

Karma or Kama

Doubt is an important element in life. Facts can often be just opinions. The only meaning in life is the meaning we give it argued John-Paul Sartre. Spirituality is an individual thing, Karma being the law of cause and effect and, to some, the basis of reincarnation. To others Kama is the threads of desire, as in the Kama Sutra.

Until recently a group of around 500 people known as the **Pirahã** lay undiscovered in the Amazon basin and were exceptionally happy. In their language, no words for the future or past existed. Everything is in the present moment. One of the strongest Pirahã values is no coercion; you simply don't tell other people what to do. Anthropological linguist [Daniel Everett](#) said:

The Pirahã are supremely gifted in all the ways necessary to ensure their continued survival in the jungle: they know the usefulness and location of all important plants in their area; they understand the behavior of local animals and how to catch and avoid them; and they can walk into the jungle naked, with no tools or weapons, and walk out three days later with baskets of fruit, nuts, and small game.

Then they were 'discovered'. Wikipedia reports that a 2012 documentary called "The Grammar of Happiness" which aired on the Smithsonian Channel, reported that a school had been opened for the Pirahã community where they learn Portuguese and mathematics. As a consequence, unadulterated observations involving concepts like the notion of quantity (which has a singular treatment in Pirahã language), became impossible, because of the influence of the new knowledge on the results. The school is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education of Brazil. In addition to a formal school being introduced to the culture, the documentary also reported that the Brazilian government installed a modern medical clinic, electricity and television in the remote area.

According to Buddhist philosophy there are three causes of suffering; clinging, craving and ignorance. The Pirahã culture does not appear to have these sufferings as it is concerned solely with matters that fall within direct personal experience, and thus there is no history beyond living memory. Conscience is made up of perceptions and memories. Perception is interpretation and is therefore fallible. Equally memories are fallible and pliable as they can be changed. The Pirahã had/have a high self esteem which, in my view, is something that needs to be protected. The question is how? Should they continue as they were 'found' in their own Karma, or should 'civilised' man impose their kama, the desire to have them like us, or is it, because of television, all too late?

What do you think?