

# **Kamma and its Fruit**

**Essays edited by  
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## Contents

### *Action*

Francis Story

### *Kamma and Causality*

Francis Story

### *Action and Reaction in Buddhist Teachings*

Leonard A. Bullen

### *Questions and Answers about Kamma and its Fruit*

Nina van Gorkom

### *Kamma and Freedom*

Francis Story

### *Collective Karma*

Francis Story 75

### *Reflections on Kamma and its Fruit*

Nyanaponika Thera

### *Karma—The Ripening Fruit*

Bhikkhu Āśāajivako

### About the Contributors

## **Kamma and its Fruit**

*Kamma*—or, in its Sanskrit form, *karma*—is the Buddhist conception of action as a force which shapes and transforms human destiny. Often misunderstood as an occult power or as an inescapable fate, kamma as taught by the Buddha is in actuality nothing other than our own will or volition coming to expression in concrete action. The Buddhist doctrine of kamma thus places ultimate responsibility for human destiny in our own hands. It reveals to us how our ethical choices and actions can become either a cause of pain and bondage or a means to spiritual freedom.

In this book, five practising Buddhists, all with modern backgrounds, offer their reflections on the significance of kamma and its relations to ethics, spiritual practice, and philosophical understanding.

# ACTION

## Francis Story

Kamma is simply action, a "deed." Actions are performed in three ways: by body, mind and speech. Every action of importance is performed *because there is desire for a result*; it has an aim, an objective. One wishes for something specific to happen as the result of it. This desire, no matter how mild it may be, is a form of craving. It expresses the thirst (*taóhá*) for existence and for action. To exist is to act, on one level or another. Organic existence consists of chemical action; psychic existence consists of mental action. So existence and action are inseparable.

But some actions, those in which mind is involved, are bound to have intention. This is expressed by the Pali word *cetaná*, volition, which is one of the mental properties. There is another word, *chanda*, which stands for wishing, desiring a result. These words all express some kind of desire. And some form of desire is behind practically every activity of life. Therefore "to live" and "to desire" are one and the same thing. (There is one ultimate exception to this statement, which we shall come to later. It is that of the Arahats.)

An action (kamma) is morally unwholesome when it is motivated by the forms of craving that are associated with greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). It is morally wholesome (in ordinary language, good) when it is motivated by the opposite factors, disinterestedness (greedlessness), amity and wisdom. An act so motivated is prompted by "intention" rather than "craving." Yet in every act of craving, intention is included. It is that which gives direction and form to the deed.

Now, each deed performed with intention is a *creative act*. By reason of the will behind it, it constitutes a force. It is a force analogous to the other great unseen, yet physical, forces that move the universe. By our thoughts, words and deeds we create our world from moment to moment in the endless process of change. We also create our "selves." That is to say, we mould our changing personality as we go along by the accumulation of such thoughts, words and deeds. It is the accretion of these, and the preponderance of one kind over another, that determines what we shall become, in this life and in subsequent ones.

In thus creating our personality, we create also the conditions in which it functions. In other words, we create also the kind of world we are to live in. The mind, therefore, is master of the world. As a man's mind is, so is his cosmos.

Kamma, then, as the product of the mind, is the true and only real force in the life-continuum, the flux of coming-to-be. From this we come to understand that it is the residue of mental force which from the point of death kindles a new birth. It is the only actual link between one life ("reincarnation") and another. And

since the process is a continuous one, it is the last kammic thought-moment at the point of death that forms the rebirth-linking consciousness—the kamma that reproduces. Other kamma, good or bad, will come into operation at some later stage, when external conditions are favourable for its ripening. The force of weak kamma may be suspended for a long time by the interposition of a stronger kamma. Some kinds of kamma may even be inoperative; but this never happens with very strong or weighty kamma. As a general principle, all kamma bears some kind of fruit sooner or later.

Each individual's kamma is his own personal act, its results his own personal inheritance. He alone has complete command over his actions, no matter to what degree others may try to force him. Yet an unwholesome deed done under strong compulsion does not have quite the same force as one performed voluntarily. Under threat of torture or of death a man may be compelled to torture or kill someone else. In such a case it may be believed that the gravity of his kamma is not so severe as it would be had he deliberately chosen to act in such a way. The heaviest moral responsibility rests with those who have forced him to the action. But in the ultimate sense he still must bear some responsibility, for he could in the most extreme case avoid harming another by choosing to suffer torture or death himself.

This brings us to the question of *collective kamma*. As we have seen, each man's kamma is his own individual experience. No one can interfere with the kamma of another beyond a certain point; therefore no one can intervene to alter the results of personal kamma. Yet it often happens that numbers of people are associated in the same kind of actions, and share the same kind of thoughts; they become closely involved with one another; they influence one another. Mass psychology produces mass kamma. Therefore all such people are likely to form the same pattern of kamma. It may result in their being associated with one another through a number of lives, and in their sharing much the same kind of experiences. "Collective kamma" is simply the aggregate of individual kammas, just as a crowd is an aggregate of individuals.

It is in fact this kind of mass kamma that produces different kinds of worlds—the world we live in, the states of greater suffering and the states of relative happiness. Each being inhabits the kind of cosmic construction for which he has fitted himself. It is his kamma, and the kamma of beings like himself, that has created it. This is how it comes about that in multidimensional space-time there are many *lokas*—many worlds and modes of being. Each one represents a particular type of consciousness, the result of kamma. The mind is confined only by the boundaries it erects itself.

The results of kamma are called *vipāka*, "the ripening." These terms, *kamma* and *vipāka*, and the ideas they stand for, must not be confused. *Vipāka* is predetermined (by ourselves) by previous kamma. But kamma itself in the ultimate sense (that is, when resisting all external pressures and built-up tendencies) is the product of *choice* and free will: between wholesome and unwholesome deeds, good or bad actions. Hence the Buddha said: "Intention

constitutes kamma." Without intention a deed is sterile; it produces no reaction of moral significance. One reservation, however, is here required; if a deed done in "culpable negligence" proves harmful to others, the lack of mindfulness, circumspection or consideration shown will constitute unwholesome kamma and will have its vipāka. Though the harm done was not "intended," i.e. the deed was not motivated by hate, yet there was present another "unwholesome root," delusion (*moha*), which includes, for instance, irresponsible thoughtlessness.

Kamma is action; vipāka is result. Therefore kamma is the active principle; vipāka is the passive mode of coming-to-be. People believe in predeterminism, fatalism, merely because they see results, but do not see causes. In the process of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) both causes and effects are shown in their proper relationship.

A person may be born deaf, dumb and blind. That is the consequence of some unwholesome kamma which manifested or presented itself to his consciousness in the last thought-moment of his previous death. Throughout life he may have to suffer the consequences (vipāka) of that deed, whatever it may have been. But that fact does not prevent him from forming fresh kamma of a wholesome type to restore the balance in his next life. Furthermore, by the aid of some good kamma from the past, together with strong effort and favourable circumstances in the present life (which of course includes the compassionate help of others), the full effects of his bad kamma may be mitigated even here and now.

Cases of this kind are seen everywhere, where people have overcome to a great extent the most formidable handicaps. The result is that they have turned even the bad vipāka to profit for themselves and others. One outstanding example of this is the famous Dr. Helen Keller. But this calls for almost superhuman courage and will-power. Most people in similar circumstances remain passive sufferers of the effects of their bad deeds until those effects are exhausted. Thus it has to be in the case of those born mentally defective or in the lower states of suffering. Having scarcely any capacity for the exercise of free will, they are subject entirely to predeterminism until the bad vipāka has run its course.

So, by acknowledging some element of predeterminism, yet at the same time maintaining the *ultimate* ascendancy of will, Buddhism resolves a moral problem which otherwise seems insoluble. Part of the personality, and the conditions in which it exists, are predetermined by the deeds and the total personality of the past; but in the final analysis the mind is able to free itself from the bondage of past personality-construction and launch out in a fresh direction.

Now, we have seen that the three roots of unwholesome actions—greed, hatred and delusion—produce bad results; the three roots of wholesome actions—disinterestedness, amity and wisdom—produce good results. Actions which are performed automatically or unconsciously, or are incidental to some other action having an entirely different objective, do not produce results beyond their immediate mechanical consequences. If one treads on an insect in the dark

one is not morally responsible for its death. One has been merely an unconscious instrument of the insect's own kamma in producing its death.

But while there is a large class of actions of the last type, which cannot be avoided, the more important actions in everyone's life are dominated by one or other of these six psychological roots, wholesome and unwholesome. Even where a life is physically inactive, the thoughts are at work; they are producing kamma. Cultivation of the mind therefore consists in removing (not suppressing) unwholesome mental states and substituting wholesome ones. Modern civilisation develops by suppressing unwholesome (the "anti-social") instincts. Consequently they break out from time to time in unwholesome eruptions. A war breaks out and the homicidal maniac comes into his own: murder is made praiseworthy. Buddhism, on the other hand, aims at *removing* the unwholesome mental elements. For this, the special techniques of meditation (*bhāvanā*) are necessary.

Good kamma is the product of wholesome states of mind. And to be certain of this, it is essential to gain an understanding of the states of consciousness and one's most secret motives. Unless this is done, it is next to impossible to cultivate exclusively wholesome actions, because in every human consciousness there is a complex of hidden motivations. They are hidden because we do not wish to acknowledge them. In every human being there is a built-in defence mechanism that prevents him from seeing himself too clearly. If he should happen to be confronted with his subconscious mind too suddenly he may receive an unpleasant psychological shock. His carefully constructed image of himself is rudely shattered. He is appalled by the crudity, the unsuspected savagery, of his real motivations.

The keen and energetic social worker may find that he is really actuated by a desire to push other people around, to tell them what is best for them and to force them to do his will. The professional humanitarian, always championing the underdog, may find to his distress that his outbursts of high moral indignation at the injustices of society are nothing more than an expression of his real hatred of other humans, made respectable to himself and others by the guise of concern for the victims of society. Or each may be compensating for hidden defects in his own personality. All these facts are well known to present-day psychologists; but how many people submit themselves to the analyst's probings? Buddhism teaches us to do it for ourselves, and to make ourselves immune to unpleasant or shocking revelations by acknowledging beforehand that there is no immutable personality, no "self" to be either admired or deplored.

An action (kamma), once it is performed, is finished so far as its actual performance is concerned. It is also irreversible.

The moving finger writes, and having writ  
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit  
Can lure it back to cancel half a line—



Nor all your tears wash out one word of it.

Edward Fitzgerald: *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam*

The moving finger is no mystery to one who understands kamma and vipāka. Ask not whose finger writes upon the wall. It is thine own.

What remains of the action is its potential, the inevitability of its result. It is a force released into the stream of time, and in time it must have its fruition. And when, for good or ill, it has fructified, like all else its force must pass away—and then the kamma and the vipāka alike are no more. But as the old kammās die, new ones are created—every moment of every waking hour. So the life-process, involved in suffering, is carried on. It is borne along on the current of craving. It is in its essence nothing but that craving, that desire—the desire that takes many forms, is insatiable, is self-renewing. As many-formed as Proteus; as undying as the phoenix.

But when there comes the will to end desire, a change takes place. The mind that craved gratification in the fields of sense now turns away. Another desire, other than that of the senses, gathers power and momentum. It is the desire for cessation, for peace, for the end of pain and sorrow. The desire for Nibbāna.

Now this desire is incompatible with all other desires. Therefore, if it becomes strong enough it kills all other desires. Gradually they fade out; first the grosser cravings springing from the three immoral roots; then the higher desires; then the attachments, all wilt and fade out, extinguished by the one overmastering desire for Nibbāna.

And as they wilt and fade out, and no more result-producing actions take their place, so the current of the life-continuum dries up. Unwholesome actions cannot be performed, because their roots have withered away; there is no more basis for them. The wholesome deeds in their turn become sterile; since they are not motivated by desire they do not project any force into the future. In the end there is no craving force left to produce another birth. Everything has been swallowed up by the desire for the extinction of desire.

And when the object of that desire is gained, can it any longer be a desire? Does a man continue to long for what he has already got? The last desire of all is not self-renewing; it is self-destroying. For in its fulfilment is its own death. Nibbāna is attained.

Therefore the Buddha said, "For the final cessation of suffering, *all* kamma, wholesome and unwholesome, must be transcended, must be abandoned. Putting aside good and evil, one attains Nibbāna. There is no other way."

The Arahāt lives then only experiencing the residuum of his life-span. And when that last remaining impetus comes to an end the aggregates of his personality come to an end too, never to be reconstructed, never to be replaced. In their continual renewal there was suffering; now there is release. In their coming together there was illusion—the illusion of self. Now there is Reality.

And Reality is beyond conception.

## KAMMA AND CAUSALITY

### Francis Story

“Does everything happen in our lives according to kamma?” This question is not one that can be answered by a plain affirmation or denial, since it involves the whole question of free-will against determinism, or, in familiar language, “fatalism.” The nearest that can be given to a simple answer is to say that most of the major circumstances and events of life are conditioned by kamma, but not all.

If everything, down to the minutest detail, were pre-conditioned either by kamma or by the physical laws of the universe, there would be no room in the pattern of strict causality for the functioning of free-will. It would therefore be impossible for us to free ourselves from the mechanism of cause and effect; it would be impossible to attain Nibbána.

In the sphere of everyday events and the incidents of life such as sickness, accidents and such common experiences, every effect requires more than one cause to bring it about, and kamma is in most cases the predisposing factor which enables the external influences to combine and produce a given result. In the case of situations that involve a moral choice, the situation itself is the product of past kamma, but the individual’s reaction to it is a free play of will and intention. For example, a man, as the result of previous unwholesome (*akusala*) kamma either in the present life or some past birth, may find himself in a situation of desperate poverty in which he is sorely tempted to steal, commit a robbery, or in some other way carry into the future the unwholesome actions of the past. This is a situation with a moral content, because it involves the subject in a nexus of ethical potentials. Here his own freedom of choice comes into play; he has the alternative of choosing further hardship rather than succumb to the temptation of crime.

In the *pañcica-samuppáda*, the cycle of dependent origination, the factors belonging to previous births, that is, ignorance and the actions conditioned by it, are summarised as the kamma-process of the past. This kamma produces consciousness, name-and-form, sense-perception fields, contact and sensation as its resultants, and this is known as the present effect. Thus the physical and mental make-up (*náma-rúpa*) is the manifestation of past kamma operating in the present, as also are the phenomena cognised and experienced through the channels of sense. But running along with this is another current of action, that which is controlled by the will, and this is known as the present volitional

activity; it is the counterpart in the present of the kamma-process of the past. It governs the factors of craving, grasping and becoming.

This means, in effect, that the current of “becoming” which has its source in past kamma, at the point where it manifests as individual reaction—as for example in the degree of craving engendered as the result of pleasurable sensation—comes under the control of the will, so that while the subject has no further control over the situations in which he finds himself, having himself created them in the past, he yet has a subjective control over his response to them, and it is out of this that he creates the conditions of his future. The present volitional activity then takes effect in the form of future resultants, and these future resultants are the counterpart in the future of the kammic resultants of the present. In an exactly similar way it dominates the future birth-state and conditions, which in the *paṭicca-samuppāda* are expressed as arising, old age and death, etc. The entire cycle implies a dynamic progression in which the state conditioned by past actions is at the same time the womb of present actions and their future results.

Kamma is not only an integral law of the process of becoming; it is itself that process, and the phenomenal personality is but the present manifestation of its activity. The Christian axiom of “hating the sin but loving the sinner” is meaningless from the Buddhist standpoint. There is action, but no performer of the action; the “sin” and the “sinner” cannot be dissociated; we are our actions, and nothing apart from them.

### **Modes of Conditioning**

The conditioned nature of all mental and physical phenomena is analysed under twenty-four heads, called in Pali *paccaya* (modes of conditioning). Each of the twenty-four *paccayas* is a contributing factor to the arising of conditioned things. The thirteenth mode is *kamma-paccaya*, and stands for the past actions which form the base, or condition, of something arising later. The six sense organs and fields of sense-cognition—that is, the physical organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and mental awareness—which, as we have seen, arise at birth in association with name-and-form, provide the condition-base for the arising of subsequent consciousness, and hence for the mental reactions following upon it. But here it should be noted that although kamma as volition is associated with the mental phenomena that have arisen, the phenomena themselves are not kamma-results. The fourteenth mode is kamma-result condition, or *vipāka*, and stands as a condition by way of kamma-result to the mental and physical phenomena by establishing the requisite base in the five fields of sense-consciousness.

That there are events that come about through causes other than kamma is demonstrable by natural laws. If it were not so, to try to avoid or cure sickness would be useless. If there is a predisposition to a certain disease through past kamma, and the physical conditions to produce the disease are also present, the

disease will arise. But it may also come about that all the physical conditions are present, but, through the absence of the kamma-condition, the disease does not arise; or that, with the presence of the physical causes the disease arises even in the absence of a kamma condition. A philosophical distinction is therefore to be made between those diseases which are the result of kamma and those which are produced solely by physical conditions; but since it is impossible to distinguish between them without a knowledge of past births, all diseases must be treated as though they are produced by merely physical causes. When the Buddha was attacked by Devadatta and was wounded in the foot by a stone, he was able to explain that the injury was the result of some violence committed in a previous life plus the action of Devadatta which enabled the kamma to take effect. Similarly, the violent death of Moggallána Thera was the combined result of his kamma and the murderous intention of the rival ascetics whose action provided the necessary external cause to bring it about.

### **Causality**

The process of causality, of which kamma and vipáka are only one action-result aspect, is a cosmic, universal interplay of forces. Concerning the question of free-will in a causally-conditioned universe, the view of reality presented by Henri Bergson, which when it was postulated was new to the West, throws considerable light on the Buddhist concept. Life, says Bergson, is an unceasing becoming, which preserves the past and creates the future. The solid things which seem to be stable and to endure, which seem to resist this flowing, which seem more real than the flowing, are periods, cuts across the flowing, views that our mind takes of the living reality of which it is a part, in which it lives and moves, views of the reality prescribed and limited by the needs of its particular activity.

Here we have a Western interpretation of *avijjā* (ignorance) —“ views of the reality prescribed and limited by the needs of its particular activity”—and of *anicca*, the unceasing becoming, the principle of change and impermanence. Bergson also includes in his system *anattá* (no-self), for in this process of unceasing change there is the change only—no “thing” that changes. So, says Bergson, when we regard our action as a chain of complementary parts linked together, each action so viewed is rigidly conditioned, yet when we regard our whole life-current as one and indivisible, it may be free. So also with the life-current which we may take to be the reality of the universe; when we view it in its detail as the intellect presents it to us, it appears as an order of real conditioning, each separate state having its ground in an antecedent state, yet as a whole, as the living impulse (kamma), it is free and creative. We are free, says Bergson, when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express that personality. These acts are not unconditioned, but the conditions are not external; they are in our character, which is ourself. In other and Buddhist words,

our *saòkhāra*, or kamma-formation of the past, is the personality, and that is conditioned by nothing but our own volition, or *cetanā*.

Bergson details an elaborate philosophy of space and time to give actuality to this dynamic view, which he calls "Creative Evolution," and his general conclusion is that the question of free-will against determinism is wrongly postulated; the problem, like the indeterminate questions of Buddhism, cannot be answered because it is itself a product of that peculiar infirmity, that "special view of reality prescribed and limited by the needs of a particular activity," which in Buddhism is called *avijjā*, the primal nescience.

The concept of causality in the world of physics has undergone modifications of a significant order in the light of quantum physics and the increase of our knowledge regarding the atomic structure of matter. Briefly the present position may be stated thus: while it is possible to predict quantitatively the future states of great numbers of atomic units, it is not possible to pre-determine the state or position of any one particular atom. There is a margin of latitude for the behaviour of the individual unit which is not given to the mass as a whole. In human terms, it may be possible to predict from the course of events that a certain nation, Gondalia, will be at war by a certain date; but it is not possible to predict of any individual Gondalian that he will be actively participating in the war. He may be a conscientious objector, outside the war by his own decision; or he may be physically disqualified, outside the war because of conditions over which he has no control. We may say, "Gondalia will be at war," but not "That Gondalian will be in the war." On the other hand, if we know that one particular Gondalian is not physically fit we may say confidently that he will not be in the war; the element we cannot predict with any degree of certainty is the free-will of the Gondalian individual, which may make of him a chauvinist and national Gondalian hero, or a pacifist and inmate of a concentration camp.

### **How Kamma Operates**

Coming to the details of the ways in which kamma operates, it must be understood that by kamma is meant volitional action only. *Cetanāhaī bhikkhave kammaī vadāmi*—"Volition, intention, O bhikkhus, is what I call kamma," is the definition given by the Buddha. Greed, hatred and delusion are the roots of unwholesome kamma; unselfishness, amity and wisdom are the roots of wholesome kamma. As the seed that is sown, so must be the tree and the fruit of the tree; from an impure mind and intention, only impure thoughts, words and deeds can issue; from such impure thoughts, words and deeds only evil consequences can result.

The results themselves may come about in the same lifetime; when this happens it is called *dīp̄hadhamma-vedanīya-kamma*, and the line of causality between action and result is often clearly traceable, as in the case of crime which is followed by punishment. Actions which bear their results in the next birth are called *upapajja-vedanīya-kamma*, and it frequently happens that people who

remember their previous life remember also the kamma which has produced their present conditions.

Those actions which ripen in successive births are known as *aparāpariya-vedanīya-kamma*; these are the actions which have, by continual practice, become habitual, and tend to take effect over and over again in successive lives. The repetition condition (*āsevana-paccaya*) is the twelfth of the twenty-four *paccayas*, and relates to that kamma-consciousness in which the preceding impulse-moments (*javana-citta*) are a condition by way of repetition to all the succeeding ones. This is known to modern psychology as a habit-formation, and is a very strong conditioning factor of mind and character. Buddhism urges the continual repetition of good actions, deeds of *mettā* and charity, and the continual dwelling of the mind on good and elevating subjects, such as the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, in order to establish a strong habit-formation along good and beneficial lines.

The three kinds of kamma described above, however, may be without any resultants if the other conditions necessary for the arising of the kamma-result are lacking. Rebirth among inferior orders of beings, for instance, will prevent or delay the beneficial results of a habitual kamma. There is also *counteractive kamma* which, if it is stronger than they, will inhibit their fruition. Kamma which is thus prevented from taking effect is called *ahosi-kamma*. Just as there are events which occur without kamma as a cause, so there are actions which, as potentials, remain unrealised. These actions, however, are usually the weak and relatively unimportant ones, actions not prompted by any strong impulse and carrying with them little moral significance.

Functionally, the various kinds of kamma operate according to four classifications. The first is *generative kamma* (*janaka-kamma*) which produces the five aggregate complex of name-and-form at birth and through all the stages of its arising during the life-continuum. The second category is that of *sustaining kamma* (*upatthambhaka-kamma*), which is void of kamma-results and is only capable of sustaining kamma-resultants that have already come into being. In the third category comes *counteractive kamma* (*upapīḍaka-kamma*), which by reason of its moral or immoral force suppresses other kamma-results and delays or prevents their arising. Last in this classification according to functions comes *destructive kamma* (*upacchedaka-kamma*); this is kamma of such potency that it utterly destroys the influence of weaker kamma and substitutes its own kamma-results. It may be strong enough to cut short the life-span so that it is destructive kamma in the literal sense.

The light and insignificant actions which we perform in the course of our daily lives have their results, but they are not dominant factors unless they become part of a habit-formation. Important actions which become habitual, either wholesome or unwholesome, are known as *bahula-kamma*, and their effects take precedence over those of actions which are morally insignificant or rarely performed. Those actions which are rooted in a very strong moral or immoral impulse, and take a drastic form, are known as *garuka-kamma*; they also tend to

fall into the *dīp̄hadhamma-vedaniya-kamma* class and take effect in the same lifetime, or else in the next existence. Such actions are: drawing the blood of a Buddha, the murder of an Arahāt, the killing of parents, and attempts to disrupt the Sangha.<sup>1</sup> Although these are the chief demeritorious actions, there are many others of lesser weight which bear results in the next birth in the absence of *garuka-kamma*. The same applies to good *garuka-kamma*.

*Dīp̄hadhamma-vedaniya-kamma* provides us with data for studying the operation of the law of cause and effect objectively. In the usual course of things crime brings its own consequences in the same lifetime, by a clearly traceable sequence of events, but this does not invariably happen. For a crime to receive its due punishment a complicated machinery of causes has to be brought into operation. First there has to be the act of crime, the kamma. Its punishment then depends upon the existence of criminal laws, of a police force, of the circumstances which enable the criminal to be detected, and many subsidiary factors. It is only when all these combine that the crime receives its due punishment in the same lifetime. If the external factors are missing, the kamma alone will not bring about its consequences immediately, and we say the criminal has gone unpunished.

This, however, is not the case; sooner or later either in the same lifetime or a subsequent one, circumstances will link together, albeit indirectly, and give an opportunity for the kamma to produce its results. Hence from the Buddhist standpoint the question of capital punishment rests not on considerations of mercy to the murderer, which must always be a source of contention since mercy to a criminal implies a social injustice to the victim and lack of protection to potential victims; it rests on a consideration of the kamma-resultants to those who are instrumental in punishing him with death, since it is kamma of the worst order to kill or cause another to take life.

It is not possible here to enter into a discussion of the moral difference between the action of one who kills another from greed or anger and one who carries out a sentence of death in the course of his duties to society. That there is a difference cannot be doubted, yet for Buddhist psychology it is clear that no act of killing can be accomplished without the arising of a hate-impulse in the mind. To take life quite disinterestedly, as advocated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, is a psychological impossibility; there must, in any case, be desire for the accomplishment of the act, or the act itself could never be carried out. This applies to every action except those performed by the Arahāt. Since there is no “unchanging Atman” no distinction can be made between the deed and the doer.

## Rebirth

The mode, circumstances and nature of the next birth are conditioned by what is known as the *death-proximate kamma* (*marāóāsanna-kamma*), which is the volition, wholesome or unwholesome, that is present immediately before death. With this is associated the *paḥisandhi-viññāóa* or connecting consciousness between one

manifestation and another. At the moment just preceding death, the death-proximate kamma may take the form of a reflex of some good or bad deed performed during the dying person's life. This sometimes presents itself to the consciousness as a symbol, like the dream symbols of Freudian psychology. It may bring with it an indication of the future existence, a glimpse of the realm (*loka*) in which rebirth is about to take place. It is due to the arising of some unwholesome consciousness from past kamma that the dying sometimes exhibit fear, while others, experiencing wholesome death-proximate kamma, die with a smile on their lips, seeing themselves welcomed by celestial beings or their friends who have passed away before them. Everyone who has been present at death beds can recall examples of both kinds.

When none of these kamma-manifestations is present, however, as with those who die in a state of complete unconsciousness, the next birth is determined by what is called *reserved kamma* (*kaṭattā-kamma*). This is the automatic result of whatever kamma of the past is strongest, be it good or bad, and has not yet borne fruit or exhausted its force. This may be weighty or habitual kamma.

### **Heedfulness in Dying and When Living**

The importance of keeping the consciousness active and faculties alert up to the moment of death is stressed in Buddhist psychology. Part of the benefit of *maranānussati*, the meditation on death, is that it enables one to approach the thought of death undismayed, in full possession of one's faculties and with control of the mental impulses. Instead of charging us to remember our sins and approach death in fear, Buddhism instructs us to call to mind our good actions, put aside terror and meet death with the calm confidence of one whose destiny is under his own control. It is a positive attitude in place of the negative and depressing mental state encouraged by other religions. Modern psychology advises the cultivation of such an optimistic attitude throughout life. Buddhism goes further, and shows it to be a necessary safeguard when we stand on the threshold of a new existence.

It has already been said that those who are able to remember previous lives can trace the course of kamma and vipāka from one birth to another. They are the only people who are in a position to differentiate clearly between the events that occur because of kamma and those that are caused by external agencies. It is certain, however, that predominantly good kamma will save us from most of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or help us to rise above whatever obstacles are set in our path. *The need for human endeavour is always present*, for in the very enjoyment of the fruits of good kamma we are generating a new series of actions to bear their own results in the future.

It cannot be too often or too emphatically repeated that the true understanding of the law of kamma is the absolute opposite of fatalism. The man who is born to riches on account of his past deeds of charity cannot afford to rest on his laurels. He is like a man with a substantial bank balance; he may either live on his capital



until he exhausts it, which is foolish, or he can use it as an investment and increase it. The only investment we can take with us out of this life into the next is good kamma; it therefore behooves every man who is, in the common phrase, "blessed" with riches, to use those riches wisely in doing good.

If everyone understood the law of kamma there would be an end to the greed of the rich and the envy of the poor. Every man would strive to give away as much as he could in charity—or at least spend his money on projects beneficial to mankind. On the other hand there would be no burning feeling of injustice on the part of the "have-nots," since they would recognise that their condition is due to their own past kamma, while at the same time its crushing effects would be alleviated by the generosity and social conscience of the rich. The result would be a co-operative scheme of sharing, in which both would prosper.

This is the practical plan of living that Buddhism suggests to us; it is sane, ethical and inspiring, and it is the one answer that a free world can make to the anti-religious materialistic ideologies. To put it into practice would be the greatest step forward in mankind's social as well as spiritual progress, and one that must be made if we are to save our civilisation from the terrible consequences of greed, hatred and delusion. It is not enough to have a knowledge of the law of kamma: it must be used as applied science in the ordering of personal and national life for the realization of a happier, more stable and more regulated phase of human history.

## ACTION AND REACTION IN BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Leonard A. Bullen

The whole universe is governed by law, and the unbroken sequence of action and reaction occurs in mental and moral operations just as strictly as in physical processes. In consequence, the Buddha-doctrine emphasizes that morally skilful thought, speech and action bring happiness to the doer at some time or other, while in the same way activities which are morally unskilful give rise to future suffering. That which determines the moral skill of an activity—whether it be in thought, speech or bodily action—is the volition or mental purpose which motivates it. Where it is based on generosity, on goodwill, or on selfless motives, it is morally skilful, whereas when the purpose which motivates it springs from greed, hatred or delusion it is regarded as morally unskilful.

Thus the Buddha-doctrine stresses the need for developing a clear comprehension of the purpose behind every activity at every level, at the levels of thought, of speech and of bodily action. Some of these activities build up forces within the mind which eventually lead to an increase in well-being, while others, being aimless or unskilful, result in sorrow or frustration. Thus, if you take on almost any form of mental culture, one of your most important aims should be to comprehend more clearly the ultimate purpose behind all these activities.

In this scientific and technological age, you are familiar with the idea that physical effects have causes, that these effects also become causes in their turn, and that in the ordinary course of events there is no room for chance or luck. But while you accept this invariable sequence of action and reaction in the material realm, you don't always recognize it in the moral sphere. The Buddha-doctrine affirms, however, that the law of cause and effect applies just as invariably and just as exactly in the moral sphere as it does in the physical realm. This doctrine emphasizes the fact that everything in the universe acts according to various laws, and that no being in the universe can set aside or invalidate these laws. It defines five systems of laws (*pañca-niyāma*).

The first of these is the law-system which concerns the rise and fall—that is, the growth and decay—of physical phenomena under the action of heat. Second, there is the group of laws relating to the generation or growth of vegetation and of the bodies of living beings. The third law-system relates to mental action and reaction, that is, to the action of the will and its results in terms of happiness and suffering. Fourth, there are the various laws governing the processes of the mind, the laws which are studied and applied by psychologists. Finally, the fifth law-system groups together the multiplicity of laws which relate to physical and mental phenomena in general which are not embraced by the other systems of laws.

Of these five groups, you'll find that it is the third law-system that interests us in the present context. This, the law-system governing the action of the will and its consequences, is only one of the five groups of laws, but it is the one that is most directly connected with your own happiness and sorrow, your own pains and pleasures.

The original Buddhist terms that are sometimes translated as moral and immoral, or as good and bad, may also be rendered as wholesome and unwholesome. However, the terms skilful and unskilful are often used to convey the meanings of the original terms, for a moral or wholesome action is considered to be skilful because it eventually brings enjoyment as a result; an immoral or unwholesome action, since in time it brings suffering to the doer, is regarded as unskilful.

Any activity—morally good or otherwise—produces, of course, its normal physical result. If you throw a stone through a window it will break the window, whether the motivation behind it be morally skilful or otherwise. The broken window is the normal physical result of the stone-throwing action.

But assuming that the action is motivated by some morally unskilful volition (such as hatred) there will be a mental effect as well. The exercise of hatred will strengthen the hatred which already exists within the mind just as the exercise of a muscle will strengthen its own tissues. In consequence, hatred will become a more dominant factor in your mental make-up.

Now hatred is one of a group of mental factors which lead to suffering. In some way or other, at some time in the near or distant future, this mental factor will bring you suffering of some kind. The basic cause of the suffering is not the action of throwing the stone, but the hatred or ill-will present in the volitional act of throwing the stone.

Now it is conceivable that the action of throwing the stone through the window might be motivated, not by hatred, but by some form of goodwill. You might, for example, use this action as a means of letting air into a smoke-filled room in a burning house in order to rescue someone in the room. In such circumstances, the unselfishness you exercise in your wholesome volitional action would strengthen your existing mental factor of goodwill, and this strengthened mental factor would eventually bring you into circumstances that would yield happiness.

Thus a morally skilful will-action brings enjoyment at some future time, while an unwholesome volition eventuates in suffering. On the other hand, an action which is not volitional (while of course it gives rise to normal physical effects) does not produce any effects in terms of strengthened mind-factors, and no effects in terms of future happiness and suffering. Where there is no volition there is no moral or immoral element.

The personal will or volition in its primal form is the urge to live, the urge to survive as a self and to assert this selfhood. From this fundamental will to live

arise various tendencies, which we know as urges, instincts, and desires, and which are accompanied by emotions.

In Buddhist psychology, the instincts and desires are all regarded as manifestations of the fundamental will to live. This will to live, as a rule, is simply called craving: it is the craving or thirst for personal existence, the craving to live and survive as a self for eternity. But the final freedom from unhappiness can be found only by transcending personal existence.

The thirst for personal existence, rooted as it is in ignorance, is said to be a primary condition on which all suffering depends. Thus the ultimate aim of the practising Buddhist is to overcome craving by the attainment of enlightenment.

This means, of course, to overcome desire, but only insofar as desire is personal or self-centred. It has been said:

To start from where we are now and unequivocally let go of every desire would be to die, and to die is not to solve the problem of living.

Houston Smith

The type of desire to be overcome, then, is what may be called ignorant desire or irrational desire. To quote again:

The desires for the basic necessities of life can be satisfied, whereas the selfish desires of the ego can never be allayed. These do not spring from the chemistry of the body but are purely mental constructions—to be more and more, to have more and more: money, possessions, power, prestige, love; to outstrip and outshine all others; to be supreme. It is an impossible dream which, if realized, would not bring in its train either peace or happiness.

The greedy, the jealous, the envious can never be satisfied because their dissatisfaction and unhappiness do not spring from any real deprivation of the essentials of life, but from the defects and distortions within their character.

*Mettā*

From all this you'll see that in Buddhism the first and last enemy is considered to be ignorance—ignorance, not in the sense of lack of education, but in the sense of lack of the capacity for true discernment.

You'll appreciate, too, that the final victory to be won is the victory of discernment or enlightenment, and that the principal weapon in the battle is the weapon of right mindfulness in its various forms.

The personal will, then, is an aspect of the will to live, the blind thirst for personal existence which, in human life, expresses itself by way of various instinctive and emotional factors. These collectively constitute the dynamic elements in mental life.

Buddhist psychology adopts a system of classifying the dynamic mind-factors which is somewhat different from the classifications you'll meet in Western psychology. It includes not only instinctive elements but also mental habits

developed from the instincts, as well as thought-patterns deliberately cultivated in opposition to the instincts.

This classification generally appears in Buddhist literature as a list of fifty active mental factors (in contrast to the receptive mental factors known as feeling and perception), and together these fifty constitute the dynamic components of the mind. Some of them are directly derived from the fundamental urge towards personal survival, while others are cultivated in opposition to the egotistic tendencies, but all of them help to determine behaviour. For this reason they can be conveniently referred to as the fifty determinants.

There is no need to deal here with the determinants in detail. All that we need to mention in the present context are three which are called the roots of unskilful will-activity and their opposites, the three roots of skilful volition.

The three roots of unskilful volition are greed, hatred and delusion, while the opposite three—generosity, goodwill, and discernment—are the roots of skilful will-activity.

Such activity may take the form of bodily action, it may take the form of speech, or it may take the form of thought; but it is the motive behind the activity, the mental determinant that gives rise to it, that is all-important.

Thus if you think, speak or act from motives of greed, whether in an obvious and intense form or in a subtle and disguised way, you thereby strengthen greed in your mental make-up. On the other hand, when you act from generosity you thereby strengthen this determinant in your own mind.

It is the same with hatred and its opposite factor of goodwill. One who allows himself to become angry or irritable immediately builds up in his own mind the factor of hatred, whereas when he makes an effort to be tolerant and patient with irritating people or annoying things he increases the mental factor of goodwill within his mind.

Again, if you think, speak or act in a self-centred way, you are allowing yourself to be motivated by delusion, for delusion in the present context means primarily the delusion of self, together with the self-deceit and feelings of superiority and inferiority that go along with it. As a result you become more and more governed by this delusion, for it becomes a stronger determinant than before.

When, on the other hand, you endeavour to discern the true nature of the illusory self and to break free from self-deceit, you strengthen the opposite factor of discernment. Thus discernment—or non-delusion, as it is often called—becomes a stronger determinant of your subsequent thought-processes.

Now the morally unskilful determinants that exist as parts of your mental make-up, as you can see, retard your progress towards the final liberation; thus we can speak of them as the “retardants.”

In the same way, you can see that the morally skilful mind-factors help you in your progress towards the final liberation; and therefore we can also call them the “progressants.”

You'll see from this that from the exercise of a particular determinant there is an immediate effect within the mind. This immediate effect is a strengthening of that determinant, which of course makes it easier to arouse it in the future.

However, there is more to it than that. Each of the determinants that we have been discussing, each of the active or dynamic factors that help to make up the mind as a whole, can be visualized as an accumulation of energy within the mind. You can regard each particular determinant—generosity, for example, on the one hand, or greed on the other—as an accumulation of a specific sort of force within the mind, and each such force will eventually bring about its own kind of experience at some time in the future.

This future experience is the result of the original will-activity—the reaction to the original action. The volitional action in the first place causes an accumulation of a specific mental force, and this force in its turn brings about its reaction in terms of enjoyment or suffering. The accumulated force, therefore, can be termed a “reaction-force.”

An accumulation of the reaction-force of generosity will at some time give rise to enjoyment of some kind, just as the accumulation of energy within an electrical torch battery may at some time give rise to light. The energy within the battery can give rise to light only when the conditions are favourable: there must be an electric-light bulb, and the switch of the torch must be turned on. The current can then flow through the filament, which then glows with light. In the process—unless the current is switched off or unless some replenishment of the battery takes place—the energy will be eventually completely discharged.

In much the same way, the accumulation of the reaction-force of generosity can give rise to enjoyment only when the environment provides suitable conditions; and, until the requisite environmental conditions come about, the reaction-force remains in storage, so to speak. When the suitable conditions do eventually appear, this particular reaction-force will give rise to the enjoyment of happy experiences, and in the process the accumulation will become less and less until completely discharged, unless of course it is replenished by further generosity.

In general, some sort of replenishment may be going on while the discharge is taking place. If, while you're enjoying happy experiences, you continue to exercise your generosity, then the accumulation of this particular reaction-force will be replenished even while it is being discharged. It is then like a water-tank from which you're drawing off water but which is being replenished by rain at the same time.

However, if while enjoying the fruits of previous generous actions you become selfish and greedy, then your mind is like a water-tank during a drought: as the water is all drained off and never replenished, so your accumulation of happiness-producing reaction-force is drained off until finally discharged.

As with the mind-factor we know as generosity, so with its opposite determinant, greed. When one gives way to self-desire in any form, the accumulation of the reaction-force of greed is increased in one's mind. When at

some future time the external conditions are suitable, this accumulation will discharge by way of suffering. During suffering, one may give way to further adverse states of mind, such as self-pity, and this will add to the accumulated reaction-force. On the other hand, one may develop patience and other favourable qualities of mind, and thus this particular sorrow-producing accumulation will eventually be fully discharged.

While each type of mind-factor is a particular reaction-force, in general we can group them into two broad classes—first, reaction-forces that lead to happiness, and second those that lead to suffering. Often these are spoken of respectively as merit and demerit, and thus we say that while one person who has a great stock of merit will enjoy great happiness in the future, another who has stored up much demerit will have to endure great suffering at some later time.

The reaction-forces that exist within the mind are stored, so to speak, below the consciously accessible level of the mind. The subconscious aspect of the mind, in Buddhist terminology, is called the life-subcurrent. It is the current of mental energy which exists below the threshold of consciousness, and it is thus the repository of the resultants of all past actions and past experiences.

This life-subcurrent may for convenience be called the storehouse of the residual reaction-forces from all previous will-actions; but you must not take the idea of a storehouse too literally. The experiences in our lives are not in any real sense stored anywhere in the same way that water is stored in a tank, any more than apples are stored in an apple tree.

You don't believe, of course, that apples are stored in an apple tree. Given the right external conditions of climate, soil, and nutrition, the forces within the apple tree will cause apples to grow on its branches; and in the same way, given the right external conditions, the forces within the life-subcurrent will project or precipitate experiences in accordance with the nature of these forces.

Wind is not stored somewhere in the air, but under the right conditions of heat or cold, the air will expand or contract and give rise to wind. In the same way, fire is not stored in the head of a match, but under the right conditions of friction the match will give rise to fire.

Again, sound is not stored in a record; but given the necessary conditions—when placed on a turn table of a record-player—the formation of the record gives rise to sound.

Thus the experiences of life, together with their corresponding happiness and suffering, are not stored in a literal sense in the life-subcurrent, but under the right conditions these events will develop as the apples develop on the branches of the apple tree.

Thus you can see that no reaction-force can take effect unless there exist suitable conditions for its operation or discharge. As the suitable conditions may not arise within your present lifetime, it follows that you may not reap the enjoyment and suffering resulting from these activities within your present lifetime.

You can see, then, that at the end of your present lifetime there will exist many undischarged reaction-forces, and for many of your actions the appropriate reactions will not have occurred as yet. In other words, when you die there'll be an unexpended residue of reaction-forces both progressant and retardant which have had no opportunities to discharge during your present lifetime.

What happens to these unexpended or undischarged reaction-forces? When you die, your body will disintegrate, of course; but the Buddha-doctrine teaches that various components of the mind survive in the form of a life-current, a current of mental energy, and that this current of energy consists of undischarged reaction-forces. This is what the life-current actually is, an ever-changing stream of reaction-forces, and at your death this life-current will initiate a new life and thus bring about the birth of a new being.

The new being is you yourself, being an unbroken continuation of the life-current. The new being inherits all the reaction-forces—all the potentialities for happiness, for suffering, and for further volitional activity—from the old being, who is also you yourself. From the point of view of continuity, the new being is the same as the old being (although in another body), for the continuity of the life-current is not broken in any way by the phase of death and rebirth.

You've seen that the moral law of action and reaction, as set out in the Buddha-doctrine, states that we each experience happiness and suffering in exact proportion to the moral and immoral qualities of our past activities. You've seen also that this same doctrine teaches that moral and immoral activities build up forces within the mind, and these forces—reaction-forces, we have called them—eventually precipitate experiences of happiness and suffering.

This is perhaps an oversimplification of the matter, for in more exact terms the Buddha-doctrine says that every cause has a number of effects, while every effect arises from a number of causes. In other words, nothing arises from only one cause, and nothing gives rise to only one effect: everything is interwoven with many other things. However, the main point is that morally skilful activity brings enjoyment of some kind in its train while morally unskilful activity brings suffering.

The concept of the reaction-force enables us to see how the Buddhist idea of rebirth differs from non-Buddhist beliefs in reincarnation, for what is reborn in Buddhist teachings is a life-current, not a soul in the ordinary sense.

This brings us to the matter of the time at which a particular reaction-force (generated by a specific will-activity) operates. If you rob a bank and bungle your escape, you'll be caught immediately and soon punished. If you plan your escape well and make a success of it, but nevertheless leave a few clues, you may not be caught for five years, but when you are eventually punished you'll be able to see the connection between the cause (your immoral action) and the effect in the shape of punishment. However, you may execute the robbery and your escape so well that you will evade suspicion and punishment (a convenient word in the present context but not a very exact one) may not come until several lifetimes



afterwards. Then you won't be able to see the connection between cause and effect.

Here again we are over-simplifying the position by talking as if one cause brings about only one effect, but the question at issue is the time at which a particular reaction-force operates.

As we have already seen, a reaction-force cannot discharge its energy until the conditions appropriate to its operation are suitable; and by conditions we mean both the external or environmental conditions as well as conditions within the mind itself. That means that if you carry out a morally unskilful activity—such as a robbery—during a time when you are reaping the benefits of a past series of morally skilful actions, you may not reap the adverse effects of the immoral act until the opposite kind of reaction-force has run its course. You say you're enjoying a run of good luck, and this is true enough so long as you realize that good luck is really the fruition of past good activity.

Similarly, if you carry out some act of generosity you can expect the enjoyment of some sort of happiness as a result, but this may not be in the near future or even in your present lifetime. You may perhaps be in the midst of a long period of frustration and failure, the effect of some past phase of morally unskilful activity whose reaction-force must run its course and exhaust its energy.

Thus the Buddha-doctrine teaches that some actions are immediately effective, since their resulting reaction-forces are discharged soon after their inception; but many will-actions are remotely effective, for the reaction-forces they generate may not produce their reactions in terms of happiness or suffering until many lifetimes afterwards.

The effects of weak volitional actions may be neutralized by stronger reaction-forces of an opposite nature. Thus, if a weak retardant reaction-force is opposed by a stronger one of a progressant nature, then the stronger may render the weaker ineffective, losing some of its own energy in the process.

This does not apply, however, to a strong reaction-force generated by a very definite morally skilful or a very definite morally unskilful activity. The reaction-forces built into the mental structure by such activities can never be neutralized, and even though the suitable conditions for their discharge don't arise until many lifetimes afterwards, they invariably become effective at some time. They are therefore called indefinitely effective reaction-forces, and while dormant they are classed as reserve reaction-forces.

In contrast to indefinitely effective reaction-force, there is a kind called weighty reaction-force, which is generated either by very serious retardant will-activity or else by very exalted states of mind. The operation of weighty reaction-force, the Buddha-doctrine states, takes precedence over all other kinds.

You can see that, however long may be the time-lag between the cause and its effect, the end-result of volitional activity is inevitable.

At first sight you might take this to imply that the present and the future are completely and inflexibly governed by the past, and that you can experience only what your past actions have determined for you.

This fatalistic view, however, is really not a part of the Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect. It is true that you are largely—very largely—influenced by reaction-forces generated by your past volitional activities, but they are not the only forces in the mind: there is also the possibility of present volition. Volition or will exists as a force within the mind, just as attention and one-pointedness exist as forces within the mind. We're not entering into any discussion on free will, beyond mentioning that everything we do is conditioned by internal and external factors; but we must recognize that volition does exist in the sense that it consists of the force of desire directed towards an objective.

Since volition does exist as desire-force directed towards an objective, we can see that we can use this volition to handle the present results of past activity. By "handling" the present results of past activity I don't mean that we can cancel these results; I mean that we can utilize our present experiences to help us to make progress, or we can let these same experiences—pleasant as well as unpleasant—retard our progress. But to handle our present experiences—to utilize them as a means of making progress—we must develop the necessary moral skill.

Although the present is conditioned by the past as the future is conditioned by the present, the future is not unalterably fixed by the past, for the future is dependent also on what we do with our present powers of volition. In many circumstances, it is true that there may be little or no scope for a constructive or progressant course of action, for the pressure of reaction-forces from the past may be too great and the present volition too weak. However, in general, even if you have no choice of external action, at least it's possible to regulate your mental and moral responses to a situation, even to a slight extent. Thus, under a difficult set of conditions that you are unable to alter, you can at least exercise patience and tolerance, facing the situation without allowing it completely to overwhelm you.

In this way, while going through a difficult period of painful reaction-force results, you're at least building up within your mental structure new progressant reaction-forces, thus using the situation to its best advantage.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT KAMMA AND ITS FRUIT

Nina van Gorkom

I

**A.** When people have an unpleasant experience they are inclined to ask: "Why did this have to happen to me?" One might be very good and kind to other people and yet receive unkind words in return. Could you tell me whether it is true that good deeds will bring a good result? I sometimes doubt it.

**B.** People ask this question because they do not always understand the reason why they have to suffer in life. It is difficult to know which cause in the past brings about this or that unpleasant experience at the present moment. The Buddha said that everything that happens must have a cause. When we suffer it must have a cause either in the far past or in the proximate past. If we know how causes and effects in our lives are interrelated, it will help us to develop the right attitude towards unpleasant experiences and sorrow.

**A.** Are the bad deeds one did in the past the cause of unpleasant experiences at the present moment? The deeds which are already done belong to the past. How can those deeds bring a result later on?

**B.** In order to have a deeper understanding of how cause and effect are interrelated it is necessary to know first what motivates good and bad deeds; moreover we should know how we accumulate wholesome tendencies in doing wholesome deeds and how we accumulate unwholesome tendencies in doing unwholesome deeds.

**A.** Why do you use the words "wholesome" and "unwholesome" instead of good and bad?

**B.** The words "good" and "bad" generally imply a moral judgement. The Buddha would not judge people as "good" or "bad." He explained about the conditions for their behaviour and about the effects of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness. An unwholesome deed is a deed which brings harm to oneself or to other people, either at the moment the unwholesome deed is done or later on, whereas a wholesome deed is one which will lead to happiness. Unwholesome is in Pali *akusala*, and wholesome is *kusala*. With unwholesome mental states or "akusala cittas" one can perform unwholesome deeds or "akusala kamma"; and with wholesome mental states or "kusala cittas" one can perform wholesome deeds or "kusala kamma."

**A.** What is a citta? Is it a soul or "self" which directs the deeds? Is it under one's control whether one will have a kusala citta which can perform kusala kamma, or is it beyond control?

**B.** A citta is not a soul or "self." There are many different cittas which succeed one another, there is no citta which lasts. Each citta which arises falls away immediately. We can experience at one moment that we have an akusala citta. However, this does not last, it falls away again. At another moment we might experience that we have a kusala citta; this does not last either, it falls away again. There can only be one citta at a time; we cannot have an akusala citta at the same moment as a kusala citta. Cittas replace one another continuously. How can we take something for self if it does not even last for a second?

It is not in our power to have wholesome cittas whenever we want to. People would like to be good the whole day but they cannot have kusala cittas continuously; it is beyond their control.

All cittas are beyond control. We cannot help it that we like certain people and certain things, and that we dislike other people and things. We cannot direct all our thoughts, we may be absent-minded although we do not want to. No two people can have the same thoughts, even if they think of the same object, for example, of a country where they both have been. One's thoughts depend on many conditions, for example, on experiences and accumulated tendencies in the past, on the object which presents itself at the present moment, on good or bad friends, or on the food one has eaten.

As it is not in one's power to have a certain citta at a certain moment, we cannot say that there is a "self" which directs our deeds. Our actions depend on the tendencies that have been accumulated in the past and on many other conditions.

**A.** I notice that some people always seem to do the wrong thing in life, whereas for other people it is not difficult to be generous and honest. What is the reason that people are so different?

**B.** People are so different because of different tendencies and inclinations which have been accumulated in the past. People who are very often angry accumulate anger. When the accumulated anger is strong enough they will perform akusala kamma through speech or deeds. Everybody has accumulated both unwholesome and wholesome tendencies.

**A.** Is it correct that good and bad deeds performed in the past are never lost, that they continue to have an influence at the present moment?

**B.** That is true. Experiences one had in the past, and good and bad deeds committed in the past, have been accumulated and they condition cittas arising in the present time. If the citta at the present moment is akusala citta, there is a new accumulation of unwholesomeness, and if the citta at the present moment is kusala citta, there is a new accumulation of wholesomeness.

Therefore cittas which arise are not only conditioned by the object that presents itself through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body-sense or mind, but they are conditioned as well by the tendencies and inclinations accumulated in the past and by many other factors.

Cittas are beyond control; they are, as the Buddha said, "*anattá*." When the Buddha said that everything is *anattá*, he meant that one cannot have power over

anything at all. Everything in our life occurs because there are conditions, and everything falls away again.

Good deeds and bad deeds which we performed will bring their result accordingly. The result will take place when it is the right time, when there are the right conditions for the result to take place. It is not in anyone's power to have the result arise at this or at that moment. Cause and result are beyond control, they are anattá.

**A.** I understand that akusala cittas which perform akusala kamma are cause and that those cannot bring a pleasant result; they will bring an unpleasant result, whereas kusala cittas which perform kusala kamma will bring a good result. Each cause will bring its result accordingly. Could you explain how the result is brought about? Is it a punishment or a reward for one's deeds?

**B.** There is no question of punishment or reward because there is no one who punishes or rewards. It is the course of nature that one reaps what one has sown. Accumulated akusala kamma produces at the right time a citta which experiences an unpleasant object; this citta is the result of a bad deed one did in the past. Accumulated kusala kamma produces at the right time a citta which experiences a pleasant object; this citta is the result of a good deed one did in the past. The citta which is result is called "vipákacitta" There will be different results at different moments. For most people it is not possible to find out which deed of the past produces the result one receives at the present moment. However, it is of no use to know in detail what happened in the past; we should only be concerned about the present moment. It is enough to know that akusala kamma produces an unpleasant result and that kusala kamma produces a pleasant result. The result is produced either shortly afterwards or later on. We cannot blame other people for an unpleasant result we receive. An unpleasant result is the consequence of our own bad deeds.

**A.** How often during the day is there vipáka? Is there vipáka at this moment?

**B.** Yes, there is vipáka now, because you are seeing and hearing. Every time you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and experiencing a tangible object through the body-sense there is vipáka. All impressions that we experience through the five senses are vipáka

**A.** How can I find out whether there is pleasant or unpleasant vipáka? I am seeing right now but I have no pleasant or unpleasant feeling about it.

**B.** It is not always possible to find out whether the object is pleasant or unpleasant. When we see or hear we cannot always find out whether there is kusala vipáka or akusala vipáka. When we feel pain or when we are sick we can be sure that there is akusala vipáka. The moment of vipákacitta is very short, it falls away immediately.

When we see, we experience colour through the eyes. Then we like or dislike it, we recognize it, we think about it. The seeing of colour is vipáka. Like or dislike and thinking about the object are not vipáka. Those functions are performed by other cittas, which are akusala cittas or kusala cittas. The cittas that

like or dislike, and the cittas that think about the object, are not results but causes; they can motivate deeds which will bring fresh results.

All cittas succeed one another so rapidly that there seems to be only one citta. We are inclined to think that like or dislike and thinking are still vipáka, but that is a delusion.

**A.** Does everyone receive both akusala vipáka and kusala vipáka?

**B.** Everyone has accumulated both unwholesome deeds and wholesome deeds, therefore everyone will receive both akusala vipáka and kusala vipáka. However, we can develop understanding of cause and effect and this helps us to be patient, even under unpleasant conditions. For instance, when we understand what vipáka is we will be less inclined to feel sorry for ourselves or to blame other people when there is akusala vipáka. If we feel sorry for ourselves or blame other people, there is a new accumulation of unwholesomeness and this will bring us more sorrow in the future.

**A.** But I cannot help disliking unpleasant vipáka. How can I change my attitude?

**B.** You can change your attitude by understanding what is vipáka and what is no longer vipáka. It is very important to know that the moment we feel dislike or regret is not the same as the moment of vipáka. People are inclined to think that the dislike which arises after the vipáka is still vipáka. When they say "This is just vipáka," they do not distinguish unpleasant feelings from the moments of vipáka. If they do not really know what is vipáka and what is not vipáka but akusala citta, or akusala kamma, they accumulate unwholesomeness all through their lives. By ignorance, by not knowing when the citta is akusala, one accumulates unwholesomeness.

**A.** I am inclined to blame people who speak harsh words to me, even when I am so kind to them. Are those people not the cause that I receive unpleasant vipáka?

**B.** We are inclined to think in this way if we haven't yet understood what vipáka is.

Let us analyse what is really happening when we hear harsh words spoken by someone else. When those words are produced by akusala cittas, it is an unpleasant object we receive through the ear. It is not really we who receive the unpleasant object, but the vipákacitta receives the unpleasant object through the ear. The vipákacitta is the result of akusala kamma performed in the past. This was the right moment that the akusala kamma, performed in the past, caused vipákacittas to arise at the present moment. The person who speaks harsh words to us is not the cause of akusala vipáka; the cause is within ourselves. Someone who speaks harsh words to us is only one of the many conditions for vipákacittas to arise. Our own accumulated akusala kamma is the real cause of akusala vipáka.

**A.** It seems to me that kamma is a fate which directs our lives.

**B.** Kamma is not an unchangeable fate outside ourselves, but our own accumulated unwholesome and wholesome deeds, and at the right moment it will produce its results in the form of vipákacittas.

**A.** If a third person would pass and if he would hear harsh words spoken to me, he might have akusala vipáka as well, although the words are not directed to him. Is that right?

**B.** If it is the right moment for him to have akusala vipáka, he will receive the unpleasant object as well; he might have akusala vipáka through the ear. Whether the words are addressed to him or to someone else does not make any difference.

**A.** Is it right that the vipáka might not be as unpleasant for him as for the person to whom the harsh words are addressed?

**B.** Is it necessary to have aversion every time we hear an unpleasant sound?

**A.** No, it is not necessary.

**B.** Aversion has nothing to do with vipáka. Considering whether the words are addressed to oneself or to another person and the unpleasant feelings about it are no longer vipáka. If we feel aversion there are akusala cittas, conditioned by our accumulations of aversion in the past. There are some short moments of vipáka only at the moment we receive the sound, before the unpleasant feelings arise. Kamma conditioned the vipákacittas right at that moment. Kamma is the real cause of vipáka, not this or that person. If we want to have the right understanding of vipáka, we should not think in terms of "I," "those people" and "harsh words." If we think of people and if we consider whether harsh words are addressed to ourselves or to someone else, we will not see the truth. If we think in terms of cittas and if we understand conditions for cittas, we will understand reality. When someone speaks harsh words it is conditioned by his accumulated aversion. It is not really important whether he addresses those words to us or to someone else.

If we understand vipáka we will take the unpleasant experiences of life less seriously. It will be of much help to us and to other people if we try to understand ourselves, if we know different cittas arising at different moments. After we have had akusala vipáka we should try not to think much about it. When we think about vipáka it already belongs to the past. It is therefore better to forget about it immediately.

**A.** I still do not understand why I have to receive harsh words in return for my kindness. How can the result of kusala kamma be akusala vipáka?

**B.** This could never happen. Kusala kamma has kusala vipáka as its result; however, the good result might arise later on. It is not possible to tell at which moments akusala kamma and kusala kamma produce results. Akusala vipáka is not the result of one's kindness; it is the result of one's accumulated akusala kamma. Kindness will certainly bring a good result, but that might take place later on.

**A.** I cannot help feeling sorry for myself when there is akusala vipáka. What can I do to prevent the accumulation of more unwholesomeness?

**B.** When there are conditions for akusala cittas we cannot prevent their arising. They arise very closely after the vipáka, before we know it. They are “anattá,” they do not belong to a “self.” However, we can develop more understanding of the different phenomena that arise. The akusala cittas that arise after the vipáka are not the same as the vipákacittas and they have conditions different from the conditions for the vipákacittas.

If we understand that feeling sorry for ourselves and blaming other people is done by akusala cittas and that in this way we accumulate more unwholesomeness, we will be less inclined to do so. If we understand that at this moment we cannot do anything about the vipáka which has its cause in the past, we will be able to forget about it more easily. At the moment we are aware of akusala vipáka, it has fallen away already and belongs to the past.

Life is too short to waste energy in worrying about things of the past. It is better to accumulate kusala kamma by doing wholesome deeds.

We read in the *Kindred Sayings* (Saí yutta Nikáya I, Sagáthá Vagga, Ch. III, Kosala, 111, §5) that King Pasenadi came to see the Buddha at Sávatthi. The king had been zealously busy with all such matters as occupy kings. The Buddha asked him what he would do if he would hear from loyal men, coming from all four directions, about a great mountain, high as the sky, moving along and crushing every living thing. The Buddha said:

“And you, sire, seized with mighty dread, the destruction of human life so terrible, rebirth as man so hard to obtain, what is there that you could do?”

“In such a mighty peril, lord, the destruction of human life so terrible, rebirth as man so hard to obtain, what else could I do save to live righteously and justly and work good and meritorious deeds?”

“I tell you, sire, I make known to you sire: old age and death come rolling in upon you, sire! Since old age and death are rolling in upon you, sire, what is there that you can do?”

“Since old age and death, lord, are rolling in upon me, what else can I do save to live righteously and justly, and to work good and meritorious deeds?”

## II

**A.** I understand that the active side of our life consists of unwholesome states of mind or akusala cittas and wholesome states of mind or kusala cittas. Akusala cittas can perform unwholesome deeds and kusala cittas can perform wholesome deeds. All through one’s life one accumulates both unwholesomeness and wholesomeness.

There are other cittas which are the result of one’s deeds: those are called vipákacittas. The result of unwholesome deeds or akusala kamma is akusala vipáka; the result of wholesome deeds or kusala kamma is kusala vipáka. Vipáka is the passive side of our life; we undergo vipáka. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling through body contact are vipáka.



I can understand this because sense-impressions are impressions which one undergoes. The cittas which think about those impressions, and which like or dislike them, are no longer result or vipáka; they are cause. They are akusala or kusala cittas. But I still doubt every time I see there is the result of akusala or kusala kamma I did in the past. Can you prove this to me?

**B.** This cannot be proven in theory. One can know the truth only through direct experience.

There are three kinds of wisdom. The first kind stems from thinking about the realities of life such as impermanence, old age, sickness and death. The second kind is understanding developed through the study of the Buddhist teachings. The third kind of wisdom is the direct experience of the truth.

The first and the second kind of wisdom are necessary, but they are still theoretical understanding; they are not yet the realization of the truth. If one accepts the Buddha's teachings because they seem to be reasonable, or if one accepts them on the authority of the Buddha, one will not have the clear understanding that stems from the direct experience of the truth. Only this kind of understanding can eliminate all doubts.

We read in the *Gradual Sayings* (Aḍguttara Nikáya, Book of the Threes, Ch. VII, §65, Those of Kesaputta) that when the Buddha was staying in Kesaputta the Kálámas came to see him. They had heard different views expounded by different people and had doubts as to who was speaking the truth and who falsehood. The Buddha said:

"Now look you, Kálámas. Be not misled by report or tradition or hearsay. Be not misled by proficiency in the collections, nor by mere logic or inference, nor after considering reasons, nor after reflection on and approval of some theory, nor because it fits becoming, nor out of respect for a recluse (who holds it). But, Kálámas, when you know for yourselves: These things are unprofitable, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the intelligent; these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to loss and sorrow—then indeed do you reject them, Kálámas."

The Buddha then asked the Kálámas whether greed, malice and delusion, and the evil deeds they inspire, lead to a man's profit or to his loss. The Kálámas answered that they lead to his loss. The Buddha then repeated that when they know for themselves that these things are unprofitable and lead to sorrow, they should reject them. Thereupon the Buddha spoke about non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion, and the abstinence from evil deeds these inspire. He said that when the Kálámas know for themselves that these things are profitable and conduce to happiness, they should undertake them.

We have to find out the truth ourselves, by experiencing it in daily life. In being aware of all realities of daily life one develops the third kind of wisdom.

In the practice of *vipassaná* or "insight," we learn to understand all realities of daily life, in being aware of them at the moment they occur. We learn to be aware of what happens at the present moment. We will

know what seeing, hearing, thinking, etc., really are if we are aware of those realities at the moment they occur. Only the present moment can give us the truth, not the past or the future. We cannot experience now the cittas we had in the past; we cannot experience the cittas which performed akusala kamma or kusala kamma in the past. We can only experience cittas of the present moment. We can experience that some cittas are akusala, some are kusala, and some are neither, that they have different functions. If we learn to experience the cittas of the present moment, we will gradually be able to see realities more clearly. If we realize enlightenment, or the experience of Nibbána, all doubts about realities will be eliminated. Then we will see the truth.

**A.** I would like to be enlightened in order to know the truth.

**B.** If you only have wishful thinking about Nibbána, you will never attain it. The path leading to Nibbána is knowing the present moment. Only if we know the present moment will we be able to eliminate ignorance about realities and the idea of “self” to which we are still clinging. We should not cling to a result which might take place in the future. We should instead try to know the present moment.

**A.** Is it not possible for me to know whether seeing and hearing at this moment is akusala vipáka or kusala vipáka?

**B.** Sometimes you can find out. For instance, hearing is kusala vipáka when the sound is produced by kusala cittas. Someone who speaks to you with compassion, produces the sound with kusala cittas. When you hear that sound there is kusala vipáka. Often it is not possible for us to know whether there is akusala vipáka or kusala vipáka. Moreover, it is not of great use to know this, because we cannot do anything about our own vipáka.

It is enough to know that akusala kamma brings about akusala vipáka, and that kusala kamma brings about kusala vipáka. It is important to remember that vipáka is caused by our own kamma, that the cause of vipáka is within ourselves and not outside ourselves.

The *Gradual Sayings* (Aḍguttara Nikáya, Book of the Threes, Ch. IV, §35, The Lord of Death) tells of a man who had been negligent in the doing of good deeds, and was brought before Yama, the lord of death. Yama said to him:

“My good man, it was through negligence that you did not act nobly in deed, word and thought. Verily they shall do unto you in accordance with your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother, father, brother, sister, friends and comrades: not by kinsmen, devas, recluses and brahmins. By yourself alone was it done. It is just you that will experience the fruit thereof.”

It is not important to know exactly at which moment there is akusala vipáka or kusala vipáka. However, it is most important to know exactly at which moments there is vipáka and at which moments we perform akusala kamma or kusala kamma. The moments we perform akusala kamma and kusala kamma will condition our future.

**A.** In order to know how and when one accumulates akusala kamma and kusala kamma one should know more about the cittas which perform kamma. I notice that the Buddha spoke about cittas in order to help people to have more understanding about their life and in order to encourage them to perform kusala kamma. Therefore I think that all through one's life one should develop a clear understanding about cittas. Could you give me a definition of a citta ?

**B.** It is not possible to give a definition that will explain to you what a citta is. You should experience cittas yourself in order to know them. There are so many different types of cittas at different moments that it is impossible to give one definition for all of them. The most general definition is: it knows something. Citta is not like materiality, which does not know anything. The citta which sees knows colour, a citta which hears knows sound, a citta which thinks knows many different objects.

**A.** Why are seeing and hearing cittas? You explained before that seeing is not thinking, but only the experience of colour through eye-sense and that hearing is the experience of sound through ear-sense. Are those not merely physical processes instead of cittas which know something?

**B.** Eye-sense and ear-sense in themselves are not cittas, they are physical organs. But eye-sense and ear-sense are conditions for the arising of cittas. There is citta whenever an object, as for example colour or sound, is experienced. We should try to be aware of the citta of the present moment if we want to know what citta is. We should be aware of the seeing or the hearing that occurs right now.

Many people who are brought up in the West do not understand why it is not possible to give a clear definition of citta, and of everything the Buddha taught. They want to prove things in theory. This is not the way to find the truth. One should experience the truth in order to know it.

**A.** I still think of citta as a mind which directs seeing, hearing, thinking, etc. How can I find out that there is not a "self" which directs everything?

**B.** We can only find this out by being aware of different cittas. Thus we will experience that we cannot direct our thoughts. We are absent-minded when we do not want to be so, many odd thoughts arise, in spite of ourselves. Where is the self that can direct our thoughts?

There is one citta at a time; it arises and falls away completely, to be followed by the next citta, which is no longer the same. There is no single citta which stays. For example, seeing-consciousness is one citta, but hearing-consciousness is another citta.

**A.** I don't understand why those functions are performed by different cittas. Why can't there be one citta which stays and performs different functions, and why is it not possible that different functions are performed at the same time? I can see, hear and think at the same time.

**B.** Seeing occurs if colour contacts the eye-sense. Recognizing it or thinking about it occurs afterwards. Seeing is not performed by the same cittas as thinking about what one saw; seeing has different conditions. Hearing has again different

conditions. Thinking about what one heard has conditions that are different from the conditions for hearing-consciousness.

You would not be able to notice that seeing and hearing are different if those functions were performed by one single citta at the same time. In that case you would only receive one impression instead of several impressions. We experience seeing and hearing as different impressions, even when they seem to occur at the same time. They have different places of origin and different objects, and they occur at different moments, though the moments can be so close that they seem to be one. Thinking about what one just saw occurs after the seeing-consciousness, thinking about what one just heard occurs after the hearing-consciousness. Seeing-consciousness occurs at a moment different from the moment the hearing-consciousness occurs. Therefore thinking about what one saw cannot arise at the same moment as thinking about what one heard. Thinking is done by many different cittas which succeed one another.

When we have learned to be more keenly aware of the citta which arises at the present moment, we will notice that seeing and hearing arise alternately, at different moments. We will notice that there isn't one long moment of thinking, but different moments of thinking.

We will notice that thinking is very often interrupted by moments of seeing and hearing, and these again are conditions for new thoughts. We will find out how much our thoughts depend on different experiences of the past, on unwholesome and wholesome tendencies we have accumulated, on the objects we see and hear and on many other conditions.

**A.** You said that all cittas are beyond control, that they are "anattá." Akusala cittas and kusala cittas are conditioned by one's accumulations. It is not in anyone's power that they arise. You said that vipákacittas are "anattá" as well.

Sometimes it seems that I can have power over vipáka, that it is in my power to have kusala vipáka through the ear. Whenever I wish to hear a pleasant sound, I can put a record of classical music on my record-player.

**B.** You put the record on because you know the conditions for the pleasant sound. Everything happens when there are the right conditions for it. It is impossible for anything to happen without conditions. When there is fire we use water to extinguish it. We cannot order the fire to be extinguished. We don't have to tell the water to extinguish the fire; the water has the characteristic that it can extinguish the fire. Without the right conditions we would not be able to do anything.

With regard to the beautiful music which you can play, there have to be many different conditions for this pleasant sound. And even when there is this pleasant sound, you have no power over the kusala vipákacittas. If you really could direct them, you could make them arise at any moment, even without the record-player. We should remember that music is not vipáka, only the cittas which experience the pleasant object through the ear are vipáka. Do we really have power over these cittas?

There are many conditions which have to cooperate so that the vipáka can arise. There has to be ear-sense. Did you create your own ear-sense? You received ear-sense before you were born; this also is a result for which you did not ask. Moreover, do you think that you can have kusala vipáka as long as you wish and whenever you wish? When you have developed a keener awareness you will notice that the kusala vipáka and the other types of cittas arise alternately.

The vipákacittas are followed by cittas which are no longer vipáka, for example, the cittas which arise when you like the music which you hear and when you think about it. Or there might be cittas which think about many different things, perhaps with aversion or with worry. Or there might be thoughts of kindness towards other people.

The kusala vipáka will not only be interrupted by akusala cittas and kusala cittas, but by akusala vipáka as well. There is akusala vipáka when there are loud noises outside, when the telephone rings loudly, or when one feels the sting of a mosquito. There cannot be kusala vipáka at the moment there is an akusala citta, a kusala citta or akusala vipáka.

If you could make kusala vipáka arise at will, you could have it without interruption, whenever you wish. This is not possible. Moreover, if it were not the right time for you to have any kusala vipáka, you would not be able to receive a pleasant object: the record-player would be broken, or something else would happen so that you could not have kusala vipáka.

**A.** Is it not by accident that the record-player would be broken?

**B.** The Buddha taught that everything happens because of conditions. There are no accidents. You will understand reality more deeply if you think of cittas, and if you do not think of conventional terms like record-player, this person or that person. Vipáka are the cittas, not the record-player or the sound in itself. The record-player is only one of the many conditions for vipáka. The real cause of vipáka is not an accident, or a cause outside ourselves; the real cause is within ourselves.

Can you find another cause for akusala vipáka but your own akusala kamma, and for kusala vipáka but your own kusala kamma?

**A.** That is right, I can find no other cause. However, I still do not understand how akusala cittas which performed akusala kamma in the past and kusala cittas which performed kusala kamma in the past can produce vipáka later on.

**B.** It is not possible to understand how the events of our life are interrelated without studying cittas in detail and without knowing and experiencing the cittas which arise at the present moment. When one can experience what the cittas of the present moment really are, one will be able to understand more about the past.

When the Buddha became enlightened he saw how everything that happens in life has many conditions and he saw how things that happen depend on one another.

The teaching about the conditional arising of phenomena, the dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), is difficult to grasp. We read in the *Kindred Sayings* (Saī yutta Nikāya I, Sagáthá Vagga, Ch. VI, The Brahmá Suttas, Ch. 1, §1, The Entreaty) that the Buddha, when he was staying at Uruvela after he had just attained enlightenment, was thinking that the Dhamma he had penetrated was deep, difficult to understand:

“And for a race devoting itself to the things to which it clings, devoted thereto, delighting therein, this were a matter hard to perceive, to wit, that this is conditioned by that—that all that happens is by way of cause.”

At first the Buddha had no inclination to teach Dhamma, as he knew that a teaching which is “against the stream of common thought” would not be accepted by people who delight in clinging. The sutta continues:

“This that through many toils I’ve won,  
Enough! Why should I make it known?  
By folk with lust and hate consumed  
Not this a Dhamma that can be grasped.  
Against the stream (of common thought),  
Deep, subtle, fine, and hard to see,  
Unseen it will be by passion’s slaves,  
Cloaked in the murk (of ignorance).”

However, the Buddha decided out of compassion to teach Dhamma, for the sake of those who would be able to understand it. Do you still have doubts about the accumulation of deeds?

**A.** Is the deed you see a mental phenomenon or a physical phenomenon?

**B.** You can only see the action of the body, but the action is actually performed by citta. We can never see the citta, but we can find out what the citta is like when the body moves in doing deeds. With regard to your question how deeds done in the past can produce a result later on, the answer is that deeds are performed by citta. They are mentality and thus they can be accumulated. All experiences and deeds of the past are accumulated in each citta, which falls away and conditions the next citta. Whenever there is the right condition the kamma that is accumulated and carried on from one moment of citta to the next can produce vipáka.

### III

**A.** I would like to know if we only receive vipáka in this life, or is there vipáka in a future life as well?

**B.** According to the Buddhist teachings one receives the results of one’s deeds in future lives as well. We read in the *Kindred Sayings* (Saī yutta Nikāya I, Ch. III, Kosala, 2, §10, Childless 2) that when the Buddha was staying at Sávatthi, King Pasenadi came to see him. A rich man who had lived as a miser had just died. He

had performed both good deeds and bad deeds and he therefore had to receive both kusala vipáka and akusala vipáka, which he experienced during different lifespans. He had given alms to a "Silent Buddha" of a former period, but afterwards he regretted his gift. As a result of his good deed of almsgiving to a Silent Buddha he was reborn seven times in heaven, where he could enjoy pleasant vipáka. After his existences in heaven he was reborn as a human being, which is kusala vipáka as well. He was born from rich parents, but his accumulation of stinginess prevented him from enjoying the pleasant things of life. Because he regretted his gift to the Silent Buddha, as a result he did not utilize his riches for himself or for others.

After his existence as a human being he was again bound for a different rebirth. He had committed akusala kamma of a heavy kind and this akusala kamma would bring akusala vipáka of a heavy kind. He had killed the only son of his brother because he wanted to get his brother's fortune. This very heavy kamma caused him to be reborn in hell where he would stay for many hundred thousands of years. The sutta points out how one can receive different results in different existences.

**A.** Is the existence of heavens and hells not mere mythology?

**B.** People have different accumulated inclinations which make them perform different kamma. No person acts in the same way as another. Each act brings its own result, either in this life or in the following existences. To be reborn in a heavenly plane or in the human plane is the result of a wholesome deed, to be reborn in a sorrowful plane is the result of an unwholesome deed. Heaven and hell are conventional terms which are used to explain realities. They explain the nature of the vipáka which is caused by kamma. Since both akusala kamma and kusala kamma have different degrees, akusala vipáka and kusala vipáka must have different degrees as well.

Names are given to different heavenly planes and different sorrowful planes in order to point out the different degrees of akusala vipáka and kusala vipáka. *Deva*, which means "radiant being," is a name given to those who are born in heavenly planes. In the *Anuruddha Sutta (Middle Length Sayings III, No. 127)* Anuruddha spoke about different degrees of skill in meditation which bring their results accordingly. A monk who was not advanced was reborn as a deva "with tarnished light." Those who were more advanced in meditation were reborn as devas with a greater radiance. There are different devas with different degrees of brightness.

**A.** I find it difficult to believe in devas and in different planes of existence.

**B.** You do not experience devas and different planes of existence right at this moment. But is it right to reject what you cannot experience yet? If one has right understanding of the citta of the present moment one will be able to understand more about the past and about the future.

Rebirth-consciousness can arise in any plane of existence. When the right conditions are present a good or a bad deed which has been accumulated can produce a result, it can produce rebirth-consciousness in the appropriate plane.

**A.** What is the first vipāka in this life?

**B.** There has to be a citta at the very first moment of life. Without a citta we cannot have life. A dead body has no citta, it is not alive. What type of citta would be the first citta? Would it be an akusala citta or a kusala citta, thus a type of citta which could bring a result? Or would it be another type of citta, for example, a citta which is not a cause but a result, a vipākacitta?

**A.** I think it must be a vipākacitta. To be born is a result; nobody asks to be born. Why are people born with such different characters and in such different situations? Are the parents the only cause of birth and the only cause of the character of a child?

**B.** Parents are only one of the conditions for the body of a child, but they are not the only condition.

**A.** What about the character of a child? Are there not certain tendencies in a child's character he inherits from his parents? Is this not proved by science?

**B.** The character of a child cannot be explained by the character of the parents. Brothers and sisters and even twins can be very different. One child likes to study, another child is lazy; one child is by nature cheerful, another depressed. Parents may have influence on a child's character after its birth in that education, a cultural pattern or a family tradition in which a child is brought up will be conditions for cittas to arise. But a child does not inherit its character from its parents. The differentiations in character are caused by accumulations of experiences from previous existences as well.

**A.** Are parents not the real cause of birth?

**B.** Parents are only one of the conditions for birth; kamma is the real cause of birth. A deed, done in the past, brings its result when it is the right time: it can produce the vipākacitta which is rebirth-consciousness. We read in the "Discourse on the Lesser Analysis of Deeds" (*Middle Length Sayings III*, No. 135) that, when the Buddha was staying near Sāvattī in the Jeta Grove, Subhā came to see him and said:

"Now, good Gotama, what is the cause, what the reason that lowness and excellence are to be seen among human beings while they are in human form? For, good Gotama, human beings of short life-span are to be seen and those of long life-span; those of many and those of few illnesses; those who are ugly, those who are beautiful; those who are of little account, those who are of great account; those who are poor, those who are wealthy; those who are of lowly families, those of high families; those who are weak in wisdom, those who are full of wisdom. Now what, good Gotama, is the cause, what the reason that lowness and excellence are to be seen among human beings while they are in human form?"

"Deeds are one's own, brahman youth, beings are heirs to deeds, deeds are matrix, deeds are kin, deeds are arbiters. Deed divides beings, that is to say by lowness and excellence."

**A.** Is rebirth in a human plane the same as reincarnation?



**B.** If there were reincarnation, a soul or “self” would continue to exist and it would take on another body in the next life. However, there is no soul or “self.” There are cittas which succeed one another from birth to death, from this life to the next life. One citta has completely fallen away when the next citta arises. There can be only one citta at a time, and there is no citta which lasts.

Cittas arise and fall away completely, succeeding one another. Death is the conventional word for the end of one’s lifespan on a plane of existence, but actually there is birth and death at each moment of one’s life, when a citta arises and falls away. There isn’t any citta one can take for a soul or “self.” Since there is no soul or “self” in this life, how could there be a soul or “self” which is reborn in the next life? The last citta of this life is the dying-consciousness. The dying-consciousness arises and falls away, and it is succeeded by the rebirth-consciousness of the next life. The rebirth-consciousness is conditioned by the previous citta, the dying-consciousness, but it is not the same citta.

**A.** I can see tendencies in people’s character which seem to be the same all through their lives. Moreover, there is rebirth in the next life. Therefore there must be continuity in life. However, I do not understand how there can be continuity if each citta completely falls away before the next citta arises.

**B.** There is continuity because each citta conditions the next citta and thus accumulated tendencies can be carried on from one moment to the next moment. All accumulations of past existences and of the present life condition future existences.

When people asked the Buddha whether it is the same person who is reborn or another person, the Buddha answered that it is neither the same person nor another person. There is nobody who stays the same, not even in this life, because there is no “self.” On the other hand, it is not another person who is reborn, because there is continuity. Former existences condition this life, and this life also conditions the following lives.

**A.** What is the last vipāka in this life?

**B.** The dying-consciousness (*cuti-citta*) is the last vipāka in this life.

Since there are many deeds which have not yet produced a result, one of the deeds will produce rebirth-consciousness after death. As long as there is kamma there will be vipāka, continuing on and on. There will be future lives, so that the results of one’s deeds can be received.

When the dying-consciousness falls away, a deed of the past, or kamma, immediately produces a vipākacitta: the rebirth-consciousness of the next life. When the dying-consciousness has fallen away, the rebirth-consciousness follows upon it immediately, and thus all that has been accumulated is carried on from the past into the next life.

**A.** What causes the rebirth-consciousness of the next life?

**B.** Everyone has performed akusala kamma and kusala kamma. Each deed brings its own result. The vipākacitta which is the rebirth-consciousness can therefore only be the result of one deed, of akusala kamma or of kusala kamma.

**A.** Is birth in the human plane the result of kusala kamma?

**B.** Birth in the human plane is always the result of kusala kamma. Akusala vipáka which arises afterwards in life is the result of kamma that is different from the good deed that produced the rebirth-consciousness. After birth in the human plane there can be many moments of akusala vipáka, every time one experiences an unpleasant object through one of the five senses. Those moments are the result of other unwholesome deeds performed in the past.

If the rebirth-consciousness is akusala vipáka one cannot be born as a human being. The rebirth has to take place in another plane of existence, such as the animal world or one of the woeful planes like the hells or the ghost realm.

**A.** Can a human being be reborn as an animal?

**B.** Some people behave like animals, how could they be reborn as human beings? Everyone will receive the result of his deeds accordingly.

**A.** Is it due to one's kamma that one is born in favourable circumstances, for instance, in a royal family or in a rich family?

**B.** Yes, this is due to a wholesome deed performed in the past.

**A.** I notice that even people who are born in the same circumstances, as for example in rich families, are very different. Some rich people are generous, others are stingy. How could this be explained?

**B.** People are different because they have different accumulated inclinations and tendencies which cause them to behave in different ways. We read in the sutta that I quoted above about the person who was born from rich parents, but who could not enjoy the pleasant things of life because of his accumulated stinginess. Although he had the opportunity to let other people share in his fortune he did not want to do this. Other people again who have received pleasant things in life grasp every opportunity to give things away to others. The different inclinations people have accumulated condition them to do unwholesome deeds which will bring them unpleasant results, or to do wholesome deeds which will bring them pleasant results. People take different attitudes towards vipáka. The attitude one takes towards vipáka is more important than vipáka itself, because one's attitude conditions one's life in the future.

**A.** Can kusala vipáka be a condition for happiness?

**B.** The things which are pleasant for the five senses cannot guarantee true and lasting happiness. Rich people who have everything that is pleasant for the five senses can still be very unhappy. For instance, when one is sitting in a beautiful garden with sweet-smelling flowers and singing birds, one can still be very depressed. At the moment one is depressed the cittas are akusala cittas. One cannot always be happy with pleasant things around. Unhappiness and happiness depend on one's accumulations of unwholesomeness and wholesomeness.

If one feels unhappy it is due to one's own defilements. Unpleasant feeling is conditioned by attachment. If one does not get what one wants one feels unhappy. If one has no attachment at all there would be no unhappiness. One can be perfectly happy if one is purified from defilements.

We read in the *Gradual Sayings* (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of the Threes, Ch. IV, §34, Of Alavi) that when the Buddha was staying near Alavi, Hatthaka was wandering there and saw the Buddha seated on the ground strewn with leaves. He asked the Buddha:

“Pray, sir, does the Exalted One live happily?”

“Yes, my lad, I live happily. I am one of those who live happily in the world.”

“But, sir, the winter nights are cold, the dark half of the month is the time of snowfall. Hard is the ground trampled by the hoofs of cattle, thin the carpet of fallen leaves, sparse are the leaves of the tree, cold are the saffron robes and cold the gale of wind that blows.”

Then said the Exalted One: “Still, my lad, I live happily. Of those who live happily in the world I am one.”

The Buddha then pointed out that a man who had a house with a gabled roof, well-fitting doors, “a long-fleeced woollen rug, a beautiful bed, four beautiful wives,” could have lust, malice and delusion. Defilements will cause “torments of body or of mind,” defilements are the cause of unhappiness. The Buddha had eradicated all defilements completely, and thus it was not important to him whether there was akusala vipāka or kusala vipāka. He could live perfectly happy no matter what the circumstance were.

**A.** How can we purify ourselves so that we take the right attitude towards vipāka?

**B.** We can purify ourselves only if we know the cause of defilements. The cause of all defilements is ignorance. Out of ignorance we believe in a “self,” we cling to a “self.” Ignorance conditions attachment and aversion or anger, it causes all unhappiness in the world. Ignorance can only be cured by wisdom. In *vipassanā* or “insight meditation” the wisdom is developed which can gradually eradicate the belief in a “self.” Only when this wrong belief has been completely eradicated can all defilements be eradicated stage by stage.

The Arahāt, the perfected one who has attained the final stage of enlightenment, has eradicated all defilements. He has no more attachment, ill-will or ignorance. As he has no defilements he is perfectly happy. After he has passed away there will be no more vipāka for him in a future life, there will be no more rebirth for him.

In the “Discourse on the Analysis of the Elements” (*Middle Length Sayings III*, No. 140) we read that the Buddha taught Dhamma to Pukkusāti when they were staying in the potter’s dwelling. The Buddha taught him about physical phenomena and mental phenomena and he taught the mental development which leads to Arahātship. The Arahāt does not cling to life. In order to describe the state of the Arahāt the Buddha used the simile of the oil-lamp which burns on account of oil and wick but which goes out if the oil and wick come to an end. It is the same with the conditions for rebirth. So long as there are defilements there will be fuel for rebirth. When defilements have been eradicated completely

there is no more fuel left for rebirth. The sutta goes on to say that the highest wisdom of those who have attained enlightenment is the “knowledge of the complete destruction of anguish.”

The knowledge or wisdom developed in *vipassanā* leads to Nibbána, which is the end of all sorrow.

## KAMMA AND FREEDOM

### Francis Story

The problems encountered in relating the Buddhist doctrine of kamma to the issue of causality and freedom are largely ones of meaning. They particularly revolve around the meaning of such concepts as causation, conditioning, and determination. Buddhism does not deny that man is largely conditioned by his circumstances and environment. But the conditioning is not absolute. It may almost amount to determinism, and the margin of free-will may be very slight indeed, but it is always present. In Buddhist ethico-psychology great importance is given to the thought-moment of choice—that moment of conscious response to a situation in which we are free to act in a number of different ways. Now it may happen that the predominant propensities of the past impel almost irresistibly towards a particular course of action; but it must be remembered that our past habits of thought and deed are never all of the same kind. Human character is very fluid, and in the critical moment it is never absolutely certain what kind of urge will come uppermost. The whole point of any character development is to systematically cultivate the good urges and eradicate the bad ones.

Then again, some precise definition of the specifically Buddhist terms is necessary, in order to grasp what is meant by kamma. Kamma is simply action, a deed. Its result is called *vipāka*, and the two should not be confused or telescoped into a single concept under the same word, as is done by Theosophists and some popular writers on Hinduism. But the two terms considered together, as *kamma-vipāka*, "action-and-result," do denote a moral principle in the universal order. Thus a cruel action, because its genesis is mental (*cetanā*), will in course of time ripen as a painful experience of a similar kind for the same person who did the cruel deed—perhaps in this life (the murderer who is hanged) or in a subsequent one.

As to whether it is the *same* person who experiences the result, that can neither be absolutely affirmed nor absolutely denied; its answer lies in the concept of personality and identity held by Buddhism, which can be found in writings dealing with rebirth. The sole identity that can be claimed for a personality, even through the course of one lifetime, is the world-line represented by his kammic continuity. While an individual at any given moment is simply the end-result of what his previous actions have made him, he is also projecting himself into the future by his present acts, and it is in these that his freedom of choice lies. He is no more determined absolutely by his own past than he is by his environment or his heredity. Buddhism teaches the principle of multiple causality: that is to say, every phenomenon is the product of more than one cause. And the will, although it is greatly modified by these causes, is itself free to choose between a number of

different causes operating upon it from the past. We are free to select the causes that will determine our action in the moment of choice. That is why conflicts arise which are sometimes so difficult and painful to resolve. There is always the existential anguish in freedom of choice.

At any time we can see how this works out in concrete instances. A man may have been reared in an atmosphere of squalor, want and anxiety, in which everything pushes towards crime. But in the moment of deciding whether or not he shall commit a crime, other, perhaps latent, causes are at work within him. He may have been taught earlier that crime is morally wrong, or some good influence from a previous life may be stirring within him, or he may have realized, quite simply, that "crime does not pay." He may be deterred by some memory of a painful result, imprisonment or flogging, from the present life. Whether these deterrent factors are noble or ignoble, they are always present, and he has to make a choice between the causes that will determine his present action. And very often he will choose not to commit the crime. If this were not so, the moral improvement of individuals and society would not be possible.

We might find it difficult to see that an individual born in an environment of destitution, deprivation, ignorance, want and hunger can be said to be born in such circumstances due to past evil deeds. But in fact what we "cannot see" is precisely what the Buddha taught. All attempts to reconstruct the Buddha's thought, leaving out rebirth, are doomed to failure. We might be able to have rebirth without the moral order represented by kamma-vipāka—in which case it would only be an infinite extension of the amoral, meaningless life-process envisaged by the epiphenomenalists—but we cannot have a moral order without rebirth.

Why so? Simply because not all murderers get hanged! (And it may be added, neither do they get punished who by their indifference, selfishness and brutality help to make others criminals. At least, not in the same life. Too often they prosper—but the principle of kamma-vipāka is never cheated. At some time they have to pay for it.)

The world is so dominated today by the concepts of materialism that some Buddhist Kierkegaard ought to write another *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to clear up the muddle. Not anti-scientific, be it understood, but simply *unscientific*. Not bounded by the dogmas of nineteenth century Darwin-Marx-Huxley materialism, which today is taken for science. We should be ready to accept what is true in this materialism, without fearing to go beyond it.

And what *is* true in that concept of man? That he is conditioned by his environment? Certainly: nobody in their senses would deny it, and the Buddha did not. But no man is *entirely* conditioned by anything, not even by his own accumulated habits of thinking and acting. No character is irrevocably fixed—except that of an Ariya (saint), whose destiny is assured. (It is necessary to make this exception, although here it is something of a digression.) The ordinary man is, as I have said, a fluid process; his identity from one moment to another is

nothing but the world-line of his continuity as a process in time. Consequently he is always acting “out of character.” Have not great and noble men arisen from the most sordid environments of want and deprivation? And conversely, have not criminals and degenerates appeared where all the social, economic and even hereditary factors were the most favourable that the world has to offer?

Let it be granted that *in the majority of cases* men are what their circumstances make them. Buddhism teaches that it is they who have created these circumstances by their past kamma. But their present kamma, which moulds their future, is in their own hands. However slight the margin of free-will, it is always there. Without it, life would be altogether without meaning, and it would be absurd to try to seek any meaning. In fact, it would be impossible, and we ourselves would not be puzzling over Buddhism! The mere fact that these questions have presented themselves to us shows that we are not automatons, not just cybernetic mechanisms, bound to run like a street car or a train along set lines, but free-swimming organisms—thinking, willing personalities, not plants.

Kamma is not solely responsible for every phenomenon and every experience. The physical aspects of life also have their share in the totality. Still, in the last resort, the mind and will are able to prevail over everything else. Not always by a single act of will, but by repeated acts of the same nature, having the same final goal. Life without suffering is impossible, because of the conditions, physical and psychological, that our desire for personalized life imposes as the condition of our being-in-the-world. But the mind can develop itself—can stop creating and imposing those conditions.

We must distinguish clearly between what we have to submit to—the circumstances of the present which we have made for ourselves by our past actions—and the future we can make for ourselves by our present thinking and doing. That distinction is most important: it represents the whole difference between absolute determinism and free-will. The root cause of phenomenal existence is the double one of ignorance conjoined with craving, each being dependent upon the other. When these two joint conditions are removed, all other conditioning comes to an end. That is the whole point of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the formula of conditioned arising—that it can be reversed by repeated acts of decision. Man can always swim against the current; if he could not, his evolution would be impossible.

It should not be thought that, as a corollary of the above, Buddhism *approves* of poverty, hunger and want. Buddhism approves of nothing in the world except the striving to gain release from it. Its view of the world is realistic. Poverty, hunger and ignorance exist in the world, and they will continue to do so as long as people, by their own infliction of these evils on others in previous lives, cause themselves to be born in such circumstances. We should try to diminish these evils, but it can never be done by purely physical means. The effort is good merely because it represents a good volition which will bear fruit in the future rather than because of any likelihood of its succeeding completely. If all the world acted according to Buddhist principles of unselfishness, generosity and

compassion, there would be no more deprivation, no more slums, no more oppression or exploitation of man by man. Yet still, bad kamma of the past would have to produce its vipáka by some other means. We can be certain that if all the wealth in the world were to be equally distributed one morning, there would be the rich and the poor again by evening. It is a fundamental fact of nature—which hates equality more than it hates a vacuum. There will be equality when all the past and present thoughts and deeds of all men are equal—and when can that be?

The economic structure of society accurately reflects man's muddled, illogical and selfish nature. It will be changed only when that nature is completely transformed. All improvement must come from within, for "mind creates all phenomena" out of the raw material of the universe. The world-stuff is neither good nor bad; it is man's thinking which makes heaven or hell out of it.

The Buddha said: "In this fathom-long body, equipped with sense organs and faculties, O bhikkhus, I declare to you is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation thereof." Philosophically speaking, these words are the most profound, most comprehensive and most illuminating ever uttered. We create the world literally. The world, in turn, conditions us, but it does not create us. That is the great difference. Since we, each of us individually, are the creators of our world, even the conditioning it imposes is ultimately traceable to ourselves.



## COLLECTIVE KARMA

### Francis Story

From time to time the question of whether there is “collective karma,” or not, keeps coming up. Is it possible for groups of people—whole nations or generations—to share the same karma? Or is karma a strictly individual and personal thing?

The Buddha treated karma, everywhere and always, as a personal inheritance:

Owners of their karma are the beings, heirs of their karma, their karma is the womb from which they are born, their karma is their friend, their refuge. Whatever karma they perform, good or bad, thereof they will be the heirs.

Majjhima Nikáya, 135

None can suffer from the karma of another, nor profit by the karma of another. But it may happen that large groups of people, through being guilty of the same misdeeds—as for instance racial persecutions, mass killings and tortures, etc.—come to make for themselves almost identical karma. Can this be called “collective karma”?

In a sense it can; yet the term is deceptive. The so-called “collective karma” is made up of individual karmas, each of which must have its individual fruition. No man necessarily shares the karma of others of his national or other group simply by reason of being one of that group. He is responsible only for his own particular share in its deeds. If he does not share them, his own karma will be quite different.

Most of the confusion of thought arises from the misuse of the phrase “the law of karma”; and the spelling of the word betrays the source from which the idea of a “law” of “collective karma” comes. The Pali word is *kamma*.

Kamma simply means “action”—a deed performed by bodily action, speech or thought. Its result is *vipáka*. There is a law of causality, and it is because of this law that kamma, the cause, is invariably followed by *vipáka*, the result. “The law of karma” has a mystical sound, and suggests a kind of fatalism. People who say, resignedly, “It is my karma,” are using the word wrongly. They should say, “It is my *vipáka*.” This would remind them that their kamma, the really important thing, is under their control: they are fashioning it from moment to moment. As their kamma is now, so will their *vipáka* be in the future. We should avoid confusing the cause with the effect.

Kamma is individual because it is *cetaná*—volitional action of an individual mind.

Volition, O bhikkhus, is what I call action; for through volition one performs actions of body, speech and mind.

To what extent can one person dominate and direct the volition of another? Sometimes to a very dangerous extent: but only if there is a surrender of the will to the external influence. That itself involves an act of *cetaná*, a voluntary submission to another person's will. Such a submission should only be made to a spiritual guru; and even then the moral sense should not be suspended. The case of Aḡulimála is a warning against a too unquestioning submission to the dictates of an unworthy teacher. Aḡulimála was fortunate later in encountering the greatest Teacher of all, who saved him. People of today have to protect themselves against spiritual quacks, and it is not always easy to discriminate.

Apart from this, there is the question of indoctrination, a very great problem in the modern world. We have seen the phenomenon, unknown before in history, of whole nations behaving under a compulsion imposed on them from without. We have seen the development of techniques for manufacturing a mass-mind capable of incredible atrocities. Propaganda, brain-washing, mass-suggestion leading to mass-hysteria—all these are features of the new technique of power. Can these produce "collective karma"? The answer is that they can certainly produce individual kammās that are practically identical; but they still remain personal kammās, even though they are instigated. No matter to what influences a man is subjected, his reaction to them together with its *vipáka* remains his own.

But supposing (not, alas, a very far-fetched supposition these days) a man is forced on pain of torture or death to participate in mass atrocities?

To begin with, it must be his past kamma that has placed him in such a terrible position; it is his *vipáka* from some previous unwholesome kamma. He has two alternatives before him: either he can submit, and for the sake of preserving his life continue to make more bad kamma for himself—or he can refuse and let his enemies do what they like. If he chooses the latter course he will probably exhaust the bad *vipáka* in suffering, in his current life. His act of self-abnegation, his refusal to participate in deeds of violence and cruelty, will be a positive good. He will have perfected his *sila*, his moral purity.

In either case his kamma, be it wholesome or unwholesome, will be his own.

But what about the sharing of merits? This again depends upon *cetaná*, an act of will. When a good deed is performed and the merit is shared with others, there must be the will to share it on their part. By approving the deed they produce a similar good *cetaná* in themselves. Their attention must be drawn to the deed, so that they can rejoice in it and generate a good mental impulse connected with *dána* (liberality), or whatever the meritorious deed may be. Again, the "sharer" makes his own kamma. We cannot share demerit, because nobody would be willing to share it with us!

The troubles we inherit from our parents' mistakes cannot be said to be sufferings resulting from their kamma. A child that is born in a country devastated by war, if it suffers it is suffering because the situation in which it has been born makes it possible for the child's own bad kamma to fructify. There

must always be more than one cause to produce a given result. Another child, in precisely the same situation, and whose parents were even more directly responsible for the mistakes that led to the country's ruin, may be materially in a much better position. Its parents may have made a fortune in the war that brought others to destitution. This child, too, is experiencing the results of its own kamma, not that of the parents. They will have to suffer for theirs.

There are different kinds of causes, and different kinds of effects. Kamma is one kind of cause; vipāka is its corresponding effect. The important thing is to distinguish clearly between the individual cause and effect that carries over from one life to another—the personal kamma and vipāka—and other chains of cause and effect that operate through circumstances in the external world.

## REFLECTIONS ON KAMMA AND ITS FRUIT

Nyanaponika Thera

I

Most writings on the doctrine of kamma emphasize the strict lawfulness governing kammic action, ensuring a close correspondence between our deeds and their fruits. While this emphasis is perfectly in place, there is another side to the working of kamma—a side rarely noted, but highly important. This is the modifiability of kamma, the fact that the lawfulness which governs kamma does not operate with mechanical rigidity but allows for a considerably wide range of modifications in the ripening of the fruit. This fact is already implied by those types of kamma called “supportive,” “counteractive” and “destructive,” and by a classification referring to the different ripening times of the result. But the teaching that kamma-results are modifiable is so important that it deserves to be stressed and discussed as an explicit theme in itself.

If kammic action were always to bear fruits of invariably the same magnitude, and if modification or annulment of kamma-result were excluded, liberation from the *saṃsāra* cycle of suffering would be impossible; for an inexhaustible past would ever throw up new obstructive results of unwholesome kamma.

Hence the Buddha said:

“If one says that in whatever way a person performs a kammic action, in that very same way he will experience the result—in that case there will be no (possibility for a) religious life<sup>1</sup> and no opportunity would appear for the complete ending of suffering.

“But if one says that a person who performs a kammic action (with a result) that is variably experienceable, will reap its results accordingly—in that case there will be (a possibility for) a religious life and an opportunity for making a complete end of suffering.”

Aḍguttara Nikāya, 3:110

Like any physical event, the mental process constituting a kammic action never exists in isolation but in a field, and thus its efficacy in producing a result depends not only on its own potential, but also upon the variable factors of its field, which can modify it in numerous ways. We see, for example, that a particular kamma, either good or bad, may sometimes have its result strengthened by supportive kamma, weakened by counteractive kamma, or even annulled by destructive kamma. The occurrence of the result can also be delayed if the conjunction of outer circumstances required for its ripening is not

complete; and that delay may again give a chance for counteractive or destructive kamma to operate.

It is, however, not only these extraneous conditions which can cause modification. The ripening also reflects the kamma's "internal field" or internal conditions—that is, the total qualitative structure of the mind from which the action issues. To one rich in moral or spiritual qualities, a single offence may not entail the weighty results the same offence will have for one who is poor in such protective virtues. Also, analogously to human law, a first offender's punishment will be milder than that of a reconvicted criminal.

Of this type of modified reaction the Buddha speaks in the continuation of the discourse quoted above:

"Now take the case when a minor evil deed has been committed by a certain person and it takes him to hell. But if the same minor offence is committed by another person, its result might be experienced during his lifetime and not even the least (residue of a reaction) will appear (in the future), not to speak about a major (reaction).

"Now what is the kind of person whom a minor offence takes to hell? It is one who has not cultivated (restraint of) the body, not cultivated virtue and thought, nor has he developed any wisdom; he is narrow-minded, of low character and even for trifling things he suffers. It is such a person whom even a minor offence may take to hell.

"And what is the kind of person by whom the result of the same small offence will be experienced in his lifetime, without the least (future residue)? He is one who has cultivated (restraint of) the body, who has cultivated virtue and thought, and who has developed wisdom; he is not limited by (vices), is a great character and he lives unbounded (by evil)? It is such a person who experiences the result of the same small offence during his lifetime, without the least future residue.

"Now suppose a man throws a lump of salt into a small cup of water. What do you think, monks: would that small quantity of water in the cup become salty and undrinkable through that lump of salt?" — "It would, Lord." — "And why so?" — "The water in the cup is so little that a lump of salt can make it salty and undrinkable." — "But suppose, monks, that lump of salt is thrown into the river Ganges. Would it make the river Ganges salty and undrinkable?" — "Certainly not, Lord." — "And why not?" — "Great, Lord, is the mass of water in the Ganges. It will not become salty and undrinkable by a lump of salt."

"Further, O monks, suppose a person has to go to jail for a matter of a halfpenny, a penny or a hundred pence, and another man does not have to go to jail on that account.

"Now what is the kind of person that has to go to jail for a matter of a halfpenny, a penny or a hundred pence? It is one who is poor, without means

or property. But he who is rich, a man of means and property, does not have to go to jail for such a matter.”<sup>3</sup>

Aḍguttara Nikáya, 3:110

Hence we may say that it is an individual’s accumulation of good or evil kamma and also his dominating character traits, good or evil, which affect the kammic result. They determine the greater or lesser weight of the result and may even spell the difference between whether or not it occurs at all.

But even this does not exhaust the existing possibilities of modifications in the weight of kammic reaction. A glance into the life-histories of people we know may well show us a person of good and blameless character, living in secure circumstances; yet a single mistake, perhaps even a minor one, suffices to ruin his entire life—his reputation, his career, and his happiness—and it may also lead to a serious deterioration of his character. This seemingly disproportionate crisis might have been due to a chain-reaction of aggravating circumstances beyond his control, to be ascribed to a powerful counteractive kamma of his past. But the chain of bad results may have been precipitated by the person’s own action—decisively triggered by his initial mistake and reinforced by subsequent carelessness, indecision or wrong decisions, which, of course, are unskilful kamma in themselves. This is a case when even a predominantly good character cannot prevent the ripening of bad kamma or soften the full force of the results. The good qualities and deeds of that person will certainly not remain ineffective; but their future outcome might well be weakened by any presently arisen negative character changes or actions, which might form a bad counteractive kamma.

Consider too the converse situation: A person deserving to be called a thoroughly bad character may, on a rare occasion, act on an impulse of generosity and kindness. This action may turn out to have unexpectedly wide and favourable repercussions on his life. It might bring about a decisive improvement in his external circumstances, soften his character, and even initiate a thorough “change of heart.”

How complex, indeed, are situations in human life, even when they appear deceptively simple! This is so because the situations and their outcome mirror the still greater complexity of the mind, their inexhaustible source. The Buddha himself has said: “The mind’s complexity surpasses even the countless varieties of the animal kingdom” (Saí yutta Nikáya, 22:100). For any single individual, the mind is a stream of ever-changing mental processes driven by the currents and cross-currents of kamma accumulated in countless past existences. But this complexity, already great, is increased still very much more by the fact that each individual life-stream is interwoven with many other individual life-streams through the interaction of their respective kammas. So intricate is the net of kammic conditioning that the Buddha declared kamma-result to be one of the four “unthinkables” (acinteyya) and warned against treating it as a subject of speculation. But though the detailed workings of kamma escape our intellection,

the practically important message is clear: the fact that kammic results are modifiable frees us from the bane of determinism and its ethical corollary, fatalism, and keeps the road to liberation constantly open before us.

The potential "openness" of a given situation, however, also has a negative side, the element of risk and danger: a wrong response to the situation might open a downward path. It is our own response which removes the ambiguity of the situation, for better or worse. This reveals the kamma doctrine of the Buddha as a teaching of moral and spiritual responsibility for oneself and others. It is truly a "human teaching" because it corresponds to and reflects man's wide range of choices, a range much wider than that of an animal. Any individual's moral choice may be severely limited by the varying load of greed, hatred and delusion and their results which he carries around; yet every time he stops to make a decision or a choice, he is potentially free to throw off that load, at least temporarily. At this precarious and precious moment of choice he has the opportunity to rise above all the menacing complexities and pressures of his unfathomable kammic past. Indeed, in one short moment he can transcend aeons of kammic bondage. It is through right mindfulness that man can firmly grasp that fleeting moment, and it is mindfulness again that enables him to use it for making wise choices.

## II

Every kammic action, as soon as it is performed, first of all affects the doer of the deed himself. This holds with as much truth for bodily and verbal deeds directed towards others as it does for volitional thoughts that do not find outward expression. To some extent we can control our own response to our actions, but we cannot control the way others respond to them. Their response may turn out to be quite different from what we expect or desire. A good deed of ours might be met with ingratitude, a kind word may find a cold or even hostile reception. But though these good deeds and kind words will then be lost to the recipient, to his own disadvantage, they will not be lost to the doer. The good thoughts that inspired them will ennoble his mind, even more so if he responds to the negative reception with forgiveness and forbearance rather than anger and resentment.

Again, an act or word meant to harm or hurt another may not provoke him to a hostile reaction but only meet with self-possessed calmness. Then this "unaccepted present will fall back to the giver," as the Buddha once told a brahmin who had abused him. The bad deed and words, and the thoughts motivating them, may fail to harm the other, but they will not fail to have a damaging effect on the character of the doer; and it will affect him even worse if he reacts to the unexpected response by rage or a feeling of resentful frustration. Hence the Buddha says that beings are the responsible owners of their kamma which is their inalienable property. They are the only legitimate heirs of their actions, inheriting their legacy of good or bad fruits.

It will be a wholesome practice to remind oneself often of the fact that one's deeds, words and thoughts first of all act upon and alter one's own mind. Reflecting thus will give a strong impetus to true self-respect, which is preserved by protecting oneself against everything mean and evil. To do so will also open a new, practical understanding of a profound saying of the Buddha:

In this fathom-long body with its perceptions and thoughts there is the world, the origin of the world, the ending of the world and the path to the ending of the world.

Aḍguttara Nikáya, 4:45

### III

The "world" of which the Buddha speaks is comprised in this aggregate of body-and-mind. For it is only by the activity of our physical and mental sense faculties that a world can be experienced and known at all. The sights, sounds, smells, tastes and bodily impressions which we perceive, and our various mental functions, conscious and unconscious—this is the world in which we live. And this world of ours has its origin in that very aggregate of physical and mental processes that produces the kammic act of craving for the six physical and mental sense objects.

"If, Ananda, there were no kamma ripening in the sphere of the senses, would there appear any sense-sphere existence?" — "Surely not, Lord."

Aḍguttara Nikáya, 3:76

Thus kamma is the womb from which we spring (*kamma-yoni*), the true creator of the world and of ourselves as the experiencers of the world. And through our kammic actions in deed, word and thought, we unceasingly engage in building and re-building *this* world and worlds beyond. Even our good actions, as long as they are still under the influence of craving, conceit and ignorance, contribute to the creation and preservation of this world of suffering. The Wheel of Life is like a treadmill set in perpetual motion by kamma, chiefly by its three unwholesome roots—greed, hatred and delusion. The "end of the world" cannot be reached by walking on a treadmill; this only creates the illusion of progress. It is only by stopping that vain effort that the end can be reached.

It is "through the elimination of greed, hatred and delusion that the concatenation of kamma comes to an end" (Aḍguttara Nikáya, 10:174). And this again can happen nowhere else than in the same aggregate of body-and-mind where suffering and its causes originate. It is the hopeful message of the third noble truth that we *can* step out of the weary round of vain effort and misery. If, despite our knowledge of the possibility of release, we keep walking on the treadmill of life, that is because of an age-old addiction hard to break, the deeply rooted habit of clinging to the notions of "I," "mine" and "self." But here again



there is the hopeful message in the fourth noble truth with its Noble Eightfold Path, the therapy that can cure the addiction and gradually lead us to the final cessation of suffering. And all that is required for the therapy is again found in our own body and mind.

The treatment proper starts with correctly understanding the true nature of kamma and thereby our situation in the world. This understanding will provide a strong motivation for ensuring a prevalence of good kamma in one's life. And as it deepens by seeing the human condition still more clearly, this same understanding will become the spur for breaking the chains of kammic bondage. It will impel one to strive diligently along the path, and to dedicate all one's actions and their fruits to the greatest end of action—the final liberation of oneself and all sentient beings.

## KARMA—THE RIPENING FRUIT

Bhikkhu -áoajivako

I

With the decline of Newtonian physics and the emergence of quantum theory and relativity, the physical world-picture in the West became centered around a *process-concept*. Natural sciences and nineteenth century scientifically oriented philosophy were in quest of new criteria that could be better adjusted to their specific aims than the crude causal interpretation of the whole world, “with its men and gods” (as the Buddha would say) in bare analogy to “dead matter” in its macroscopic common-sense aspect. This was the end of the stiff mechanistic absolutism based on the substance-view, and the corresponding conception of causality as the universal pattern of blind determinism in nature. The dominant role of physics was about to be replaced by a prevalently biological orientation. This at least was the tendency of the new vitalistic philosophy, whose most preeminent representative was Henri Bergson.

By this essential turning, modern philosophy seemed to return to pathways that closely, though not explicitly, resembled certain specific features of Buddhism, which have arisen out of different contexts and much earlier in time. The first to advert to this analogy explicitly, in the terms of a new philosophy of culture, was Friedrich Nietzsche. The idea of his “eternal recurrence” of cosmic and historical cycles, taken over from early Greek philosophy, was not sufficient for his dynamic “transvaluation of all values.” Yet the way from the early Ionian world-view to the Indian heritage in the dissolving civilizations of the Near East—out of which ultimately the Ionian Renaissance had arisen—was not very long. Thus Nietzsche discovered in the teaching of the Buddha an archetypal model for his own vitalistic attitude in philosophy. His interpretation of Buddhism became a paradoxical counterpoint accompanying Nietzsche’s antithetic position to Christianity.

Despite its rather strange position in the structure of Nietzsche’s own thought, his interpretation of Buddhism is neither vague nor unauthentic. Nietzsche found his access to Buddhism through the basic text of *The Dhammapadam* (probably Fausboll’s masterly Latin translation of 1855, the first in Europe). In Chapter I, 5, the Buddha is quoted as saying: “Enmities are never appeased by enmity, but they are appeased by non-enmity. This is the eternal law.” In Nietzsche’s interpretation, this statement is “the moving refrain of the whole of Buddhism ... and quite rightly: it is precisely these emotions ‘of resentment’ which would be thoroughly *unhealthy* with regard to the main dietetic objective,” since Buddhism “no longer speaks of ‘struggle against sin’ but, quite in

accordance with actuality, 'the struggle against *suffering*.'" Suffering is in Nietzsche's existential interpretation "a state of depression arisen on the basis of *physiological* conditions: against this depression Buddha takes hygienic measures." The Buddha was a "deep physiologist, whose 'religion' should more properly be called a 'hygiene' ... whose effect depends on the victory over resentment: to make the soul free from it—this is the first step towards health. 'Enmity is not ended by enmity' ... this is not a moral advice, this is an advice of physiology."<sup>1</sup>

As brutally partial as this interpretation may seem even to Buddhists, it nevertheless singled out an essential point whose deeper implications will remain characteristic for the development of the later philosophical thought on the main subject of the present paper.

On the other hand, at the end of the nineteenth century, and also much later, missionaries of more popular versions of Buddhism, still unaware of the essential purport of the new scientific and philosophical world-view emerging in their own cultural ambience, were praising Buddhism for its eminently rational advantages as a religion founded on the "solid scientific basis" of the universally valid "principle of causality," almost in its Newtonian meaning. For at that time the term *papicca-samuppádo*, or "interdependent origination" of all phenomena (*dhammá*), used to be interpreted in analogy to the "hard facts" of physics and physically oriented "positive" sciences. This understanding of the principle of causality seemed sufficient to account for the generally Indian teaching on *karma*, the basic principle of moral determinism, and for its peculiarly Buddhist version, distinguished by the Buddha's negation of a permanent soul-principle (*anattá*) in the *process* of becoming, visualized as a "stream" (*ṣái sára*) of life-experience, and corresponding most closely, as we shall see, to Bergson's *flux du vecu*.

It seems that at that time, and for a long time after, nobody except Nietzsche was interested in taking note of another humble historical fact, namely, that the Buddha's attitude to the world as a whole was emphatically negative: *sabba-loke anabhirati*, disgust with the whole world—not only because the world, whose overlord is Death (*Máro*), is essentially anguish or suffering (*dukkham*), but also because the deeper reason for this existential anguish is the "nullity" (*suññam*) of our-self-being-in-the-world, or "nihilation" as we might express it in twentieth century terms:

"Since in this very life such a being (as the Buddha) cannot be identified by you as existing in truth, in reality, is it proper for you to state that such a being is the superman, the most excellent man who has attained the highest aim, and that such a being, if he has to be designated, should be designated in other than these four terms: 'Such a being exists after death'; or 'he does not exist after death'; or 'he both does and does not exist after death'; or 'he neither does nor does not exist after death'?"

"Surely not, reverend sir."

"Good, Anurádho. Both formerly and now, it is just suffering that I proclaim, and the ceasing of suffering."<sup>2</sup>

## II

In the oldest Buddhist texts of Abhidhamma ("about phenomena"), the central conception of phenomenological analysis (*vibhajjavádo*) was concentrated on the idea of a "stream of existence" (*bhavaòga-soto*), or, in a free translation, emergence of fluctuating articulation. Thus, in early Buddhism as in modern philosophy, "substance-thought" had to be replaced by "process-thought." Long before the Buddha, substance-thought was formulated in the Vedantic conception, contained, among so many other world-views, in the earliest Upanishads as the teaching of an absolute, all-encompassing being, Brahman, conceived as "changeless, all-pervading, unmoving, immovable, eternal." In negating all these attributes, the Buddha challenged Vedantic absolutism by adopting the alternative solution of resolving all "being" into flux and nullity (*suññatá*), in negating even a permanent or static soul-principle (*anattá*, or the negation of *átmá*, the Vedantic Self).

Thus the core of the Abhidhamma conception of the "stream of existence" consists in its theory of momentariness (*khaóikavádo*). Its modern analogy has found its first and best formulation in the philosophy of William James, especially in his essay, *Does "Consciousness" Exist?*, where the "stream of consciousness" or "stream of thinking" (which, "when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing") is elicited from his basic theory of "pure experience," defined as "the instant field of the present ... this succession of an emptiness and fullness that have reference to each other and are of one flesh"—succession "in small enough pulses," which "is the essence of the phenomenon." In the same connection, as "the result of our criticism of the absolute," the metaphysical and metapsychical idea of a "central self" is reduced by James to "the conscious self of the moment."<sup>3</sup>

Compare this with Whitehead's further elaboration in his metaphysical conception of "actual occasions" and "throbbing actualities" understood as "pulsations of experience," whose "drops" or "puffs of existence" guided by an internal teleology of their "conrescence" (analogous to the Buddhist *saòkhára* in kammic formation) join the "stream of existence."<sup>4</sup>

All this was summarized by Bergson in a statement which to a Buddhist sounds like a formulation in the simplest and most authentic terms common to all schools and periods of Buddhist thought: "There are changes, but there are underneath the change no things which change: change has no need of a support ... movement does not imply a mobile."<sup>5</sup>

In his introduction to the French translation of *Pragmatism* by William James, Bergson says that "from the point of view taken by James, which is that of pure experience or of 'radical empiricism,' reality ... flows without our being able to say whether it is in a single direction, or even whether it is always and

throughout the same river flowing.”<sup>6</sup> And in his own *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he says, “All reality is, therefore, tendency, if we agree to call tendency a nascent change of direction.”<sup>7</sup>

Bergson’s approach to a biologically oriented philosophy of life was entirely different from Nietzsche’s intentions. He did not explicitly consider the cultural implications of the biological reorientation of the new philosophy of nature until the last period of his activity (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 1932). Bergson’s most important work, *Creative Evolution*, which appeared in 1907, begins with the question, “What is the precise meaning of the word ‘exist’?” The answer, at the end of the first section, is:

We are seeking only the precise meaning that our consciousness gives to this word “exist,” and we find that, for a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.<sup>8</sup>

In such maturing and “creation of self by self, which is the more complete, the more one reasons on what one does,”<sup>9</sup> consists the *problem of freedom*. In this process, each individual self-consciousness “lives and develops itself as an effect of its own hesitations until a free action is detached from it as if it were an overripe fruit.”<sup>10</sup>

The Buddha also speaks of the guidance, or protective care, “of self by self” in the same process of “the ripening fruit of action,” thus: “One oneself is the guardian of oneself. What other guardian would there be?” (*Dhammapadam*, 160).

“If, Ānanda, there were no kamma (*karma*), action ripening in the sphere of sense existence, would there appear any sensual becoming?” — “Surely not, Lord.”

“And wherever the action ripens, there the individual experiences the fruit of that action, be it in this life, or in the next life, or in future lives.”

“The results of kamma are unthinkable, not to be pondered upon.”<sup>11</sup>

Here is Bergson’s explanation of the thesis:

What are we, in fact, what is our *character*, if not the condensation of the history that we have lived from our birth-day, even before our birth, since we bring with us prenatal dispositions? Doubtless we think with only a small part of our past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act. Our past, then, as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse ... From this *survival of the past* it follows that consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. Our personality, which is being built up each instant with its accumulated experience, changes without ceasing.... This is why our duration is irreversible.... Thus our personality shoots, grows and ripens without ceasing.<sup>12</sup>

Bergson’s conception of causality and motivation departs from the classical theories of determinism and freedom of action, and approaches the Indian (not exclusively Buddhist) idea of karma in two essential points: its psychological

origin and its creative character. It is based on Bergson's critique of both mechanistic and finalistic theories in biology:

Evolution will thus prove to be something entirely different from a series of adaptations to circumstances, as mechanism claims; entirely different also from the realization of a plan of the whole, as maintained by the doctrine of finality.... Such a philosophy of life ... claims to transcend both mechanism and finalism, but ... it is nearer the second doctrine than the first.<sup>13</sup>

As for this second doctrine, Bergson maintains that "the finalistic interpretation, such as we shall propose it, could never be taken for an anticipation of the future.... How could we know beforehand a situation that is unique of its kind, that has never yet occurred and will never occur again? Of the future, only that is foreseen which is like the past or can be made up again with elements like those of the past. Such is the case with astronomical, physical and chemical facts, with all facts which form part of a system in which elements supposed to be unchanging are merely put together, in which the only changes are changes of position.... But an original situation, which imparts something of its own originality to its elements ...; how can such a situation be pictured as given before it is actually produced? All that can be said is that, once produced, it will be explained by the elements that analysis will then carve out of it. Now, what is true of the production of a new species is also true of the production of a new individual and more generally, of any moment of any living form."<sup>14</sup>

Compare the simpler statement of the Buddha, with strict reference to the karmic, i.e. the morally relevant, act:

If anyone were to say 'this person commits an act and he *will* suffer accordingly'—if that were the case, there would be no (use of leading a) life of holiness, and there would be no opportunity of putting an end to suffering. If anyone were to say 'this person commits an act for which he *deserves* to suffer accordingly'—if that were the case, there would be (a use of leading) a life of holiness, and there would be an opportunity of putting an end to suffering.<sup>15</sup>

The vitalist attempt to re-examine the problems of causality, finality and freedom of will, from Bergson's standpoint of "transformationalism"<sup>16</sup> brought us to a wider epistemological problem of establishing adequate relations between science, history and philosophy—a problem extensively discussed by the later philosophies of existence:

*Science* can work only on what is supposed to repeat itself.... Anything that is irreducible and irreversible in the successive moments of a *history* eludes science. To get a notion of this irreducibility and irreversibility, we must break with scientific habits which are adapted to the fundamental requirements of thought, we must do violence to the mind, *go counter to the natural bent* of the intellect. But this is just the function of *philosophy*.<sup>17</sup> Modern science is the daughter of astronomy; it has come down from heaven to earth along the inclined plane of Galileo, for it is through Galileo that Newton and

his successors are connected with Kepler.... Each material point became a rudimentary planet.... Modern science must be defined pre-eminently by its aspiration to take time as an independent variable.<sup>18</sup>

But to the artist who creates a picture by drawing it from the depths of his soul, time is no longer an accessory.... The duration of his work is part and parcel of his work. To contract or to dilate it would be to modify both the psychical evolution that fills it and the invention which is its goal. The time taken up by the invention is one with the invention itself. It is the progress of a thought which is changing in the degree and measure that it is taking form. It is a vital process, something like the ripening of an idea.<sup>19</sup>

Compare with this the statement of Buddhaghosa, in *Atthasálini*: "By time the Sage described the mind, and by mind described the time."<sup>20</sup>

The "scission" of *intellect from intuition*<sup>21</sup> is explained by Bergson (and later existentialists) by the "practical nature of perception and its prolongation in intellect and science"; we could almost say, by the *lack of contemplative interest* in modern, technically oriented science. Thus, in a deduction which reminds us of Heidegger's basic thesis on the scope of metaphysics, Bergson formulates the question:

But has metaphysics understood its role when it has simply trodden in the steps of physics, in the chimerical hope of going further in the same direction? Should not its own task be, on the contrary, to remount the incline that physics descends, to bring back matter to its origins, and to build up progressively a *cosmology*, which would be, so to speak, a *reversed psychology*?<sup>22</sup>

Everything is obscure in the idea of creation, if we think of *things* which are created and of a *thing* which creates, as we habitually do, as the understanding cannot help doing.... It is natural to our intellect, whose function is essentially practical, made to present to us things and states rather than changes and acts. But *things-and-states are only views, taken by our mind, of becoming. There are no things, there are only actions*.<sup>23</sup>

*Epoché*, refraining from judgments based on such "views" (Greek *doxa*, Sanskrit *drishṭi*, Pali *dippḥi*), the philosophical method brought from India by Pyrrho of Elis at the time of Alexander the Great, has become in the twentieth century the fundamental method of Husserl's "meditating philosopher" in phenomenological analysis. It is a "science of phenomena, which lies far removed from our ordinary thinking, and has not until our own day therefore shown an impulse to develop ... so extraordinarily difficult ... a new way of looking at things, one that contrasts at every point with the natural attitude of experience and thought," whose development is felt, however, as an "urgent need nowadays."<sup>24</sup>

The teaching of the Buddha was, with a still wider purpose, the expression of "the right effort" (*sammá-váyámo*) to "swim against the stream" of such world-

views, i.e. "the type of views called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views."<sup>25</sup>

In Bergson's theory of intuition, the act of "swimming against the stream" is interpreted with his basic French term torsion:

Let us try to see, no longer with the eyes of the intellect alone, which grasps only the already made and which looks from the outside, but with the spirit, I mean with that faculty of seeing which is immanent in the faculty of acting and which springs up, somehow, by the *twisting of the will on itself*, when action is turned into knowledge, like heat, so to say, into light.<sup>26</sup>

By intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely. That an effort of this kind is not impossible is proved by the existence in man of an *aesthetic faculty* along with the normal perception.... This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of *sympathy*, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model.<sup>27</sup>

The ultimate metaphysical consequences implied in a theory of causation based on the biological phenomenon of the "ripening fruit" were taken into adequate consideration only in some later philosophies of existence. Yet the preparatory vitalistic stage of modern philosophy remains more important for an Indian reinterpretation of the theory of karma than can be assessed within strictly European limits, where the importance of the missing link between the vitalist and existentialist stages—the link of a new theory of causality—has not yet been fully and explicitly realized. Let us therefore conclude the survey of this cycle of ideas by returning to the lowest level on which Bergson's vitalistic interpretation of cosmic matter had to establish a new starting point:

Let us merely recall that extension admits of degrees, that all sensation is extensive in a certain measure, and that the idea of unextended sensations, artificially localized in space, is a mere view of the mind, suggested by an unconscious metaphysic much more than by psychological observation. No doubt we make only the first steps in the direction of the extended, even when we let ourselves go as much as we can. But suppose for a moment that matter consists in this very movement pushed further, and that *physics is simply psychics inverted*.<sup>28</sup>

The conception of "a cosmology which would be a reversed psychology," or of physics understood "simply as psychics inverted," was destined to become the fulcrum for a transition from a physical to an historical orientation in other contemporary philosophies. This transition is also clearly marked in Whitehead's later works: "Physical endurance is the process of continuously inheriting a certain identity of character transmitted through a historic route of events."<sup>29</sup>

Bergson expressed this emphasis in terms which brought him still closer to a specific aspect of later existentialist thought: the predominant importance of the



future for (karmic) shaping of the present by the past. Though Heidegger's critique of Bergson's idea of the "stream of experience" was concentrated on this point, where in an initial metaphor Bergson compares a "mental state, as it advances on the road of time, continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates" with "a snowball on the snow, rolling upon itself" and thus increasing—we can read a few pages later in the opening chapter of *Creative Evolution* another statement, anticipating Heidegger's objection to some extent: "Duration is the continuous progress of *the past which gnaws into the future* and which swells as it advances."<sup>30</sup>

### III

Martin Heidegger, in his basic work, *Being and Time*,<sup>31</sup> seems to take over the meditation on "the ripening fruit" at the critical point reached by Bergson's analysis of its wider biological scope: the karmic predicament of human existence. It can be seen from Heidegger's numerous critical references to Bergson (though in many cases I would not agree with them) that in the meantime it had become obvious that there was more to elicit by the process philosophy than the biologically oriented thinkers of the vitalist period could realize. The philosophy of existence undertook this work in essentially different dimensions. Heidegger in particular was very careful and explicit in critically adapting new methods of independent historical thinking in the philosophy of culture introduced by Dilthey, and above all the new structure of transcendental logic laid down by his teacher Husserl, for phenomenological analysis independent of natural science. Within the scope of this new framework, similarities with Buddhist thought emerge still more strikingly, especially in the domain of the "suffering/concern" theme and the need for the notion of *karma* in a process-multiple causality structure.

The second part of *Being and Time* deals in particular with problems of human reality and temporality (*Dasein und Zeitlichkeit*). The possibility for human being to attain to full ripeness in an existence conditioned by man's "being-towards-death" is discussed in the first chapter ("Dasein's authentic potentiality—for-being-a-whole and its being-towards-death"). Chapter Five is dedicated to "temporality and historicity" as essential constituents of the human being<sup>32</sup> involved in this ambiguous process.

When, for instance, a fruit is unripe, it "goes toward" its ripeness. In this process of ripening, that which the fruit is not yet is by no means pieced on as something not yet present-at-hand. The fruit brings itself to ripeness, and such a bringing of itself is a characteristic of its being as a fruit. Nothing imaginable which one might contribute to it would eliminate the unripeness of the fruit, if this entity did not come to ripeness *of its own accord*. When we speak of the "not-yet" of the unripeness, we do not have in view something else which stands outside, and which—with utter indifference to the fruit—

might be present-at-hand in it and with it. What we have in view is the fruit itself in its specific kind of being... The ripening fruit, however, not only is not indifferent to its unripeness as something other than itself, but it is that unripeness as it ripens. *The "not-yet" has already been included in the very being of the fruit*, not as some random characteristic, but as something constitutive. Correspondingly, as long as any Dasein is, it too *is already* its "not-yet."<sup>33</sup>

The implicit emphasis laid on the difference from the "classical" European mechanist theory of causality is obvious enough.

The karmic process, in its Buddhist meaning, can be defined as a vicious circle of "interdependent origination" (*paṭicca-samuppādo*), consisting of a chain of twelve rings (*nidānam*), the first of which is *avijjā*, "ignorance," or better, metaphysical nescience of a human being (defined by Heidegger as a "being-there"—*Dasein*) about his own emergence in the flux of existence. The last ring of the chain is "death." Heidegger's analysis of human reality as a "being there" in the world is not less distinctly determined and delimited by the tension of the same polarity—ignorance and death:

If the term "understanding" is taken in a way which is primordially existential, it means to be *projecting towards a potentiality-for-being, for the sake of which any Dasein exists*. In understanding, one's own potentiality-for-being is disclosed in such a way that one's Dasein always knows understandingly what it is capable of. It "knows" this, however, not by having discovered some fact, but by maintaining itself in an existential possibility. The kind of *ignorance* which corresponds to this, does not consist in an absence or cessation of understanding, but must be regarded as a deficient mode of the projectedness of one's potentiality-for-being. Existence can be questionable.... When one understands oneself protectively in an existential possibility, *the future underlies this understanding*, and it does so as a coming-towards-oneself out of that current possibility as which one's Dasein exists. Projection is basically futural.... Temporality does not temporalize itself constantly out of the authentic future. This inconstancy, however, does not mean that temporality sometimes lacks a future, but rather that the temporalizing of the future takes various forms.<sup>34</sup>

This seems to explain one step further the "hesitation" of the self "until a free action is detached as an overripe fruit," as Bergson expressed the limits of freedom as release (*moksha*) within the scope of a karmic determinism.

With ripeness, the fruit *fulfills* itself. But is the death at which Dasein arrives, a fulfilment in this sense? With its death, Dasein has indeed "fulfilled its course." But in doing so, has it necessarily exhausted its specific possibilities? For the most part, Dasein ends in unfulfilment, or else by having disintegrated and been used up. Ending does not necessarily mean fulfilling oneself. It thus becomes more urgent to ask *in what sense, if any, death must be conceived as the ending of Dasein*.<sup>35</sup>

Arising out of this situation, the problem of karma, implicitly felt as an “anticipatory resoluteness” in “concrete working out of temporality” aiming at an “authentic historizing of Dasein,” is further discussed as the existential problem of “Dasein’s potentiality-for-being-a-whole.”<sup>36</sup>

Since “those possibilities of existence which have been factually disclosed are not to be gathered from death ... we must ask whence, in general, Dasein can draw those possibilities upon which it factually projects itself.” The answer is:

The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, *as thrown, takes over*. In one’s coming back resolutely to one’s thrownness, there is hidden a *handing down to oneself* of the possibilities that have come down to one, but not necessarily as having *thus come down*.<sup>37</sup>

We shall take for granted that the coincidence of the expression (underlined by me) “thus come down” with the literal meaning of the most common attribute of the Buddha—*tathāgato*—is another of many casual cases where a modern philosophy of essentially the same trend as our archaic one will, to some extent, come to use the same terms in expressing ideas of the same kind. What is meant here by the same trend will be explicated later. Let us first single out the specific meaning of this important term in the specific context.

The word *tathāgato*, in its widest sense in the early Pali literature, is used as a designation of “human being” in general. Its logical connection with the Buddha’s best known definition of the human being as “heir of his own actions” is obvious, even when it is used as the highest epithet of the Buddha.

What Heidegger wishes to point out is that the “heritage” of a *tathāgato* has not to be understood here as a passive facticity of historically “objectified” social tradition or collective behavior, which in Heidegger’s terms would be designated as “inauthentic heritage.” Unlike the social study of external history, Dasein in its intimate ripening “never comes back behind its thrownness” in the “situationality” of its world. In other words, in a personal history there is no possibility of statically objective repetition of one and the same situation. This is the basic law of karmic development that both Bergson and Heidegger try to confirm on different levels of their investigations.

On this point, in Heidegger’s philosophy, “thrownness” appears as a critical term whose meaning has to be better determined, in view of the fact that it denotes an obvious Christian “cypher” for a karmically determined situation. This historical implication in basic existentialist terminology could even be interpreted by some critics as revealing an apparent deficiency of our analogy, had not Heidegger, fortunately for us, explained it, in the same context, by an “attribute” synonymous with the basic First Truth of the Buddha, *dukkha*, “anguish” or “worry”: “Before we decide too quickly whether Dasein draws its authentic possibilities of existence from thrownness or not, we must assure ourselves that we have a full conception of *thrownness as a basic attribute of care*.”

The translation of the German word *Sorge* by “care” may often diminish the full meaning of “Dasein’s character” of this fundamental “*existential*” or practical category on which Heidegger’s entire ontology is built. From our standpoint, “worry” would often seem a preferable translation. Yet Heidegger himself has left no doubt about the meaning of this term. At the end of the first part of *Being and Time*, whose aim it was to “exhibit Care (*Sorge*) as the Being of Dasein,” i.e. “of that entity which in each case we ourselves are, and which we call ‘man,’” the basic “ontical” meaning of *Sorge* is interpreted (and illustrated by an ancient fable) as “worry” and “grief.”<sup>38</sup>

The continuation of the inquiry shows how the karmic phenomenon has to be comprised within the scope of this central theme—how the essence of worry and grief is revealed in response to the “call of conscience.” First of all Heidegger’s philosophy is no longer a philosophy of consciousness, but a philosophy of *conscience*. (The word “consciousness” is never used by Heidegger except in critical disputes, mainly with the Kantians.) Here conscience discloses itself as the awakening call which alone can liberate us from our lost condition (*Verlorenheit*) and thrownness in *avijjā* (ignorance), or metaphysical “nescience.” Only in giving heed to the awakening call does “Dasein understand itself with regard to its potentiality-for-being” in man’s mindfulness and resoluteness “to take over in his thrownness—right under the eyes of Death—that entity which Dasein is itself, and to take it over wholly,” as his karmic load. In Heidegger’s words, “Resoluteness is defined as a projecting of oneself upon one’s own Being-guilty—a projecting which is reticent and ready for anxiety.”<sup>39</sup> This is the ultimate moral aspect of the “hesitation in the ripening fruit” of the Bergsonian “creative activity.”

The last metaphysical (or better, eschatological) question to which Heidegger’s inquiry into the phenomenon of karma, or “ripening fruit,” arrives, concerns the origin of that strange experience, the primeval phenomenon of all religion: being-guilty.

“The call of conscience” is the call of care. Being guilty constitutes the being to which we give the name of “care.” In uncanniness Dasein stands together with itself primordially. Uncanniness brings this entity face to face with its *undisguised nullity*, which belongs to the possibility of its own-most potentiality-for-being.<sup>40</sup> ... *The appeal calls back by calling forth*: it calls Dasein *forth* to the possibility of taking over, in existing, even that thrown entity which it is.<sup>41</sup>

The statement underlined by me (“*Der Anruf ist vorruffender Rueckruf*”) is the best short definition of karma that I can imagine, even if it had to be formulated by the greatest master of Zen art in Japan (an art not at all unknown to Heidegger). The next one is not less pregnant with deep oriental meaning:

We have seen that care is the basic state of Dasein. The ontological signification of the expression “care” has been expressed in the definition:

*ahead-of-itself-being-already-in "the world" as being-alongside entities which we encounter "within-the-world."*<sup>42</sup>

Heidegger insists on an implicit consciousness of karma<sup>3</sup> in the experience of care, or worry, as Dasein's "understanding of itself in being-guilty."<sup>44</sup> He equally insists on the fact that even "phenomena with which the vulgar interpretation has any familiarity point back to the primordial meaning of the call of conscience when they are understood in a way that is ontologically appropriate," and that "this interpretation, in spite of all its obviousness, is *by no means accidental*."<sup>45</sup>

And yet, the call of conscience is "a keeping silent. Only in keeping silent does the conscience call; that is to say, the call comes from the soundlessness of uncanniness, and the Dasein which it summons is called back into the stillness of itself, and called back as something that is to become still."<sup>46</sup> A Japanese student in Heidegger's seminar once interpreted this course of thoughts in terms of a few Zen koans.<sup>47</sup> A follower of Ramana Maharshi in India could do it just as well to Heidegger's full satisfaction.

Having, unfortunately, no better word than "destiny" wherewith to designate the full range of the category of karma (though fully conscious of the wide horizon it encompasses), Heidegger brings us ultimately to the following summary of essential questions on this subject:

But it remains all the more enigmatic in what way this event as destiny is to constitute the whole "connectedness" of Dasein from its birth to its death. How can recourse to resoluteness bring us an enlightenment? Is not each resolution just *one* more single "experience" in the sequence of the whole connectedness of our experience?... Why is it that the question of *how the "connectedness of life"* is constituted finds no adequate and satisfactory answer? Is our investigation overhasty? Does it not, in the end, hang too much on the answer, without first having tested the legitimacy of the *question*?<sup>48</sup>

Speaking of the problem of re-emergence or "recurrence" of existential situations in their essential dependence on "destiny" in Dasein's "historizing" course, Heidegger does not even indirectly attempt to formulate any hypothesis analogous to "rebirth" (as, e.g., Nietzsche did in his own way) in Indian religious thought (*punarbhava*), though his sensitivity for the "enigmatic" remainder of the problem, as traced above, permits a still closer approach to this complex issue: "Dasein can be reached by the blows of destiny only because *in the depth of its own being Dasein is destiny* ... a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen."<sup>49</sup>

In suggesting the categorial designation of "karma" for the *whole range of problems concerning the organic connectedness of vital processes whose ripening results in creative activity*, my intention remains far from any attempt to propose any overhasty solution or pattern that could be discovered readymade in the transcendental schematism of some specific type of Asian philosophy or religion, such as Buddhism. Though, for the purpose of the present survey, Buddhism

was chosen as the *tertium comparationis*, it was presumed as a well-known fact that the historical origin of the categorial designation of karma in Indian philosophy is considerably older than its specific interpretation by the Buddha.

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