

Is Suffering Caused by *Karma* or by Ignorance?

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Seeker: Hello, James.

There is an idea that a person has done something wrong in the past that is causing them to suffer in the present. Cancer is caused by bad *karma*. You get tortured because you had the bad *karma* to be born in Syria. There is something “off” in this concept. There are bad things happening to people, and I don’t think there is a justification for it. We had better learn to find the sacred despite the bad things that happen to us. The blame game gets us nowhere. What do you think?

James: I agree. There is something wrong with the concept that suffering is due to one’s past actions, from two points of view.

1. You are not responsible for the life you have been born into. Before you were born you did not think, “I will be born in a particular womb.” The process is unconscious. Your present life is the result of myriad factors over which you have virtually no control. So what happens is not your fault. God – the whole field of existence – causes good and bad things to happen – according to how the actions of individuals interact with the field. You can’t remember what you had for lunch a week ago, so how can you remember all the good and bad actions that will eventually fructify into *karma*? Right now you are generating *karma*, some good and some bad, that will visit you later. If you knew what actions created the bad *karma*, you wouldn’t do them. But you don’t. Even good actions done today can produce bad results tomorrow. No good deed goes unpunished. There is always an unknown factor in every situation that influences your *karma*. So you can’t blame yourself, although you are indirectly responsible or the *karma* wouldn’t be coming to you.

2. The idea that what you have done or what the world does to you causes suffering hides the fact that suffering is caused by ignorance of the Self. Most children don’t die of cancer. There are many people in Syria who are not tortured. Yes, the solution is to find the sacred, the Self. A person who sees no difference between himself and the sacred Self does not suffer, even when the body suffers.