

Translator's Introduction

Karma, a Sanskrit word meaning 'action', is an abbreviation for 'action—cause and result' (*las rgyu 'bras* in Tibetan). Expanded further it is "the subject of karma, and how it operates in a process of cause and effect".¹ Hence the title *The Collection of Teachings on the Causes and Results of Good and Bad Actions*.

This is a weighty matter because, according to all Buddhas and enlightened sages, our happiness or lack of it depends entirely on our own actions. As the accomplished master Jigmed Tenpa'i Nyima says in *Turning Happiness and Suffering into the Path*²:

Think carefully, "The sufferings I have experienced and other sufferings that are more unimaginably numerous and severe than those I have experienced are all solely the results of unvirtuous deeds." Carefully consider this with regard to the four following aspects:

1. The certainty of the process of karma.
2. The tendency of karma to increase greatly.
3. That you will not encounter the result of what you have not done.
4. That the effects of what you have done will not be wasted.

You should also think, "If I do not want suffering I should renounce the cause of suffering, which is negative actions."

1 "This is an exceptionally important term in Buddhism. The Buddha used it to explain how an afflicted mind produces further experiences of deluded existence again in the future. Roughly speaking it is defined as the drive of dualistic mind engaging an object and in doing so producing a tension in the mind which is called a karmic seed. The karmic seeds are potentials which, given the right conditions will ripen into an experience of cyclic existence in the future. Karma is only produced in a mind that is operating under the confusion of not seeing reality as it is (ignorance). Generally speaking karma is produced with that kind of ignorance as a basis and affliction as direct cause. When a being with a dualistic mind experiences a result of previous karma ripening, it is usually reacted to with affliction; that affliction creates more karma; the karma ripens as experience again in the future; the being reacts by affliction, and the cycle of existence, which the Buddha called (*samsara*) "cycling" cycles on."

This quote and the preceding are from THE ILLUMINATOR TIBETAN-ENGLISH ENCYCLOPAEDIC DICTIONARY, ELECTRONIC VERSION 5.15 July 1st, 2007; © TONY DUFF 2000-2007. Padma Karpo Translation Committee, P.O. Box 4957, Kathmandu, NEPAL. This dictionary has been an indispensable aid to my meager translation abilities.

2 Tibetan text by the Third Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, Jigmed Tenpa'i Nyima, originally translated by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche; translation updated by Jonathan Miller:
<http://www.lapislight.com/images/Turning%20Happiness%20&%20Suffering%20into%20the%20Path.pdf>

Bottom line: whatever happiness or suffering I experience now and in the future is the result of what I myself have done. That makes it extremely important for us to know clearly which actions will steer us in the right direction, and which are like driving ourselves over a cliff. But how can we find out?

By definition, a Buddha's unlimited awareness perceives directly the infinite subtleties of the chain of causes and effects throughout existence. Out of compassion Buddhas teach the natural law of karma and explain the qualities of actions and their results for the benefit of the rest of us. Then it is up to us to choose.

The Collection of Teachings on the Causes and Results of Good and Bad is a treatise written by my master, Jigmed Thubten Thrinley Palbar, the Fourth Dodrup Chen Rinpoche. It is based on a discourse³ taught in ancient India by Sakyamuni Buddha in response to a question by his disciple Ananda. Ananda, his younger cousin and attendant, asked the Buddha to explain how it comes about that some have happy and fortunate circumstances and others suffer in misfortune.

This treatise is written in the elegant classical style of ancient wisdom texts. This may be awkward for modern readers due to its manner of expression and a presumption of cultural knowledge that is not contemporary, at least in the west. I have tried my best to render it true to the meaning but digestible to the reader who is not an academic.

One convention of the original text deserves special mention. In the classical style the result of a particular action is sometimes expressed as an undiluted absolute. For example, "Those who scornfully make fun of others by repeating the words they say and take pleasure in teasing them with contempt will later take birth as a parrot." Are we to understand that a person who makes fun of and teases others will always be reborn as a parrot?

This, in my opinion, can seem odd and too simplistic to the modern reader, even smacking of evangelism. Such a misinterpretation would be a calamitous loss of the opportunity to gain the indispensable knowledge of how we should act for our own well-being.

The Buddha taught that the results of actions are complex. There are the 'fully ripened results'⁴, 'results congruent with the cause', 'dominant results' expressed in the environment, remnant results of previous actions, etc. The function of the law of cause and effect is as

³ Extracts from the *mDo-sde Las rnam par 'byed pa* (Sanskrit: *Karmavibhanga-sutra*), Vol. Sa (folios 277a/4 – 298b/7), mDo-sDe section of the *Kajur* (Derge edition). Many thanks to Tulku Thondup Rinpoche for this and other kind and scholarly suggestions.

⁴ *rNam par smin pa* (*vipaka*, Sanskrit).

infinitely complex as the limitless phenomena of life itself. Each passing moment is a kaleidoscopic progression of the combinations of various gross and subtle results of actions performed in the recent and distant past. A single action and its result never occur in isolation, but ripen in continuum with an individual's stream of activity from time immemorial. The result of teasing others will be mixed in with the other results coming to fruition in the causal continuum. You might or might not be reborn as a parrot depending on the total matrix of cause and effect.

Yet there is an important purpose in describing the results of actions in 'simple primary colors'. How else are we to gain a clear impression of the nature of an action and its result, and the effect it will have on the continuum of our own happiness or suffering?

For example, a novice cook in training with a master chef might need to learn the flavors and qualities of the herb oregano. He or she will have to smell and taste some oregano by itself, not because anyone would eat a dish consisting solely of oregano, but to know clearly what effect a pinch of this herb will have on a kettle of soup. Its taste will act together with and be modified by all the other ingredients—but tasting it undiluted beforehand is the way to know what effect it will contribute to the whole.

I think this is the reason that classical wisdom texts often point out the result of an action in such a bold manner. Thus we can clearly know what an action will contribute to our own stream of cause and result. Are we adding salt, nectar, or excrement to our soup? In my opinion, we'd better know before we pour something into the pot because we're going to have to eat the whole thing ourselves.

The Refuge Lord Dodrup Chen Rinpoche published the original Tibetan text at Deorali Chörten Gonpa in Gangtok, Sikkim, India. When I first saw it I thought that this is just the thing to help me and others like me gain a better understanding of how to act in daily life for our own good. Since we are continuously fashioning our own destiny I felt that, for myself anyway, there is not a moment to lose. That is why I undertook the translation even though I'm not a scholar. If I have ever had a worthwhile wish in my life it is this: that everybody everywhere clearly discern the actual nature of actions and their effects and, choosing only the good, totally eliminate the causes of suffering and eventually reach the destination of perfect happiness.

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