

If you have faith in this law of karma, it also becomes natural that if you happen to create some negative actions, then you immediately feel bad about them. You know that unless you do something to purify those actions you will have to pay for them in the form of suffering. You know that your negative action is going to bring something that you do not want, and which you always try to avoid. So therefore faith in the law of karma inspires us to prevent negative actions, and to purify any negative actions that we have already created.

There are, of course, many levels of understanding the truth of this law of karmic cause and effect in our life. At one level we can see that the happiness we seek is not just a matter of enjoying good material conditions. Likewise unhappy events are not always related to poor material conditions. In other words it is hard for us to know the complete causes of our experiences unless we consider the topic of the law of karma.

With the law of karma, even though the actions that we create cease to exist with the completion of that particular action, we say that they leave some imprint in our mindstream. This imprint, which will be retained in our mind stream, has the capacity to produce the result of that action in the future. Therefore many things happen in this lifetime, which are not necessarily the result of karma that we have created in this life. Rather they could be the result of karma that we have created in past lifetimes.

What this means is that even if in this life we find a great deal of happiness, we may possess within our mind stream a vast number of karmic imprints of negative actions created in the past. Therefore we have to realise that it is important to engage as much as possible in the practice of purifying those.

Of course this has been just a general introduction to the importance of this topic of karma in our day-to-day practice.

The best way to approach the Buddhadharma is to first try to apply all those teachings and practices which are most personally relevant. These are the ones that can be understood and practised in the immediate time frame. One tests, as much as possible, the Buddha's teachings in the context of one's own immediate life. If, as it says in the teachings, through this testing the Buddhadharma proves unflinching, particularly with respect to the law of karma you will find that positive karma brings happiness and negative karma sufferings.

The teaching of the Buddha mainly relates to our thoughts and our actions. It shows the path to achieve happiness and to eliminate suffering. By applying these teachings to our own mind and actions, we learn that the source of our happiness, from the immediate present to lasting peace and happiness, is in our own mind. Likewise the source of suffering, restlessness, difficulties and confusion also lies within our own mind.

If the source of happiness lies within our mind, then what is that source? It is generating loving-kindness, compassion and a good heart towards others. Whereas generating any harmful ill thoughts is the inner source of suffering, and hence the source of our problems. Through our everyday actions we have to try to test whether the peace and happiness that we seek really does come from this positive state of mind of showing love and compassion to other beings?

If we relate the teachings to our own daily actions we can understand the meaning of the teachings. We know how we feel very inwardly disturbed if our mind is under the

control and influence of some harmful thought like hatred. Not only that, but if we check our outer actions, there is no peace in creating any negative, destructive actions like physically showing aggression to another. We can also see the effect in our life and also in the life of others of sincerely putting into practise all these teachings of showing love and respect to others.

Sincere, genuine faith in the Buddha's teachings on the law of karma or other whole aspects of the teachings has to be based on our own immediate experience. With some knowledge and faith we can develop an even deeper faith in the Buddha's teachings. Without relating the Buddha's teaching to our own experience, our knowledge becomes very abstract rather than something that we can immediately apply to our life.

This is even more the case for the higher, more profound teachings such as the existence of life before or after this one, and its relationship to the law of karma. Then the teachings become even more abstract, and appear to be very subtle to grasp. Therefore it is said in the teaching that in order to logically prove these facts, then we also need to use very abstract, subtle logic, because basically there is no other way of understanding these facts.

First of all we need to make sense of the Buddha's teachings in terms of our experiences in this life, and so gain some faith in the validity of the teachings. Then we are in the position to say that, having tested the teachings and not having found any fault with respect to this life, we can infer that the teachings on the law of karma with respect to previous and future lifetimes are true.

By testing and examining the Buddha's words we confirm and authenticate them as fact. On the basis of this we gain a deep faith in the law of karmic cause and effect, and then it becomes so natural to always feel motivated to create virtuous, positive actions. Creating negative actions on the other hand becomes so frightening that, unless you take some action to purify that negative action, you can find it difficult to sleep. Faith in the law of karma can be a great source of continual inspiration to practise Dharma and purify negative actions.

Faith in our practice of Dharma is strongest when it is derived from our own knowledge and experience. Faith can be so strong that we shall be prepared to forsake our own life for the cause of Dharma. Whereas a faith that is just based on saying that whatever you learn in Dharma is true because it is the word of the Buddha, can be very fleeting faith, in the sense that you can lose it very easily.

The Lord Buddha himself said to his followers, "Do not honour my teachings just out of your faith in me. Rather you should honour the Dharma by examining the teachings for yourself, just as you would assay the quality of gold."

As the Buddha said, it is very important for the stability of our own practice to test the ways in which teachings relate to our own mind and actions.

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Note on authentication

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