

Chapter 9: Karma and Retribution

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The reason people of the world cannot refrain from all evil and practice all good is entirely because they do not understand the principle of karmic cause and effect.

Confucius said: "If good is not accumulated, it is not sufficient to make one's name known; if evil is not accumulated, it is not sufficient to destroy one's person."

Sage Emperor Guan said: "The two paths of good and evil — fortune and misfortune are thereby distinguished."

Lord Lao said: "Plant melons, harvest melons; plant beans, harvest beans. If planting does not miss its season, in ten years roots grow and stems bear fruit. Whether it is melons or beans, one still receives the harvest in return."

The Treatise on Response and Retribution says: "Misfortune and fortune have no gate through which they enter of their own accord; it is only people themselves who summon them. The retribution of good and evil follows one like a shadow follows the body."

The Sutra on Karma says: "If you wish to know the causes of your past life, look at the body you receive in this life. If you wish to know the fruits of your next life, look at the heart with which you act in this life."

The Earth Treasury Sutra says: "Whether one does good or does evil, never has there been the slightest discrepancy. Whether misfortune descends or fortune descends, reward and punishment have from ancient times never erred."

Dipankara Buddha said: "Even the slightest good — offer it as a convenience to others. Even the slightest evil — exhort people not to do it." And: "Let clothing and food follow whatever conditions arise, and naturally you will be content. Being generous to others is fortune; deceiving others is calamity."

Mencius said: "When Heaven sends down calamities, one may still escape them; when one brings calamity upon oneself, one cannot survive."

The Book of Changes says: "A household that accumulates goodness will surely have blessings to spare; a household that accumulates what is not good will surely have calamities to spare."

The Book of Documents says: "To those who do good, a hundred blessings descend; to those who do not good, a hundred calamities descend."

From the words of the ancient sages and worthies cited above, it is proven that whatever one plants, one harvests — karmic retribution is absolutely without error.

Furthermore, taking the present world as evidence: if you treat people with kindness, they will surely be grateful to you; if you treat people with cruelty, they will surely resent you. Just consider those corrupt officials who strutted across the stage, boasting of their abilities and flaunting their power, relying on their influence to bully the orphaned and the widowed. Once their evil reached its full measure, everything crumbled — were they not, in the end, dead or imprisoned? And those local tyrants and wicked gentry who borrowed the tiger's prestige like foxes, dominating for a season — are they not now running in every direction with no home to return to? From this we can see that karmic retribution is the upright principle by which Heaven unfolds. The only difference is whether it comes early or comes late.

Therefore the proverb says:

Good causes bring good returns;
evil causes bring evil returns.
If retribution has not yet come,
the appointed time has not arrived.

From this one can know that prior causes and later effects are not off by even a hair's breadth.

Revision #1

Created 2026-03-08 10:12:13 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-08 10:12:13 UTC by Phil