

## Tibetan Buddhism Basics

# Karma

"I am the owner of my karma.

I inherit my karma.

I am born of my karma.

I am related to my karma.

I live supported by my karma.

Whatever karma I create, whether good or evil, that I shall inherit."

-- *The Buddha, Anguttara Nikaya V.57 - Upajjhatthana Sutta*

"Countless rebirths lie ahead, both good and bad.

The effects of karma (actions) are inevitable,  
and in previous lifetimes we have accumulated negative karma  
which will inevitably have its fruition in this or future lives.

Just as someone witnessed by police in a criminal act  
will eventually be caught and punished,

so we too must face the consequences of faulty actions  
we have committed in the past, there is no way to be at ease;  
those actions are irreversible; we must eventually undergo their effects."

-- *His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama*

The Sanskrit word Karma literally means action. In Buddhism however, karma mainly refers to one's intention or motivation while doing an action. The shortest explanation of karma is: 'you get what you give'. In other words; whatever you do intentionally to others, a similar thing will happen to you in the future.

Our largest obstacle to understanding or even believing in karma may be time. The 're-actions' or results of our actions show up with a time delay, and it is extremely hard to tell which action caused which result.

Actions done in a previous life can create results in this life, but who remembers their past life? For ordinary humans, the mechanisms of karma can be intellectually understood, but never completely "seen".

**The idea of karma is not only found in Buddhism and Hinduism; the Bible seems to convey the essence:**

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A person reaps what he sows.” (*Galatians. 6:7*)

“All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (*Matthew. 7:12*)

**And, the 'Golden Rule' of Confucianism makes a similar statement:**

Tzu-kung asked, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?"

Confucius answered, "Is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

# Karma (cont.)

From His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

"Some people misunderstand the concept of karma.  
They take the Buddha's doctrine of the law of causality to mean that all is predetermined,  
that there is nothing that the individual can do.

This is a total misunderstanding.

The very term karma or action is a term of active force,  
which indicates that future events are within your own hands.  
Since action is a phenomenon that is committed by a person, a living being,  
it is within your own hands whether or not you engage in action."

*Watch your thoughts, for they become words.*

*Watch your words, for they become actions.*

*Watch your actions, for they become habits.*

*Watch your habits, for they become character.*

*Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.*

– Unknown source

As the Buddha taught:

"Do not think a small sin will not return in your future lives.  
Just as falling drops of water will fill a large container,  
The little sins that steadfast accumulate will completely overwhelm you.

Do not think a small virtue will not return in your future lives.  
Just as falling drops of water will fill a large container,  
The little virtues that steadfast accumulate will completely overwhelm you."

"Karma is often wrongly confused with the notion of a fixed destiny. It is more like an accumulation of tendencies that can lock us into particular behavior patterns, which themselves result in further accumulations of tendencies of a similar nature . . . but it is not necessary to be a prisoner of old karma.

Here's how mindfulness changes karma.

When you sit, you are not allowing your impulses to translate into action.

For the time being, at least, you are just watching them.

Looking at them, you quickly see that all impulses in the mind arise and pass away,  
that they have a life of their own, that they are not you but just thinking,  
and that you do not have to be ruled by them.

Not feeding or reacting to impulses, you come to understand their nature as thoughts directly.  
This process actually burns up destructive impulses in the fires of concentration, equanimity and non-doing.  
At the same time, creative insights and creative impulses are no longer squeezed out so much  
by the more turbulent, destructive ones.

They are nourished as they are perceived and held in awareness."

– Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are'