
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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འཇིགས་རིམ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

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422.122.121.3: The Results Of Karma

We have now listed the ten non-virtuous actions and discussed the differences between heavy and light karma. Then we looked at the three results of karma.

1. Ripened result
2. Result similar to the cause
 - a. Similar to the experience of the cause
 - b. Similar to the habit of the cause
3. Environmental result

In the Abidharma text it is said "As a result of killing other beings one will be born in the lower realms, wherein the experience of suffering is enormous - both physically and mentally. This lower rebirth is the ripened result of the action of killing."

Just as one has caused suffering to other creatures' minds and bodies, so one also experiences the same as a result of that action. In future there will be more threats to one's own life. This is also the result of the same action that has been committed in the past but this result is similar to its cause. As a result of the same actions one will be born in an unpleasant or uncomfortable place. This is the environmental result and is understood by knowing its cause. The action of killing frightens other beings thereby diminishing their personal dignity. It is said that a king will lose his sense of personal glory or charisma when approached by his assassin. This feeling of weakness is a loss of his personal glory. So it is said that the action of killing de-glorifies the victim. This results in the killer being reborn in an awful environment.

The Results Of Killing And Stealing

Each one of the ten non-virtuous actions produces three different types of result.

Killing

To begin with killing:

1. The ripened result is to be born in lower realms.
2. The result similar to the cause would be a short lifespan in a future human rebirth, and a lot of disease in that short life.
3. The environmental result which occurs in the environment in which one lives. The medicines and food taken to regain health are very ineffective. The medicines have no impetus to heal. This is said to be the

environmental result of killing.

Stealing

In the same way the non-virtuous action of stealing also has these three types of result.

1. Ripened result is the same as before - taking a bad rebirth
2. Result similar to the cause is that even if one is reborn as a human, it will be a life spent in poverty. Any possessions may become common property with others or it may be difficult to secure them.
3. Environmental result includes very poor crops and also obstacles like drought, hail, storms, and crop disease. These are the environmental result of stealing from others.

If there are problems because of a failure to accumulate wealth, there is no point in blaming others. There is a fundamental cause - one's previous actions of stealing in the past. In some way this explanation also helps to overcome frustration. In this way as we can see how this topic applies to daily life in a very beneficial way.

We have covered the three results of the first two non-virtuous actions. Study the remaining eight non-virtuous actions in the text.

Differentiating Where The Three Results Of Karma Ripen

Of the three types of result of non-virtuous actions, we said that the ripened result occurs in lower rebirth, whereas the other two appear in higher rebirths. Does this mean that the other two results do not occur in the lower rebirth? The answer is no. In the lower rebirth, the other two results (the result similar to the cause and the environmental result) also occur. So why does the text say that the ripened result is lower rebirth, whereas the other two occur in the human form? It is principally to emphasise that the ripened result of non-virtuous acts like killing is the lower rebirth. In this lower rebirth the environment is very unpleasant. This is the environmental result and there are miserable experiences which are the result similar to the cause. The reason why the other two results can occur in higher rebirth as well, is an indication that the ripened result has been fully completed. The other two results however have not been completed in the lower rebirth, so they appear in the higher rebirth.

In reality all our experiences are the result of their respective causes from past behaviour. If in this present life we suffer from diseases, a threat to our life or poverty, these are the result of our own actions, although not necessarily the actions in this life. We try to see the experiences of this life in the light of actions of this life. However when we face unexpected problems we become very doubtful of the effect of the virtuous actions we have created. We could doubt whether there will be any good result from the virtuous actions that we have created.

It is possible that someone, who always does practise, will experience a short life, or disease. Other beings who always commit non-virtuous actions seem to enjoy a rich and healthy kind of life. This indicates that we have to see the law of karma in the broad sense of the context of previous lives, not just this immediate life.

When one thinks of the actions committed in past lives, then it is to be expected that one will experience some problems. This human existence is an opportunity to solve them. The problems faced in this life can be like a blessing in disguise. If one doesn't experience suffering now, then later it will be a more serious form of suffering. It is possible that a very serious negative action committed in the past initially had the potential to result in an enormous form of suffering but because of spiritual practice and purifications, this karma has now only ripened in a very small form e.g. a headache. If not for our practice, this karma could yield a very bad rebirth, where pain and suffering are experienced over many lifetimes. In this way we can generate some positive feelings about suffering. In the Nyung Nā practice there is a day of penance, hunger and thirst. This is purifying the negative karma to prevent experiencing this hunger and thirst for a far greater period of time than just one day.

After finishing non-virtuous behaviour the text discusses virtuous actions and their results.

Next Tuesday night is Discussion night, followed by the test. Questions are to be chosen from the list of discussion topics except for the compulsory question which will be:

"Differentiate between the conception of self of a person and the conception of self of other phenomena, and why are they the root of samsara." You need to focus on the meaning of these two conceptions (of self and of other phenomena) separately, trying to identify their objects and the apprehension of that object and then see how they serve as the source or root of cyclic existence. One needs to understand how, because of these two conceptions, sentient beings are caught repeatedly in the cycle of existence.

Accidental killing

Geshe-la: Is there an action of killing which does not have all four components present?

Student: For example accidentally stepping on a snail?

Geshe-la: In this instance which are present?

Student: The base is present. But of the thought there is no recognition, nor is there motivation or delusion. There is action and the completion.

Geshe-la: There is delusion present.

Student: How can delusion be present in the accidental killing of a snail? There would be no attachment or hatred. Is it ignorance?

Geshe-la: For an ordinary person all actions are derived from ignorance. When any karma is created whether it is or is not throwing karma depends upon whether that karma is motivated by the ignorance of the twelve links. This is another subject. Throwing karma or propelling karma is motivated by ignorance which is the first of the twelve links. This karma can serve as the substantial cause to take rebirth in cyclic existence.

The Result Of Habit

Student: How do we differentiate between the result similar to the cause in terms of habit and experience?

Geshe-la: Of all the results, the result similar to the cause in terms of habit is the worst. For all the other results, once it experienced it is finished. But the result similar to the cause in terms of habit can be a cause for further future results. For example with killing, the result similar to the cause in terms of habit is the compulsion to kill from childhood. Such a habit if not removed, can create further causes for further results. A habit retained from childhood, according to the subject of karma, is the result similar to the cause of one's previous actions. Early habits can be changed as people mature. They can change from very bad to good or vice versa. Because it was the result similar to the cause in terms of habit caused by a previous action, this habit has now come to an end - sometimes without any apparent effort.

The Increase Of Karma

Student: Can we quantify the increase of karma? Does good karma increase at the same rate?

Geshe-la: This question is in relation to the four characteristics of karma. There are two ways to understand the increase of karma:

The first way:

Of the four general characteristics of karma the second characteristic (karma increases) focuses on the result karma can produce. Karma after its creation in the mind will increase in the result which it can produce. For example, if one borrows money then interest is added and the amount owed grows. This is the nature of karma, when it meets with certain conditions it can grow.

The second way:

This is in the context of someone who is holding vows. If a celibate or tantric vow or pledge is maintained without any breach or disintegration, then all one's virtues shall increase. If the vow or pledge is broken, then negativities will keep multiplying until there is purification of that downfall of the vow with some confession practice. As if when borrowing money not only will the capital have to be repaid, but interest, and interest on the interest will also grow and have to be repaid. It is recommended that

reciting the one hundred syllable Vajrasattva mantra twenty one times daily will stop the 'interest' of the negativity from accumulating. One must still apply a confession practice to purify the actual downfall.

The Doors That Lead To Powerful Karma

The first way looks at the amount of result produced by karma. This is determined by it being complete and forceful. Then the result, which it produces, will be greater in terms of quantity. One of the conditions which determines the amount of virtue or merit which is accumulated, depends upon the type of person who creates that action¹. For example if Geshe-la creates virtue by restraining from killing, the amount of benefit accumulated is many times greater than the same action created by a lay person. Similarly the shortcomings or the virtues created are respectively greater when done by a novice monk or nun, by a fully ordained monk or nun, by a bodhisattva or by a holder of the tantric vows. The seriousness of the negativity, or alternatively the benefit from virtue, is determined by the person holding such vows and the nature of the vow.

Of course the motivation behind that action is another factor which makes that action powerful. For example, an action created from the motivation of bodhicitta has hundreds of thousands more benefits than the same action created from renunciation. Therefore, motivation is taken into account in determining the power of an action.

It also depends upon the scope of one's motivation. If one generates the thought, "I shall refrain from causing harm, to every single being", then this is the morality of not causing harm to all beings existing in the universe. So one accumulates the same merit. If one thinks, "Under no circumstances shall I kill any human being," then one gains merit from the morality of not killing all humans. From this perspective when we talk about how to create the virtuous action of not killing it more or less depends upon one's mind. If one makes effort and sincerely generates that thought of not killing a single being then it is possible to create the thought to not kill all beings. Mentally one could have some intention to kill all sentient beings, but it is impossible to kill even all humans. Whereas it is possible to create the virtuous action of not killing all human beings, or all sentient beings.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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¹Geshe-la is here referring to the four doors which lead to powerful karma. These are covered in the classes of twelfth, nineteenth and twenty sixth of April 1994. These four doors are the doors of field, base, thing and motivation.