

Karma, What It Is, What It Isn't, Why It Matters
By Traleg Kyabgon, Rinpoche
Notes for March 7, 2019
Chapter 2: The Buddha's View of Karma, pp 27-58

The Buddha made an enormous contribution to the topic of Karma. It meant a great deal to him. He believed in Karma, and he believed he had become a buddha because of his past lives and through the coming together of causes and conditions. He had a great deal to say about karma. He did not simply appropriate stock ideas, but gave it a radically different interpretation.

He provided a systematic description of human nature which was unprecedented. The older Hindu sources are based on the assumption of a certain kind of human nature based on old myths and define man in relation to family lineage, especially paternal. (p. 28)

He did comply with prevalent physical understanding that saw the body comprised of the five elements: earth, fire, wind, water and space. However in addition to the body, the Buddha added feeling, perception, disposition, and consciousness. But the Buddha did not think that these implied something apart from them, extra and eternal such as jiva, soul, atman. It failed to explain anything. (p.29)

Buddha proposed that the best way to see our nature is to pragmatically examine what we pay attention to. This introspection requires curiosity and the cultivation of mindfulness. We start to notice our habits and what preferences are driving us to maintaining them. This type of insight meditation is called *vipassana*. (p. 30) This is not done by observing things in isolation, but rather seeing how everything is connected – the self, the environment, others, public events, etc. (p. 31)

Buddha challenged the view of karma that nobility came as a birthright. Good fortune, nobility, beauty, wealth, and any other favorable circumstance are workable through our own dignity and not fixed forever. No one can deprive us of our birthright. (p.33)

Buddha used the traditional analogy of a seed, but emphasized that whether or not the seed sprouts, and if so whether it thrives is due to the coming together of an enormous number of causes and conditions of which we know only a few at best.

Even if one commits terrible deeds, one may not be reborn in hell. Where the mind goes at the moment of death is of great significance. (I am reminded of the original Godfather movie by Mario Puzo.)

Traleg Rinpoche's discussion of karma reminds us continuously that living our present life as best we can is also the best preparation for the time of death and the next life. (P. 37) Several movies about RBG.) Traleg, Rinpoche, insists that not everything is karma. We can experience things we are not responsible for. It is the way we deal with things that counts, and that is a reflection of character. (p. 37)

The Buddha did not see determinism and freedom as two diametrically opposed concepts. To accept only one of these is already dualistic. Buddha believed in a soft form of determinism recognizing the importance of the past while pointing to the freedom or openness of the future. (p. 48)

The Buddha's great emphasis on character can be seen in the traditional devotion to virtue. The supports for virtue are (1) morality and ethics – shila, (2) meditation – bhavana, (3) generosity – dana. A singular focus on one of these does not work. It is too narrow.

Traleg, Rinpoche, comments on Shantideva's explanation of patience. It does not mean waiting patiently until the circumstances are right. A better understanding of patience is to be undefeated by adverse circumstances. (p. 54)

The discussion of the right form of generosity on page 55 is also important.