

How to learn from karma 1 of 2

Source: SD 61.5b, The Buddha's karma © Piya Tan 2024.

6.1.1 Karma as teacher

6.1.1.1 The Buddha is our teacher; he teaches the truth that is **suffering**; understanding this truth, and following the path of training, we end suffering, that is, **nirvana**. The Buddha is the peerless teacher because he has experienced suffering to the very limits of the body; he has also fully understood the true nature of suffering; that it arises from craving; he has found the path to the ending of that craving and suffering; he is thus fully awakened. He teaches us how to reach the path and its goal.

6.1.1.2 Unlike other teachers, the Buddha teaches **self-reliance**, that we can and must know suffering, and so end it. While other teachers preach, even demand, faith as dependence, the Buddha teaches **faith** as belief through understanding, leading to self-liberation. The Buddha shows us the path, but we must walk it ourselves. For, *the path is our journey*, the course of inner change, spiritual transformation, awakening and **liberation**.

6.1.2 Karma as teaching

6.1.2.1 To the **foolish**, driven by the unconscious tendencies of lust, aversion and ignorance, suffering is simply the pain they must replace with pleasure, but this only brings on greater and a greater variety of suffering. Out of ignorance, we crave to end suffering by seeking pleasures; but we only create **karma**, which is action, conscious but mostly habitual, driving us to project images of what we desire. These images shape our world, a complex of mirages of cool oases appearing to lost and parched travellers.

6.1.2.2 The **wise**, unbiased by liking or disliking, look on at pain as arising from certain conditions. They investigate those conditions, and understanding those conditions—avoiding the bad, promoting the good: they are able to minimize bad karma and maximize good karma. Even as the wise watch the conditions bringing suffering, they also notice themselves, what **pain** really is; how it is relative to **pleasure and joy**; how one is the absence of the other.

Understanding this duality, they rise above the trap, the extremes, of liking and disliking. They learn to see things just as they are, rising and ending, becoming other, impermanent. This is the nature of suffering. They understand that it is the *liking* of pleasure and the *disliking* of pain; and wanting to have that pleasure, that pleasant thing.

That desire to **own** what they desire creates a sense of **self**. When they renounce that desire, there is no more “self,” that something that *wants*, something that is *wanted*. “Why must there be *something*?” they ask. When they realize that a wrong question invites wrong answers, they learn to ask the right questions. *How does the idea of this “something” arise?* It arises from our own wanting, seeking, finding, grasping, clinging. And then seeing that there is really *nothing* that we can want, seek, find, grasp or cling to.

It's like **breathing**: we are conscious of it; we breathe *in*, we breathe *out*. What we take in, we must give it back. There is nothing to make of it. When we make nothing of it, there is an inner peace of calm and clarity. This helps us to learn better and rightly: we begin to see things as they are.

6.1.3 Karma as learning

6.1.3.1 Everything is teachings us; that “everything” is how we think, how we speak, how we act, and how we sense things; how we live and experience the world. Every action (*karma*) we do is a chance to learn. First, we notice that our action is either *conscious* or *unconscious*. Either way, we will

notice that the roots of action drive us to act; we act out of greed, out of hatred, or out of delusion; these are **the unwholesome roots** of karma. We learn that this only brings pain and suffering. It has taught us something. This is because we are willing and ready to learn.

6.1.3.2 Then we notice that when we mindfully act with **charity, love and wisdom**—the opposite of the unwholesome roots—we tend to experience the sweet joyful fruits of peace, fulfilment and freedom. We learn that this is true pleasure and joy. When more people learn to do this, the pleasure and joy become more mutual and widespread. We have a family or partners, a community or a world, based on charity, love and wisdom.

We do not have such a world, yet; it is a goal, a vision, a dream we have; we must have. We then see that path, or create a path so that we can move towards that dream. We have been doing that, which brings us to this moment when we are able to live and learn charity, love and wisdom. That path we have today is called **learning**, and on a more systematic and wider scale, we call it **education**; it is learning to bring out the good and the best out of us. For this reason, we are teachers, scholars, and students of Buddhism.

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