



By Jim Ellison

*If you are reading this I will assume that you do believe in Karma.*

I started looking at this because of an incident that happened to me in the mid 1990's. I was driving a little over the speed limit on the way to work because I was running late and stressed out. Being in retail at the time, I was rushing to be on time for a Saturday morning meeting before the store opened. All employees were expected to attend, and I didn't want to walk in late in front of everyone.

I was on the highway, trying to concentrate on the road and my driving, when a couple of kids in a hot rod zoom past me, flipping their middle fingers as they sped by. Maybe because I was already stressed to begin with, this action hit me so fast and hard that I **reacted** to it, rather than **responding** – there is a big difference between the two.

In an instant, I slammed on the brakes as hard as I could. Remember – I'm on the highway doing 60+ miles an hour. Cars don't like that kind of action. My car spun around in a complete circle (and then some) before screeching to a halt just inches away from the steel guardrail.

To this day, I can't tell you what made me slam on those brakes. Admittedly, it kept me from doing something even more stupid. If the kids had stopped, there would have been a fight. I was so angry that it was difficult to think clearly. Someone would have most likely gotten hurt – me, them, or all of us. At the time, it really didn't matter to me, even though it should have. Later on, when the anger cooled, I realized with horror that I came close to being hurt or killed. Just as bad, I could have hurt or killed someone else.

At that point, I realized that I needed to learn to control my anger, so it wouldn't control me. I could not let myself get so upset – especially while driving – that it affects my own safety and sanity, or that of the people around me.

The rule of Karma basically states that what you give out comes back to you. Every major religion has some variation on the “Golden Rule”, which states “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. This is a simplified version of the Karma rule. In reality, it is a bit more complex than that, but that is for another writing.

When you drive, do you find yourself getting stressed out? Do you honk, swear, and yell at the cars around you? Do you cut in and out of traffic, cutting people off, not letting them over into your lane because you are in a hurry? In short, does driving make you upset or anxious?

This is fixable, and in doing so, you can and should get good karma.

Have you ever thought about what is going on with that person you just honked at? Perhaps it's a father of four who just got fired from his job. Maybe it's an elderly woman who is increasingly unsure of her reflexes behind the wheel. Or a young wife who just learned of her husband's terminal cancer diagnosis. We just don't know what's going on with other people's lives, what they are struggling with at any given time. Someone could be at the breaking point. What if that honk or raised middle finger pushes them over the edge, and they go into an emotional breakdown or a road rage event. Do we really want our energy to be involved in something like that? According to the law of karma, you would get that energy back at some point in time. Maybe not as much as they will, but a lot more than you want or need.

What if we just assumed the best about the other drivers on the road? What if their spouse, child, friend or loved one was in the back seat and they were rushing to the hospital, consumed with fear and worry? What if they are just having a really bad day? Most of us – if we knew the whole situation – would be empathetic, wish our fellow driver well, and send them on their way. After responding in this manner, I immediately feel much better and calmer than I would if I'd honked and yelled. What kind of energy came back to me?

Here's how you can put these principles to work for you. It may take some time before it will feel natural. But the results will be worth it – I promise.

### **1. Realization**

When you catch yourself getting upset, the first step is to realize that it is happening. This realization is what helps break the habit of reacting in anger. When I first started looking at this, I had honked and/or yelled at the other driver even before realizing I was doing it.

### **2. Reformation**

To start correcting this, talk to yourself out loud. It may feel silly at first, but after awhile it will become more comfortable. At first, it may be easier to try when you are driving by yourself. When I do this, I say something like “Jim, this isn't what I want to do. I don't know what it going on with that person, and I don't want my energy involved with something I don't need to be involved with. I hope all is well with them, and that they get where they are going safe and sound.”

If you want to correct a bad habit, it is better to do this out loud. Just thinking about changing a reaction versus the habit of doing the action, the habit of doing is stronger. If you say something out loud, you have (1) thinking, (2) speaking, and (3) hearing. This is three energies against one. It takes a little while, but the three will win out.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Repetition**

The more of this you catch, the more you can change this habit. Habits – especially ingrained ones – don't change overnight. The more you do it, the easier it will get, just like developing any new skill or routine. You are changing a habit that may have taken years to develop. It may be difficult to change but, with persistence and repetition, you can make it happen.

### **4. Results**

The results are that you find yourself less stressed out, slower to anger, calmer – in short, you will create good karma for YOU. The law says “What you give out comes back.” It does not make exceptions! If you don't use up as much of your energy being upset with other drivers, then less and less of that energy comes back to you. Over time, you will find that driving will become easier for you. Traffic will flow better, people will let you in or over, lights will seem to stay green longer, and you will be less stressed out overall.

## There is a catch!

**You can't do the good act to get good karma; you have to do the good act because it is the right thing to do.** It is just as easy.

Here are some things that you can do:

1. Leave earlier to reduce stress from running late and being in a hurry to get somewhere.
2. Try not to let it bother you if other people want to get in front of you. Let them in and make their and your day better.
3. When you see a wreck, or a car broken down on the side of the road send them a good thought that everything is ok or fixed easily. For an extra challenge, try sending a good thought to another driver that cuts you off, tailgates you, or otherwise irritates you. Try to assume the best about the other driver.

## **It really is that easy and that hard.**

1. *I used to be an in-home salesperson. When figuring prices, I would mumble to myself. There was a reason for this, but it sometimes looked odd to the customers. Because of this, I got into the habit of explaining this to the customers.*

*I learned this from an accountant friend in the 1970s. This was before calculators were commonplace – people had to actually add numbers. My friend told me that when he added numbers while talking to himself out loud, he would usually catch mathematical errors at the time he made them, rather than after he had totaled the entire column.*

*Why does this work? It took me awhile to come up with an answer. Thinking, hearing, and speaking all activate different areas in the brain, and they all have to agree. If one of the three is “off”, you will know there is a problem. (As an example, is it easier to read this word – orange? Or this one – orange?). Another example involves baking a cake. If you talk out loud to yourself as you follow the recipe, and you try to pour salt into the batter while telling yourself to add sugar, your brain will “lock up” for a second and give you a chance to correct this before you add the salt and ruin the cake.*

*The reason that this works is because you have thought it, said it, and heard it. This is three different areas of the brain, and hearing comes in last. The three different areas have to agree. You might be able to get a little bit past the mistake, but your mind will “know” that something doesn't seem right and give you a chance to correct it.*