

[From: <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2010/01/22/the-law-of-karma/4454>]

## Haiti and the Law of karma

*Many have criticized Pat Robertson's suggestion that the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti was the work of the devil or a form of divine punishment. But if one believes God is good and intervenes in the world, why does God allow innocents to suffer? What is the best scriptural text or explanation of that problem you've ever read?*

One of the several reasons I stopped believing in the Abrahamic understanding of God dealt precisely with the questions posed. While people like Pat Robertson believe that such horrible disasters are a punishment for bad or evil deeds, others like Rabbi Kushner (according to Lisa Miller's recent article in Newsweek) suggests that a loving God is not involved in the occurrence of natural disasters. There are also those who see suffering as God's way of testing our faith, with others saying the suffering of innocents shows that there is no loving God, or any God at all. Personally, I do not accept any of these answers as being definitive or explanatory.

For those who believe that an all compassionate God gets angry at our sins and thus causes us such extreme suffering, how is that being all compassionate? For those who believe that an all powerful God stands aside when such events happen, that would suggest an aloof and non caring God. If a supposedly all knowing God causes us to suffer in order to see how faithful we are, then obviously she, or he, is not all knowing. Then, there is the problem of attempting to explain why infants or young children might undergo great suffering and death. What had they done wrong or what are they going to learn through that suffering?

The way I have come to look upon any event that causes suffering, from a headache to the Holocaust, and everything in between, is related to karma. It is important to note that there are a variety of ways that the concept of karma can be and is understood. As I understand it, whatever we do, why we do it, how attached we are to our thoughts and actions, what we learn from them, and what expectation of reward we have all play a role in the resulting karma.

I see all suffering as occurring for two basic reasons. One is as a result of negative actions. The consequence can be immediate: I eat too much and get an upset stomach; it can be slow to develop: I smoke tobacco and end up with lung cancer; or it can carry over to another lifetime (I will discuss to concept of what I will call "carry-over" karma in a minute). One does not have to have a belief in karma to understand these examples. The other reason we suffer is to gain knowledge and grow spiritually, which can also be somewhat immediate, slow in developing, or be carried over to a future life. One example would be like learning to ride a bicycle. I will likely fall several times and hurt myself, but I will soon learn, i.e. my knowledge and experience have expanded in a relatively short period of time with a small amount of suffering. If I want to get a college degree, it will take several years, many sleepless nights study and assorted other forms of suffering in order to accomplish it. The process takes longer, the suffering is probably greater, but my corpus of knowledge and experience is greatly expanded. These are also obvious and apparent examples.

In addressing carry-over karma, the issue becomes more complex and is where suffering such as what is occurring in Haiti makes sense, at least to me. The suffering of some people may be a result of actions from past lifetimes that have come to fruition in this lifetime. Although I believe this happens, I do not see it as the main reason why the suffering caused by extreme and collective events such as Haiti or the Holocaust occur. I see these solely in terms of events for spiritual growth, both for those who experience the suffering directly as well as those witness it and choose to help. In order to understand this, however, one has to understand the concept of reincarnation and the belief that each of us has a multiplicity of lives. It can be somewhat compared to the multiplicity of courses and semesters that one goes through in order to get an education. Some classes and semesters are relatively easy, and the amount of suffering experienced in the process is small. Others are extremely difficult and can cause great suffering, but all of them are a part of the process of getting the requisite knowledge to graduate. In a similar way, we go through many lifetimes and must all experience the pleasures of life as well as its pains. We must all experience poverty and wealth, sickness and health, happiness and suffering, life and death. It is the only way we can experience and know reality in its completeness, and it is not something that can happen in a single lifetime.

Therefore, I don't see what happened in Haiti as the result of a testing God, a uninvolved God, of the proof of no God. I also don't see the suffering or loss of lives as the result of bad karma because of a vindictive God, which is pretty much what Pat Robertson suggested. Instead, I see those who experience such suffering as going through one of the most difficult of life's lessons and courses. It is something we all must experience and learn in one lifetime or another, maybe in several of them until we are able to realize the lessons to be learned. The next disaster could be the time for any of us to learn that lesson. It is important to remember that first graders are given easy lessons, and some lives are rather easy. The harder ones are for those who are the higher grades. I have had teachers who would say that those who go through such extreme suffering may be souls well advanced on the road to God realization learning one of their final and most difficult lessons. No one really knows.

As for those of us who are not directly involved, maybe our lesson is to learn the practice of compassion and giving, and do what we can to help alleviate the pain and suffering of those who we can help. I see all great disasters as events of tremendous physical suffering that are also times great spiritual learning, growth, and advancement. In addition, they are opportunities for all of us to come together in a shared humanity, no matter what we believe, to learn to move beyond petty prejudices and self absorption, and to show selfless love and compassion to all suffering beings.



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