

# The Power of Habit

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There is a bestselling book, *The Power of Habit*, in which the author, Charles Duhigg, in a very simple way explains how habits work and how we can change them. In Buddhism, we call habit “karma.” In the Kwan Um School, we say that karma is the energy of habits, the power of habits. Everybody has some habits. We all have karma, and actually this karma controls our lives. Most people don’t understand what is happening to them because every human being is making 35,000 to 50,000 decisions every day. More than 90 percent of those decisions are made subcon-

sciously. We are doing things out of habit, not aware of a hidden software running our lives. We are controlling us, or we are controlling our karma. We practice to be in charge of our lives and help others: I control my karma; my karma does not control me.

When we control our karma, we can change it. Most karma is lingering karma, “leftover” karma. This lingering karma is the most difficult to fix, because it is created by very small, insignificant actions repeated every day. We keep repeating and repeating some actions or thoughts over a long time, and in the end we get the big result of those actions. Surprise! If we really look closely, we will see that big karmic results were

created by some kind of lingering karma. So it’s important to be aware of our daily, small habits.

If we want to change our karma, we’ve got to understand our habits first. The next step is to *attain* that understanding. Being aware that we have some negative habits is the first step, but it is not enough. Understanding can’t help. Attaining the habit means this understanding has some energy. Only then are we able to decide, “I’m going to change

it!” After we make a strong decision, we need to have a method of how to change it.

The skillful way to start the whole process is to create what Charles Duhigg calls a “keystone habit.” This one new habit can start a domino effect of changing not only one but many habits over time. Don’t worry about the rest of our karma—only do that one thing. If we try to change too many things at once, we fail. For the Zen student, nothing could be a better keystone habit than the habit of meditating first thing in the morning. In the morning, everyone’s willpower is the strongest. While sitting still and by simply breathing with the lower belly, we can recharge our willpower battery. There is no way to change ourselves if we have a weak center, that is, if our willpower battery is depleted.

So let’s start our day with some practice, just 10 minutes every morning. Over time, this one small habit of 10 minutes meditation every morning will trigger a domino effect of positive changes in our life. Zen Master Ko Bong used to say, “Don’t worry about your karma; just make a habit of strong practicing.” ♦



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The karmic process has three elements:

- 1. Primary cause.** In the whole universe, there is no result without primary cause.
- 2. Condition.** Whatever is happening to us will only happen when primary cause will meet a specific condition of time, space, emotions, people, prior actions, and so on.
- 3. Result.** You have to do something to get the result. Because we are always doing something, we are always getting results. Those results become the next primary causes, closing the “wheel of karma” or “habit loop.”

Since most people are not aware of their karma, they cannot connect the dots between cause and effect. Only sometimes, when results happen immediately after the cause—for example, when we put our finger into boiling water—are we able to connect those dots and learn the lesson. With karma, we only have a choice: either karma is