

THE MAYA AND KARMA CONUNDRUM

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As has become a norm (or so it seems) these days, my Sunday mornings are spent driving up to my Tai Chi teacher's home with my friend Evgeny for semi-private lessons. We have been learning some interesting and mind-expanding Tai Chi Exercises.

Besides learning individual forms we have been delving deeper into two-person practices (Tai Chi exercises that can be seen as viewed as Martial sequences to the onlooker, but really are energetic exercises). These have been very helpful and thought-provoking (besides the constant re-adjustment of what corporeal reality is really for me).

Anyhow, before I digress further, let me also state that Evgeny has been taking Yoga lessons from an Indian Yogi (from Chennai) called Yogi Ram. Yogi Ram teaches in the Siddha school (which is said to have common roots as that of Babaji's Kriya Yoga). So, my earnest friend has been learning about both Tai Chi and Yoga. In course of our discussions (which we inevitably have during the half-hour drive each way), we came upon the topic of Karma, Maya and Tao/Brahman.

Now, the reader needs to beware that neither of us are in anyway masterful authorities on these subjects, but are merely humble students in the path of Brahman and Tao.

In any case, let me proceed with a brief description of our discussion and subsequent questions/doubts that arose. Perhaps one of our Medhavis will be able to shed some light?

Evgeny said that the Yogi told him about Paschimottasana and how it supposedly burns Karma and aids in freeing the practitioner from the clutches of the Karmic cycle. So that brought about the question, why Karma and what is it's role in the grand scheme of things?

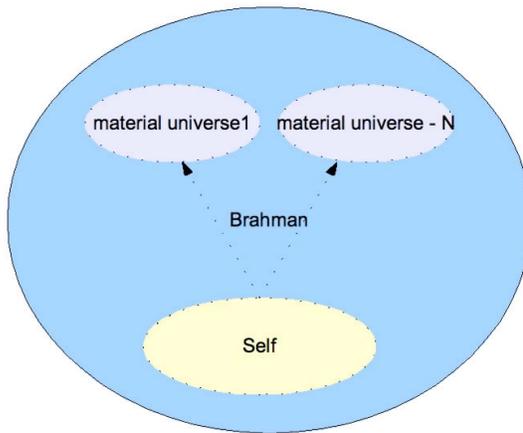
As Taoists and Vedantins/Yogins we are familiar with the idea that there is no duality in actuality, but rather that everything is One (Brahman, Tao, call it what you may). If that be the case, then what is this material universe and what is its role?

I will use the word Brahman to represent both Brahman and Tao (for there is no difference between the two in my mind).

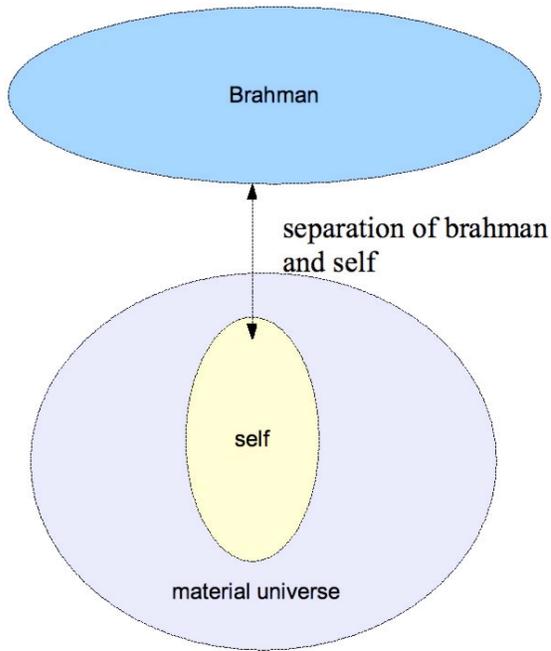
Karma and Maya

We are familiar with the Theory of Karma, about the Cycle of Karma and about its various categories. There is Sanchita Karma (accrued Karma or accumulated Causality), Prarabdha Karma (karma that is already in action or activated causality) and Agami Karma or Kriyamana Karma (the Karma that is being created or future causality). This Cycle or Wheel of Karma is animated by our thoughts and actions (which includes both actions and inactions). The Theory is at a simplistic level of understanding (namely, mine), about Cause and Effect. What we do (and think) has an effect. This Causality travels from one lifetime to another and this is in effect the cause of Re-incarnation.

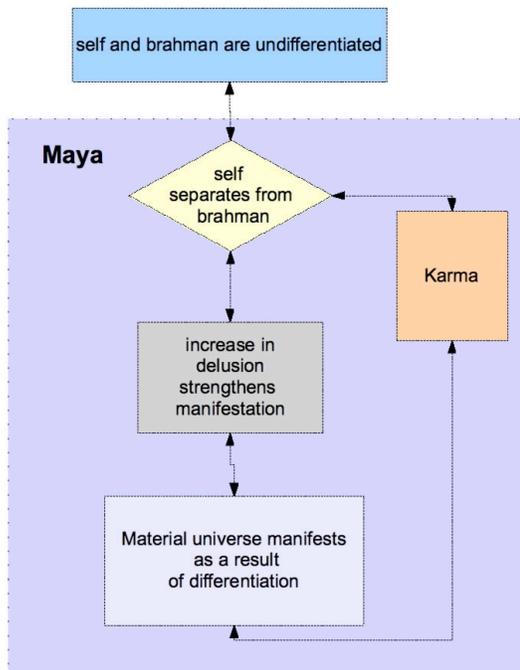
So how do we explain Karma? In order to explain Karma, we had to bring up the concept of Maya. From the layman's perspective, Maya is the reality that is created due to our ignorance of the fact that we are all One (Brahman). This Ignorance (Avidya) gives rise to the material world as we know it, along with the experiential elements. All these exist and reinforce the delusion of separation (from the Brahman), the Ego (which is the delusion). Try and visualize this —



The Material universe and the self exists (or infinite material universes) only as a possibility which is manifested by the Avidya of the being. The Avidya is strengthened by the actions (which are a result of this delusion). The effect of these actions is Karma.



So if this were a simplistic flowchart, it would be like this —



So, simply put, as the self differentiates from the Brahman, the ghostly apparition (that was) the material universe is actualized. The more the self (now differentiated from Brahman) does actions, the result is

increase of delusion, solidifying the ethereal material universe further, entrenching the self into this loop of infinite regression. This process of entrenchment is called Maya.

So the purpose of the spiritual practice is to re-integrate the self back into Brahman, thus gradually dissolving the material universe and the mechanism of Maya and Karma, until eventually one day nothing except Brahman remains.

The way to go about dissolving the material universe and the self back into Brahman is Meditation. So in our Tai Chi practice or Yoga practice (or meditation practice), we use the body or the breath or a mantra or a sound or a visual prop (Light, Yantra, Diety and so on) as a tool to induce silence (slow down the thoughts and expand the gap between thoughts) to realize the true nature of the self — which is Brahman. This silence is achieved because the active mind is kept busy working in a continuous loop of focusing on the body, breath, mantra, diety, yantra (whichever the prop) until the thoughts can be observed (by the witness) and their patterns, gaps between the thoughts and so on. As we spend more time in the gap between thoughts, the true nature of Brahman shines forth (the eternally aware consciousness). As one becomes stable in this gap, the gap elongates until only the gap remains (and the thoughts are merely like gusts of the wind or fluffs of clouds that base off the vast expanse of the sky).

All this was fine and dandy, until this thought snuck up on us — If all that exists is Brahman (I will use the word Brahman to mean both Brahman and Tao from this point on), then what is the purpose of this duality that we experience in our everyday (mundane) existence? Why this elaborate machination, this great Maya. Some of those who have gone before us have called this Lila (or God's divine play). Some have said all this is the dream of the divine mind. Most have said that there is no point in trying to figure this out using mundane consciousness/intelligence. Once the self re-integrates back with Brahman, the reason will become evident.

But this intellect is such a nag . . . it doesn't want to let up. Evgeny, an accomplished chemist and Quantum Mechanist ventured to describe the concept of String Theory and the Quantum surface/soup. He described this as an efferevescent surface (imagine a bubbling soup) and each of these bubbles as the self. Once the bubble (self) rises from above the body of the soup, it somehow becomes deluded into thinking it is separate from the soup it self. As it bursts and falls back into the soup (Brahman), it becomes evident to it again that there was no differentiation between itself and the soup (Brahman).

But why this Soup and why the bubbles? One reason that comes to mind is that the boiling soup cannot help being what it is and the bubbles are a natural result. There doesn't have to be a reason why, it simply is. Is this

explanation of life and the universe really as simple as that? Who knows?
Anyone venture to shed some light on this?

Previously published in *The Medha Journal*, written under the pseudonym
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