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Karma or coincidence?

Things happen. Whether they are good or bad depends on your response and inner constitution.



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You have to build yourself up rightly.

By Acharya Prashant

Things are things, situations are situations, events are events, external stimuli are just external. You have no control over them. But, potentially, you have all possible control over the one within who responds to external situations. That is where your authority lies.

Questioner: When something good or bad happens unexpectedly to someone, is it karma or mere coincidence?

Acharya Prashant: The happening is just a random coincidence. How you experience the happening is your own decision, your own doing, in other words, karma.

Get the difference right. The material world is not predetermined. It is not even deterministic; it is random in the real sense of the word. There are just too many cause and effect nodes to take care of, and additionally there is the unpredictable element of free will involved with respect to many of the actors.

If the entire material world were a colossal machine, we could have said that a day will come when we will be able to fully map the machine, and if we can know the machine fully, then we can determine, predict all that would happen in the machine at a particular time and place. Then everything becomes predictable.

But the machine is not only gigantic, several parts of it also carry free will, so unexpected things happen. Therefore, you cannot really know what is going to happen next in the external world. It is going to be a coincidence.

Kindly do not think that things are predetermined or that certain things are happening to you because you are destined to experience them.

No, nothing of that kind. Fatalism is a sham.

The external world is truly unpredictable. Having said that, how you respond to what happens to you is very much your own decision, and there you have all the authority, all the ownership, and a lot of possible freedom.

So, things happen. Whether they are good or bad depends on your response and inner constitution. Where does your inner constitution come from? Your inner constitution is not really random because you are a conscious being: you have freedom in deciding what you must be, and you have freedom in building yourself up.

The one who responds to an experience from within is not a random occurrence. The one who responds to an external stimulus is the result of your entire life journey.

The same thing can happen to two people and they might respond very differently. Why is that so? The external event is the same. Something inside them must be different. From where does this thing inside come from? It comes from the accumulated set of your choices, and that is what is called karma in popular parlance.

You have brought yourself to a stage where you will respond negatively or favourably to an incident, where an incident will impact you greatly or not at all. That is your doing. That is what you have done.

So, it is not that good things are happening to you or bad things are happening to you. Things are things, situations are situations, events are events, external stimuli are just external. You have no control over them. But, potentially, you have all possible control over the one within, who responds to external situations. That is where your authority lies. That is what you can control. That is what you must have all power over. That is the entire purpose of life, and that is freedom. Otherwise, you are just a slave of situations: situations can come and drive you mad. That is no way to live.

So, good and bad things that happen, are they karma—in other words, a result of our past actions, deeds, choices, etc—or coincidence?

Both.

To what extent are these things coincidental? To the extent they are external. The external world, we said, is random. Anything can happen to anybody anytime. There is no guarantee of any fixed thing happening. Things are probabilistic at best.

But when it comes to the inner world, how you respond to what happens to you is your choice, your decision, and that decision cannot be taken fully in this moment itself because it is a thing that accumulates.

You have to build yourself up rightly. You cannot say you want to remain uninfluenced by all the catastrophic situations outside and wish that what you want just happens.

If you really want to be uninfluenced by the external situations, you will have to work very hard at developing that kind of a core within. That is karma.

(An interaction with IIT Kharagpur students, 2020)

Excerpted with permission from Karma: Why Everything You Know About It Is Wrong by Acharya Prashant, Penguin India

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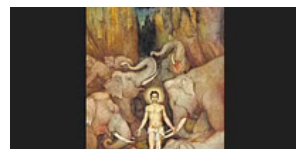
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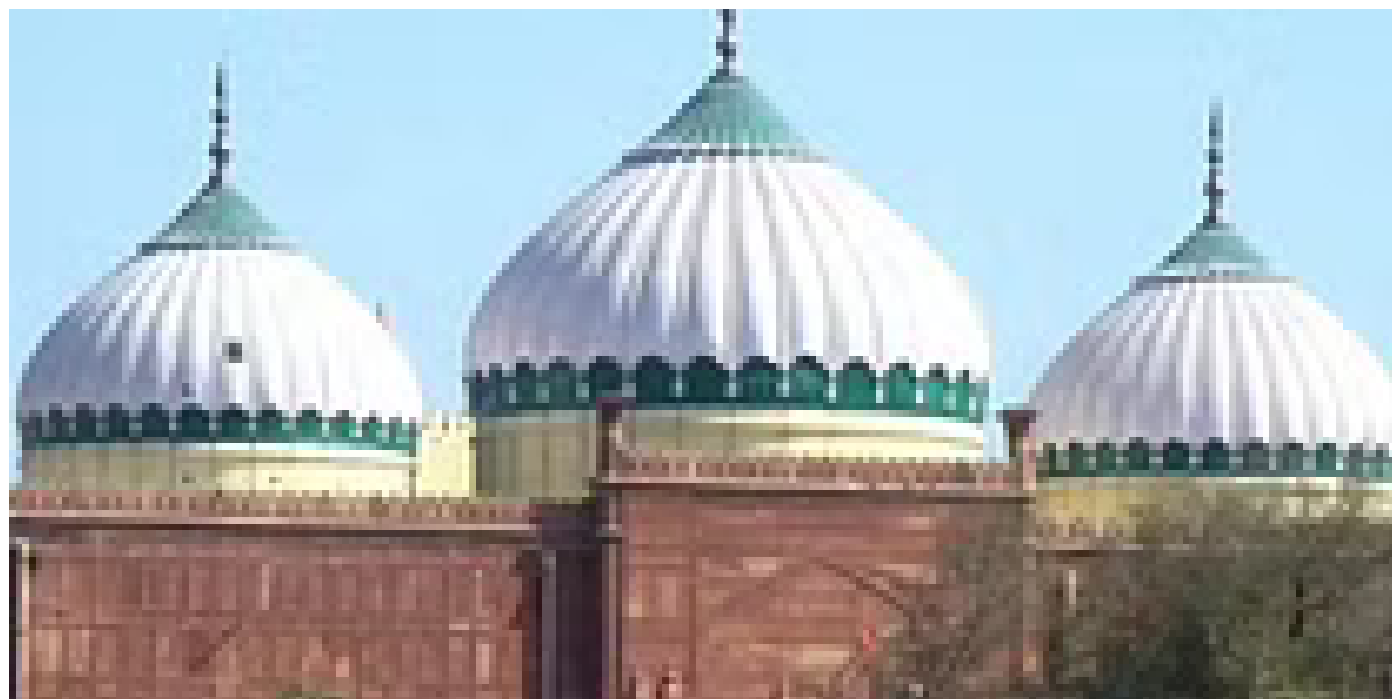


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