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## KARMA IN BUDDHISM: AN ETHICAL BASE OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM

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### ABSTRACT

**K**arma (Pali: Kamma) is accepted as one of the main concept in all the philosophy and religion. In system of Indian Buddhism, the doctrine of Karma plays an important role in the cognitive education as in the following statement: "Deeds are one's own, being are heirs to deeds, deeds are the matrix, deeds the kin, deeds the arbiters. Deeds divide beings, that are to say by lowness and excellence."

**KEYWORDS:** Engaged Buddhism , karmic conditions , worse direction.

### INTRODUCTION:

In the personal level, the law of karma encourages an individual engage in the basic of morality and takes full responsibility towards his deeds, speech and his mind. One will become lowness or excellence dependence on his



karma. In the social level, if the doctrine of karma is disseminated and observed, there will be reduced the crime rates and prevented the increase in crime. By our mind, speech and action we create the world in which we live. Buddhism developed numerous models to assist people in efforts to extinguish dukkha. Buddhists think that human beings are constituted by nexus of causal conditions. The conditions of greatest interest and importance to Buddhists are karmic conditions. Therefore, the teaching of karma offers a path of practice based not on fear of a Supreme Being but on a clear understanding the

law of cause and effect. In the practicing, the law of karma is the guidelines which lead to clear direction in life. If our lives do not base on clear direction, it becomes a collection of blunders and the meaning of life is reduced to a worse direction. Regarding on the personal level and social level, the teaching of karma is so relevant; hence, I decided to study on this topic.

### THE MEANING OF KARMA

The term Karma derives from the verbal root kr, to do or to make. This term has several meanings, literary means "action" or

"deed". Any kind of intentional action whether mental, verbal, or physical is referred as Karma. In the Buddha's teaching, Karma refers only to volitional action as the below definition:

It is volition (cetan ) bhikkhus, that is Karma, I declare. Having willed, one accomplishes karma by body, by speech, and by mind. Any act which is without intention has no bearing on the law of karma. It is attributed to one of the other niyama such as utuniyama (physical law). Such actions have the same significance as a pile of earth caving in a rock falling from a mountain, or a dead branch falling from a tree.

There are two types of volition, unwholesome volition (akusala cetan ) is unwholesome karma, and wholesome volition (kusala cetan ) is wholesome karma. But the volition of the Buddhas and other

Arahants is neither unwholesome nor wholesome: it is purely functional. It never produces Karma, because they have eradicated the root of karma: ignorance and craving. When a person performs an action with his will, this action is done to achieve his purpose. The intention which causes the act, it constitutes karma. An action is considered as unwholesome (akusala) in the moral aspect when that action is motivated by the desire (tanha) and combined with greed (lobha), anger (dosa) and ignorance (moha). An action is considered as wholesome (kusala) when it is motivated by the reverse factors: absence of greed, hatred and delusion.

Vasubandhu in his commentary on Abhidharmakosa divided volition into two types, cetana karma and cetayitv karma. Firstly, the initial or preparatory stage, wherein one produces a volition. That is pure volition, 'I must do such and such an action', this stage is called cetana karma. Thereafter, one produces a volition of action, the volition of doing an action in conformity to the previous will. This itself motivates to move the body or emit a voice, it is called cetayitv karma, action after having been willed. According to Buddhaghosa, karma means consciousness of good and bad, merit and demerit. Buddhists conceive that karma is produced from one's intention therefore people can control their mind by cultivating of compassion (karuna), loving kindness (metta), wisdom (prajna), combined with the knowledge of good and evil, as well as the effect of their karmas on their living. One's effort which can be changed the world around them. The life is the continuing of a string of activities, intellectual people are always watchful over their own wrong thinking to avoid the evil deeds which are exposed by body and speech. By this way, they create their happy world.

### DIFFERENT KINDS OF KARMA

One of the prominent way of classification of karma is that physical karma, verbal karma and mental karma. Other classification is dependent on moral principles. It divided karma in three kinds: good, bad and neutral karma. Abhidharmakosa states that good karma leads to tranquility. However good karma is subdivided into two categories: actions lead to a differently maturing result which is aspired and actions lead to Nirvana. The deed that leads to happy, pleasure is called good karma, contrary to it that is bad karma. Thus all the buddhist precepts which will lead to a moral life for laity and leads to nirvana for whom aspires to get rid of samsara. However if the karma gives the good result within the three realms: Desire, Form and Formless, it is called impure good. According to Samma diṭṭhi sutta, there are ten impure good acts (dasa-kusala-karma-patha) which lead to the differently maturing effects that are desirable in three realms. They consist of Abstention from killing living things; Abstention from stealing; Abstention from unchaste activities; Abstention from lying; Abstention from malicious speech; Abstention from harsh speech; Abstention from indistinct chatter; Abstention from covetousness; Abstention from anger; Abstention from wrong views. Nirvana is a pure good (anasa-kusala) but it is not a kind of karma. Nirvana transcends karma. It is absolute good (paramatha-subha) which does not lead to differently maturing effects. Karma is also classified as actions that give a pleasant birth somewhere between the desire realm and the Third Meditation Heaven of the form realm (sukha-vedanaya-karma), actions giving in an unpleasant rebirth in the desire realm (dukkha-vedanaya-karma), and actions giving in a birth that is neither pleasant nor suffering in the Fourth Meditation Heaven of the form realm or above (adukkha-asukha-vedanaya-karma).

Besides, we can classify karma in several ways according to their functions, characteristic, effect and so on. Such as, depend on the time in which effects are work out. We have four kinds of karma.

**Ditthadhammavedaniya (Immediately Effective karma):** some moral and immoral actions may show their effects in the present life.

**Upapajjavedaniya (Subsequently effective karma):** because its effect one may reap in the subsequent birth, hence, it is so-called.

**Aparipariyavedaniya (indefinitely effective karma):** no person is exempt from this class of karma. Even the

Buddhas and Arahants may reap the effects of their past karma.

**Ahosi karma** : the karma does not operate in this life, it becomes ineffective.

In the Abhidharmakosa, Vasubandhu accepts fourfold categories as following: Dark with Dark result; Bright with bright result; Both dark and bright with mixed results; Neither dark nor bright with neither result. He notes that the third category, that of mixed karma, refer not to the character of individual acts but rather to the series of acts which define an individual life. One of the most common classifications of karma is into acts of body (k yakkama), acts of speech (vac kama) and acts of mind (manokarma).

From these classifications which point out that there are various kinds of karma as well as the concept. However, karma is just one of a number of natural laws. This reminds us that not all events are the working of karma. The law of karma is the most important one for human beings because we are responsibility toward our suffering and happiness. We are creators of our karma and it in return shapes the conditions of our life. But by regulating our thought, speech and action, we are able to create and control the things around us.

### OUR EXPERIENCE ON THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA

In one penetrative exposition of the Dhamma, the Buddha taught that “Kamma should be understood; the source and origin of kamma should be understood; the diversity of kamma should be understood; the result of kamma should be understood; the cessation of kamma should be understood; the way leading to cessation of kamma should be understood” These statements point out that knowledge of karma must include all those things: the definition, the origin, the diversity, the result, the cessation, and the way leading to the cessation of karma. The definition has mentioned above. What is the source and origin of karma? Herein, “Contact is its source and origin.” In other sutta, the Buddha showed the causes for the origination of unwholesome karma, those are greed, hatred and delusion. They are the causes lead to the bad destinations. Whereas, the causes for the origination of wholesome karma, those are non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. They will lead to the good destinations. The diversity of karma is described as: karma is experienced in hell; experienced in the animal realm; experienced in the realm of afflicted spirits; in the human world; and in the deva world. The result of karma is threefold: to be experienced in this very life; or in the next rebirth; or on some subsequent occasion. The cessation of karma is defined that with the cessation of contact there is the cessation of karma. And the Noble eightfold path is the way leading to the cessation of karma, namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. When a noble disciple understands thus, he understands this penetrative spiritual life to be the cessation of karma.

Understanding the doctrine of karma which shows us that we have to response for our happiness and suffering. We are the owner of our karma therefore we have ability to regulate our actions by which we can be able to change to the direction of our life. Furthermore, we are not slaver of their karmas; we have inner power and ability to change our karma by changing our thought, speech and deeds. We might be had been done the unwholesome karma in the past, instead of these we try to change the result by doing good deeds in this present life. We purify our mind by practice the virtue, mindfulness and wisdom. Depending on this holy life, we can be able to reduce the bad result which will arise from bad deeds in the past. In Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha confirmed the effort of human beings in the moral cultivation to get the happiness. “Here, bhikkhus, some person has created trifling bad karma yet it leads him to hell, while some other person here has created exactly the same trifling karma yet it is to be experienced in this very life, without even a slight [residue] being seen, much less abundant [residue].” What is the reason makes different between those two kinds. Here, some person is undeveloped in body, virtuous behavior, mind, and wisdom; he is limited and has a mean character, and he dwell in suffering. When a such person creates trifling bad karma, it lead him to hell. Whereas, some person is developed in body, virtuous behavior, mind and wisdom. He is unlimited and has lofty character, and he dwells without measure. When such a person creates exactly the same trifling bad karma, it is to be experienced in this very life, without even a slight [residue] being seen, much less abundant [residue]. These points are cleared by a simile as below: Suppose a man would drop a lump of salt into a small bowl of water. That lump of salt would make the small quantity of water in the bowl salty and undrinkable. But suppose a man would drop a lump of salt into the river Ganges. That lump of salt would not make the river Ganges become salty and undrinkable. Because



the water in the bowl is limited so a lump of salt makes it salty, but the river Ganges contains a large volume of water therefore a lump of salt could not make it become salty.

Buddhists think karma as only one of many determination factors which influences the course of one's existence. In the twelve links of Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada) karma belongs to samskara (formation) which includes mental, verbal and bodily karma from which one is born as the result of his past karmas. These samskara (karmic formation) influence the human behaviour and bring radical changes in attitude, character, and personality. Therefore, they are also responsible for one's happy and painful experiences in the present and future life. However, by self-effort one could decide between wholesome and unwholesome deed from his thought as well as speech and action. When there is a change in existing samskara, there will be change in the direction of life. In a Buddhist context, karma denotes the cause and effect relation which obtain between an act and certain others acts which have preceded and will succeed it, particularly if any of those acts can be classified as kusala or akusala

## THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

### Responsibility towards one self

#### Giving up unskillful action

The law of karma reminds that our actions have consequences which influence our disposition, tendencies and our environment. One has to take full responsibility for any deed caused by him. The consequences of karma may be visible or invisible; immediate or distant; individual or universal; psychological or physical, and so on, but nowhere can escape the karmic consequences as the following statement: "All karma, whether good or evil, bears fruit. There is no karma, no matter how small, which is void of fruit." In other sutta also pointed out that: "Bhikkhus, I do not say that there is a termination of volitional kamma that has been done and accumulated so long as one has not experienced [its results], and that may be in this very life, or in the [next] rebirth, or on some subsequent occasion. But I do not say that there is making an end of suffering so long as one has not experienced [the result of] volitional kamma that has been done and accumulated. If one fears sorrow, should not make bad deeds, either in public or in private. Once, one performed unwholesome deeds, even if he flies into the air, he will not be able to escape suffering. In Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha indicated that: "Bhikkhus, I do not say that there is a termination of volitional kamma that has been done and accumulated so long as one has not experienced [its results], and that may be in this very life, or in the [next] rebirth, or on some subsequent occasion. But I do not say that there is making an end of suffering so long as one has not experienced [the result of] volitional kamma that has been done and accumulated."

From the above mentions, we are aware of our responsibility towards our deeds due to they firstly affect and make changing our disposition as well as create the new kammass. When one aware of his responsibility towards his deeds he will be careful about his thought, bodily actions and speech. Specifically, there are three bodily actions which must give up, killing living things, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Towards the verbal karma, there are four actions must give up, lying, malicious speech, harsh speech, and gossip. Furthermore, the deeds which are manifested through body and speech that are motivated by mental karma. The mental karma always plays an important role in the creation of karma, as in the Upali sutta, the Buddha replied to the Nigantha Digha Tapassi that: "Of these three kind of action, Tapassi, thus analysed and distinguished, I describe mental action as the most reprehensible for the performance of evil action, for the perpetration of evil action, and not so much bodily action and verbal action" therefore, we need to purify our mind by practice sīla, samadhi and pañña (morality, concentration, and wisdom). We abstain from covetousness, anger and wrong view to regulate our mind in the right view (sammādiṭṭhi). Furthermore, mental karma is considered to be the most significant because it is the origin of all other karmas. Bodily and verbal deeds are derived from mental karma. One of the most important influences of mental karma is ditthi (view), belief and personal preferences. Views have an important bearing on individual behavior, life experiences and social ideals. If there is wrong view, it follows that any subsequent thinking, speech and actions will tend to flow in a wrong direction. If there is right view, the thinking, speech and actions will trend to the righteousness. Due to these, right view takes the first position in

the Eight Fold Path which will lead to the cessation of suffering in the samsara. In the Samma diṭṭhi sutta right view is defined as the understanding of what is unwholesome and wholesome; the root of unwholesome and wholesome. When one has thus understood, he entirely abandons the underlying tendency to lust, aversion and uproots ignorance, there arises true knowledge from him, and he here and now makes an end of suffering. Furthermore, there are another way to make the arousing of true knowledge such as understands nutriment; the origin of nutriment; the cessation of nutriment; and the way leading to the cessation of nutriment. There are four kind of nutriment: firstly, physical food which is gross and subtle; contact as the second; mental volition as the third; and consciousness as the fourth. With the arising of craving, there is the arising of nutriment. With the cessation of craving there is the cessation of nutriment. And the Noble Eightfold Path is the way leading to the cessation of nutriment. Understanding the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, and the taint, the origin, the cessation, the way leading to the cessation of the taints which also arise the truth knowledge and make an end of suffering.

### **Relying upon yourself**

The law of karma develops a sense of the individual responsibility. Purity and impurity are not the reward and punishment that are sent by the Supernatural powers. Pleasant or unpleasant that come from your deeds, no one else can make you purity or impurity as mentioned in Dhammapada: "By self is one defiled. By self is one purified." Buddha only shows the way, and your work is starting to walk step by step on that way. Any step you have passed, that is your reaching, the Buddha could not do for you, "You must do practice yourselves. The Tathagata only points the way."

The doctrine of karma emphasizes the self-effort and self-reliance which promote the self-awareness in each individual. "Bhikkhus, dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge." These teachings show the human values and self-efforts in the creating of one's life. Even if one had done the unwholesome deeds, he can improve his life in positive way by learning and practicing Dhamma. When you clearly know about karma, the arising of karma, the cessation of karma and the way leading to the cessation of karma, you will not waste your time for praying in order to overcome the consequences of unwholesome deeds; or sink into the religious rite with the hope to get rid of your sins. There is a visual instance which demonstrates uselessness of praying or wish for the saving. It just likes a hen that refuses to sit on her eggs in order to hatch them, but she wishes her chicks using their feet to break out from these eggs. This will not happen. Just like a person who throws a heavy stone into the pond and pour oil into it, then he prays in order to make stone floats on water and oil sinks into mud. It would be impossible for him to do so. Furthermore, if it were possible to cleanse evil kamma simply by bathing in a river, then the frogs, fish, otters, crocodiles, and other river-dwelling animals would certainly be destined for rebirth in a heaven realm. If these rivers were capable of carrying away your evil kamma, then they could probably also carry away your good kamma. Therefore, we should concern about our action rather than prayer. By abstaining from ten unwholesome deeds, one starts to establish the heaven here and now, it is not a distant heaven which one only comes after death.

When the death comes, one must go without taking anything. Everything must left behind. But what one has done by body, speech and mind which are truly one's own, they follow one like a shadow that never departs; hence, one should do good deeds as the collections for the future life. Keep in mind these teachings, one will take care in each action, see danger in the slightest faults, think twice before action, observe the commitments one has taken on regarding body, speech and mind, devote to the skilled and purified life with the sense doors guarded, skilled in mindful awareness and content.

### **Towards others by practicing catu-sangaha-vatthu and Bramavihāra**

The consequence of our actions which is not only affects our life but also affect others. When one performs a wholesome deed, he himself gets benefit from his action; simultaneously others also get the benefit from that. This is the interrelation of all phenomena, so, by protecting oneself, one protects others; by protecting others, one protects oneself. When the ruler of a country fails to apportion wealth to those in need, poverty becomes prevalent. Poverty being prevalent, theft becomes prevalent. Theft being prevalent, weapons become

prevalent. When weapons become prevalent, killing and, maiming become prevalent, lying becomes prevalent..." The arising and cease of all phenomena take place under the principle of Dependence Origination (Paticcasammupada). Nothing could be existed from an isolated factor, hence, one who has understanding and great wisdom does not think of harming himself or another, or of harming both alike. He rather thinks of his own welfare, of that of others, of that of both, and of the welfare of the whole world.

In Buddhism, while social action is encouraged, it should always stem from skillful mental states rather than idealistic impulses. Any social action, no matter how seemingly worthwhile, will be ruined if it becomes tainted with unskillful intentions. For this reason, all action, whether individual or social oriented, should be done carefully, with an awareness of the real intention behind it. Therefore, one also takes part in others' happiness or suffering, on this regard one should act for the benefit not only oneself but also others by practicing four means of sustaining a favorable relationship (catu-sangaha-vatthu): Dana - generosity; piyavaca – kindly speech; atthacariya – helpful action; and samanattata – impartiality, or equal participation. They are mentioned in the Anguttara Nikaya:

"Giving, endearing speech,  
Beneficent conduct, and impartiality  
Under diverse worldly conditions,  
As is suitable to fit each case: these means  
Of sustaining a favourable relationship

Are like the linchpin of a rolling chariot." These four qualities manifest as the four conditions for social welfare. When they are combined with the Four Sublime States (Brahmavihāra: metta – goodwill, loving kindness; karuna – compassion; mudita – sympathetic joy; gladness at the good fortune of others; and upekkha – equanimity), there will be arisen the harmonious relations on a social level and pleasant living. Thought, Dana is a basic stance towards others in society; it should be based on goodwill and compassion through giving. Kindly speech which is a standard behavior in everyday, it can be based on all four of the Sublime States. The third condition is helpful action which refers to the offering of physical effort to help others, and the last condition is samanattata which means to share with other in the case of pleasures and pains, to join with them and to be one with them. Both of these conditions should be based on the four Sublime States.

## CONCLUSION

In Buddhist tradition, karma is the actions which are caused by volition (cetanā). If the deed is performed without the motive or intention, that deed does not form karma. It will be not accurate to determine a deed through the manifestation of bodily postures or speech. The volition which causes the action will determine the karma's nature. The different kinds of karma show that even one has done the unwholesome deeds, he still has the opportunity to do the wholesome deeds. Furthermore, karma is seen as condition factor. We find karma as a component within the whole life process. It is the agent which forms the direction of life, because it creates being's habits. Beside, other conditions which also affect to the arising of karma and impact on the process of Cause and Effect such as four advantages (sampatti) and four disadvantages (vipatti) as the above mention.

The doctrine of karma establishes an understanding of actions and their results as subject to cause and effect, rather than lucky charma and auspicious objects. The success of any aspiration is dependent on action, encouraging self-reliance and diligence. It puts the future in the form of personal responsibility, back into the hands of each individual. Karma also points out that mental qualities, abilities and behavior are measuring sticks of human baseness or refinement. We cannot measure one's quality depend on his race or his family class due to the old karmas from which one's body and one's mind exist as a result. Beside, one has still done to generate the new karma: "What is old kamma? The eye is old kamma, to be seen as generated and fashioned by volition, as something to be felt. The ear is old kamma... The mind is old kamma, to be seen as generated and fashioned by volition, as something to be felt. This is call old kamma. And what, bhikkhus, is new kamma? Whatever action one



does now by body, speech, or mind. This is called new kamma.” With the understanding about karma and its consequences, one will not treat himself as a foolish as the below: “Foolish people devoid of wisdom; Behave like enemies towards themselves; They go about doing evil deeds; Which yeild only bitter fruit”

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