather than lining up to go on the next ride. In other words, humans are here in the park to collect a certain amount of experience, just as the soul had done previously by taking birth in the lower species.

The Rules of the Park

Just like in school, you can go forward and skip grades or flunk out of the human class and go backward, that is to say downward for some time. Thus the Vedic theory of *karma* does not lend itself for a New Age interpretation, in which the soul only moves upward, learning lesson after lesson. Devolution instead of evolution is also possible. If a human acts like an animal, they can slide back into an animal body for some time before going further forward. After all, once we are humans, we start flying our own airplane through choice and then reap the results of our choices. If we choose to act like an animal, the message we send to Nature is: "Put me in an animal body". If you were the owner of a huge amusement park, your job would be to see to it that the park runs smoothly as well as providing a good time for the customers. In the park of Material Nature, there are rules that govern the operation of the park and those rules are mandatory for all the visitors.

**Jeffrey Armstrong (Kavindra Rishi)
A Western Master of Eastern Wisdom**

**Inspirational Speaker, Visionary Spiritual Teacher Author &
Founder of VASA-The Vedic Academy of Arts and Sciences**

Initiated by Masters of the mystical Eastern Traditions, Jeffrey Armstrong is a charismatic speaker and counselor who teaches the Philosophy of Yoga as a way of being, and Enlightenment as a way of life. As a student and scholar of the Vedic Philosophy for over thirty-five years, Jeffrey has mastered Raja Yoga, Tantra and Mantra practices. Jeffrey uses humor, passion and spiritual insights to address the needs of our current relationships. Jeffrey is also an award winning author and mystical poet, with degrees in psychology, literature and history and comparative religion. www.JeffreyArmstrong.com