



INTENTION (CETAANA) AND KAMMA IN BUDDHISM: AN ETHICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

An early Buddhist teaching says: "What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow. Our life is the creation of our mind".

Karma means intended action, and is a dynamic concept. It is not fate or predestination, but a consequence of what has gone before. In other words, you are now in circumstances because of your thoughts and decisions, and this is an on-going process. That is, new actions create new Karma. The Buddha divides kamma ethically right down the middle into two different classes, wholesome kamma ("kusala kamma") and unwholesome kamma ("akusala kamma"). Unwholesome kamma is action which is spiritually harmful and morally blameworthy. Wholesome kamma is action which is spiritually beneficial and morally praiseworthy.

INTRODUCTION

Intention is a major part of Karma. If you come home and accidentally trip over the dog and hurt the animal, this is not intended and has no effect. However, after a hectic day, you come home and kick the poor dog, then negative Karma is generated. All the combined intended actions add up to what you are now. here are two basic criteria for distinguishing wholesome and unwholesome kammās. One is the intention behind the action. If an action is intended to bring harm to oneself, harm to others or harm to both oneself and others, that is unwholesome kamma. Kamma which conduces to the good of oneself, to the good of others or to the good of both is wholesome kamma.

The Buddha saw this as an explanation of the different circumstances that all living beings find themselves in.



Karma is closely linked with dependant origination, where it is the consequence of the law of cause and effect. In the Bible, it says that we reap what we sow, and karma has the same impact. All unwholesome actions come from three unwholesome roots, greed, aversion and delusion. Greed is selfish desire aimed at personal gratification, expressed as grasping, craving and attachment. Aversion is ill will, hatred, resentment, anger and a negative evaluation of the object. Delusion is ignorance, mental unclarity and confusion. We also find the roots in the wholesome side: non-greed, non-aversion and non-delusion. Non-greed becomes manifest as detachment and generosity. Non-aversion is expressed positively as good will, friendliness and loving kindness. Non-delusion is manifested as wisdom, understanding and mental clarity. The working of kamma is so complex and so subtle that it is almost impossible to make definite predictions. All that we can know with certainty are the tendencies, but that is enough to guide our actions.

Obviously, we also are subject to non-karmic forces such as the ageing of our bodies. And there are circumstances, which are natural and also affect our lives. But in addition to that, the Buddha said that we are subject to this karmic effect where the ethical actions and thoughts we have will have a positive effect on the future and on our spiritual development.

The mind cannot be purified if we do not thoroughly investigate it. When we try to analyse the mind it seems to escape us, we cannot grasp it. The mind is variable, it changes very rapidly. At one moment there is a mind with attachment, at another moment a mind with generosity, at another moment a mind with anger. At each moment there is a different mind. Through the Buddhist teachings we learn that in reality the mind is different from what we mean by the word “mind” in conventional language. What we call mind are in reality different fleeting moments of consciousness succeeding one another very rapidly. Since “mind” has in psychology a meaning different from “mind” according to the Buddhist teaching, it is to be preferred to use the Pāli term citta (pronounced: chitta). Pāli is the language of the Buddhist scriptures of the Theravāda tradition. Citta is derived from the Pāli word for thinking (cinteti). All cittas have in common that they “think” of an object, but we have to take thinking here in a very general sense, meaning, being conscious of an object, or cognizing an object.

The Buddha’s teachings explain in a very precise way the objects which, each through the appropriate doorway, can be cognized by citta. For example, colour or visible object can be known through the eye-door, sound through the ear-door. Through each of the senses the corresponding object can be known. Through the mind-door all kinds of objects, also concepts and ideas, can be known. Before we studied the Buddhist teachings we had a vague, general idea of a thinking mind and we did not have a precise knowledge of objects which are cognized each through their appropriate doorway. Citta is varied because of the different kinds of objects it experiences. Seeing is totally different from hearing.

Buddhism attributes this variation to kamma, but it does not assert that everything is due to kamma.

If everything were due to kamma, a man must ever be bad, for it is his kamma to be bad. One need not consult a physician to be cured of a disease, for if one's kamma is such one will be cured.

According to Buddhism, there are five orders or processes (*niyamas*) which operate in the physical and mental realms:

- i. *Kamma niyama*, order of act and result, e.g., desirable and undesirable acts produce corresponding good and bad results.
- ii. *Utu niyama*, physical (inorganic) order, e.g., seasonal phenomena of winds and rains.
- iii. *Bija niyama*, order of germs or seeds (physical organic order); e.g., rice produced from rice-seed, sugary taste from sugar cane or honey, etc. The scientific theory of cells and genes and the physical similarity of twins may be ascribed to this order.
- iv. *Citta niyama*, order of mind or psychic law, e.g., processes of consciousness (*citta vithi*), power of mind, etc.
- v. *Dhamma niyama*, order of the norm, e.g., the natural phenomena occurring at the advent of a Bodhisatta in his last birth, gravitation, etc.

Every mental or physical phenomenon could be explained by these all-embracing five orders or processes which are laws in themselves. Kamma is, therefore, only one of the five orders that prevail in the universe. It is a law in itself, but it does not thereby follow that there should be a law-giver. Ordinary laws of nature, like gravitation, need no law-giver. It operates in its own field without the intervention of an external independent ruling agency.

Nobody, for instance, has decreed that fire should burn. Nobody has commanded that water should seek its own level. No scientist has ordered that water should consist of H₂O, and that coldness should be one of its properties. These are their intrinsic characteristics. Kamma is neither fate nor predestination imposed upon us by some mysterious unknown power to which we must helplessly submit ourselves. It is one's own doing reacting on oneself, and so one has the possibility to divert the course of kamma to some extent. How far one diverts it depends on oneself.



It must also be said that such phraseology as rewards and punishments should not be allowed to enter into discussions concerning the problem of kamma. For Buddhism does not recognize an Almighty Being who rules his subjects and rewards and punishes them accordingly. Buddhists, on the contrary, believe that sorrow and happiness one experiences are the natural outcome of one's own good and bad actions. It should be stated that kamma has both the continuative and the retributive principle.

Inherent in kamma is the potentiality of producing its due effect. The cause produces the effect; the effect explains the cause. Seed produces the fruit; the fruit explains the seed as both are inter-related. Even so kamma and its effect are inter-related; "the effect already blooms in the cause."

A Buddhist who is fully convinced of the doctrine of kamma does not pray to another to be saved but confidently relies on himself for his purification because it teaches individual responsibility.

It is this doctrine of kamma that gives him consolation, hope, self reliance and moral courage. It is this belief in kamma "that validates his effort, kindles his enthusiasm," makes him ever kind, tolerant and considerate. It is also this firm belief in kamma that prompts him to refrain from evil, do good and be good without being frightened of any punishment or tempted by any reward.

It is this doctrine of kamma that can explain the problem of suffering, the mystery of so-called fate or predestination of other religions, and above all the inequality of mankind. This article is completely modified by me in Previous article.

Conclusion:

The second element of the Noble Eightfold Path is sometimes called Right Thinking, or Right Thought.

To cultivate good will — and combat ill will — Buddhist practitioners work to cultivate loving-kindness (the Pali word for this is *metta*; the Sanskrit word is *maitri*). A clear distinction is made between this and compassion, which is discussed in the next section, below. An intense feeling of selfless love for other beings radiating outwards as a heartfelt concern for their well-being and happiness. *Metta* is not just sentimental good will, nor is it a conscientious response to a moral imperative or divine command. It must become a deep inner feeling, characterized by spontaneous warmth rather than by a sense of obligation. To cultivate this intention, Buddhist practitioners work to cultivate compassion. This can help us eliminate hateful thoughts toward others — even the most despicable people. We can still condemn the evil actions of such people, and not excuse their actions or ignore them. We can

still protect ourselves against harm. But ideally we will not attempt to cheat anyone, to deprive anyone, even for the benefit of those we love. The meditation practice for developing compassion has some similarities to the *metta* practice, but it focuses explicitly on the suffering of others.

At the core of these practices to develop loving-kindness and compassion toward others is the Buddhist ideal of non-duality. Bhikkhu Bodhi discusses this somewhat later in his text:

Our minds divide everything up into the dualities of “I” and “not I,” what is “mine” and what is “not mine.” Then, trapped in these dichotomies, we fall victim to the defilements they breed, the urges to grasp and destroy, and finally to the suffering that inevitably follows.

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