

[Quotes & Quips](#)

Category : [July/August/September 2006](#)

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Karma, the Natural Law

Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), founder of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

Once a British author named Stuart wrote a book about Ramana Maharshi after living in his ashram. Some disciples of the saint wrote to him seeking a donation for the ashram in view of the substantive income he received from the book. This brought about the coarse aspect of Stuart's character: "I had thought of you people as being very dedicated and sincere. Now, after receiving your letter, I am going to write a book against you." This was a shocking indictment for the calm and peaceful community of young brahmacharis. Maharshi expressed his disapproval of the request for a donation and sent a letter to Stuart. He wrote, "I am very pleased by your plan to write a book against me. You will be doing me a service, something within a short month which we would have failed to achieve during a lifetime of effort. Followers come and go like the leaves of a tree with the changing seasons, and it is difficult to judge their essential nature. When spring approaches, the tree sheds its leaves and draws upon its vital roots to bring forth healthy, new leaves. I shall be beholden to you for bringing to us such a spring of life. If any permission from our side is needed for publishing the book, it is granted herewith. In case you are beset with any financial difficulty therein, please apprise me of it and we will fund-raise for you through subscriptions." How the author responded is not known.

I wish there was a knob on the TV to turn up the intelligence. There's a knob called brightness, but it doesn't work. Swami Anubhavananda, humorous author, lecturer

Books are the way the dead talk to the living. Violence is the diplomacy of the incompetent. Do not speak quickly; it is a sign of insanity. There is no sin greater than ignorance. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, spiritual head of Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Puroshottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

Good thoughts are the foundation stones in the mansion of good conduct. If the foundation is strong, the mansion will endure. Sri Rameshbhai Oza, inspired performer of Vaishnava kathas

It cannot be seen by the eye, and yet it is the eye within the eye. It cannot be heard by the ear, and yet it is the ear within the ear. It cannot be smelt by the nose, and yet it is that which makes the nose to smell. It cannot be uttered by the mouth, and yet it is that which makes the mouth to speak. It cannot be grasped by the hand, and yet it is that which makes the hand to grasp. It cannot be reached by the feet, and yet it is that which makes the feet to walk. It cannot be thought by the mind, and yet it is the mind within the mind. It is the Primal One without past or future. Its form is free from age and sickness. It manifests as father and mother. It blossoms as the Self-Existent. It cannot be described as one or two. No artist can portray It. It is That which lies 'twixt good and evil. It ever abides in the hearts of the wise. It permits no distinction between Vedanta and Siddhanta. It is That which dances at the zenith beyond the realm of sound. Satguru Siva Yogaswami (1872-1964), Sri Lanka's most renowned contemporary spiritual master

If evil is spoken of you and it's true, do something about it. If untrue, ignore it.

I have nothing new to teach the world, Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5

Hinduism was organized for peaceful and harmonious coexistence, not for continued confrontation with external enemies in the shape of unbelievers. It is no accident of history that, though Hinduism knew internal feuds like any social polity, it never crossed its borders to wage wars against people simply because they worshiped different Gods. Organized on such nonmilitary principles, there is no wonder that Hinduism did not even have a name for itself. Ram Swarup (1920-1998), foremost spokesperson of Hindu spirituality and culture in India

If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one? Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), sixteenth president of the United States

The beef industry has contributed to more American deaths than all the wars of this century, all natural disasters and all automobile accidents combined. If beef is your idea of "real food for real people," you'd better live real close to a real good hospital. Neal D. Barnard, medical doctor, author and president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

Do not resist change. Accept change as one of the prerequisites in your life to spiritual illumination. A positive mental attitude overlooks many things that happen and sees the overall picture of what is progressing in your life. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001), founder of Hinduism Today

Basics of Hinduism

Karma literally means "deed " or "act " and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter.

Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The Vedas tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future.

It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction.

Did You Know?

Ancient India Produced the First Dentists

According to the New York Times, man's first-known trip to the dentist occurred as early as 9,000 years ago, when at least nine people living in a Neolithic village in ancient India had holes drilled into their molars. The findings, reported in the scientific review Nature, push back the dawn of dentistry by 4,000 years to around 7000 bc.

The drilled molars come from a sample of 300 individuals buried in graves at the Mehrgarh site in what is now western Pakistan, believed to be the oldest Stone Age complex in the Indus River valley. "This is certainly the first case of drilling a person's teeth, " said David Frayer, professor of anthropology at the University of Kansas. "But even more significant, this practice lasted some 1,500 years and was a tradition at this site. It wasn't just a sporadic event."

Most of the drilling was done on the chewing surfaces of their molars, probably using a flint point attached to a bow that made a high-speed drill, the researchers say. Concentric ridges carved by the drilling device were found inside the holes.

Dental health was poor at Mehrgarh, though the problems were less often tooth decay than brutal wear and tear. Roberto Macchiarelli, professor of paleoanthropology at the University of Poitiers, France, attributed the bad teeth to the Neolithic diet, which included newly domesticated wheat and barley. "A lot of abrasive mineral material was introduced when grains were ground on a stone, " Professor Macchiarelli said, "and as these people moved to a grain diet, their teeth wore down."