



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

His Eminence Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche's talk on "The Eight Points on Karma" at the German-American Institute, Heidelberg, Germany, on 22nd Nov 2011

First of all, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me an opportunity to speak on Karma at this institute of Heidelberg. This city is renowned for its beautiful landscape and academic excellence throughout Europe. At the same time, I would also like to greet in Tibetan with TASHI DELEK all friends, ladies and gentlemen, for coming here and showing interest in this profound subject.

It's not difficult for me to speak on the theory of Karma by just repeating what Lord Buddha had taught or based upon the Himalayan culture because I have studied Buddhist philosophy for many years and also I was born and brought up in a Himalayan region called Dolpa. However, in the past, I faced real difficulties in explaining the concept of Karma to those who have a strong Western background, tradition, culture, habits and particularly to those who are atheists. Therefore, not being just complacent with what I have heard about the western culture, I did some study about the western culture with the help of teachers, friends and students of the West. Having done that, I will try my best to explain the meaning of Karma by giving suitable examples related to western lifestyle and particularly to the atheists.

I want to explain about Karma through eight points because firstly, it will be easy for you to understand; secondly, they can possibly clear out the doubts that you have about Karma and thirdly, instead of a rough sketch about Karma, I thought of explaining in detail about the concept and philosophy of Karma.

Hence, I would like to name this speech as "The eight points on Karma".

The eight points are:

1. Origin of the concept of Karma
2. The way Buddha explained about Karma
3. The nature of Karma
4. Wrong understanding of Karma
5. Classification of Karma

6. The apparent expression of Karma
7. The relation between Karma and dharma
8. The way of accepting the law of Karma

These are the eight points through which I will be explaining about Karma.

1. ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF KARMA

To speak of the source of this concept, it arose from the beginning of human civilization and later from the religions.

In the process of the development of civilization, human beings experienced different circumstances of happiness and suffering. Due to this, various external surroundings came into being, based upon which different constituents of the physical attributes of beings were created. These brought about the varieties in the structure and power of brain which gave rise to varied mental faculties and inclinations. At the same time, unequal life sustaining provisions within the human society compelled them to the question "How did these diversities come about?", which led to the understanding and realization of Karma.

This question arose from the conditions of livelihood and life experiences of humans since the beginning of civilization. Thus, we can say that along with this question, the understanding and realization of Karma came about.

Let's take for an example making preparations today for tomorrow's meal. Tomorrow's meal depends on today's efforts of body, speech and mind and if we do not work today, then we will not have food to eat tomorrow. This knowledge itself is the view of action and fruition.

According to every individual's life, time and experience, there arises the need for preparation and rectification of methods to fulfill one's dream of the future. This concept has developed since the dawn of human civilization. Thus, this view symbolizes the basic philosophy of Karma. Based upon this concept, gradually the elaborate explanation on subjects related to Karma, such as past and future lives and so on came about in various religious philosophies.

Amongst the existing popular religions, Hinduism is the first to explain about Karma. Hinduism has a history of more than 3500 years and 2555 years have passed since the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana.

Buddha taught the concept of Karma differently from Hinduism. He pointed out that it is contradictory to accept Karma on the one hand and a creator on the other hand, who is permanent, self-arising, unchanging and independent. According to Buddha's point of view, if one wants to establish the concept of Karma in depth and in detail, then believing in a creator who is permanent, self-arising, unchanging, and independent is

considered to be illogical. In brief, to accept the authentic law of Karma and to believe in a creator is conflicting. Thus, the followers of Buddha admit that the concept of Karma devoid of creator is a great improvisation to the then existing view of Karma.

All of you should analyze whether it has been improvised or not. It may or may not be improvised. Being a follower of Buddha, because of my inclination to Buddhism or knowing the valid reason, I find the concept of Karma without creator to be logical. To prove this, I don't want to quote Buddha's words here, rather I will suggest an example which is generally acceptable to all.

Take for an example driving a vehicle. You should be one hundred per cent responsible when it comes to the matter of turning the steering wheel, controlling speed, stopping and turning, following the traffic rules and signs, reading the road map etc. If you simply rely on Triple Gem, God, elements, Creator, etc. in order to drive, you cannot arrive at your destination. Moreover, as I said above, if you lose control of the vehicle's speed, there is a definite risk of an accident. Therefore, as one is supposed to take responsibility completely upon oneself, I find the view of cause and effect without creator to be rational.

2. THE WAY BUDDHA EXPLAINED KARMA

Buddha taught the Dharma based upon the concept of Karma. The supreme teacher explained the meaning of Karma through various examples. To mention but a few, Buddha said that the relation between action and its effect is one of the essential truths within the truth. It is because of the inevitable nature of conditioned phenomena. If causes are complete, the fruition is certain even though one may not desire or wish for it. If all the causes are incomplete, there is no way for fruition to arise, no matter whosoever wishes for it, a high or low person. Hence, this phenomenon is generally called interdependence. The actions of body, speech and mind are a specific form of interdependence and they are called Karma.

No one, whether high or low in caste, powerful or weak, with or without backing can undermine the relationship between good and bad actions and their respective good and bad results. Thus, the supreme Buddha taught this to be the infallible truth of interdependence.

Buddha said in one of the sutras:

Actions of all beings

Will not go in waste even for one hundred kalpas.

When the gathering (of cause and conditions) and the right time comes,

Its fruition will certainly come to being.

The fruition of actions committed will certainly ripen even after a span of one hundred eons. Therefore, no actions will fail to bring their fruition. Sometimes, there may be temporary benefits by engaging in unwholesome actions like banditry, robbery and killing, but ultimately the objective of one's life will remain unfulfilled.

In this regard, Lord Buddha gave an example of a bird flying high up in the sky, its shadow disappearing, and it seems as if there is no shadow. But when it descends back towards the earth, its shadow reappears simultaneously. Similarly, it is taught that even though it seems that you are temporarily benefitted by engaging in non-virtuous actions, sooner or later, it is certain that the consequences will catch up with you.

Lord Buddha further warned not to disregard the law of cause and effect. A sutra says:

Do not take small misdeeds so lightly

Thinking that they are harmless.

Even a tiny spark of fire

Can gradually set alight a mountain of hay.

Therefore, sometimes although we know the relation of cause and effect, we neglect it, thinking that 'this is trivial and will not harm'. In this way, we get habituated by many such negativities which harm both oneself and others. For example, if a tiny spark of fire touches a mountain of hay, it can burn it to the ground. Similarly, it is a fact that even the smallest negative action will harm back.

Likewise, it is said:

Do not take for granted small good deeds

Thinking that they are of no benefit

Even little drops of water

In time, can fill a giant pot

If you think that except for great and major virtuous actions, there is no point in engaging in small virtuous actions or if you neglect small virtues thinking that there is no significant benefit in them, you can neither engage in great virtues nor accumulate small ones. Finally, there is a danger of ending up achieving nothing in future. Therefore, you should gradually accumulate small virtues so that ultimately, you will be able to achieve great ones. For example, many drops of water can gradually fill up a giant pot. In the same way, Buddha taught, one should engage in all virtues, big or small.

This completes what the Buddha taught in sutras about Karma.

3. NATURE OF KARMA

The nature of Karma is the actions of body, speech and mind. Other than this, there isn't anything particular about it. For example, nature of fire is hot and burning. Apart from that, there is nothing else to say about it.

As far as a person is concerned, the behavior of a person is his or her Karma. In English, it is called behavior or conduct. In short, the person is the creator of his or her own Karma and the behavior is the Karma. When we identify behavior, there is nothing to be pointed out other than one's actions of body, speech and mind. In this way, we understand Karma, behavior and the actions of body, speech and mind to be of the same meaning.

The Vehicle of Hearers from the Buddhist schools accepts all the three actions of body, speech and mind to be Karma. The Vehicle of Bodhisattavas from the Buddhist schools asserts that because actions of body and speech follow the mind, mind is the chief. Hence, they consider exclusively the action of mind to be Karma. Therefore, when it comes to Karma, two different viewpoints exist within the Buddhist tradition. In the teachings of Lord Buddha, action of mind has been termed the "mental state of will". However, all Buddhists generally accept actions of body, speech and mind as Karma.

In Sanskrit, all these three actions are called "Karma" whereas in Tibetan and Himalayan language, it is called "las". Both terms can show the meaning of the three actions in their respective languages. If we mention the word "Karma" to a person who doesn't know Sanskrit/Indian language, it cannot convey the meaning of "the nature of action" to that person. In English language, there is no other term for "Karma" and since "Karma" is not an English term, it conveys no meaning to an English speaker. Due to this problem, occasionally, there are people who come up with an understanding, which is in conflict to the doctrine of cause and effect.

It was the year 2008 and I was in Australia, when some of us went to a nice restaurant for dinner. My introduction had already been given to the restaurant owner by my friends. As soon as we arrived, the owner as he received us, begged me saying, "Please give me a good Karma for my restaurant business". With laughter, I pretended as if I had the thing to give and greeted him. In the course of eating the meal, I thought that I ought to make an explanation because firstly I had the responsibility of being an exponent of the philosophy of Karma and secondly I had no good Karma to offer for the smooth running of the restaurant business.

At the moment, I cannot offer any good Karma for the smooth running of restaurant business as such, I said. I explained that I couldn't comply not just because I did not have the capacity. In reality, whether the restaurant's business goes well or not depends on how you manage it, the skill of the cook and the way the receptionist receives the guests with proper conduct of their body, speech and mind. Those three actions are the

ones upon which the Karma of the restaurant's business is based. Since this is the reality, the only thing that you can do is – act well. Therefore, I said that I have got no good Karma to offer them.

This misunderstanding arises because of not using the original term for Karma. Thus, in order to understand the right meaning of the word, it is best to use one's own language. I think it is most appropriate to translate the word “Karma” as “work” in English and use it. The reason for this is in Sanskrit language, “Karma and Karmachari”, and in Tibetan, “Las and Las Jed pa” and in English, “Work and Worker”, all of these can be understood as having the same meaning. Therefore, if we use “work” in English for “Karma”, its meaning can be easily understood.

A question may arise, “What is the work of body, speech and mind?” This, as mentioned above, can be identified as the actions of the body, speech and mind. In English, it is called the actions of body, speech and mind.

If the word “Karma” had been translated as “work” and used as such, the restaurant owner would have understood Karma as the present work that he is involved in. He would most likely not have said, “Please give me a good Karma” as through his ample years of experience, he himself would obviously best know what should or should not work (for the success of his restaurant business).

In brief, the words, Karma, ‘las’ and work indicate the actions of body, speech and mind. Therefore, the nature of Karma is the actions of body, speech and mind. Apart from that, the nature of Karma cannot be pointed out. Karma should mean the actions of the three doors. Hence, we should use an equivalent term for Karma, which can convey the meaning of the actions of the three doors.

4. WRONG UNDERSTANDING OF KARMA

If I am to explain the wrong understandings of the concept of Karma, then it is helpful to understand the nature of Karma from the negative angle. In the second point of my talk, I have explained the nature of Karma from the affirmative aspect. So if you think deeply on both the aspects, affirmative and negative, you can easily understand Karma. Hence, I wish to share here some of the wrong comprehensions of Karma.

1. Some consider the explained theory of Karma and taking refuge to be contradictory. The reason for thinking this is that if we take the objects of refuge to protect us, we show ourselves as not dependent upon karma and if we do depend upon Karma, the objects of refuge cannot protect us. There are scholars, who claim that Karma and taking refuge are contradictory. At a glance, this appears to be true, but if you analyze it in detail, they are not contradictory at all. On top of that, if you study social science, work plans and way of life, these have great relevance and meaning.

In this context I can give as an example a tourist who comes from a foreign country. He needs to have a guide for his tour. But if the tourist doesn't follow the guide's instruction, merely having shown the way, he will not be able to visit all the places. Therefore, the tourist must endeavor to follow the instruction.

Similarly, Buddhists accept Lord Buddha as a guide who shows the way to attain the peace of mind for oneself and the means of accomplishing beneficial activities for the sake of others. This is the actual meaning of taking refuge in the Buddha. By taking refuge, we are not entrusting the full responsibility of our future to Buddha.

In fact, we ourselves have to take on seventy percent of the responsibility. If Buddha alone could do everything for the wellbeing of sentient beings, then everything would have been done already, as he is endowed with the pervasive compassion for all. Just as affectionate parents do everything for the improvement of their child's condition because of their love and compassion.

Hence, Buddha said,

Buddhas neither wash sin by water

Nor remove the sufferings of beings by their hands.

Even though their realization cannot be transferred to others

They liberate beings by giving the teaching of peaceful ultimate reality.

Buddha accepted that apart from giving the medicine-like dharma and showing how to practice dharma, which is like showing how the medicine should be taken, complete transformation cannot be done. To be cured from the disease, it depends on the patient taking the medicine in a proper way. Likewise, liberation from suffering depends on the effort of the person who takes refuge.

Buddha said;

Nirvana depends upon oneself, know this.

Therefore, just as accepting Buddha as the guide who shows the way, in the same way, Dharma as the path which can liberate us from suffering and spiritual community as the friend is how Buddhists take refuge in the Three Jewels. In brief, the guide, path, spiritual friend and our own actions are not inter-contradictory.

These four components are involved not only in dharma practice, but also in the above mentioned example of a tourist. Likewise, in social science, work plans and others, we can clearly witness these four in all tasks.

The important question here is, which one is the chief amongst these four? Our action is the most important one. In a nutshell, as seventy per cent of the responsibilities is carried by oneself, the concept of karma is logical.

Just as the guide shows the way, and one treads the path and one relies upon a trustworthy friend, we take refuge in the Three Jewels. Hence, the concept of taking refuge in the Three Jewels is also rational.

2. It is wrong to think that Karma is not related with our body, speech and mind, like a bank where good and bad fruit are entrusted. As we clearly know that favorable and unfavorable conditions of our lives in future totally depend upon our way of thinking and how we educate ourselves. Therefore, when we identify the way of thinking and educating ourselves, other than the efforts of our body, speech and mind, we cannot identify anything else. In the same way, apart from these efforts, there is no Karma as such.

Some people who accept the principle of cause and effect think that good and bad livelihood/life and successful and wasted life are solely the results of past karma. This notion is completely mistaken. This viewpoint is refuted with valid reasoning in the Buddhist scriptures. If everything happens due to past karma, then there is no point in making preparations for today's dinner. Without doing anything, naturally the food should appear on the table? Because, they have accepted that everything arises solely from the past karma. If we also need to rely upon the present efforts for things to happen, then it is clear that past karma alone cannot suffice. Therefore, in reality, things arise due to the Karma and conditions of both the past and present.

For example, to cook food, some prerequisites, which already existed before are conditions of the past and the efforts being put to create those facilities are karma of the past. These two factors are known as past karma and condition. There are some prerequisites, which need to be gathered in the present. These are known as present conditions and the efforts being put to create those conditions are the karma of the present. These two are known as present karma and condition. Hence, two karmas and two conditions enable us to prepare the food.

The same rule applies to all other activities and as such what need is there to explain more? One can clearly understand through the example of cooking food. The above-mentioned logic also refutes the viewpoint of those who accept rebirth and believe that everything arises solely because of past karma.

4. Some people believe that there is nothing that cannot be achieved through our present efforts and if we carry out a task, we can achieve all our wishes. There are many who say that those who believe things to be dependent upon past actions lack self-belief and confidence.

This is also an incorrect view, as this is obviously incompatible with facts. There is no doubt that we need self-belief and confidence, but to have self-belief and confidence that goes against reality is arrogance. This notion is the main cause that can diminish self-belief and confidence.

For example, if I nurture the aspiration and confidence to become the leader of Germany, this is a dream that will never come true. This is because I was not born in Germany due to the past karma. Even if I were born in Germany and I was a German citizen, it would be impossible for me to become the leader of Germany if I had gone against the law in the past.

It is clear that breaking the law in the past would cause a hindrance to becoming a leader. It is utterly hopeless for a German prisoner to aspire to become the leader of Germany. Some of us may think, 'I am wrong to be an artist. If I was a lawyer, I could accumulate more wealth.' But there is no choice at the present, as I have not accumulated the karma in the past to study law.

We go through many such situations in life. This indicates that all our aims cannot be accomplished merely based on current efforts. If we are realistic, we will certainly develop self-belief and confidence.

5. CLASSIFICATION OF KARMA

If there were too many classifications of Karma, it would create confusion, and if it was not classified at all, you would not be able to know the view and tenets of Karma. Therefore, let me carry out the necessary classification.

If we classify the Karma based upon its support, there can be three, namely Karma of body, speech and mind. These are also known as the action or work of the body, speech and mind. We call these behavior/conduct. Good and bad types of behavior/conduct are determined by threefold good and bad actions.

To classify Karma in terms of identity, whether one is a believer or not, just as in our society, we have the classification of good, bad and neutral, likewise, karma also has the same classification. The way of classifying good, bad and neutral should depend upon the society in which we live. If an action is praiseworthy in a particular society, it can be considered good, if it is degradable, then it is bad and if it is neither praiseworthy nor degradable, then it is neutral.

The classification should be done on the basis of the particular society's religious tradition, culture, customs and habits. If we take the example of eating food, in India, eating with your hands is considered to be a good manner, whereas in the West, it's a bad habit. In Africa, keeping your eyes down when you talk signifies a respectful manner where as in the West, it is considered to be disrespectful.

In Japan, if you burp after having a meal, it is considered good. This is because burping shows that you overate as the meal was too delicious to resist, thus making the host happy. But for westerners, burping is considered disrespectful.

Therefore, many of the actions of body, speech and mind, which we consider to be good in our tradition is considered bad in other religions, cultures, customs and traditions. As such, without holding one's own culture and tradition to be supreme, it is very important to learn and know the culture of the society in which we live and then engage in good actions. This shows your respect for other cultures.

In my case, I tended to learn the Western habits of eating food before traveling to western countries. At first, when I tried taking food with four or five spoons, I didn't get the taste of food, but rather felt like I was doing work. Once or twice, the spoons slipped from my hands and splattered my food over the other person's face and plate! (laughing).

In the movie Kungfu Panda, a section showed Chinese way of taking food and the method of using chopsticks. I learned to use chopsticks from that movie. It is for sure that by learning even a little bit of good qualities of other cultures, we can establish good relation with other people, broaden our outlook and build up our confidence without hesitation. I came to know this after travelling to different countries, meeting different people and knowing different religions, cultures and so on.

Based on these classifications of good, bad and middling karma, religion and philosophy classify actions into virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral. Good, bad and middling karmas are generally named and classified by society whereas virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral karmas are named and classified according to religion. Virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral karmas are: Actions which give good fruition are virtuous. Actions which give bad fruition are non-virtuous. Actions which give middling fruition are neutral. These explanations primarily show their meaning and are not the detailed definition as found in Abhidharma teachings of Buddha.

They can be further classified into ten virtuous and ten non-virtuous actions. They are the ten bad actions and ten good actions. Ten bad or non-virtuous actions are three of the body, four of the speech and three of the mind. Three non-virtuous actions of body are killing, taking what is not given, engaging in sexual intercourse if one is ordained and committing adultery if one is a layperson.

It is adultery to have physical relationship with someone other than one's own life partner. Even having sexual intercourse with one's own partner at an inappropriate place and time in that particular society is also adultery. Many Westerners feel that unlike other non-virtuous actions, having sexual intercourse is mutually pleasurable for both partners and hence not harmful to others. Therefore, it is illogical to consider engaging in sexual intercourse to be not only non-virtuous, but grievous/highly unwholesome as mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. There are others who also say that having intercourse is scientifically beneficial for health. In this way, there are many who put forward questions regarding sex.

An eminent scholar, Gedun Choephel said:

*To provide (sexual) pleasure to humans in the desire realm
If it does not entail virtue, how can it bring about non-virtue?*

As mentioned above, there is nothing unwholesome in the mutual pleasure that has been derived from the act of sex. Generation of love and mutual support and help that arises from this act is not something to be abandoned. Just as scientists have explained, in the Abhidharma/Dharma Treasury of Knowledge, food, massage, sleep and meditative concentration are the four causes of physical/bodily development and on top of that, sexual intercourse is also added. I heard that same is being mentioned in Ayurvedic medicine.

However, more than bringing out love, help and mutual benefit, sexual intercourse has the great power to give rise to negative emotions like attachment, jealousy, harmful intention and so on leading to immense suffering. Therefore, Lord Buddha, our teacher has put restriction upon sexual intercourse.

Generally, in Buddha's teachings, there are three kinds of actions to be abandoned. Firstly, the natural misdeeds, secondly, the actions that give rise to more non-virtuous qualities than virtuous ones and thirdly, those actions, which are considered bad or unwholesome in any particular society where we live.

Sexual intercourse is taught to be an action to be abandoned because more than virtuous qualities, it generates negativities. Sometimes I playfully remark that those who consider sexual pleasure to be naturally non-virtuous might say that the reason why the great ship Titanic sank in the ocean is because of the act of sex and pure love between the hero and the heroine which they carried out on the ship's deck. (Laughter) Non-virtuous actions of speech are lying, divisive speech, harsh words and senseless chatter. Non-virtuous actions of mind are covetousness, harmful intent and wrong view.

I do not need to explain on these as it is not difficult to understand their meaning. There is one important thing that we need to know here. The three bodily actions and the four actions of speech or in short the seven non-virtuous actions can be transformed into virtuous actions with good motivation. However, under any circumstances, there is no possibility of transforming the three non-virtuous actions of mind into something positive. As this particular topic holds a deep meaning, I will clearly explain this with reasoning in the later part when I speak on the apparent expressions of Karma.

The antidotes for the ten non-virtuous actions are stated as ten virtuous actions. Simply by not committing or abstaining from ten non-virtuous actions are not called as ten virtuous actions. Many animals do not have the potential to commit non-virtuous actions and just because of this reason, we cannot consider them to be accumulating virtuous actions.

For example, in the case of human beings who have the ability to commit the ten non-virtuous actions, there are very few who actually engage in killing and other non-virtuous actions because on the one hand, most of the people are educated in this modern society and on the other hand, from the bitter experiences of wars in the past century, people are naturally fed up of violence, and finally, because of strict laws for crimes in many countries. Just refraining from non-virtuous actions cannot be considered an accomplishment of merit. Just not getting the opportunity to commit crime does not mean abstinence. For example, most prisoners in the prison do not commit any crime like killing but that does not mean that they have refrained/abstained from non-virtuous actions. They just do not have the opportunity.

True abstinence, we can say, is to avoid non-virtuous actions without losing our dignity even though we can either be temporarily benefitted by engaging in them or we have the opportunity to conceal our faults. Otherwise, in this era of outer and inner transparency, one cannot consider it as true abstinence simply because of not engaging in non-virtuous actions either due to a lack of benefit or being incapable of concealing one's own faults.

Ten virtuous actions means not only abstaining from non-virtuous actions but also engaging in the ten virtuous actions. With this explanation of ten virtuous actions, the same principle applies to all other virtuous actions.

The ten virtuous actions are: as antidotes to the three non-virtuous actions of body, one should protect the lives of other beings, practice generosity, observe celibacy and abstaining from adultery for lay persons. As antidotes to the four non-virtuous actions of speech, one should engage in truthful speech, harmonious speech, pleasant speech and meaningful speech. As antidotes to the three non-virtuous actions of mind, one should practice contentment, generate altruistic mind and develop realistic view.

6. THE APPARENT EXPRESSION OF KARMA

The apparent expression of Karma means appearance of one's behavior/conduct. Since the expression of mind is very hard to realize, one should understand that appearance of behavior refers to the appearance of body and speech. Even though, body and speech may follow the mind but sometimes appearances of the body and speech might be contradictory to one's motive. There are many cases where the actions of body and

speech may appear to be good but in reality they are bad while some actions of body and speech may appear to be bad but in reality are good.

Since most of us are confused with the various appearances of body and speech which are incompatible with the motivation, it is important to know the expressions of Karma in order to be able to classify them. This is the reason why I am specifically speaking of the expressions of Karma.

For instance, it is like a mother showing her violent expressions of the body and using harsh expression of speech for the benefit of her child. On the face value, it seems to be a bad expression but if the child listens to what the mother has to say, it will help the child accomplish his or her future aims.

If I again give an example of deceiving, it is like engaging in the harmful actions with the intention of deceiving others, yet speaking nicely which is contrary to one's motive.

Amongst the ten virtuous and non-virtuous actions mentioned above, there is a possibility for the actions of body and speech to have good and bad appearances which might contradict the motivation. Actions of the mind do not have good or bad appearances. There are no different aspects of the mental actions in terms of their appearance and reality, because bad mental expressions are bad mental actions and good mental expressions are good actions.

Regarding this, even though these seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech should be abandoned, our teacher, Lord Buddha had given permission to engage in these actions to accomplish noble causes. For example, killing one person to protect many, stealing foods from the King's treasury to save others from hunger and thirst, lying to save others, talking divisively to separate from bad friends, using harsh words for the betterment of studies and engaging in senseless chatters to overcome depression of someone are very much beneficial for others.

On the other hand, for one's own benefit, there are situations where terrorists save the lives of criminals, people who provide funds to engage in criminal activities, abiding in the destructive discipline, in order to create schisms and divisions in society, speaking truth of abusive exchanges of individuals of two parties, speaking harmoniously, speaking nicely and speaking words which can create havoc in society even though they are true. These may appear good but the actions themselves harm one and all.

7. RELATION BETWEEN KARMA AND DHARMA

To explain the relation between karma and Dharma in a brief and simple way, karma is conduct/behavior and Dharma is the method to transform the conduct into a positive one. If there is no such relationship between these two, then dharma cannot benefit us at all. This is because our life and its conditions rely upon the actions/conduct of our body, speech and mind. If we want to change, we must be able to change our actions/conducts of body, speech and mind. If these three change, our life and its conditions will go through change, which can be actually perceived as the way in which cause and effect works. For instance, with education and gradual accumulation of experience, our actions of body, speech and mind change. This would have a corresponding effect on our jobs, friends, environment, and so on.

Even according to the theory that accepts past and future lives, the belief is that after practicing dharma, the means/way of transforming the actions of one's body, speech and mind, one gets better and better in the subsequent lifetimes. In any case, as long as we are unable to transform the actions of our body, speech and mind, then there is no point of practicing dharma. Therefore, we should ensure to bring about change in ourselves through the means of dharma practice.

As mentioned above, please remember that Karma; actions of body, speech and mind; and conduct are all same in meaning. It is beneficial to understand the relationship between dharma and karma. In brief, karma is action and dharma is the means to transform our actions into righteous ones. For example, like wisdom and compassion. To what extent we practice or use these two means of wisdom and compassion, to that extent we will be able to differentiate good actions with the bad ones. Therefore, it is called Dharma in Sanskrit. Dharma means to hold and protect. "What does it hold?" It holds the mind from falling into suffering and thus protects us. In Tibetan language, it is called "Chos". It has the meaning of, "to change". What does it change? It transforms and changes the mind from negative to positive. For this reason, it is called "Chos". Both the words "Dharma" and "Chos" are given from the two aspects of protecting and overcoming.

If you want to protect yourself from suffering, then you must overcome your negative emotions. By the power of transforming your mind, protection from suffering happens. Therefore, the means to transform one's conduct/actions endowed with the two virtuous qualities (*i.e. protecting and overcoming*) is known as dharma.

Vasubhandu said,
*"The one that overcomes the enemies of negative emotions
And protects us from entering lower realms,
Possessing these two qualities of overcoming and protecting is called a "Shastra"
(treatise)
Which you will not find in other traditions.*

In short, it is quite easy to understand the existing relationship between karma and dharma, as the essence of Karma is the actions of body, speech and mind and essence of dharma is the means or way to transform body, speech and mind into something positive.

8. THE WAY OF ACCEPTING THE LAW OF KARMA

Many people say that to accept karma means to accept the karma of the past and future lives. This I do not find appropriate because even though karma of the past and future rebirths indeed is one of the most important characteristic basis as well as relevant principle related to Karma, yet karma of the previous and next rebirth are just an example of karma and they do not signify the essential nature of karma. Since they do not signify the nature of karma, we cannot establish that by just accepting or rejecting the actions of the past and future, one accepts or rejects karma.

As such, in order to determine the boundary line for accepting or not accepting karma, one should check whether one accepts the essence of Karma or not. There are many who do not consider the past and future birth as karma, instead accept the nature of karma as the actions of body, speech and mind, which can bring about their fruitions.

Therefore, to determine whether anybody is accepting or not accepting Karma and other related aspects, one should check whether he or she does or doesn't accepts the essential nature of Karma. This is in accordance with the science of dialectics and the way of valid reasoning.

Based upon this reasoning, there are many ways of accepting the karma of body, speech and mind according to each individual's mental capability. If a person thinks that a good education is needed to get a good job, that means that the person accepts Karma. Because that person accepts that getting a good job depends upon the present cause of acquiring good education. Likewise, students who diligently study their respective subjects, aiming to become a teacher, a doctor, political leader, planning officer, and in case of fruitions of Buddhist practices, to become a Shravaka Arhat, Pratyekabuddha Arhat and Buddha, all accept the karma in accordance with their mental horizon.

This explanation is not an effort to please you all and leave aside the Buddha's intended meaning of Karma. Today, it's my responsibility to explain about the meaning of Karma, which Buddha had preached. If it is not explained precisely, then I have not accomplished my responsibility.

It is also Buddha's intention that to accept karma in general it is not necessary to accept the concept of the karma of past and future lives. The reasons behind this are: Firstly, when Buddha taught of the consequences of actions, they were classified into three kinds. The outcome of karma whose fruits will ripe in this life; and those experienced in

the next life and others in the subsequent life or lives. In the case of the first one, it talks about the relation of the karma of this life and their effects that ripen in this very life. Therefore, in this case it is not necessary to talk about the karma of the next life or lives. Secondly, the supreme teacher, Lord Buddha did not abandon his concern for those beings who strive to seek the purpose of the present life. He also expounded the way to attain the peace and happiness in this life and he taught that happiness of this life also depends on the actions, conduct or karma of one's body, speech and mind. He showed the path or method to positively transform those actions, which is called worldly dharma. The principles of worldly dharma are taught to be based upon the cause and effect of this life. Thus, when we talk about karma, it is not that necessary to relate it to the next life.

In essence, keeping in view the aspirations of beings, Buddha preached the principles of worldly dharma as a method to accomplish a comfort of the present life; the vehicles of gods and humans for those who seek the exalted body of gods and humans in the next life; the vehicles of Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas for those who seek cessation from the sufferings of both present and next lives; the vehicle of Bodhisattvas for those who are interested to benefit others; and Tantrayana for those who have the ability to achieve others' benefit with ease and swiftness. In this systematic order, Buddha had expounded the concepts of karma according to the mental capacities of each and every individual.

Thus, what I wish to stress here is that our parents advice us saying, "If you want a genuine friend, behave well; if you want a healthy body, practice hygiene, and if you want a good job, study well", in the background of such advice, there is the understanding of karma and its fruition.

Generally, to have a common understanding of cause and effect, it is not necessary to be a believer like a Buddhist and so on. But to be a Buddhist, one must accept the actions of past and future lives. In brief, those who are wise will accept karma in accordance with their mental disposition and capacity.

The supreme teacher explained karma with examples in accordance with the mental capacities of beings and pointed out that karma is the root of happiness and based upon karma, the aims and objectives of beings are fulfilled. Buddha did not teach Karma without relation to the mental dispositions of beings and their level of understanding. With examples and based on the beings' mental capacities, he taught karma in detail. Therefore, in the various teachings on karma, there are many levels of accepting karma according to different levels of mentalities. One will not become a non-believer of the karma just because of not accepting any one of the levels.

In brief, I state that based on the understanding of fundamental view of karma and Buddha's teachings, to accept karma, it is not necessary to accept the karma of past and future lives and to accept karma it is not necessary to be a believer.

In a nutshell, it is certain that a socially experienced person will have the understanding of karma.

Thanks! I have completed the explanation upon the eight points on karma. I hope that none of you has got bored. If my talk has bored you, forgive me.
Thank you all!

*Translated from Tibetan by Khenpo Sonam Tsewang
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