



Karma: What It Is, What It Isn't, Why It Matters

Traleg Kyabgon

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A jargon-free explanation of two central teachings of the Buddha: karma and rebirth.

The Buddha's teaching on karma (literally, "action") is nothing other than his compassionate explanation of the way things are: our thoughts and actions determine our future, and therefore we ourselves are largely responsible for the way our lives unfold. Yet this supremely useful teaching is often ignored due to the misconceptions about it that abound in popular culture, especially oversimplifications that make it seem like something not to be taken seriously. Karma is not simple, as Traleg Kyabgon shows, and it's to be taken very seriously indeed. He cuts through the persistent illusions we cling to about karma to show what it really is—the mechanics of why we suffer and how we can make the suffering end. He explains how a realistic understanding of karma is indispensable to Buddhist practice, how it provides a foundation for a moral life, and how understanding it can have a transformative effect on the way we relate to our thoughts and feelings and to those around us.

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From Reader Review Karma: What It Is, What It Isn't, Why It Matters for online ebook

Eugene Pustoshkin says

That's a very good book that takes a rational and contemporary, yet fully traditional in the best sense of this term view on the notion of karma. The first historical chapter is not the strongest, but in the following chapters things get very interesting. I especially enjoyed the chapter on bardo. Very profound teachings, and the author convinced me to pay more attention to the Buddhist vision of karma.

Bohdan Pechenyak says

Perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive treatment of the Buddhist concept and theory of karma, with background history in Hinduism. Written in a precise, clear language that is devoid of jargon and excessive use of foreign terms, which is an advantage to those unfamiliar with Buddhism and other Asian dharmic traditions.

Alycee Lane says

The author presents a concise, accessible and engaging explanation of an oft-misunderstood Buddhist concept. Glad I read it, especially since it helped me to understand karma better -- the history of the idea, its misinterpretation in western discourse, and how it fits into Buddhist cosmology.

Sarah says

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Analouise Keating says

An insightful, deeply considered discussion of karma and related teachings. Highly recommended.

St Fu says

Hard to give a ratings when your karma is on the line. Rate it too high and you attract those who won't find it helpful. Too low and it may dissuade those who should read it from doing so. Luckily intent is important. I'm trying. I went with the middle way of 3 stars.

The takeaways for me are:

1) Don't avoid good karma just because your goal is no karma.

- 2) You need your bad thoughts to have something to turn away from.
- 3) Being in the world isn't to be avoided.

In particular, number 3 says not to think to mystically about things. Better to stay with how things present themselves instead of getting caught up in trying to transcend. Especially because it's just ego to be "more spiritual than thou."

Tonya Jakubowski says

It's much more information on karma than I was interested in.

jampa says

I really enjoyed this little gem. Rinpoche's explanations are clear and precise. He packs a wallop in a very short text. I was amazed at his brilliant explanation of the Yogacara philosophy in 6 pages! Other complicated and extensive subjects were equally handled in very succinct and informative manner. Of course one can do more exploration and extensive studying, but for a wider audience it was perfect. I also recommend reading his brilliant text on Mahamudra: Mind at Ease.

Russell Paradis says

This book taught me so much about karma. It really helped me shed the notions of what I thought it was. This book has a clear and very simple way of explaining how a belief in or even just an openness to karma can enrich our lives. The discussion on perspectives of death in Christianity and Buddhism are very beneficial for those of us who will die someday. Haha (just a little Buddhist humor)

James Crouse says

Excellent treatment of Karma

Renee Legris says

If you really want to understand the Buddhist view of karma, read this book. The author very patiently walks you through how it works and what it means, and how you can learn to "cultivate" karma. I was surprised how many things I have misunderstood for a long time. Authentic dharma, but friendly to Westerners.

Ellen Keener says

Learned a lot. Writing about complicated subject with clarity.

E.J. says

I had the privilege of attending a 2 1/2 day teaching by Traleg Rinpoche maybe a year or so before his death. At that time, he presented a number of teachings from his then "upcoming" book on Karma. I must say that it was the one of the best teachings on Buddhism I ever attended. In addition, Traleg Rinpoche was a very engaging individual. He mixed a lot of humor into his teachings. The teaching was illuminating and actually fun. For whatever reason, I forgot about his then upcoming book and just recently happened to bump into it.

IMHO, this is one of the best books on Buddhism that I have ever read. I find the wording that he uses communicates clarifies and simplifies very complex concepts in a very down-to-earth way. Still, this is not an easy read, requiring several rereads to get the ideas to sink in. However, every time I reread it, I find a new gem of thought.

I am no expert, but this has to be one of the best and most important books on Buddhism written in this modern age.

C. Varn says

This is a great book in that it messages to explain the complications of an often misunderstood Buddhist doctrine, but Kyabgon goes further and explains the pre-Buddhist developments of the concept and contrasts Buddhist ideas of karma with its development in Hinduism and, in the second half of the book, contrasts and compares with Christian doctrines as well. Kyabgon makes more references and explains in the concept in a rational way, but does "modernize" the traditional concept in a way that changes it. Kyabgon also shows the various developments and shifts in the meaning of idea of Karma in its development in classical Indian and Tibetan Buddhism without invalidating other Buddhist understandings or denying significant developments and differences. An excellent book.

Ash Todd says

This book offers a better understanding into how 'karma' impacts our lives and suggestions on ways to accept things as they are...
