

## Nuances of Karma and Karma-Results Doctrine as Addressed by the Buddha

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### Overview of Karma

It is significant to understand the teaching of karma from the Buddhist perspective. For the Buddha, Karma are actions of body, speech, and mental that operated within the chain of cause and effect. The word Karma (Sanskrit) or Kamma (Pāli) means intentional action (volitional action) of body, speech, and mind. For the Buddha, action without intention is only action and not categorized as karma. Intentions are actions of the skandhas or consciousness (cetāna) that may be divided into three aspects, i.e., good or bad, or neither good nor bad.

For popular, when speaking of karma, it is to speak about good and bad karma in the phenomenal cycle of birth and death. This is called conventional karma. In the sutras, there is an occasional mention of unconventional karma, but with the law of cause and effect. It must be understood in the sense of borrowed words to express karma. Actually, conventional karma is outside of karma, according to the definition of karma mention above.

The Buddha instructs his disciples, both lay and monastic, continuously observe the karma that: *“I am the master of karma, the receiver of karma, karma is the store, is familiar, a place of refuge. As human beings, whether your actions are with good or bad intent, you will receive the effect of that karma.” (Anguttara Nikaya)*

The Buddha encourages disciples observe karma as their shadow, their heritage. Whether encountering the suffering or happiness, it is observed as the results of their own actions of body, speech and mind.

In the Buddhist notion of karma, mind or intention plays an decided role in creating the so-called karma that leads to good or bad, happiness or suffering. Dhammapāda says that:

*“The mind is the leader of all dharma, mind is the master, the creator. If the mind is defiled, so would be speech and actions, suffering would follow closely. Just as a carriage being pulled by an ox” (Dhp.1).*

*“...If the mind is purified (good), speech and action, happiness and peace would soon follow, just as a shadow that follows the image.” (Dhp 2)*

Because there are karmic results that karmic actions are known. To understand karma is to understand karmic result or fruit of karma. Here, we need to point out things that would lead to its effect.

- First, because the mind is the creator of action, therefore whether the intention is strong or weak will affect greatly the presence and time of the fruit of karma.
- The time from when the action to the results of action, any action made will greatly affect the final outcome of the results based on past actions.
- The human mentality when they receive the fruit, whether it is suffering or happiness it is called the fruit of actions.
- All actions made before death effects the determination.
- Usually, bad actions result in bad fruits; whereas good action result in good fruit.

However, as the Buddha says, it is hard to think about karmic results. Simply put, karma is a conditional arising, so it is always uncertain.

For Buddhism, when karma is theorized to mean that, karma is unable to be transferred, past karma decides current retribution, it is not consistent with the nature of dependant co-arising, the non-local nature of dharma. If karma can not be transferred, how can there be liberation in the present. In fact, human past actions lead to different results.

The fundamental teachings of Buddhism is grasped that there are kinds of retribution that can be transferred, others can not be transferred. In these two categories, it is the person who receiving retribution is mentally prepared or not. That's why Buddhism teaches the practice of training and change one's mind for liberation. Liberation means liberation of karma, is not dominated by the cause of karma or the fruit of karma. In the teachings of co-arising, the Buddha clearly points out

that there is suffering, ... but there is no one to suffer, or there is the fruit of karma but no one to receive the fruit of karma. That is the entrance to liberation.

For the Buddha, there isn't a kind of karma that can be called definite karma. All karma can be transformed. If karma is created by beings (or by the mind) then it must be illuminated by the human (or by the mind). It is the subject of the mind, it has no relation to outer conditions. Good or bad karma is not merely determined by good or bad actions but the very mind that is stuck in good and bad. When there is no grasping mind, at that point, karma doesn't have the conditions to arise, to formulate, or exist (kriyā).

### **Different types of Karma**

It is significant to have a brief understanding of different types of karma as classified in Buddhist sutta. There are more than 60 terms that speak of karma. Here are only a few basic forms of karma are mentioned.

Buddhist sutras address good karma as clear karma (white karma), and bad karma as dark karma (black karma), and the actions of the holy one as neither dark nor clear (Neither black or white karma).

Fixed karma will bring about a fruit that we call the certain karma. Actions that don't lead to results or fruits and manifests far away without certainness is called uncertain karma.

Individual karmic feelings are called individual karma, the good or bad actions of body, speech and mind also have 10 actions called the ten good or bad karmas.

The Noble Eightfold Path, Noble Tenfold Path are called the Eight Holy Actions or the Ten Holy Actions.

When the human mind receives karmic fruit, then it is called receiving karma, vice versa non-receiving karma.

Karma that brings about the result in the present moment is called receiving karma in the present moment. Karma that brings about results in the next life is called next life receiving karma, and karma that are to be received in many lives later are called life after Karma.

Typically, in the *Abhidhamakosabhasyam*, karma has different types. With regard to their functions, one distinguishes (1) regenerative (or productive) karma (janaka-kamma), (2) supportive (or consolidating) karma (upatthambhaka-kamma), (3) counteractive (suppressive or frustrating) karma (upapīlaka-kamma), and (4) destructive (or supplanting) karma (upaghātaka- or upacchedaka-kamma).

These types of karma are explained as:

(1) karma that produces the five groups of existence (corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness) at rebirth as well as during life-continuity.

(2) karma that does not produce karma-results but is only able to maintain the already produced karma-results.

(3) karma that counteracts or suppresses the karma-results.

(4) karma that destroys the influence of a weaker karma and effects only its own result.

With regard to the priority of their result, one distinguishes (1) weighty karma (garuka-kamma), (2) habitual karma (ācinnaka- or bahula-kamma), (3) death-proximate karma (maranāsanna-kamma), and (4) stored-up karma (katattā-kamma).

### **What kinds of karma lead to higher rebirth and liberation?**

As a crucial question in Buddhist theory of karma, we should identify what kinds of karma at the time of death lead to higher rebirth and liberation.

Usually Buddhism teaches that, whichever habitual actions are strongest at the point of death will determine where we will be reborn. However, actions that are made right at the point of death (whether good or evil) is the factor that determines into which realm you would be reborn.

When we are in the moment of death, it is clear that our mind will be the last determining factor as to where we will be reborn. This also says that a person who has cultivated his mind, usually in a state of awareness, awakening, will not be reborn in any realm, but liberation. In Buddhist understanding, if the awakening is strong enough at the moment of death, then the person can end all afflictions, can reach liberation right away and doesn't need to be reborn again.

If the mind at the moment of death is filled with desires, it is most likely to be reborn in the samsara. If the mind is filled with desires, with ten good actions then will be reborn in the realm of desire; if their mind is filled with desire and not practice the ten good actions, have no meditative concentration, not observe the 5 precepts, then will be reborn in one of the three low realms: hell, demons, or animal.

If the mind finds no pleasure of the five sense objects, and able to observe the precepts and gain concentration, enter the four meditation levels, then that person will be born the realm of form. If the mind finds no pleasure in the realm of form, and the person observes the precepts and concentration, can enter the four levels of nothingness, then he will be born into the realm of no-form.

If the mind finds no pleasure in the realm of birth and death, and wants to be liberated from birth and death, but because the mind is still attracted to no-form realm then it depends on the past actions prior to being born in the realm of no-form. Therefore, it is clear that we have the mental condition to chose the realm into which we want to be born. The right at our hand, the mind play the main role, whether we able to train our mind or not.

## **Conclusion**

In this Buddhist Karma theory, it is often mis-understood that there has a separate self (ego) to be born. However, the path to liberate from karma is to recognize the idea of no-separate self. Non-self has no coming, no going, no birth, no death, no action. Coming back to the definition of Karma, every situation is born from volition, intention. If our mind is collected in purity, become awakened and free from the ideas of good and bad, it comes to the realization that everything is the nature of no birth, no death, no coming, no going. This is the main point in the Buddhist teachings on karma, also the main key to understand the teachings of karma.

In Buddhist perspective, Karma is created by the mind, then it must be illuminated by the mind). It is the subject of the mind, it has no relations to outer conditions. Therefore, in the issues of karma, it is in the hand of human, not the god that is the master to give rise, maintain or illuminate Karma for total liberation.

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