

Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)
As taught by
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the Gift of Dhamma is Priceless!

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Training-→ FS-16--“So, what is Kamma? (action)?”

Q: Before we go on to the last link, can we please take a look into Karma now?

A: Yes. As I promised you Q, this installment will discuss Kamma.

Q: I have so many questions!

A: I bet you do. I'll try to tell you what you need to know. For this is a subject that can pull you off track and it can get you lost from your goal.

Q: What do people ask most about Karma?

A: First, let's use the Pali word here of Kamma. OK? Just to be consistent. Most often they ask what Kamma means and often they miss it.

Q: Can you explain it?

A: Well, one day I overheard someone saying, “I really need to change my karma now!” The other person replied, “What just happened was because of karma. You cannot change your karma.” (they were using the more colloquialized word from the Sanskrit KARMA.)

I began to contemplate what they said because if we take responsibility for our life, I think you can somewhat steer your kamma!

Year's back, when I first began practicing meditation, I was suffering a lot and unconsciously I thought that “KAMMA” meant everything happening to me was pre-destined and I was stuck with it no matter what! I believed I had to accept being a victim! But I found out that this wasn't true. Life can change. We can change life through changing our perspective.

Q: What is Kamma? How does it work? What makes it heavy or light, good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome? How does it move through the Universe?

A: Kamma is the action that takes place in our lives. It concerns Mental, Verbal and physical actions.

Q: OK.

A: Take a look at what the Buddha said about Kamma.

“Beings are owners of their actions; heirs of their actions; their actions determine what their future is going to be.”

Q: OK. What does it mean?

A: It means there is cause and effect going on all the time and personal responsibility plays a part in this.

YOU are personally responsible for your actions, no one else is.

YOU decide to do or not do a mental, verbal or physical action.

Therefore, YOU are the sole heir of your actions.

YOU are creating your inheritance in front of you.

It makes you stop and think.

Therefore, there is the chance you can plot a course and then steer the boat!

Q: Yes. OK, how does it work?

A: **Kamma** is action. That's what it is.

Q: I remember that there are three kinds of action.

A: What are they?

Q: Mental, verbal or bodily action.

A: Good. Thoughts, words, and deeds. A being commits good or bad action producing good or bad fruit in the future.

Q: What about fruit?

A: That means the result of the action. Let's see.

There are four words to understand in this kammic process.

Q: Uh huh!

A: There is **cetana, karma, vipaka, and kamma-phala**.

Cetana means **intention**.

Kamma means **action**.

Vipaka literally means **ripening**.

The last word is a combination of two words; **Kamma + phala**. '**Phala**' means **fruition or fruit**.

Kamma-phala means **fruition of an action**.

Q: Then, this IS a process?

A: Definitely. And, this process directly affects your meditation too.

Q: Interesting.

A: Remember when I told you that in Buddhism all subjects we discuss are presented and then realized in gradual degrees?

Q: Yes.

A: Kamma is no different. We can look at it in degrees too. You can talk about an action is a past life, when you were younger, a few years back, or a few minutes ago. It doesn't matter. The process happens in the same way.

Q: Got an example?

A: Sure.

Suppose a man driving home accidentally hits and kills a dog by the side of the road. Another man driving home, who is angry from his work that day, sees a dog and decides to take out his feelings on the dog. So he viciously hits and kills the dog on purpose.

Now, would there be the same fruit of action that comes back to both of them?

Q: No. One man had no intention of killing the dog. The other man intended to kill the dog.

A: Right.

On the one hand, there was no thought of killing the dog. There was no unwholesome **cetana** (intention) involved. Because there was no wrong intention, no **vipaka** (ripening) took place and, therefore, no **kamma-phala** (fruit of action) arises.

But the second man had another intention involved. There was unwholesome **cetana** (intention). Ill-will and hatred came into play. The **vipaka** (ripening) in this case will cause bad **kamma-phala** (fruit). The kamma-phala could cause things for him like restless leg, sleepless nights, or he could live in fear that someone saw him do this act. This action can rebound in his life because of the degree of **cetana** (intention) that drove forth the action.

Q: So the ripening is important to understand.

A: Yes. Kamma can ripen and have immediate results within this lifetime or the energy from the action can travel into future lifetimes.

Q: What can we do about all this?

A: The Buddha gave us some pointers. It goes back to personal responsibility.

Q: Can anything guide us concerning this?

A: The precepts help. When we learn the precepts, it's a good idea to discuss the consequences of breaking them at the same time as when we discuss the hindrances.

You see, keeping the precepts isn't just a morality teaching. It's also a guidebook that leads to smooth meditation and a happier life in general. It's simple. If you want life to run smoothly, keep the precepts. If you want a bumpy ride, break them.

Therefore, it's good to agree with yourself not to kill; not to steal; not to have wrong sexual activity; not to lie, curse, gossip or create slander which separates people; and not to take recreational drugs or alcohol.

Whenever you break the precepts, there are 5 basic barriers or hindrances that may pop up in retaliation.

These hindrances are Lust and Greed; Hatred and Aversion; Sloth and Torpor; Restlessness, Guilt, or Remorse; and Doubt.

Hindrances can arise individually or in groups to attack us.

If we give too much attention to the hindrances, they can pull mind's attention into an imbalance such as depression. A person with an untrained mind will not know what to do and they can get into a heap of reactive trouble.

On the other hand, with a trained mind, a person is better prepared to handle anything.

A trained mind will recognize arising hindrances but not take them personally. They will recognize them, release them, relax all the tension and tightness in mind and in body, and smile at being caught, then go on with life! They will take things more lightly, more impersonally.

Q: That is the practice of the 6Rs isn't it?

A: Yes. The 6Rs can lead us to loving acceptance of the present moments in life. This means living in a more positive light.

Q: As a Buddhist, with this practice, you could say we can be ahead of this curve?

A: Yes, you could say that. If you understand these two groups and how they work, then, you will see how it is knowledge, vision, and proper action that actually sets you free!

Q: I can see that. So, when we break a precept, whatever our **cetana** (intention) was at the time we did that **kamma** (action), this determines the degree of consequences we will have to face in the future?

A: Right. The degree of intention determines the strength of the fruit.

Q: Is there an example?

A: Let's go back to the road.

Take a situation where you are driving a car and you hit a turtle and kill it on the road!

If you intended to do this then you had hatred and anger in your heart and the intention to kill, right?

Q: Right.

A: But if you accidentally did it there would be no bad karma-phala. There will be no payback. See what I mean?

Q: I think so. People sometimes make this far more complicated than it really is don't they?

A: They do. **Cetana** sets up how strong the intention will be. **Kamma** is the action.

Vipaka is the ripening. The degree of **kamma-phala** is determined by the **cetana**.

Intention puts the power into what comes back around.

Q: Does karma come back to you in this life or in the next lifetime?

A: First, you have to tell me what "next lifetime" means. <grin>. We can't know what will happen in advance.

Q: Hmm. Cute.

A: I know you have had the experience of doing something in the morning and having it come back to you in the afternoon.

Q: Sure.

A: But suppose you did something when you were 20 yrs old. That could come back to you when you turn 40! Or, maybe, you said something a few minutes ago and now your friend is still angry and carrying it around for the rest of today?

Each of these examples involves two life-times!

Q: I see.

A: There are times that energy created by an action in this lifetime moves into a future lifetime affecting a future being. That being is then faced with your **kamma-phala** (fruit of action).

Q: Whoa there! This is like a play on words. Are there examples of that?

A: Yes.

Take the death of Venerable Maha Moggalana after his time with the Buddha. Long time back, in a previous lifetime, he did some bad things to his parents. As a result of what he did in that lifetime, at the end of his last lifetime with the Buddha, some rough people found him and they beat him up so badly that every bone in his body was crushed!

That death was not a result of his recent good works. That incident was the **kamma-phala** (fruition of his action) of that previous action committed in that previous lifetime.

Even though he was an Arahant in this final lifetime, he could not avoid this tragic final death play because that universal energy was attempting to balance the kammic scales. Action had ripened and the fruit of the previous deed faced him.

In another story, two women were married to the same man. The first wife was barren. A second younger wife repeatedly became pregnant but could not deliver because the first wife kept killing the child off to prevent the second wife from achieving a higher position in the household. Many miscarriages happened. Then, in later lifetimes, these two women kept finding themselves in close proximity and one would kidnap and kill the other woman's child before it could grow up. These two women kept this cycle going across many lifetimes until they were born within this Buddha dispensation. Finally, the Buddha explained what was happening and he told them to STOP. Only then did they forgive each other, become friends, and help each other live out their lives. The scales finally balanced.

Q: What did the Buddha say about Karma concerning the Buddhist meditation?

A: Although Kamma is helpful for us to realize Equanimity, He advised us not to spend too much time talking about Kamma outside basic understanding. Just enough for balancing is enough.

That's because Kamma is a real puzzle that can steal away our life's time without giving a solution. He encourages us to sit in meditation as much as possible to achieve the highest attainments we could while in this human form and strive to get permanently free from suffering with clear understanding.

Q: What are those pointers on Kamma the Buddha gave us for this life?

A: He told us two things:

“What you do in the present moment dictates what happens in the future.”

and

“What a person thinks and ponders on, that is the inclination of their mind”.

Q: Sounds like a different slant on destiny.

A: You got it. This is how you can steer the boat. Buddhism takes a different stand on destiny. It promotes the idea that you have something to do with shaping it.

People often come into Buddhism to regain control of their lives. This is possible through understanding and shifting into wholesome action. But, on this journey to understand, they discover that the only way to get control is to first give up control, step aside, and see how things actually work.

Once they see how things work, they see that, **THERE REALLY IS HOPE FOR CHANGE.**

With good understanding of Universal Law, you can reclaim strength and confidence building a stronger foundation and life becomes easier.

Q: So basically we have to get out of the way to see what's real. Those two statements also open the way for you to determine your future. Don't they?

A: Yes. We begin to realize that the future we conceive in our minds can flow forth if the Universe is given the space to provide! You discover how to allow your future to unfold.

Q: WOW!

A: I know what you mean. Without pre-destination, new creative solutions appear on the horizon.

Q: This is truly magnificent. This opens up all kinds of possibilities. It certainly will help me to keep curiosity, interest, and persistence going in my meditation.

A: Good. That's important. Have fun with this investigation! Keep it light! Keep going and smile. **AND** keep checking in now and then so I know how you are doing, ok?

Metta and smiles

Ven. Sister Khema

NEXT installment: FS-17- “What is Ageing and Death? (marana)