



**Karma**

*transcript of a teaching given October 17, 1997*

**Geshe la:** Today I am going to talk about the Buddhist concept of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word, which means action. Any action that is generated, or created from, our body, speech, or mind, definitely gives fruit or resolve in this lifetime or in next lifetime. So this is also the meaning, or definition, of Karma.

Primarily, there are three types of karma: 1) Positive karma, 2) negative karma, and 3) unmoving, or unchanging Karma.

Positive karma gives wholesome or positive or happy results and negative karma gives unwholesome or unhappy or undesirable results. Happiness cannot come from negative karma and unhappiness cannot come from positive karma. According to my understanding, even Catholicism presents the idea or concept of karma but not in detail like in Buddhism and Hinduism. For example, in the Bible, there are two statements: First, as you sow, so you reap, and second, one can understand the nature of seed and the tree from its fruit. This is very similar to the concept of Buddhist karma. The third type of karma, the unmoving or unchanging type of karma, is also a positive karma, but this karma can be only created or generated by certain practices of meditation. This karma will lead oneself to be reborn as celestial being.

Let's go back to negative and positive karma. Negative karma can be generated by performance of ten negative actions, such as killing, stealing, lying and so on. Positive karma can be created by engaging or cultivating the ten positive actions, like abstaining from killing stealing, lying and so on.

Within karma, there are two categories: a) Completed karma, and b) incomplete karma. The question is what makes the difference between complete and incomplete karma. There are some factors that have to come together to make a complete action or karma. When one or two of these factors are missing, then the action becomes incomplete. The complete action, or karma, produces very heavy, or serious, negative consequences. Whereas incomplete karma, produces light consequences.

The factors that are necessary to make complete karma are motivation, intention, effort (or attempt) and satisfaction. For example, killing: When these four factors are present at the time of the killing action then the action of killing becomes complete. When one or two factors are missing the karma is incomplete. If we carefully examine, most of our actions become complete because when we are engaging in any negative actions first we have a very strong motivation or desire to kill someone, and this thought or desire is influenced by attachment, hatred anger or jealousy; then we make some effort, or attempt to kill, such as buying weapons or poison; then, after we kill someone, we have a sense of satisfaction, joy, or contentment. This is how most of our negative action becomes complete, it is really hard to find, or see, that one of these factors are missing at the time we engage in certain negative actions, especially

if we have hardly a sense of regret, right after killing or stealing, etc., instead there is joy or satisfaction.

The other side, positive karma, there are three or four factors that are necessary to make complete positive karma: 1) Proper motivation, 2) right thought, 3) right effort, and 4) satisfaction. If you carefully examine the way we are engaging in the positive actions or karma, most of our positive karma becomes incomplete because of lack of bringing these factors together. Proper motivation refers to motivation which is not influenced by a self-cherishing attitude, or material reward out of self interest. Right effort refers to effort that should be joyous. Once positive karma is created we immediately dedicate this positive action, or deed, for the welfare of every sentient being, without expectations of self interest. If we think in this way , most of our positive karma, becomes complete.

Now I'll discuss the fruits of karma. Each karma brings forth four different results: 1) Maturation result, 2) the result corresponding to its initial act, 3) the result corresponding to the initial experience, and 4) environmental results. For example the karma of killing, The maturation of killing karma is to be born as an unfortunate being such as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal. The result corresponding to the initial act is to have short life, and frequent disease or illnesses. The result corresponding to the initial experience is to have mental impulses or a propensity to joy, pleasure or delight in killing. The last one, environmental result, resolves that one has to face living in the place where destructive climate and natural disasters are. Here, the important thing to understand is, the second, the result corresponding initial act, act is the most serious result because one will not only suffer in the next lifetime but it will cause suffering in many, many lifetimes since we have the mental impulse to take pleasure in the action, and we repeat the same actions, thus leading to further undesirable consequences. Therefore, one should consciously try to abstain from repeating the same action by means of cutting these unhealthy mental impulses.

According to Buddhism, living in a sound, ethical way, restraining from the ten negative actions, and cultivating the ten positive actions, is the healthiest way of living. This is we call living with spiritual discipline, or law. One becomes one's own policeman.

Karma can be further divided into additional categories: Propelling karma, and completing karma. Every karma comes under these two categories. Propelling karma refers to karma that propels existence. Completing karma refers to karma that brings different conditions (desirable or undesirable), in one's lifetime. Let me clarify about these two karmas, what it exactly means. For example: For someone born as human it could be possible that he or she faces very undesirable circumstances and conditions in this lifetime, such as poverty, poor health, loneliness, hearing unpleasant words and groundless rumors about oneself, and so on. These circumstances are said to be the results of completing karma. Also, someone born as a human in fortunate circumstances such as good health, wealth, power, fame, having good friends and a faithful, pleasant partner, praised by everybody, infantile, attractive, generous, and successful in every step is considered to be the results of completing karma. These conditions can be clearly seen in our human society.

If we are lacking in understanding of these degrees of karma and their consequences then we are confused when we see others with more fortunate circumstances and successes. If

we see something we are lacking then there is a danger of having self hatred, and depression that may lead us to suicidal thoughts, jealousy and so on, which is again very destructive. Gaining a proofed and stable understanding of karma its effects and results can help protect us from confusion and mentally one can live undisturbed, calmly and peacefully.

**Student:** How does a purification practice like Vajrsattva, or Kilaya work?

**Geshe la:** Negative karma has one good quality, it can be purified. So we believe negative karma can be purified as a good quality of it. Vajrsattva practice is the most powerful antidote to destroy or to purify the seeds of negative karma so that it will have no results. But, the Vajrasattva purification practice should be complemented by four other antidotal powers: a) feeling deep regret, b) making resolution in one's mind not to repeat the same action in the future, c) going for refuge and generating a genuine compassion, and d) the actual practice like meditation or visualization of Vajrasattva, reciting the 100 syllable mantra, prostrations and so on. Then the negative karma can be purified.

**Student:** Geshe la, if you dedicate your rightly motivated actions to the liberation of all sentient beings, does this increase joy and satisfaction in the action?

**Geshe la:** Yes!

**Student:** One more question about Vajrasattva. Does the practice purify the mind stream, so the result does not occur? How does this exactly work? What is it about the 100 syllable mantra?

**Geshe la:** Yes, it does not occur, it is something like "burning the seeds".

**Student:** So the seed is in the mind stream?

**Geshe la:** Are you asking the meaning of the mantra or how it works?

**Student:** How does it work on the mind stream?

**Geshe la:** It is something like a detergent that rubs out the stains in the mind. The energy created from the sound and syllables refines the quality of mind stream.

**Student:** Geshe la, in the time of The Buddha, people were easily brought to enlightenment, now people have a tougher time. Why is this?

**Geshe la:** According to Buddhism, there are four degenerations: 1) Degeneration of time or era, 2) degeneration of view, 3) degeneration of lifespan, and 4) degeneration of mental delusions, meaning that people's minds will be dominated by delusions. These four make it tougher to attain enlightenment and other spiritual realizations.

**Student:** If you have bad karma of illness, what is the best recourse?

**Geshe la:** Actually there are many things that one can do. One can practice Tong Len,

which means giving and taking. Giving one's fortune, virtues and merit to others, out of loving kindness and taking others suffering upon oneself out of compassion. Generally, once the fruit or result is already manifest, then there is not that much else to resolve it.

**Student:** Geshe la, it is our practice to circumambulate the Migure Dorje Stupa, and do Vajrasattva in the case of illness if we can.

**Geshe la:** Yes, for example, in a Tibetan community there are certain illnesses that medicine doesn't cure, or help, no matter whether we consult good doctors or take prescriptions. Then we Tibetans do circumbamulations and recite the Vajrasattva mantra and it helps to cure that disease or illness. So far, we Tibetans have a very unique treatment, combining modern medicine with ancient spiritual healing practices.

**Student:** When we experience a problem and we think that we are taking this problem away for everyone else, is this a purifying practice?

**Geshe la:** Yes, I would say if one is doing this out of compassion and loving kindness and maintaining the view of seeing others to be equal to oneself, in terms of not wanting suffering but wanting happiness, then it is purifying practice.