

## Samsaric Karma, Nirvanic Karma

[Previously published as fb190608 piya]

Whether we are Buddhist or not, we are shaped by our **intentions**. Simply, an “intention” is the most potent part of our actions, involving some kind of purpose. A purpose is a motivation in the form of goals, desires or impulses: we are motivated to select and apply the means to fulfill those motivations. A purpose necessarily involves a desire, conscious or unconscious, for a future state. This means that we also think in terms of the past, which tends to powerfully shape our purpose. Hence, we are not always conscious of our karma!

Intention also refers to the nature of our mental experiences that they must have an **object**. Hence, we cannot hear without hearing a sound; we cannot believe without some idea of a belief or view; we cannot experience an emotion without a situation arouses our feelings. In short, there are also the nature of **karma**; to be more specific this is Samsaric Karma: it keeps us going in a cycle of repetitive habits and activities.

### Samsaric Karma

Samsaric Karma is the kind of intentional actions that we have or do (it can be a **state** of mind, speech or bodily **action**) that is rooted in or moved by greed, hate or delusion. **Greed** essentially arises when we think of others and the world (and often ourselves, too) as being “things.” We have some kind of measurable worth, especially in terms of money, power or class. Hence, we are driven to **have** and collect more of the measurable “things.”

**Hate** is just the opposite: we dislike what is of less or little worth; or the worst, what is of no worth at all (in our views, of course). We tend to push away people or situations we see as being of little worth or worthless to us. This may explain why “successful” or not-so-successful people tend to neglect their old folks, or even cheat on their spouses, partners, clients and students — for all there are worth! Hence, hate is painful.

**Delusion** is blind to true reality. So it depends on lame Greed to shape and guide it. But it is also hauled in opposite directions by Hate. We tend to push away things when we have some bad idea of them. It is not the “thing” that is good or bad: often, it is our **idea** or bias that defines what we see as good or bad. So we live in a very private reality. This reality can become so narrowly private that everything is darkly seen and shaped in our blindness: it is called **madness**.

### Samsaric Buddhism

Buddhists tend to speak of **good karma**, that is, performing “deeds of merit” so that the dead may benefit, or we will benefit with some worldly blessings, and in the end, be reborn in some happy place, even a heaven or paradise. But whenever we desire some thing or some state, and we do not really know how it works, there is PRICE we must pay.

The price of such “measured” karma is that we are caught in a **karmic game**. Since we do not know how to create these “good karma” ourselves, we depend on others to do it for us. We depend on monks, nuns and priests to “**transfer**” merit (as if goodness is a thing that is

negotiable!). We are taught that chanting **blesse**s us (but the suttas tell us that chanting suttas is to help us remember them, study them and gain wisdom and freedom).

Anyway, because of this popular delusion perpetuated by some monks, nuns, priests and their minions, it has made Buddhism a big and profitable **business**. It is a Buddhism of dependence, helplessness and fear; a Buddhism of the measuring crowd—but the Buddha sits happily alone under the Bodhi tree!

### **Nirvanic Buddhism**

Samsaric Karma belongs to a **measuring religion**—where people and things are measured in terms of merit, money and more. It is a Buddhism rooted in greed, hate and delusion. We should renounce this kind of religious business by understanding how karma really works.

Remember: **karma is intention**, that is, the purpose behind our actions. Wrong and bad purpose is rooted in greed, hate or delusion. Right and good purpose is motivated by non-greed (lovingkindness and compassion), non-hate (joy) and non-delusion (equanimity as a manifestation of wisdom).

Simply, then, **good karma** is our purpose in overcoming greed, hate and delusion: by cultivating non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion through love, ruth, joy and peace. At some point, when we understand what this really means, we are able to be free of any **purpose**. Our actions are naturally and spontaneously good just like those of the Buddha and the arhats. Hence, we call this **Nirvanic Karma**.

### **Path Karma**

It is easier to give up Samsaric Karma, but harder to cultivate Nirvanic Karma. However, as true monastics we will find working for Nirvanic Karma much easier — **unless** we are “renouncing a small gain for a bigger one” in the sense of earning a living or living a life of luxury, power and pleasure—then, we are creating **Subhuman Karma**: that of the animal, the preta (ghost) and the hell-being in this life itself.

To be a practising Buddhist, especially a meditator or one aspiring as a renunciant (lay or monastic), we are really training ourself to wholesomely **shape** our good intentions. The best way to do this is to remind ourself of the nature of true reality: **Everything is impermanent**. This constant reflection strengthens us to keep to the “middle way,” avoiding Samsaric Karma and readying ourself for Nirvanic Karma.

In due course, we understand that the **middle way** starts with the attaining of streamwinning, which even lay practitioners can easily attain in this life itself. (See any of the Suttas in Samyutta chapter 25.)

The real truth is: either we shape our intentions, or our intentions will shape us. We have the power to shape our destiny. If we fail to know or accept this, then others are likely to shape our destiny for us. That destiny enslaves and belittles us to blindly follow the destinies

and idiocies of others. Only when we shape our own destiny will we be truly wise and free.  
We should never hand our remote to others.

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