

KARMA - READER

"Karma – The Key to our Freedom lies in our hand"

Teaching materials on the subject of karma

*Quotes from Buddhist masters,
explanations, exercises, and mnemonics*

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"That negative action of yours was neither done by your mother,
nor done by your father, nor done by your brother,
nor done by your sister, nor done by your friends & companions,
nor done by your kinsmen & relatives, nor done by the devas.
That negative action (kamma) was done by you yourself,
and you yourself will experience its result."
(MN 130)

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Instructions on karma have been incorporated from the following sources:

- Buddha Shakyamuni in the *Pali Canon* (the notes after the headings refer to the corresponding passages in the Pali Canon)
- Asanga in the *Abhidharma Compendium*
- Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury* chapter 4 p.1-128)
- Gampopa in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*
- Gendün Rinpoche in public teachings
- Karmapa Wangtschug Dordje in the *Mahamudra – Ocean of True Meaning*
- Djamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye in *Torch of True Meaning*
- Padmasambhava in the *Dakini teachings*

Foreword

Buddha Shakyamuni in MN 135 (as well as AN VI.63, quoted by Asanga in the *Abhidharmakosha*):

*"Listen, practitioners:
Beings are owners of kamma,
heir to kamma,
born of kamma,
related through kamma,
and have kamma as their arbitrator.
Kamma is what creates distinctions among beings
in terms of coarseness & refinement."*

Dharma teachings are answers to intelligent and meaningful questions that arise from our desire to attain liberation and enlightenment. The Buddha himself set out in search of such existential questions. By observing, meditating and giving new direction to his actions, he found satisfying answers to these questions. His answers are based on experience.

The two foundational works for the Kagyu lineage on the Abhidharma, the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (Abhidharma Compendium) by Asanga and the much more comprehensive *Abhidharma-kosha* (Abhidharma Treasury) by his brother Vasubandhu, present the core themes of Buddhist teaching in the form of questions and answers. The following text is arranged according to such questions, strung together in loose order. Before reading the answers, you may wish to pause for a moment to reflect on them yourself and then compare your personal answer with these teachings.

Incidentally, there is an excellent compilation of contributions by Buddhist teachers on this topic, published by Alfred Weil in the DBU series of publications under the title "Karma" (Theseus Verlag). This compilation is warmly recommended to all readers, as some of the explanations to be found in it are not repeated here or are only presented in abbreviated form.

The doctrine of karma is often misunderstood in the West. This text has been compiled to address these misunderstandings. It is primarily intended as an aid for teachers and is only a first, provisional approach to this huge topic. Framed in boxes, we will find reminder sentences that summarize key points, such as the first one here:

If we understand the laws of karma, then we understand how samsara works and where we have to start in order to attain liberation.

Understanding karma means understanding life.

Alfred Weil in Karma, page 11:

"Anyone who fully understands the law of karma understands 'what holds the world together at its core'. It becomes clear to them how the 'destinies' of people mature; how some fall deeper and deeper into misery against their conscious will and others attain happiness and contentment. They understand how the beings in the cycle of existence forge their chains again and again without even suspecting it. But they also recognize how they can free themselves from them completely and forever."

Introductory explanations

1. What existential questions lie behind the question of karma?

➤ *Exercise 1: What interests me about karma? Write down the questions that motivate you to pick up this text and deal with karma. What would you like to know or better understand about karma?*

If you find these questions in the table of contents, you can go to these questions and read them in the corresponding passage.

Frequently asked questions that we deal with in this guide are:

- Why are we humans so different and experience such starkly different life circumstances?
- Why do I experience this or that situation or mood? How does my character come about?
- Is the world a chaos of coincidences or are there laws that we can use to find happiness and liberation?
- If there are such laws, what guidelines can I derive from them for my actions?
- Where is my scope for freedom? How can I possibly use these laws to bring about true happiness in this world?

2. *Do we really need to concern ourselves with karma?*

Yes, if we still have questions about this topic. However, there is a simple and straightforward way of dealing with the complex subject of karma that spares us an intensive intellectual debate:

Trusting in the countless masters who have already devoted themselves to this subject, we can simply follow their summary of the teachings on karma. In the briefest form, a *summary of the teachings on karma* could perhaps read like this:

In all actions, be mindful and motivated by love and compassion and the wish to contribute to the awakening of all beings. In addition, develop an understanding of the illusory nature of all phenomena, then action will be flawless.

Padmasambhava in the *Dakini teachings*, p.44: "There are many people who do not recognize good from evil, but those who do have entered the Buddha's teachings."

A summary of the karma teachings of Gendün Rinpoche can be found at the end of the book. Nevertheless, it can be extremely helpful to study the individual statements on karma in more detail, because a more precise understanding of karmic laws enables us to help others better. Also, when we die, we should not have to regret not having made better use of our lives:

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.34: "Since I cannot get around this state of affairs [of my approaching death], and since there will be no other refuge and escort at that time apart from virtuous karma and the Three Jewels, it is essential to have the provision of a mind that is at ease and without regret at that time."

3. *How can the term "karma" be defined?*

Karma is a Sanskrit word meaning "action, work, creation". When we talk about karma, we are referring to all kinds of conscious, intentional actions.

In conventional language, *karma* also includes the effects of actions (the "effected, created") as well as the laws that can be observed between actions and their consequences.

The karma teachings therefore deal with:

1. the actions (the "seed"),
2. the consequences of our actions (the "harvest")
3. the rules according to which these consequences occur (the "seed-harvest law").

Buddha Shakyamuni summarized it like this: The doctrine of karma is about sowing, reaping and the ripening in between.

- Strictly speaking, however, *karma* is only the triggering action, i.e. point 1. The resulting consequences are called *phala* ("fruit") or *vipaka* ("ripened effect") and are distinguished from the actual karma.

Paul Debes in *Begriffe der Buddha-Lehren*, p.157:

"Karma is the term for the mental causal connection between what a being wills and does and what they perceive and experience, which permeates their entire existence. According to their will and actions, their perception and their experience will adapt sooner or later."

Karma arises through "conscious" actions. These are all actions carried out with full mental sanity. Mental foggiess, insanity and the like diminish the karmic effects. However, being conscious does not mean that we are aware of our motives, but only that we intend the action while being mentally present.

In some respect, it would be more skilful if we avoided the word "karma" in our conversations with others and rather spoke of actions and their consequences.

4. *What does an understanding of karmic forces entail?*

Understanding the cause and effect of actions entails:

- an understanding of the forces that are set in motion by conscious actions
- an understanding of the decisive factors (motivation, emotion, frequency, etc.)
- an understanding of the way in which they come into effect (the causal relationships)
- an understanding of the possibilities of influencing (strengthening, neutralizing or weakening) these forces
- an understanding of how karmic forces can be used for the liberation from suffering and the awakening of all beings

5. *What is karma? The role of the mind and intention (A VI.63, Dh 1-2)*

The doctrine of karma refers to conscious actions that we perform with our body, speech and mind.

All action is preceded by the mind. That is why mental action is of crucial importance.

This may come as a bit of a surprise to us, as the word "action" initially only makes us think of physical and perhaps verbal action. However, all action with the body or speech is preceded by thought, which is why mental action must be included in the analysis of cause-and-effect relationships. Even mere thinking is already an activity that has effects. These effects become all the more noticeable when our thoughts are formed into intentions, which are then implemented by the body and speech or even by the mind itself.

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury chapter 4* p.1): "What is action? It is volition (*cetanā*) and that which is produced by volition." and: "Actions consist of thoughts and their implementation." and: "Volition is mental action. It gives rise to two actions, bodily and verbal action."

Buddha Shakyamuni in AN VI.63:

"Intention [*cetanā*], I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect... There is kamma to be experienced in hell, ... kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, ... kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry shades, ... kamma to be experienced in the human world, ... kamma to be experienced in the world of the devas. The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that."

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.38: "Actions are of two kinds: the action of intending, and the action of doing the intended. They again are included in actions of body, speech and mind."

Asanga defines actions in the *Abhidharma Compendium*, p.82:

"What is emotionally veiled action (*kleśādhipeya karma*)?"

Intentional action (*cetanakarma*, the development of an intention) and intentional action (*cetayitvakarma*, the realization of the intention). These are the characteristics of action."

Here, a distinction is made between wholesome and unwholesome intention (*kusala-* or *akusala-cetanā*).

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury chapter 4* p.12-13): "There are two types of volition. First, the initial or preparatory stage (*prayoga*), wherein one produces a volition which is pure volition, "I must

do such and such an action": this is what the Scripture calls action which is volition (*cetanakarma*). Then, after this stage of pure volition, one produces a volition of action, the volition of doing an action in conformity with what has been previously willed, to move the body or to emit a voice: this is what the Scripture calls action after having been willed, or willed action (*cetayitvakarma*)."

There are five types of action (see Asanga, p.83), but in the context of karma it is generally about action that is accompanied by intention.

Buddha Shakyamuni in the *Dhammapada*, verses 1 and 2:

"Experiences are preceded by mind,
led by mind and produced by mind:
If one speaks or acts with an impure mind,
suffering follows
even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox drawing the cart.

Experiences are preceded by mind,
led by mind and produced by mind.
If one speaks or acts with a pure mind,
happiness follows
like a shadow that never departs."

Or in another translation:

"All experiences are preceded by the mind; the mind is their master; they are created by the mind. Suffering follows ill-intentioned thoughts and words like the wheels of the oxcart follow the hoofprints of the ox. - All experiences are preceded by the mind; the mind is their master; they are created by the mind. Happiness follows benevolent thoughts and words like a shadow that never leaves us."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 9:

"The actions of body or speech depend directly on the state of mind we are in when we commit the respective act. If we are in a wholesome state of mind, the action of body or speech is wholesome, and vice versa. The mind is the chief, body and speech are only servants of the mind. All the actions we commit depend on our state of mind."

The Torch of True Meaning, p.84:

"Actions that are motivated by desire, aversion, or ignorance but not actually physically or verbally expressed are mental actions. Those actually expressed are actions of body and speech. The mind must precede all actions, so it is said:

'Because it makes the world go dark, the mind is the root of poison'."

6. What leads the mind and thus the world into darkness?

The Buddha says: This is what the formative forces (*samskara*, the 51 mental factors, the fourth skandha) bring about.

Asanga, p.3: "What is the characteristic of the formative forces? Creating is the characteristic of the formative forces. The nature of creation is to form and construct. Through the formative forces (the 51 mental factors), the mind is directed towards wholesome action (*kusala*, the 11 wholesome mental factors and related qualities), towards unwholesome action (*akusala*, the 26 unwholesome mental factors) or towards neutral/indeterminate action (*avyakṛta*)."

Asanga, p.6: "How is the skandha of the formative forces defined? They are the six groups of interest (*cetanā*): the interest caused by contact with the eye, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, due to which one tends to a 'pure' state of mind, or to an 'impure', i.e. emotionally veiled state of mind, or to the differentiation of states."

(More detailed explanations of these formative forces are compiled in my text "The 51 mental factors", see the homepage of the Ekayana Institute.)

7. *Can we understand karma at all?*

The following explanations are intended as an impetus for us to deal with the connections pointed out by Buddhist masters ourselves. To do this, we need a sincere interest and also a reasonably clear mind in order to be able to perceive more subtle levels of reality.

We should not be deterred from an independent investigation of reality because we have heard that only a Buddha is able to fully understand karma. This is certainly true, for who among us can survey the lives of all the countless beings in the past, present and future?

However, there is much that we can already explore with our limited possibilities and that is extremely helpful on the path to liberation from suffering.

Many a Dharma practitioner make the mistake of putting on the Dharma teachings like a new sweater without testing and questioning them. This is certainly also a quality, trusting in the word of Buddha and the teachers, to have no doubts about their teachings. However, many practitioners develop doubts later on. They then realize that they have not laid the foundations of their Dharma practice thoroughly enough. They have swallowed doctrines like dogmas without really applying the medicine, contained in each of these Buddhist doctrines, in a beneficial way.

The teaching on karma, like the other teachings of the Buddha, is not a dogma or a construct of ideas, but an invitation to look at reality from a new perspective.

The Buddha attached great importance to the fact that we should not blindly follow his explanations but rather examine everything ourselves. And by no means did he exclude the karma teachings from this. That is why we want to do this now, as far as this is possible at the moment, without forgetting that there are limitations to our efforts, as we have not yet developed a clear view of reality, as Djamgön Kongtrul also expresses it in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.31:

"Karmic cause and effect is the fundamental meaning of all the infinite Dharma teachings given by the Buddha. This topic is so incredibly profound and vast that until one has realized One Taste¹, one will not fully comprehend it. ... ordinary beings cannot fully appreciate it ..."

8. *Is the doctrine of karma a Buddhist invention?*

Not at all. The doctrine of karma already existed in India at the time of the Buddha. In the West, as in every culture, there is also a great deal of knowledge about the connections between certain forms of behaviour and future experiences. The Ten Commandments are just as much an expression of this as the more subtle aspects of Christian ethics. Today's psychology and sociology are also dedicated to examining in detail the connections between action, perception, emotion and decision-making. They show the connections between action, experience and personality structure and develop concepts and therapeutic approaches to beneficially influence the development of the personality.

In every culture there is a certain understanding of the connections between actions and consequences.

However, different cultures attach different importance to the precise observation of these relationships. Additional differences arise from culturally influenced interpretations of what is experienced. Some cultures limit their observations to this one life. Some assume the existence of a god as the judge of karma, etc.

9. *Buddha's view of karma (Dh 183): Acceptance and active responsibility*

Buddha Shakyamuni summarized the teachings of all the Awakened Ones as follows (*Dhammapada* 183):

¹ *One Taste* is a very high level of realization where the practitioner realizes that all phenomena without exception have one and the same nature, beyond all duality.

"Ceasing to do the unwholesome, cultivating the wholesome, and purifying one's heart-mind – this is the Teaching of the Buddhas."

The Buddha opposed fatalistic misinterpretations of karmic connections, which were common on the Indian subcontinent. He also pointed out that there is no permanent self and no God to be found in the entire karmic process and showed the way how karmic conditionality can be overcome, and complete freedom be attained. He emphasized the important role of the doctrine of karma for the path to liberation. It was especially vital too, that he emphasized the importance of intention or motivation in action as the crucial component, making speech and the body secondary to the mind.

Alfred Weil in *Karma*, page 11: "The Buddhist doctrine of karma... does not only want to show ways to a better, more fulfilling life. That is why it is not content with the advice to leave what is harmful and do what is beneficial', as other religions and world views predominantly suggest. It does not simply guide us to do the right thing, as do the other great concepts of morality and ethics. In the end, it goes beyond all action and thus points to the gate that leads to unrestricted freedom."

The most important features of the Buddhist doctrine of karma are:

- Accepting what happens to us and what we experience as self-caused, but:
- not fatalism, but active responsibility to ourselves and others
- No permanent self as the centre of action
- No God as an authority of judgment or mercy
- Understanding karma opens the way to liberation from suffering
- Whether an action is wholesome or not depends solely on the motivation and its consequences
- In the end, the doctrine of karma transcends all action and workings; Buddhist ethics has its point of reference beyond action

Paul Debes in *Begriffe der Buddha-Reden* (p.161): "Two basic attitudes arise from the law of karma: one is to accept what is unpleasant and cannot be changed, without demands, without rebellion - because it is the return of what at some point originated from me; by withstanding it, i.e. bearing it and getting through it, it is cleared away and even erased. - The other basic attitude is to act as well and as brightly as possible and become more and more persistent in this."

10. Buddha's summary of the doctrine of karma (M 135)

Here once again the quotation from Buddha Shakyamuni (MN 135), which precedes the text:

"Listen, practitioners:
Beings are owners of kamma,
heir to kamma,
born of kamma,
related through kamma,
and have kamma as their arbitrator.
Kamma is what creates distinctions among beings
in terms of coarseness & refinement."

Asanga's explanations on this (p.96) provide an insight into the most important aspects of the doctrine of karma:

- In what way are living beings owners of their actions? - Since they [themselves] experience the effects of the actions performed by them.
- In what way do they become heirs to their own actions? - Because in experiencing the effects of their actions [in this and later lives] they receive as an inheritance the corresponding wholesome and unwholesome karma.
- In which way are they born from their actions? - Since living beings are not born without cause (*ahetu*), nor are they born through an erratic cause (*visamahetu*) [but through the karmic forces generated by their mind-stream].

- How do they have their actions as a refuge? - Since they are connected to opposing actions (*pratipaksakarma*) and higher actions [because they can counteract the consequences of harmful actions and direct themselves towards wholesome "higher" actions].
- In what way do beings experience higher or lower states due to their actions? - As they receive different personalities (*atmabhavaprabheda*) in higher or lower realms of existence due to their actions [i.e. they are born in more or less favourable conditions according to their previous actions].
- In what way are they better off or worse off? - Because beings have different good and bad qualities [i.e. because of their actions they are born with more or less abilities and different inclinations].

11. How are karma and the four noble truths connected?

The first truth the Buddha taught about was the *truth of suffering*, the fact that not only the obviously unpleasant situations are suffering, but also the pleasant and seemingly neutral situations. He pointed out the omnipresent, subtle forms of suffering.

This suffering is based on our clinging to the pleasant and the belief in the supposed existence of a self with all the resulting actions. This is the second noble truth, the *truth of the causes of suffering*– attachment to a self with the resulting self-centred perceptions and actions as the cause of all suffering in this world. Self-centeredness colours all our actions, it colours our view of the world and is the source of all suffering. And this brings us to the subject of karma: carrying out self-centric actions with body, speech and mind is what we generally, somewhat casually, call "accumulating karma".

Karmic forces, generated by self-centred actions, are the cause of suffering.

Fortunately, the Buddha did not leave it at this apt but dreary analysis. The third noble truth he taught is the *truth of the end of all suffering*, the complete liberation from suffering, beyond self-centeredness and self-illusion, what is also called *nirvana* ("beyond suffering").

The Buddha also described the path to this, and this teaching is the fourth noble truth, the *truth of the path to the dissolution of all suffering*. This is good news: there really is a way to become free from all self-centeredness. Later Buddhist masters have called this the path to the Great Joy, the joy beyond all clinging.

The central method on the path to awakening is acting and letting go purposefully.

Thus, the doctrine of karma is an indispensable key to understanding especially the second and fourth noble truths that Buddha Shakyamuni drew our attention to.

12. Do I have to believe in karma?

Some people think that dealing with karma necessarily means having to believe in karma. This is not the case. Karma is not a question of faith, and the doctrine of karma is not a dogma, but a description of our relative reality. This description has been confirmed again and again by the masters of the past and reformulated according to the respective circumstances.

In order for our inquiry into karma to unfold a power that changes our being, it must build on our personal experience and lead to personal conviction.

The question: "Do you believe in karma?" is misguided, because it simply means: "Do you believe that actions have consequences?" and it is not a question of belief whether actions have effects. Perhaps we should turn the question around: "Do you believe that actions have *no* effects?" and everyone would answer "no" because it is obvious that actions have very tangible effects. So everyone "believes" in one of the most important phrases of the Buddhist doctrine of karma on the basis of their experiences that have congealed into certainty: actions have consequences.

If we were asked: "Do you believe everything that is said in the Buddhist teaching on karma?", we would certainly hesitate, because who knows the entire Buddhist teaching on this subject and has taken the trouble to check it all out? In all honesty, we would have to answer: "I don't know, I don't know enough about

it. Some things seem completely plausible to me based on my own experience and others I can't understand, at least not at the moment." This is a healthy attitude: we don't need to persuade ourselves or others to believe in karma.

Some aspects of the doctrine of karma we can already verify now, and other aspects will have to wait until we are perhaps able to verify them at some point.

We should put aside in our minds these aspects of the Buddha's teaching to be checked later, put them in a bag, so to speak, and write on it: "Probably helpful – check later". In doing so, we leave these questions open. We have confidence in the Buddha that he probably didn't fool us about these aspects of his teaching either. But we are aware that understanding it personally is beyond our capabilities at the moment. In the long run, this is healthier than basing our Dharma practice on untested beliefs.

Beliefs will not help us much in emotionally difficult situations. We may have been told phrases such as: "It's your own fault; it's your karma" or "You shouldn't do that; it will lead to a bad rebirth". Although there is something helpful in these sentences, they tend to make some of us angry when we get to hear them, because they are somewhat clumsy and show a lack of empathy and personal reflection. After all, who knows from personal insight what actions in the past have led to the current situation and what a certain action will lead to in the future? And if we did know, we would certainly find more empathetic words and not drive our friends up the wall with remarks about karma.

13. Do I have to believe in reincarnation?

By the way, dealing with karma does not necessarily mean that we also have to deal with the doctrine of rebirth and even accept it. It is true that dealing with karma raises the questions: "What was actually before this life? And what comes afterwards? Do the karmic forces end with death, or do they continue to have an effect in some form? Why do even identical twins differ so much as babies?" But for now, we can confidently put these questions, which cannot be verified at the moment, in the bag mentioned above ("Probably helpful – check later").

Our present life offers us a wealth of material for dealing with karmic connections and we do not necessarily need to believe in other lives for this. From a Dharma point of view, it is enough to say: "What do I know about rebirth? I do not exclude this possibility." and:

"I don't need absolute certainty about the time after death to act in a helpful way, to strive for awakening and to support other beings."

and: "There are of course many indications of life after death and also before birth, but I don't worry about it, I just do what I can to lead a life in the spirit of the Dharma."

14. Advice on dealing with doubts about the doctrine of karma (MN 60)

In the sutra "A safe bet" (*Apannaka Sutta*, MN 60), Buddha Shakyamuni gave detailed explanations on how we can deal with such questions about karma and rebirth that are currently unsolvable for us. In doing so, he refers to several views that are the opposite to the Dharma he teaches:

- the view that there is no further existence after this life
- the view that there are no effects of actions beyond this life
- the view that there are no different consequences of beneficial and of harmful actions
- the view that there are no causes for the confusion or clarity of beings
- the view that there are no happy or painful areas of rebirth
- the view that there is no way to put an end to rebirths

The Buddha's answer is always the same; he says (*Apannaka Sutta*, M 60, here in abridged form):

"On this a sage reflects thus: 'Various teachers and philosophers hold these doctrines and views. But this has not been seen by me. Other teachers and philosophers hold the exact opposite views. But I do not know that either and cannot judge it. If, without knowing or seeing, I were to choose one side and proclaim: 'Only this is true, everything else is false', that would not be appropriate. And the wise man ponders:

If there is another existence after this life,

if there are effects of actions beyond this life,
if there are different consequences of beneficial and of harmful actions,
if there are causes for the confusion or clarity of beings,
if there are happy and painful areas of rebirth,
if there is a possibility of putting an end to rebirths,
then we will be reborn at the dissolution of the body, after death. The effects of wholesome actions are then experienced as a clear, unconfused mind in a happy place, even in celestial abodes, and there is also the possibility of putting an end to the cycle of rebirths.

But regardless of whether the words of these teachers and philosophers are true or not. Suppose there were no further existence, no consequences of actions, etc.: A person who acts in a harmful way is nevertheless rebuked here and now by the wise. On the other hand, one who acts wholesomely is praised here and now by the sages as a decent, trustworthy person, as one with right views, who acts helpfully, tames his emotions, is aware of the possible consequences of his actions, and does not prematurely take point of views on things he cannot judge.

But if, on the other hand, there is a further existence, consequences of actions that extend beyond this life, etc., then the harmful doer has made a doubly bad throw, for not only is he rebuked here and now by the wise, but after death he experiences the effects of his unwholesome actions as great suffering, possibly even as extreme torment in the hell realms. He has not properly considered this indisputable teaching and adopts a one-sided attitude that excludes the wholesome alternative.

On the other hand, the person who acts wholesomely has made a doubly good throw, for he is praised by the wise here and now and after death experiences the effects of his wholesome actions as happiness and he even has the possibility of attaining complete liberation. Someone who considers and acts in this way has correctly accepted and adopted this indisputable teaching in a way that leaves both possibilities open and excludes the unwholesome alternative."

This is an attitude with which the path can initially be walked. However, it is clear to all Buddhist masters with complete certainty that there are previous and later lives. That is why the following explanations are also based on this.

15. How did the Buddha arrive at his statements about karma? (M 12)

Buddha Shakyamuni makes his statements on the basis of direct vision. This can be seen in the sutra *The Great Discourse on the Lion's Roar* (M 12, Mahasihanada Sutta). There, the Awakened One speaks about the ten powers of a Tathagata Buddha (a "Thus Gone"):

"Sāriputta, the Tathagata has the ten powers of a Tathagata, and because he possesses them, he claims the place as leader of the community, sounds his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets the wheel of pure teaching in motion. What are these ten?

- The Tathagata understands, according to reality, what is possible as possible and what is impossible as impossible.
- The Tathagata understands, according to reality, the consequences of performing actions - past, future and present consequences - with the various possibilities and causes.
- The Tathagata understands, according to reality, the paths that lead to all destinations [rebirth and liberation].
- The Tathagata understands, according to reality, the world with its many and various elements [i.e. in their interrelationships].
- The Tathagata understands, according to reality, the different tendencies of living beings.
- The Tathagata understands, according to reality, [all higher states of mind]: defilement, purification, and emergence in terms of immersions, releases, concentrations, and attainment states.
- The Tathagata remembers his manifold previous lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many eons in which the universe contracted, many eons

in which the universe expanded, many eons in which the universe contracted and expanded: 'There I was called such and such, was of such family, with such appearance, such was my sustenance, such was my experience of happiness and pain, such was my lifespan; and having departed from there, I reappeared elsewhere; there too I was called such and such, was of such family, with such appearance, such was my sustenance, such was my experience of happiness and pain, such was my lifespan; and having departed from there, I reappeared here.'

- The Tathagata with the Celestial Eye [of deep meditation], which is purified and superior to the human eye, sees beings dying and reappearing: ordinary and noble, beautiful and ugly, happy and wretched. He understands how beings move on according to their actions: 'These cherished beings are inclined to what is harmful in deed, inclined to what is harmful in word, inclined to what is harmful in thought, disapproving of the noble ones, harbouring wrong view, and from wrong view come to wrong conduct. When the body dies, after death, they enter a bad path, circumstances characterized by deprivation, unhappiness and corruption, even the depths of the world of pain. But those esteemed beings are devoted to the wholesome in deed, devoted to the wholesome in word, devoted to the wholesome in thought. They do not disapprove of the noble ones, cherish right view, and from right view comes right conduct. When the body dies, after death, they enter a good path, happy circumstances, even celestial abodes.
- The Tathagata enters and abides in the liberation of the heart through his own realization with higher mental power here and now, the liberation through wisdom that is free from urges (emotional delusion) with the destruction of those drives. These are the powers of a Tathagata, and because he possesses them, he claims the place as leader of the community, sounds his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets the wheel of pure teaching in motion.

Karmic laws

16. Do all actions have consequences?

We are all aware that *certain* actions have an impact, but does this apply to *all* actions? If we throw a stone into a lake, it makes a noise and waves. So the action of taking a stone and throwing it towards the lake has clearly perceptible effects. The stone is in a different place after this action, something has changed. And the same applies to all other actions. This is why the first sentence of the Buddhist doctrine of karma reads:

Every action changes something. All actions have consequences, even if these are sometimes not easy to recognize.

To stay with the image: Every stone, no matter how small, that is thrown into the lake creates waves, settles to the bottom, etc. and thus has an effect on the lake.

However, the doctrine of karma is mainly concerned with actions that have a significant impact, and also on future lives and on liberation.

The Buddha said little about the other kinds of actions, which are of a weaker nature and whose effects remain limited to this life, because anyone can observe this relatively easily for themselves.

- *Exercise 2: Do all actions really have an impact? Try to find a physical, verbal or mental action that has no effect whatsoever, whether on the environment, on other people or on your own mind.*

17. When does karma reach maturity?

Buddha Shakyamuni in A III.33:

"Wherever beings come into existence, there their actions (*karma*) will come to maturity. And wherever their actions come to maturity, there they will reap the fruits of those actions, be it in this life or the next, or in any later life."

It is said that our present experiences are not only caused by actions in this life, but also by actions in the last life immediately before this birth and in lives further back. In the same way, the actions we carry out now will also show their effects at different times in the future.

There are three possibilities when the fruits of an action can come to maturity: 1. in this life, 2. in the next life, 3. in later lives. (See also: MN 136)

Asanga (p.92) and Vasubandhu (p.115) explain this as follows:

1. Actions whose effects are certain to be experienced in this present life (*drstadharmavedaniyakarma*). These are (a) actions that harm or help realized practitioners², (b) wholesome and unwholesome actions towards the Sangha with the Buddha at its head, and (c) wholesome and unwholesome actions with a high intensity of intention. This is what the Karmapa (p.19) calls the "experience of the result in a visible way". The effects of such actions can - according to Vasubandhu, p.116 - last several lifetimes.
2. Actions whose effects are certain to be experienced in the next, immediately following life (*upapadyavedaniyakarma*). These are, for example, the five actions (crimes) with immediate effects (*anantaryakarma*) and, according to the Karmapa (p.19), also the five actions that are almost as serious. He calls this the "experience as a birthplace".
3. Actions whose effects will be experienced in some future life (*aparaparyavedaniyakarma*). This leads to "experience in some future life".

18. Actions with definite and indefinite effects

The above three are the three types of "certain" actions (*niyata*) whose effects are to be experienced in any case. These include, according to Vasubandhu p.120:

- (a) Actions with strong passion or strong devotion
- (b) Actions in relation to a field of qualities (the Awakened Ones, their teaching and their community)
- (c) Actions that are performed continuously
- (d) the murder of father or mother.

All other actions, i.e. those that are performed with less emotional involvement, belong - according to Vasubandhu, p.116 - to the "indeterminate" (*aniyata*) actions. With them, the time at which the fruits appear is uncertain.

Regarding indeterminate actions, the Karmapa writes in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.44:

"Obscured [impure] neutral action refers to actions with defiled mental factors in the higher realms. Unobscured [pure] neutral action refers to actions like handicraft [of an awakened person who is free from ignorance, craving and the like]. The difference between obscured and unobscured neutral action results from the presence or absence of defiled mental factors at the base of this neutral action."

19. Are there completely irrelevant actions?

Yes and no. Some actions have extremely minor effects, but even such trivial actions as simply walking or standing, opening or closing a door, sitting down and the like are not without consequences. Through such actions, we place ourselves in certain situations and shape them. For example, they change our physical position. This can in turn create the conditions for this or that karma to ripen.

Even seemingly irrelevant actions are habit-forming like all other actions, but they do not generate direct positive or negative karma. More important than the mere fact of walking is where we are going, why we are going there and what we are thinking at the same time. We can waste our lives on trivial actions, and this is by no means irrelevant for someone who wants to attain enlightenment.

For someone for whom life is precious, there are no irrelevant actions.

² Asanga cites on p.92 the types of samadhi that such Realized Ones must have experienced in order for actions related to them to bear fruit in this life: Absorption in boundless love, absorption free from struggle, absorption of liberation from suffering, and those who have entered the stream of liberation up to the level of arhats.

- *Exercise 3: Try to find an action that is always, under all conditions, completely irrelevant, i.e. without any other consequences.*

20. What are the most important types of actions?

Basically, there are as many types of actions as there are situations. In the context of Dharma, it is particularly important to distinguish which actions cause suffering and which, on the other hand, lead to happiness and liberation from suffering. Accordingly, actions are called "unwholesome" or "wholesome".

There is also a third category of actions, the so-called "unmovable" actions or rather: actions "with a fixed effect". These are the deep but still dualistic meditative immersions in the realms of the gods, a special case of action that will not be discussed further here (see *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6).

In terms of happiness and liberation, there are two types of actions: wholesome and unwholesome.

Asanga, p.86:

"What is meritorious action (*punyakarma*)? Wholesome action (*kusalakarma*) within the realm of sensuality. What is non-meritorious action (*apunyakarma*)? Unwholesome action (*akusalakarma*)."

Asanga, p.83:

"What is intentional action (*cetanakarma*)? Meritorious, non-meritorious and unmovable action. What is intended action (*cetayitvakarma*)? These are bodily, verbal and mental actions, which in turn can be wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*)."

Accordingly, Djamgön Kongtrul summarizes saṃsāric action in *The Torch of the True Meaning*, p.32-33 as follows - there are

- Non-meritorious acts, which are included within the ten nonvirtues, lead to rebirth in the three lower realms.
- meritorious actions - virtues such as generosity that are not accompanied by the intention to achieve nirvana - lead to rebirth in high realms as gods or humans.

Of course, actions can also be differentiated according to the prevailing emotion (clinging, aversion and ignorance) or other criteria.

The 9th Karmapa (in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.43) and Asanga (p.92) put it this way:

"What are actions that lead to the experience of happiness (*sukhavedaniyakarma*)? These are all wholesome actions in the realm of sensuality up to and including the third stage of meditative absorption (*dhyana*) in the realm of subtle form.

What are actions that lead to the experience of suffering (*dukkhavedaniyakarma*)? These are unwholesome actions in the realm of sensuality."

21. Pure and impure acts (AN IV.232; MN 57)

Furthermore, the influence of self-centeredness on actions can be examined. Whenever duality, self-centeredness or "underlying biases"/emotional delusion accompany an action, it is "impure" using old Buddhist parlance. This always applies to unwholesome, harmful actions; they are always dualistic.

Buddha Shakyamuni mentions in AN IV.232 and MN 57 the additional categories of mixed and completely pure actions (which, however, are probably expressions from the Mahayana tradition):

"There is dark kamma with dark ripening, there is bright kamma with bright ripening, there is dark-and-bright kamma with dark-and-bright ripening, and there is kamma that is not dark and not bright with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening that conduces to the exhaustion of kamma. (Pali: *kamma-kkhaya*)."

Karmapa writes in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.44:

"Wholesome [meritorious] action is either [impure] conditioned wholesome action or [pure] unconditioned wholesome action. Conditioned wholesome action [accompanied by self-centeredness] refers to

abstaining from killing and so on an accomplishing the ten karmic paths of wholesome actions. Unconditioned wholesome action refers to liberation, the state beyond suffering [nirvana]."

and:

"Impure" actions are accompanied by self-centeredness.

"Pure" action is completely free of self-centeredness.

22. What are wholesome actions? (M 88)

wholesome actions open the mind, bring about happiness and help to reduce self-centeredness and suffering.

The definition of Vasubandhu, p.621, reads:

"Good action (*kusala*) is salutary (*ksema*), because it is of agreeable retribution (*istavipaka*) and as a consequence it protects one from suffering for a time ... or rather, because it brings about the attainment of Nirvana and, as a consequence, definitively protects one from suffering. ... Good action of the sphere of Kamadhatu [realm of sensual pleasures] is called "meritorious" action (*punya*), because it purifies, and because it produces an agreeable retribution."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, 5-91, page 4: "Actions are wholesome or harmful, depending on the attitude of mind. If we have a wholesome attitude of mind, any action on the level of body, speech and mind is wholesome, its result is happiness. If, on the other hand, one performs an action with harmful intent with body, speech or mind, this action is unwholesome and sooner or later comes to fruition as suffering, illness, obstacle or misfortune. This is the law of karma, the close and infallible relationship that exists between an action and its result. The only result of an unwholesome action is suffering. A wholesome action has a wholesome and favourable result. For this reason, the Buddha explained that an action of any kind is wholesome if one has a wholesome attitude of mind and that, on the other hand, any action is actually harmful if our attitude of mind is negative. It is advisable to follow the Buddha's teaching and do our utmost to develop the right motivation of the mind of awakening in all our actions."

Unselfish actions release joy. The more often we perform such actions, the happier we become.

They begin to change our minds and our situation. Even if their effects are not always immediately visible, the first signs almost always appear in this life. It is extremely rare for someone who always acted wholesomely in this life, to only ever experience bad things.

The attitude of mind is decisive in all actions. Actions that arise from the mind of awakening are always beneficial.

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.40:

"All unwholesome actions, the three of body, the four of speech, and the three of mind, you have to give up, and strive to practice their opposite, the ten wholesome actions."

23. What are unwholesome actions?

The definition of Vasubandhu, p.621, reads:

"Bad action is pernicious: this is action of disagreeable retribution."

Unwholesome actions cause suffering. They arise from a narrow, self-centred state of mind and reinforce it. We experience how self-centred or even ruthless actions make the mind of ourselves and most others narrow and cause tension. The more often we perform such actions, the more selfish and joyless we become. Such actions are the cause of suffering directly (for others) and indirectly (for ourselves). They may bring us satisfaction and happiness for a short time because we are satisfying a personal desire. But this happiness is short-lived and, in most cases, soon turns into dissatisfaction and negativity. It is extremely rare for someone who only does harmful things to remain happy in this life.

The distinction between unwholesome and wholesome actions is found in MN 88, where Ananda is asked by King Pasenadi the following question: "What bodily, what verbal, and what mental behaviour is condemned by wise monks and brahmins?" [Explanations in brackets]

Ananda's answer - later approved by the Buddha - is summarized here: "Physical, verbal, and mental behaviour that is not wholesome [*gelaṇṇa*, an unwholesome state of mind], that is blameworthy [*sāvajja*, ethically detrimental], that brings suffering [already now] and [also later] has painful results [*dukkha-vipāka*, sorrowful karmic consequences], that leads to one's own suffering, to the suffering of others, or to the suffering of both, and because of which unwholesome states increase and wholesome states decrease."

And the king goes on to ask: "What physical, verbal and mental behaviour is not condemned by wise monks and brahmins?"

Ananda answers - also later approved by the Buddha: "Physical, verbal and mental behaviour that is wholesome, that is blameless, that brings no suffering, that has pleasant results, that does not lead to one's own suffering, to the suffering of others or to the suffering of both, and due to which unwholesome states decrease and wholesome states increase."

Unwholesome actions lead to suffering by definition. However, when dealing with the question of unwholesome actions, we should always remember that the same action that is unwholesome under normal circumstances can also be meaningful under special circumstances (e.g. tyrannicide).

A quote from *The Precious Garland Ratnavali* of Nagarjuna, verses 20-21:

"Desire, hatred, ignorance, and the actions they generate are non-virtues. ... From non-virtues come all sufferings and likewise all bad transmigrations [lower realms of existence]."

An unwholesome action unfolds its full karmic effects when five conditions come together (Asanga, p.84):

1. object (*vastu*) : A corresponding object is present, e.g. a living being, an object of value, etc.
2. intention (*asaya*): There was an intention to perform this action.
3. implementation (*prayoga*): The action has been prepared and performed.
4. success (*nisthagamana*): The action was successful and was experienced consciously.
5. emotional delusion (*kleśa*): The moment of the act was accompanied by clinging (desire), aversion (hatred) or delusion and satisfaction/gratification was felt without immediate remorse.

These five factors apply to all actions. They also determine when a vow is completely broken.

24. Are wholesome action, positive karma and merit identical?

These terms are often used interchangeably. However, the perspective from which the actions are viewed is slightly different in each case.

Wholesome actions (a) trigger wholesome forces, which are generally called "positive karma" (b) or "merits" in a broader sense (c1).

Merit in the narrower sense (c2) refers to the consequences of wholesome actions that are consciously dedicated to the liberation and awakening of all beings.

Merit therefore refers to the forces triggered by beneficial actions that lead to happiness in any form, but above all to liberation and enlightenment.

Outwardly, there is no difference between wholesome, worldly actions and meritorious actions aimed at awakening. The difference lies in the motivation, in the orientation towards awakening (the "dedication") and in the long-term effects.

During the dedication, we dwell for a moment beyond the identification with a self that has performed the action. We "dispossess" the action, so to speak, whereby it becomes a strong force that further dissolves the self-illusion.

Merit not only leads to happiness in the cycle of existence but is the driving force behind the dissolution of self-centeredness.

These forces, called merits, which bring about the awakening of all beings, are all the greater the "purer", i.e. freer from self-centeredness, the actions are.

Padmasambhava in the *Dakini teachings*, p.34:

"Those who have not accumulated merit cannot develop a noble attitude of mind, but those who accumulate spiritual merit will be rewarded with a noble mind. Once the noble attitude of mind has become part of your being, you will naturally abandon all harmful things and strive to do wholesome things. Therefore, it is important to diligently apply the various methods by which you can accumulate merit with body, speech and mind."

25. *How far-reaching are the effects of our actions?*

➤ *Exercise 4: Take any action and see how far you can trace the chain of its effects. What are the immediate effects? What other effects result from these? How do the effects spread, perhaps by affecting more and more people or changing our environment, which in turn has an impact? What are the short and long-term effects of the action on our mind?*

Many of us do not realize how far-reaching the effects of our actions are. They are not limited to the immediately perceptible situation but continue into other situations. However, due to ignorance and a lack of observation skills, we usually assume that the effects of our actions are limited to what we immediately perceive and think that we don't need to worry about anything else. This is a mistake.

The Buddha and other far-sighted masters draw our attention to the fact that the ripples of our actions usually go much further than we realize— into distant future lives.

Actions show their effects at different times: immediately, in the next few days and months, in the next few years, in this life, perhaps only at the time of death, in the after-death state, in the immediately following life or only in much later lives.

Every action has immediate and subsequent consequences.

An action can only have later consequences because it already has effects at the moment of the action itself. Performing an action generates at the same moment forces and thus effects and traces. If our perception is subtle enough, we can perceive these effects very clearly in our own minds, even if nothing is perceptible to others outwardly and even though it may have been a purely mental action.

This also applies to seemingly insignificant physical actions, such as simply picking up a stone and putting it down again, and also to purely mental actions, such as thinking "blue" right now. However, the effects become clearer when it comes to strong thoughts, such as a wish. Once the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings has been generated, it has far-reaching immediate and long-term effects.

The example with the waves

The 'waves' of our actions combine with earlier and later waves triggered by ourselves and interact with the waves triggered by other beings. The description of this complex interplay is the description of 'karma'.

To illustrate this: We sit in a bathtub and splash around. We create one wave after another. These waves constantly come back to us and mix with the new waves. The more we splash around, the more and bigger the waves are, until they almost go above our heads. If we want the water to calm down, we have to stop constantly creating new waves and be patient and wait for the waves to subside.

Well, this is a very simplified picture of the karmic process that we should not overuse. For one thing, we are not sitting alone in our karmic bathtub, but together with countless others, and for another, there are waves of all kinds: depending on the strength of the self-centeredness, there are beneficial, harmful or

mixed actions, and depending on the type and intensity of the emotion, we can speak of small and large, red, green, multi-coloured, etc. waves. Our karmic bathtub does not have a solid wall either: it is the situations themselves, with their beings and objects, that send the waves back to us with a shorter or longer duration.

26. What is influenced by our actions?

- *Exercise 5: Make a list of all aspects of the effects of a given action. Choose an example and consider all the possible effects of this action, for example the decision to build a house, or the union of partners that leads to the conception of a child, or the decision to travel somewhere...*

To summarize:

Actions influence ourselves, others and our material environment.

More precisely, actions influence:

- our state of mind immediately following the action
- our future states of mind, as the mental impressions, habits and tendencies resulting from the action lead to similar states of mind later on. They create karmic tendencies that are reflected in our future thinking and communication behaviour
- the appearance, constitution and state of our body now and later
- the states of mind, attitudes and actions of other beings who were present during the action, even if we were not aware of them at the time
- indirectly also the states of mind, attitudes and actions of living beings who later encounter the persons present at the action, thus enabling a long chain of continuing effects in our world and society
- the nature of our material environment (houses, gardens, air, water, objects...) now and in the future.

It follows from all this that many future situations that occur both in our immediate surroundings and elsewhere will be influenced by our actions.

In principle, there are no limits to the spatial extent and temporal duration of the consequences of actions.

They can have an impact across the entire planet and reach far beyond our death. They interact with the actions of all other living beings.

27. The consequences of actions (A I,29; M 136)

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.38:

"Generally speaking, all happiness and suffering arises due to actions."
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Karmapa, p.38: "The experiences of happiness and suffering of this present life are the effect of wholesome or unwholesome actions (*karma*) carried out in previous lives. Every action you carry out in this present life will lead to a ripened effect in future lives."

It should be noted here that some of our experiences of happiness and suffering can certainly be traced back to actions in this, our current life, but the general framework for these experiences and how we deal with them due to our karmic tendencies is already largely defined by the strong traces from previous lives. However, those who work hard on themselves can significantly influence, expand and change this framework.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 13: "We know that all living beings strive for happiness and try to escape suffering. Despite this strong striving, no one attains real happiness in the long run. This means that the pursuit of happiness and the desire to turn away from suffering are not enough. The law of karma must be considered: deeds done in the past sooner or later come to maturity.

No matter how hard we try, it is impossible to stop a process of suffering if we have accumulated corresponding unwholesome actions in the past.
--

Similarly, it is impossible to experience happiness now if we have not created the necessary causes and conditions for this happiness in the past.
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The efforts made in trying to change the present situation are in reality of little importance, as this situation is simply the result of the past and accumulated karmic deeds. Rather, one should think about the future. If we look at the present situation, we cannot change anything that is caused by the past; on the other hand, what we make of the present situation influences the circumstances we will encounter in the future. We must therefore think now about the causes that will help us to find circumstances of lasting happiness."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.84-85:

"In brief, we carry the burden of a mountain of misdeeds and downfalls that we do not know about or feel but have accumulated in beginningless lifetimes. On top of that, almost all our present intentions and actions of body, speech, and mind just heap on additional misdeeds and obscurations due solely to the three poisons. Because of those wrongs, we are cursed and slandered by gods and humans in this life. Things often go wrong or don't work out. Our guardian deities forsake us, and insanity and obstructive spirits take advantage of this. We are thrust into the ranks of the wretched. Our misdeeds cast a shadow on everything we are connected to, bringing bad luck. We have various bad dreams and are unhappy. Fatal accidents and severe, mortal illnesses occur."

In the text *Dren-nyer Chungwa* we read: "Through wholesome action you receive happiness, from unwholesome action comes suffering. Thus the result of wholesome and unwholesome action is clearly stated."

Buddha says in the Mahayana sutra *Requested by Surata* as quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.41:

"From hot seeds, hot fruit will grow. From sweet seeds, sweet fruits will grow. From these examples understand, that the ripening of unwholesome actions is hot, and the ripening of white actions is sweet."

Buddha Shakyamuni in AN I,20:

"It is impossible and cannot be that from unwholesome conduct in deeds, words, and thoughts a longed-for, desired, pleasing harvest could arise: such a case is not found. Likewise, there is no case in which an unwished-for, undesirable, unpleasant harvest could come from wholesome conduct in deeds, words and thoughts: there is no such case.

"It is impossible and cannot be that one who has adopted unwholesome behaviour in deeds, words, and thoughts could, as a result, appear on a good path in the celestial world upon the dissolution of the body after death: such a case is not found. Nor is there a case where one who has adopted wholesome behaviour in deeds, words, and thoughts could, as a result, upon the dissolution of the body, after his death, appear on a bad path in disaster, in hell: such a case is not found."

M 136: However, an existence with only wholesome activity can be followed by a bad existence, because forces from earlier unwholesome activity come to maturity.

28. Consequences of our actions – an overview (DN 30, MN 135, AN VIII.40)

In his book *Die Furt zum anderen Ufer*, pp. 277-279, Helmuth Hecker summarizes the statements of Buddha Shakyamuni in the Pāli Sutras (especially DN 30, MN 135, AN VIII.40) on the consequences of actions:

"Harvest of deeds Taten):

1. Unattractiveness and premature ageing are the result of sensual unrestraint and the angry rebellion against any restriction in this respect. - Beauty and grace are the result of moderation in enjoyment and of not hating.
2. Sickness and vulnerability is the result of bodily harm and the snatching of other possessions that serve the welfare of beings. - Health and vitality are the result of caring protection of others and their property.
3. Short life due to lack of vitality is the result of killing. - Longevity is the result of helping and encouraging.

4. Being born in primitive circumstances is the result of disrespectful arrogance. - Being born in good circumstances is the result of respect for the hierarchical (karmic) order.
5. You become poor and destitute by refusing and withholding. - You become rich and wealthy by giving and granting.
6. You become unskilled and untalented through envy and begrudging. - You become talented by treating others in a supportive way.
7. You die prematurely due to external circumstances through unreflected killing, e.g. abortion, mass cruelty to animals, etc. - Protection and help from mortal danger can be found through unlimited willingness to help.
8. Alcohol and drugs can make you mentally restricted or even possessed. - Good, far-sighted friends in this life and beyond can be found through clarity of mind.

Harvest of words:

9. Discord and strife are achieved through backbiting, incitement, etc. - harmony through reconciliation and mediation.
10. One will be lied to and deceived when lying and slandering oneself. - One encounters openness and honesty through integrity and reliability.
11. You will be insulted and affronted because of scolding and nagging. - Kindness and politeness are encountered through gentle speech.
12. You will experience banal chatter when you bored others to death with your prattle. - Meaningful speech is heard by those who speak meaningfully themselves.
13. Those who treat others carelessly will receive no recognition or attention. - You find security and acceptance by showing consideration for the emotional state of others.
14. You become an "unlucky devil" who is constantly faced with closed doors through hypocrisy or feigned interest in others. - You become a "lucky devil" for whom doors open, through genuine affection.
15. Censure and criticism are experienced when putting people down and constant fault-finding. - Uplift and encouragement are experienced through praise and recognition of achievements.
16. The pig-headed and opinionated become inglorious. - You gain respect and esteem by making concessions and putting things into context.

29. No automatic higher evolution: three types of long-term effects

From all that has been said so far, it is already clear that there is no automatic higher evolution for humans and other beings. All possibilities are open, the higher as well as the lower realms of experience, and where we will go after death depends solely on our thoughts, words and actions. The belief in an automatic higher development independent of our actions is naive, pure wishful thinking. The law of karma states that higher development is "automatic" for those who act in a wholesome, i.e. mindful and loving way. And in the same way, the descent into more painful areas is the guaranteed consequence of unwholesome, i.e. careless and unloving actions. In contrast to many esoteric schools of thought, the awakened masters describe how most people do not make sufficient use of the opportunity they have in the human realm and accumulate more negative than positive karma.

A distinction is made between three types of long-term effects of actions:

- The "effects coming to full maturity" determine in which realm of existence a being is born as a result of such actions.
- The "secondary effects" determine the state of the living being born there.
- The "influencing effects" determine the environmental conditions he experiences there.

1. "effects coming to full maturity"

Asanga, p.85: "The effects (*vipaka-phala*; Tib.: *rnam-smin*) of the ten kinds of unwholesome actions coming to full maturity manifest themselves (as a birth) in the three lower realms of existence, with the weaker actions leading to the animal realm, the medium ones to the hungry ghosts, and the strong ones to the hell realms. ... The sutra also states: The effects of the ten kinds of wholesome actions coming to full maturity manifest for those who are born as gods or humans in the god and human realms." Asanga also calls the corresponding actions "existence-determining actions".

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.38-39:

"The ripened effect of unwholesome actions will be a birth in the three lower realms."

Ratnavali, verses no. 21&22: "Desire, hatred, stupidity and actions arising from them are not wholesome. Unwholesome actions lead to suffering and to all suffering forms of existence. Absence of desire, hatred, stupidity and actions arising from them are wholesome. Wholesome actions lead to all pleasant forms of existence and to happiness in all existences."

verse no. 229: "From desire you become a hungry ghost. Hatred hurls you into the hell realms. Stupidity leads to an animal existence."

verse no. 24: "Through the immeasurable formless meditative absorptions you attain the happiness of Brahma."

Asanga, p.85: "In what order will the 'effects coming to full maturity' appear in such a case? (1) Serious actions (*guru-karma*) are the first to show their effects, (2) then actions performed immediately before death, (3) then actions habitually performed in the respective life, and (4) finally actions performed in previous lives."

So with regard to our next birth, serious actions make everything else take a back seat. If there is no such action, the powerful action performed immediately in death dominates. If there is no such action, the actions that have been performed most frequently show their effects. If none of these three forms of action has sufficient power, an action from a previous life will show its effects.

2. "corresponding to the cause" or "secondary" effects

Asanga, p.85: "In the case of rebirth among human beings, the secondary effects (*nisyandaphala*) of unwholesome actions - each separately and in accordance with the cause - manifest themselves as the dangers that threaten such a person and the things belonging to them ... The secondary effects of wholesome actions - each separately and in accordance with the cause - are the increase of the well-being of the person and the things belonging to them in these areas." Asanga also calls the corresponding actions (together with the third group) "completing actions".

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.39: "Killing leads to a short life. Causing harm leads to being harmed a lot. Stealing leads to poverty. Committing adultery leads to hostility. Telling lies leads to being abused. Divisive talk leads to being separated from friends. Speaking harsh words leads to getting to hear unpleasant things. Speaking meaninglessly leads to disrespect of your words. Greediness leads to having your hopes ruined. Ill-will leads to fear. Wrong views lead to harmful beliefs."

In Padmasambhava's *Dakini teachings*, p.76 the "result corresponding to the cause is that the habitual tendencies of holding wrong views will solidify in your all-ground [the non-conceptual memory consciousness for karmic impressions], after which you will be fond of holding wrong views."

3. the "dominating" or "influencing" effects

Asanga, p.85: "The influential effects (*adhipatiphala*) of unwholesome actions - each one separately and in accordance with the cause - are the dangers that threaten the external things (in the environment). ... The influential effects of wholesome actions - each separately and in accordance with the cause - are the increase of external things in the environment."

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.39, gives the following examples, each of which should be understood as representative of other similar effects:

"The environment is very unpleasant [due to killing], with much damage (from frost and hail) [due to stealing], dense dust [due to adultery], foul smells [due to lying], scraggy landscape [due to slander],

infertile land [due to harsh speech], untimely seasons [due to gossip], bitter fruits [due to malice], small fruits [due to greed], and no fruits [due to wrong view]."

All three of these effects can be modified by influencing actions, such as immediate regret and the like.

30. What are existence-determining and completing actions?

Asanga continues with the above explanations (p.85):

"The effects of wholesome and unwholesome actions manifest themselves as rebirth in pleasant or painful realms of existence. This also happens through the 'existence-determining actions' (*aksepaka-karma*)³ and the 'completing actions' (*paripuraka-karma*).

What are 'existence-determining actions'? These are the actions that cause the 'effects coming to full maturity' (i.e. rebirth in a certain realm).

What are 'completing actions'? These are the actions through which one experiences pleasant or unpleasant consequences after birth (i.e. the secondary and dominant effects).

Here, one action can determine one birth, or several actions can determine one birth, or several actions can determine several births. One being is accompanied by several actions."

But it is important to remember that the place of rebirth is not immutably fixed, as Vasubandhu, p.622, describes:

"Action of the sphere of Kamadhatu [realm of sensual pleasures] is agitated (*injati*) in its retribution. The place of retribution is not fixed."

and further p.622: "": one action which produces, naturally, a certain realm of rebirth, can be retributed in another one; an action which produces a heavenly realm of rebirth can be retributed in another heavenly realm of rebirth. In fact it happens that actions which produce power, a good figure, beauty, or objects of enjoyment, instead of being retributed in a heavenly realm of rebirth, are retributed in a human, animal, or Preta realm of rebirth through the efficacy of certain cause."

31. How is the maturing of karma experienced?

Here is a summarized quote from Vasubandhu, *Abhidharma Treasury* p.623ff:

"The essential element in the maturing of karma (*vipaka*) is sensations."

"Can certain actions ripen exclusively as a mental sensation (*caitasika*) rather than as a physical sensation (*kayiki*)? Can certain actions ripen as a bodily sensation and not as a mental sensation?"

The fruit of a wholesome action that was free from thought (*vitarka*) is exclusively mental sensation.

This applies to all actions above the level of the first meditative absorption (*dhyana*), because these are free of thought. Since a physical sensation, i.e. a sensation connected with the five sensory perceptions, always involves initial thought (*vitarka*) and applied thought (*vicāra*), it cannot be the fruit of an action free from thought.

The fruit of an unwholesome action always manifests itself as a physical sensation and this is painful.

A painful mental sensation is called unsatisfactory or 'non-satisfaction' (*daurmanasyendriya*). But unsatisfactoriness, as has been shown elsewhere, cannot be a karmic fruit. ... One therefore speaks of agitated mind (*cittaksepa*), which shows itself as agitated mental perception. ... The five (other) sense perceptions cannot be agitated (*ksipta*) because they are free from imagination (*vikalpa*), scrutiny and memory, and because agitated mind consists of imagining something that does not exist (*asadvikalpa*).

An agitated mind arises from the ripening of karmic fruits.

³ literally: 'throwing' actions

One who agitates and disturbs the minds of others, whether by witchcraft, casting spells, giving poisonous drinks or alcohol to those who do not want to drink it, who frightens game by hunting, setting fire to the forest or setting traps, who in whichever way agitates the mindfulness (*smṛti*) and presence of mind of others, his mind will be agitated as a result of these actions and will not have the help of mindfulness.

The consequences of an agitated mind are terror, being afflicted by demons (mental illness), disturbance of the elements responsible for the physical condition and sorrow. ... In addition, there is an imbalance or disturbance of the bodily elements, which in turn agitates the mind (*prakopa*), makes it uncontrollable and deprives it of the guidance of mindfulness (*bhrastasmṛtika*).

There are four possibilities:

1. The mind is agitated but not confused, i.e. it is agitated but 'not tormented' (*aklista*) by emotions.
2. The mind is confused, but not agitated, i.e. it is 'tormented' (under emotional, dualistic tension), but calm, normal.
3. The mind is agitated and confused.
4. [The mind is neither agitated nor confused.]

... Realized ones (*ārya*), with the exception of Buddhas, are not free from agitated minds, for their minds may be agitated due to an imbalance (*vaisamya*) of the elements. But for them this imbalance of the elements does not arise due to the ripening of karma (here meaning actions from previous lives). ... Neither terror, attacks by demons nor sorrow can agitate the minds of the realized ones, for they are beyond the five fears⁴, they do not perform any actions that would not pacify (*aprasadika*) and trigger the anger of demons, and they know deeply the nature of things (*dharmatā*).\" (end of quote summary)

32. The role of decisions, conversations, thoughts

➤ *Exercise 6: To what extent did I create my situation myself? First, we sit up straight and relaxed and collect our mind. Then we ask ourselves the question: How have I contributed with my body, speech and mind to the fact that I am now in this situation, sitting here and thinking about karma?*

- a) *What physical actions did I perform to get here?*
- b) *What conversations have I had in the past that have contributed to this situation? What have others told me?*
- c) *What have I been thinking over the last few hours, days and years that has led to this situation? What thoughts, i.e. mental actions, have preceded it? What inner questions? What decisions have I made?*

We focus our attention on everything that we ourselves have contributed to this situation - in particular the many decisions and preliminary decisions that we have made in the run-up to our external actions.

We always have the choice to leave or stay.

In our actions, we are not merely at the mercy of external forces, but always have a choice, e.g. to get up and leave or to stay in the respective situation, to talk about something or not, and so on. Often without realizing it, we make a multitude of such decisions. The contemplation of our passive and active participation based on small decisions can be applied to every situation and also to the overall conditions that determine our lives, such as the choice of our profession, partner, place of residence and friends. These are all decisions.

Karma (action) is the result of decisions.

The above exercise shows us how all the experiences of our lives are conditioned by the three levels of our actions, by all the actions we have performed in the recent or former past. At first, we may think that

⁴ The *five fears* that dissolve upon reaching the first bodhisattva stage are found in the *Ten Stages Sutra*: "Upon reaching the stage of 'Supreme Joy', the following five fears dissolve simultaneously and are no longer present from then on: the fear of not having enough to live on, the fear of not understanding the meaning of the Dharma, the fear of death, the fear of the lower realms of existence and the fear of being stuck in samsara (for lack of teachings)."

the concrete physical actions carry the most weight. But on closer inspection, we realize how decisive our thoughts, our mental orientation and motivation are.

Every external action is preceded by thoughts. They are all planned by thoughts and in turn accompanied by thoughts. We could almost say that thoughts create the world. But the Buddha said it even more precisely:

"Actions create the world."

Thoughts alone, without further actions with speech and the body, will not achieve everything in our world. It also needs the body and speech.

33. *The role of right and wrong view (AN I,22-25)*

In AN I,22-25, Buddha Shakyamuni explains that it is right and wrong view that are primarily responsible for our wholesome and harmful actions and thus for our rebirth. And the essential factor in cultivating right view is thorough attention as opposed to "shallow" attention, which leads to wrong view.

In AN I,23 Buddha Shakyamuni says:

"Whatever a person with wrong view, bhikkhus, does and undertakes in deeds, words and thoughts in accordance with that view, and whatever is their intention (*cetanā*), their aspiration (*paṭṭhāna*), and their orientation (*panidhi*), their formations, all these things lead to the unwelcome, the undesirable, the unpleasant, to unhappiness and suffering. And why? Because the view is wrong.

If you sow Nimba, Kosataki or bitter gourd seeds in moist soil, everything they absorb from the soil or water will only lead to bitterness, pungency and unpleasantness. And why? Because they are bitter seeds - and it is the same with wrong view.

Whatever a person carries out and undertakes with the right view, following this view in deeds, words and thoughts, and whatever is their intention, their aspiration and their orientation, their formations, all these things lead to what is welcome, desired, pleasing, to happiness and well-being. And why? Because the view is the right one.

If you plant sugar cane or grapevine shoots or rice grains in moist soil, everything they absorb from the soil or water will only lead to sweetness, pleasantness and exquisiteness. And why? Because it is good seed - and it is the same with right view."

→ see also AN X,104

34. *Delaying the effects of actions (Dh 119, 120)*

Buddha Shakyamuni in the *Path of Truth* (*Dhammapada*, verses 119 and 120):

"Even an evil guy is fine,
as long as the evil has not matured.
but when the evil fruit is ripe,
then it goes badly for the bad man.

Even a good guy is not fine,
as long as his good has not matured.
but when the good fruit is ripe,
then the good man is doing well."

35. *How does suffering arise from ignorance and karma?*

Ignorance, the erroneous assumption of an "I", is the root of all emotions and therefore the driving force behind all actions that lead to suffering.

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.31-33:

"As for samsara, the root of suffering comes down to accumulating negative acts. That comes down to the afflictions, and those come down to the ignorance of cherishing a self.

Ignorance - the delusion that is the root of all afflictions - is the obscure darkness of not knowing where samsara came from; what its nature is; how karmic cause and effect benefit and harm us, and so forth.

It is that fleeting thought that we cannot identify something, as if we were imagining a place we had never visited, even if a guru explains it or we come to an intellectual understanding through study and contemplation. Because of this, we grasp at the lack of a “me” as being me. Due to that, we develop many wrong views such as doubt about the true meaning. Desire based on our own bodies, possessions, and so forth arises, and because of that, pride, envy, and stinginess also occur. Hatred arises based on the “other” (supposedly external objects), and from that come anger, contentiousness, grudges, and so forth.

Without those afflictions - the three poisons - it is impossible to accumulate karma.

And without karma, its result does not occur, so we must do all we can to eliminate those three roots of wandering in samsara. ... In brief:

Until the imprints of thought have been exhausted, we will continue to accumulate karma, and due to that, it will be impossible to stop the confused perceptions of samsara.

Thus those fools who meditate on false emptiness and say, “I don’t need to pay attention to action and result - I have realized the nature of mind,” are great marauders of the teachings."

Asanga, p.86: "The sutra says: The meritorious, non-meritorious and immovable actions are the formative powers (*samskara*) conditioned by ignorance (*avidya*). Why are the meritorious and immovable actions also called 'conditioned by ignorance'?"

Ignorance is twofold: ignorance of effects (*vipaka-avidya*) and ignorance of reality (*tattvartha-avidya*).

Ignorance of the effects causes the non-meritorious (unwholesome) formative powers (*apunya-samskara*), and ignorance of reality causes the meritorious and immovable formative powers (*punya-aninnya-samskara*)." (end of quote)

Thus, every action accompanied by ignorance generates karma, which leads to further existence in the cycle of existence. A fully realized person who is free from ignorance and has attained knowledge of ultimate reality is beyond duality, beyond wholesome and unwholesome, and no longer generates any karma, not even good karma. When such a Realized One performs an action, it is a pure action that does not create causes for further existence, as it is free from the mistaken belief in an "I" and the desire for further existence.

Karma arises from ideas based on ignorance and the resulting emotions. Liberation from karma is liberation from ignorance and vice versa.

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.291: "Because of imputing unawareness [unconsciousness that misconstrues], we do not recognize self-awareness [*rang-rig*] and cling to an I where there is no I, to a self where there is no self, to conceptual elaborations [concreteness] where there are no conceptual elaborations [where nothing concrete exists]. Driven by attachment, aversion and blindness, you accumulate actions [karma], as an inevitable result of which you keep roaming in the cycle of conditioned existence."

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (chapter 17, p.104): "Having grasped this person as being permanent and unique, one then clings to it and becomes attached to it as “I” or “self.” That is what should be known as the self of the person or mind. The afflicting emotions are produced by this self. Karma⁴ is produced by the afflicting emotions. Suffering is produced by this karma. Therefore, the root of all suffering and faults is the self or mind."

The erroneous assumption of the existence of an I is the root of the generation of karmic forces.

The twelve factors of dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) describe how the erroneous assumption of the existence of a self gives rise to the cycle of existence, with all the suffering associated with it. More

detailed explanations can be found in Gampopa's *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, p.97-99, and in Asanga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, pp.42-44.

36. *The search for happiness as a cause of suffering (M 13)*

Gendün Rinpoche in a conversation, Losar 97:

"You should remember that you have experienced countless lives in countless bodies since beginningless time. With all these bodies you have accumulated boundless karma. Now you have the body of this life, which is like the sum, the end result of all the previous bodies and lives. And because of this body you have sensations, feelings, which are the exact corresponding result of the tendencies cultivated earlier. The main feeling is the desire to be happy and to have pleasant experiences.

This desire for happiness and attachment to pleasant experiences is the cause of suffering.

When you realize this, you realize that this desire still dominates you and you realize that this is based on past tendencies. You are still very dependent on it, because it is difficult to dissolve this attachment and become free of this desire for happiness."

MN 13.15-16: "Clinging to sensual experiences ["sensual pleasures" in the broadest sense] is the cause, the source, the foundation why people indulge in misconduct in body, speech, and mind. When they have done so, they reappear at the dissolution of the body, after death, in circumstances characterized by deprivation, at an unhappy destination, in disaster, even in hell. ... - By eliminating, overcoming craving and greed for sensual pleasures, one escapes the dangers of clinging to sensual pleasures." ...And the same applies to clinging to form and even the subtlest experiences of meditation (MN 13.18-37).
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37. *What influences the effects of actions?*

➤ *Exercise 7: Take any action and go through, how different factors influence their effects. Repeat in your mind the same action over and over again under slightly different conditions. Thereby, examine the factors of the following list. Let's choose the following, quite illustrative situation:*

A young woman goes for a walk. It is autumn. A five-year-old girl crosses a bridge in front of her. She leans too far over the railing, trying to catch a leaf sailing in the wind, and falls into the rushing river, but is unable to swim. The woman has the impulse to save the child. (Suggestion by R. Leisner)

Play through the following scenarios and try to imagine what the different effects could be. Imagine that you are this woman. What do you feel before, during and after the action? What effect does this action have - on our body, our perception, feelings, thoughts, now and later, on others, etc.?

- *Without even thinking, she jumps in after the child fully clothed.*
- *She doesn't hesitate, but first circumspectly takes off her heavy robe.*
- *She is afraid but overcomes the fear and brings herself to jump.*
- *She jumps out of a desire for recognition.*
- *She jumps under pressure.*
- *She succeeds or fails to save the child.*
- *She is (a) a bad swimmer, (b) an experienced lifeguard who has already saved several people, (c) can't swim herself.*
- *There are (a) no other people present, (b) the child's family is there or (c) there are even journalists present.*
- *She is angry at her parents for not paying attention but jumps anyway.*
- *The child is (a) a homeless child, (b) the child of the country's president or (c) a billionaire's child.*
- *The woman is (a) a complete stranger, (b) a Buddhist nun, (c) a woman accused of murder or child abuse, or (d) the wife of the president.*
- *She gets severe pneumonia due to the cold water and (a) afterwards regrets having jumped, or (b) rejoices every time she thinks about this action, even years later, or (c) reacts proudly and boastfully, or (d) dedicates the action to enlightenment.*
- *(a) She succeeds or (b) she does not succeed in saving the child.*

- *She is (a) praised or (b) reprimanded for her actions.*

The effects of a given action depend on the following factors:

- the type of emotion or motivation underlying the action
- the intensity of the emotion or motivation
- the nature of the action
- the success of the action
- the frequency of the action
- the object or counterpart of the action
- the personal level of development
- the subsequent strengthening or weakening of the action
- Interactions with other actions already performed
- the current global situation and mindset

The conditions just listed also influence the time at which these effects mature, because all of these factors can also mean that an action can have its full effects right now or not right now. For example, if we leave the place immediately after an action, certain reactions from those affected cannot affect us immediately. We avoid the immediate consequences. But "postponed is not abandoned".

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.39: "One will be born as a hell-being, a hungry ghost, or as an animal, depending on whether the unwholesome actions accomplished were great, medium or small, and depending on whether the karma accumulated is motivated by hatred, desire or stupidity. Accomplishing small wholesome actions leads to a human body, medium ones to the desire gods, and accomplishing big ones leads to a birth as a samadhi god and a formless god."

We will discuss each of these factors below. But first we quote the traditional teachings on what influences the strength of the effects of an action.

38. *What is meant by strong actions?*

Strong actions are:

- Actions that are strong enough to cushion the effects of an unwholesome action
- all intentional wholesome actions
- all intentional unwholesome actions that are not buffered
- all intentional actions that have definite consequences.

Asanga, p. 87/88: "The sutra mentions 'strong actions' (*balavatkarma*) and 'weak actions' (*durbalakarma*). So what is a strong action?

(1) This is the intentional unwholesome action of a person in which strong opposing qualities (*pratipaksa*) come into play. Since the power of the opposing qualities (*pratipaksabalaviskambhana*) prevents this, an action that should produce effects in the hell realms only produces effects in this life, and an action that should produce effects in this life produces no effects at all. Here the action is called 'strong' because of the strength of the action of the opposite qualities.

(2) Any intentional wholesome action is called 'strong' (because of the power of the workings of the qualities opposite to the unwholesome that lead out of samsara). Referring to such actions, the Buddha said: "My noble disciples develop a wholesome mental focus on the limitless and great actions (*apramanavaipulya*); but as for the conditioned and limited actions (*abhisamskrta sapramana*), they do not reject them, do not forget them, but do not belong to this category [of conditioned and limited actions] either.

(3) A deliberate unwholesome action on a person with weak opposing qualities is also called 'strong' [because it will have strong effects].

(4) Furthermore, any intentional action is called 'strong' if it is certain to bring about consequences or if it is not extinguished by the Noble Eightfold Path or even if it is unknown. - In view of all this, it is said:

All (intentional) wholesome and unwholesome actions that definitely produce consequences are called 'strong'.

Unwholesome actions in the realm of sensual pleasures, actions of the past performed habitually, actions performed at opportune times⁵ and actions that cannot be abolished (*asadhya*) because they are by their nature incompatible with Parinirvāṇa - all these actions are inherently 'strong'." (end of quote)

39. The 51 formative factors

From the perspective of the Abhidharma, karma arises from the creating forces (*samskara*). They shape our world, as they shape our view of the world and our actions. These primarily include the 51 mental factors (*caitta*) or formative factors: 5 ever-present; 5 that each sound out an object; 11 that are wholesome; 6 basic mental poisons or "afflictions" that are responsible for emotional delusion; 20 other factors of emotional delusion that arise from the first-mentioned; and 4 mutable factors whose wholesome or unwholesome qualities depend on their changing objects. Of course, more shaping factors could be added to the list, but basically this covers the whole range of mental functions and moods.

"Wholesome" (*kuśala*) stands for: widening the mind, opening, clarifying, leading to joy and liberation. The wholesome mental factors are often summarized under compassion and wisdom. This also includes beneficial mental emotions such as love, joy etc.

"Unwholesome" (*akuśala*) or "defilement", "affliction" (Skt: *kleśa*, Pali: *kilesa*) is that which constricts, obscures, darkens the mind and leads to suffering and confusion. Unwholesome mental factors all arise from ignorance or lack of awareness (*avidya*), the immediate experience of which is fear or distress. From lack of awareness comes attachment (craving) and aversion (hatred). All obscuring emotions are summarized in these three. The basic obscuring emotions are also referred to as defilements or "effluences". Their common characteristic is the dualistic clinging, the attachment to the supposed existence of subject and object.

40. The four underlying biases (MN 2)

There are, as the Buddha put it, four principal "urge flows" or "currents" (Skt: *asrava*; Pali: *asava*, Tib: *zag-pa*) that determine the cycle of existence: (1) the urge flow of craving for sensuality, desire (*kāma*), (2) the urge flow of craving for existence, existence or "becoming" (*bhava*), (3) the urge flow of clinging to viewpoints and opinions (*dhitti*), and (4) the urge flow of ignorance or lack of awareness (*avidya*).⁶

The word "urge flow" - *asava* - comes from *a-savati*: to flow or to flow towards. It describes the unnoticed flowing, flowing towards or flowing out of the consciousness stirred up by these four urges towards the objects of the senses with the resulting clinging, which in turn has an 'influence' on the consciousness. The urge flows are the unnoticed shoals of small fish (unnoticed thoughts) in our agitated consciousness. Consciousness becomes entangled in dualistic projections without realizing it, losing the clarity and power of timeless awareness. The sign of the influence of the urge flows is the emergence of "thirst" (*tanha*), wanting to have, clinging. The four urges push for manifestation through the gates of thinking, speaking and acting; they want to be lived, we are driven by them to act. From them arise the specific defilements or clouded emotions (*kleśa*) of the heart or mind. Their presence clouds the mind and results in clouded mental, verbal and physical actions, i.e. characterized by duality. These can be unwholesome but also wholesome. States of mind and actions characterized by the urge flows (Skt: *sasrava*; Tib: *zag-bcas*) are the motor of further rebirths in the cycle of existence. The urge flows have created us; they are what have led to this *samsāric* existence.

When we act in a wholesome way, these wholesome actions are initially still characterized by the urge flows, albeit in a weaker form, and the actions are therefore wholesome but "impure", in the old parlance. Only when the fundamental ignorance is dissolved can actions be carried out completely "pure", i.e. free from the urge flows.

⁵ *opportune times*: An action in youth is considered stronger than an action in childhood or old age. An action in full health is stronger than the action of a sick person.

⁶ The Buddha often speaks of only three urge flows; in such lists he omits the third urge flow. In Pali Buddhism, it is said that the sense drive is overcome at the third stage of awakening (non-return) and the urge flow of becoming and ignorance only upon attaining arhatship. In Mahayana, this may correspond to the high bodhisattvas from the 8th stage onwards.

The practice of overcoming the four urge flows, as the Buddha describes in the *Discourse on All Āsavas* (M 2, Sabbasava Sutta), is based on dealing wisely with the emotions through: (1) insight, (2) restraint, (3) right handling, (4) acceptance, (5) getting out of the way, (6) dispelling and (7) unfolding. Those who find their way into deep meditation, which is completely unclouded by the urge flows, i.e. free from dualistic projections, free from conceit, are liberated from the cycle of painful rebirths. Such a person is called *Khinasava* in Pali: one in whom the urges have dried up.

(Other passages in the Pali Canon: MN 20.4/7; MN 118; SN 46.5/7/11/17/22/38; AN 10.102)

41. The emergence of emotions and tendencies

When the basic dualistic clinging, as described by the four underlying biases, is directed towards unwholesome objects, it leads to emotional involvement, the emotional "afflictions" (Skt: *kleśa*, Pali: *kilesa*, Tib: *nyon-mong*) or in short: emotions. It is the underlying biases, which stay almost always unnoticed, that lead to the various signs of emotional delusion, the *kleśas*, which we can become aware of.

Repeated involvement in similar clinging, similar *kleśas* over and over again, forms tendencies in our mind. Repeated, similar emotions pave the way for new, similar behaviour in the future. This leads to the development of emotional patterns or tendencies (Pali: *anusaya*,⁷ Tib: *bag-chags*), which repeatedly give rise to similar emotions in the mind. This is how a temperament or character is formed. And these tendencies continue beyond death, determining our experiences in the after-death state and entry into the next existence.

"Emotions" (*kleśas*) such as craving, hatred, etc. are therefore emotional afflictions or defilements in the Buddhist sense, which are nourished by corresponding patterns. These patterns arise from the repeated affirmation of *kleśas* and in turn increase the occurrence, frequency and intensity of further mental defilements. Their common basis is lack of awareness (*avidya*): the clouding or "urge flows" (*asrava*) of the mind due to dualistic clinging. Every time we do not give in to a *kleśa* in our practice, we weaken the underlying pattern and vice versa.

With "stream entry", the first great awakening, we are aware for the first time of what non-attachment is, of not dwelling in dualistic patterns. The non-self reveals itself, the timeless awareness. In this first step, fundamental ignorance and fear are overcome and true joy arises. This is, from the Buddhist perspective, the absolutely achievable goal in this life of working with our emotions.

42. What does the strength of an action depend on?

Apart from the four factors mentioned above which are:

- the power of opposing qualities
- the power to lead out of samsara
- the power to cause suffering
- the power to bring about consequences with certainty

the strength of an action depends on further nine factors, according to Asanga p.88-89:

1. from the "field" (*ksetra*) of action: for example, the Sangha or a realized master acts as a reinforcing "field of accumulation" (*punyaksetra*) for acquiring of merit.
2. the "objects" (*vastu*) of the action: for example, the quality and quantity of offerings (*danavastu*) impact on the karmic strength of the generous action.
3. from the "essence" (*svabhāva*) of the action itself: For example, ethical behaviour (*sīla*) in its essence brings forth stronger effects than generosity (*dana*) and meditation (*bhavana*) is stronger than ethical behaviour.
4. from the "basis" (*asraya*) of an action, i.e. the acting person himself: For example, the wholesome action of a person who is pure in their discipline has a stronger effect than that of an undisciplined person. This probably also includes the person's state of mind (referred to above as "opportune

⁷ The Sanskrit term for patterns is probably *vasanas* ("habitual forces", literally: "scents"), but this refers more to neutral and wholesome patterns that strengthen the wholesome powers of the heart, such as the development of the liberating qualities (*paramitas*).

time"): An action in full physical and mental strength, i.e. in full sanity, has a stronger effect than the same action in sickness and frailty (e.g. in old age in Alzheimer's disease; however, to perform prostrations despite frailty is of course stronger than in a fully healthy person).

5. from the "awareness" (*manasikāra*) that accompanies an action: For example, deep, devotional mindfulness enhances the karmic power of an action (as does wisdom).
6. the "intention" (*asaya*) accompanying an action: For example, the intention to attain nirvana increases the karmic power of an action. This also includes the "resolution" or "path of aspiration" (*prañidhāna*) that accompanies an action: for example, the resolution to become a perfect Buddha for the benefit of beings (*abhisambodhi prañidhāna*) has an enormously strengthening influence on the power of all actions performed in this context.
7. of the "aid" (*sahaya*) to an action: for example, wholesome actions performed together are stronger than those performed alone.
8. the "frequency" (*bahulikara*) of performing an action: repeating an action reinforces its karmic traces. This also includes the effects of perseverance in the face of obstacles.
9. from their connection with many living beings (*bahujanya*): Actions performed for the benefit of a large number of beings are more powerful than comparatively limited actions.

There are a total of 13 factors that make an action "strong".

"Weak actions" (*durbalakarma*) are to be understood as the counterpart to the strong ones.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 9:

"With regard to the scope of an action and the significance of its result, there are several types of actions. Certain actions are very harmful, and their result is rebirth in a hellish state of great suffering. Other harmful actions are of medium strength; they lead to rebirth in the realms of hungry ghosts. If the harmful deed is not so severe, it results in rebirth as an animal. If the harmful deed is very minor, one can be reborn as a human, but one encounters difficulties that directly correspond to the type of deed one has done in the past. For example, if you have committed many harmful acts through speech, such as deceiving or lying, you can be reborn in the human world, but you will always have a problem of not appearing credible, and you will be constantly associated with lying and deception and never taken seriously."

43. What effect do emotions and moods have? (D 33, A X.174)

The same external actions have different effects depending on the accompanying emotion.

- *Exercise 8a: Imagine performing the same action (giving a gift, walking through the city, having a conversation, writing a letter, killing a creature, etc.) with different emotions or moods, e.g. filled with fear, hate, desire or tired, bored, fresh, etc. What are the effects of each on your own mind? What are the respective effects in their own mind and for others?*

For example, two people walk through the city on the same day, same route, same situations. One walks in a mental climate of calm, serenity, serenity and clarity. The other walks with a mind full of chaos, restlessness, uncertainty and fear. What experiences will they have? How do these experiences affect each of them respectively? What are the consequences for each of them, their next actions including their future results? (Suggestion R. Leisner)

If the same emotional mood always prevails, this leads to a chain, a spiral that goes in the same direction. Anger breeds rejection, breeds more anger and hostility, breeds more anger and so on. As for the long-term consequences of a dominant emotion in our lives, *Nagarjuna* writes succinctly in *The Precious Garland Ratnavali*, verse 229:

"Out of desire you become a hungry ghost, hatred hurls you into the hell realms, blindness usually leads to an existence as an animal."

To make this self-reinforcing spiral even clearer, you can use the following exercise:

- *Exercise 8b: Imagine a bad day in your life, a day when you "got up on the wrong foot". What experiences will we have? How do we encounter others and how do they encounter us? How will the world appear to us? What would our lives be like if we were always like this? (Suggestion R. Leisner)*

Of course, the intensity of the emotion or inner involvement also leads to effects differing in intensity.

- *Exercise 8c: Imagine performing the same action with strong inner involvement, then weaker and then almost no inner involvement. Perhaps you also remember actions that you have already performed with very different levels of involvement. What does the intensity of your inner involvement change?*

Buddha Shakyamuni in DN 33:

"There are the following roots of the unwholesome: Greed, hatred and delusion; and there are three roots of the wholesome: non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion."

Buddha Shakyamuni in AN X.174:

"Killing, I declare, practitioners, is caused threefold: by craving, hatred, and delusion. Also, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, hurtful speech, gossip, greed, ill will, and wrong views - all these, I declare, are caused threefold: by greed, hatred, and delusion. Thus, practitioners, greed is an originator of concatenation of action, hatred is an originator of concatenation of action, and delusion is an originator of concatenation of action. However, through the destruction of greed, hatred and delusion comes the abolition of concatenation of action." (see also AN VI.39 and AN III.34)

44. What effect does motivation have?

The same external actions have different effects depending on the accompanying motivation.

- *Exercise 9: Imagine performing the same action with different motivations or intentions, e.g. for personal gain, for recognition or for the benefit of others. What are the respective effects in your own mind and for others, short- and long-term?*

Gendün Rinpoche in his last public teaching, Dhagpo 1997: "The starting motivation, our commitment towards all beings, is the basis of our path on which our practice will develop. We should pay careful attention to the motivation with which we start. Let's take the example of two men who each plant a tree: One says to himself, 'This is my soil, and once this tree bears fruit, I will enjoy it. This tree and its fruit belong to me. He identifies with his property. His neighbour also plants a tree, but with a different intention: 'When the tree bears fruit, I want everyone who passes by to be able to taste its fruit and enjoy it. This tree belongs to everyone. Planting these two trees will have very different effects because their initial motivation is different. And it is the same with Dharma practice: the motivation determines the result."

45. What effect does the frequency of an action have?

- *Exercise 10: Imagine that you perform a certain action not just once, but repeatedly, often or even constantly. Play this through for a wholesome and for an unwholesome action. What are the short- and long-term effects? How does your mind change, possibly even after death?*

Regardless of which emotion or form of self-centeredness is dominant in our actions, the frequency of unwholesome actions alone already has foreseeable consequences.

The more frequently an action is performed, the more dominant its effects.

Thus Gampopa writes in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6 p.35: "Relating to frequency, when one creates countless nonvirtuous actions, one will be born in the hell realm; one will be born as a hungry ghost by committing many nonvirtuous actions; one will be born as an animal by committing some nonvirtuous actions. "

46. Buffering the effects of actions (Dh 173, AN III.101)

Isolated unwholesome actions in an otherwise incessant stream of wholesome actions do not have such catastrophic effects, as they are buffered by the many wholesome actions.

- *Exercise 11: Imagine that a friend who is otherwise very attentive and loving acts unwholesomely. How would you and others react? Would you respond differently if the same action was carried out by someone who has already committed many harmful actions? Will the friend's mind-stream change significantly if they return to wholesome actions immediately after their 'slip-up'?*

The Buddha compared (in AN III, 98) wholesome actions to clear, sweet drinking water and unwholesome actions to salt. The small number of unwholesome actions of an otherwise wholesome person is like a handful of salt thrown into the Ganges. The small amount of salt is not enough to oversalt the huge amounts of fresh water of the Ganges. However, as far as a person, who rarely acted wholesomely, is concerned, it would be as if the same handful of salt was thrown into a small container of drinking water, making all the water undrinkable.

For us, this means that we need to see each action of a person (with body, speech and mind) in relation to the totality of their actions. This relationship determines the harvest, not the individual action. The more we direct our thoughts, speech and actions towards the wholesome, the less the salt of our harmful actions will be tasted.

Buddha Shakyamuni says accordingly in the *Dhammapada*, verse 173:

"He who by good deeds
covers the evil he has done,
illuminates this world
like the moon freed from clouds."

Paul Debes (*Begriffe der Buddha-Reden*, p.160f.): "It is possible, therefore, to let a light shine in the darkness that one has created through harmful deeds. You cannot undo what you have done, but you can send good things after it, until the drinking water from good deeds gradually outweighs the salt from bad deeds to such an extent that you taste the salt less and less. Now and here, you can make your harvest not only edible but sweeter and sweeter by continuing to let good thoughts, words and deeds succeed the bad ones."

According to Paul Debes in *Begriffe der Buddha-Reden*, p.112 Buddha Shakyamuni says in AN III, 101 that the fruits of one and the same action, when they approach a high-minded person who is largely free of the drives (of emotional delusion), trigger almost no reaction in them, while another person who is 'very needy' (i.e. constantly seeking satisfaction through sensual pleasures) can be so strongly affected by the same karmic fruits that his actions affected by them cause him to enter the underworld (lower realms).

47. Which effect does the field or object of an action have on the result?

- *Exercise 12: Imagine doing the same insincere action first to an unknown person, then to a friend or parent, then to your spiritual teacher, then to someone who is insincere themselves, to a poor person or a rich person. What changes? What does it take to perform this action?*

The more we are indebted to a person (or the more needy they are), the more serious an unsalutary act towards them becomes.

We realize that we have to internally build up a lot of negative energy in order to be able to perform such an action towards them at all. The consequences will be according to the intensity of our negative attitude. Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6, p.35 writes a warning about the long-term consequences of such actions:

"Relating to object, one will be born in the hell realm if one acts nonvirtuously toward beings of higher status [Realized Ones, spiritual teachers, the noble community as well as stupas, Dharma texts and statues as representations of the Buddhas, as well as parents and the sick]; if toward mediocre beings, one will be born as a hungry ghost; if toward ordinary beings, one will be born as an animal."

48. *Karmic tendencies*

The doctrine of karma is the presentation of the doctrine of dependent origination on a more relative, everyday level, where we speak of concrete persons, while on a higher level we only speak of the interplay of various factors of existence (skandhas) or of the *twelve links of dependent origination*. The latter representation is completely impersonal, as it no longer makes use of the makeshift construction of an acting person. In the doctrine of karma, on the other hand, the Buddha uses conventional expressions and many figurative examples that are very close to our experience as an acting subject but cannot claim ultimate validity.

Gampopa describes the first four of the twelve links of dependent origination for the human realm in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 16, as follows:

"At the very first, there is *ignorance*, which is the confusion that misunderstands all knowledge [i.e. reality]. Under the influence of ignorance is created the mental formation of the karma of afflicted [i.e. dualistically coloured] virtues and nonvirtues. This is called "*mental formation* conditioned by ignorance." The seed of that karma is carried by the mind so that is called "*consciousness* conditioned by mental formation." By the power of that karma, the mind is fully confused, enters into a mother's womb, and an embryo and so forth arise. This is called "*name and form* conditioned by consciousness."⁸ " It becomes obvious how decisive actions and the karmic tendencies arising from them are. Together with the underlying ignorance, they are the cause of all suffering.

Ignorance leads to dualistic actions that generate karmic tendencies.

Karmic tendencies refer to a readiness to act or react, i.e. attitudes or patterns of behaviour that have become deeply ingrained in our minds, like a path used over and over again that has become a sunken path. This also includes predispositions and talents. Gampopa gives an example of the twelve links of dependent arising:

"Ignorance is like one who plants the seed, karma is like the field, consciousness is like the seed, craving is like moisture, name and form are like shoots, the others are like branches, leaves and so forth."

He concludes by pointing out that "because there is ignorance, mental formations are fully created."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Meditation jenseits von Hoffnung und Furcht*: "Thoughts appear due to tendencies that are latent in the mind. These tendencies, in turn, are based on clinging. This is the cause of everything that appears in our mind. If we observe the stream of thoughts carefully, we can see how - without having any control over it - one thought arises after another. They appear suddenly, as if of their own accord, even without us wanting to think anything in particular. All these thoughts arise under the influence of our past actions."

Our karma and our karmic tendencies decide which thoughts emerge.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 35: "Our body and all experiences of body, speech and mind are the result of our actions, words and thoughts in this life and in other existences - in countless existences. Our present existence is conditioned by the accumulated force of habits and tendencies that determine our reactions. When we now experience certain situations due to karmic conditions, we react, without even thinking, based on these habits.

Our habitual reactions create new karma and reinforce the karmic forces and tendencies that determine our future lives."

49. *Karmic vision or pure vision ?*

Actions leave a trace of the karmic tendency to further similar actions and views, in both a positive and negative sense. By karmic view we mean our own view of the world, which is typical of our emotional veils, our world of projections, a veil that accompanies us almost constantly. Everyone perceives the world

⁸ *Form* stands for the physical aggregate and *name* for the mental aggregates.

and situations differently, because everyone has their own karmic view, their own karmic glasses. A pure view would be a view free of emotional veils, free of self-centeredness.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 14:

"Things appear to us under the influence of karma, which obscures our mind: Our perception of the outside world is a projection of the mind and the consequence of our karma."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Geist des Erwachens*, page 7: "A state of mind that is confused by disturbing emotions is the source of difficulties and causes us to sink into suffering that is constantly maintained by ourselves. The mind is under the power of the five mental poisons such as pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance and anger. Due to the generation of these five types of disturbing emotions, we project our confused state of mind onto others, and our view of others is coloured by our emotional state: we see them full of emotions, pride, jealousy and anger. This state of mind brings us much suffering to the extent that it constantly confuses the mind and thus creates a very negative karma. This is fundamentally due to the fact that we are unable to see our inner attitudes and that we do not carry out a mindful examination of our state of mind."

50. Karmic tendencies and Dharma practice

Our different karmic views and tendencies have a significant influence on our encounter with the Dharma and on our assessment of what we consider to be qualities and faults.

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.124: "In these times you will not find a guru who has abandoned all faults and perfected all qualities. Were even it possible to find one or two, with our impure perception we would see their good qualities as faults, as has happened many times such as when Devadatta saw faults in the Bhagavan Buddha.

These days, most people are only predisposed to accumulate negative karma, so they see faults as qualities and qualities as faults.

Or they see those who inwardly lack even a single one of the Dharmic qualities that they exhibit outwardly as being holy. Thus it is hard to even know how to examine anyone [a potential teacher]."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.143: "Sentient beings of different capacities cannot be tamed by only one deity or one Dharma.

The Sage's teachings appear differently to people with different karma.

Due to this, there are different interpretations of the philosophical schools, so they have various kinds of conduct."

The Torch of True Meaning, p.156: "... disciples have only the bad fortune of a degenerate age. Thus many - not knowing the crucial points of the Dharma - run after nothing but nonsense, and it seems that even Shakyamuni could not block the paths to pitfalls and deviations were he to try."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 27: "It is important to know that the choice of teacher is in the hands of the student. Depending on their own karma, they choose the lama to whom they feel naturally drawn and who corresponds to their current karma."

- *Exercise 13: Imagine that the same situation is perceived by several uninvolved witnesses, for example: A teacher is verbally attacked by someone in the audience. How would the various people present react under certain circumstances? What would they think? What is behind their different reactions?*

Karmic tendencies make our Dharma practice more difficult or easier. They can change based on the actions we perform now.

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.18: "Even if you attain a body capable of practicing Dharma, in order to practice purely, you must not be affected by the sixteen circumstances without leisure. There are eight defects based on present circumstances:

- (1) The five poisons being exceedingly coarse and disturbing your mind
- (2) Being influenced by negative companions
- (3) Having erroneous views and conduct
- (4) Being extremely lazy
- (5) Being flooded by obstacles arising from the awakening of previous negative actions
- (6) Being under someone else's control, such as being enslaved or indentured
- (7) Entering the Dharma just to get food and clothing or out of fear of death and then acting contrary to the teachings
- (8) Simulating Dharma practice [in behaviour and speech] for sake of offerings, respect, and renown

All these obstructive circumstances are caused by karma. In order to get out of obstructive tendencies, we must first stop and not continue with the pattern.

The Torch of True Meaning, p.23: "Generally, when we have not completed an action, it is called unfinished business ['someone with karmic tendencies'⁹]. Due to unfinished business from our past lives' Dharma practice, in this life as well we will have faith in the Dharma and guru we are used to, and we will train under them. This is a sign of the awakening of positive karma."

51. Karmic veils

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 33: "The impurities (self-centred patterns) of our mind, the cause of which is ignorance, manifest as three kinds of emotional reactions: clinging, aversion and indifference (craving, hatred and stupidity). These three patterns influence all the actions we perform with body, speech and mind and are the cause of the accumulation of karma. Such actions, clouded by confusion, cause our mental veils to increase further, making it difficult to recognize our true nature."

The more ignorance-based actions we perform, the stronger our karmic veils become.
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Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 8: "With regard to the body, this refers to all unwholesome physical actions that one has committed that have harmed others. These are actions that took place in a context of confusion, because we perceived the situation dualistically. There was the self and the other, where the self was the subject and the other was the object. This dualistic relationship gave rise to actions: in our state of ignorance we may have killed, stolen, cheated, behaved sexually inappropriately, frightened people, tried to be the best, physically intimidated someone. Such actions equal deeds that result in the veiling of Buddha nature. It means veils created by the activity of the body."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 7: If this is the case, why is Buddha nature imperceptible and why does it not reveal itself to us? Because it is covered by veils and impurities. These veils of the mind are the fruit of ignorance, and the weightiest of them stems from negative karma accumulated in the past through body, speech and mind. It forms a kind of dark layer that obscures the Buddha nature and prevents it from being recognized, but this layer can be removed. Once the temporary stains are removed, the Buddha nature manifests itself: you perceive it immediately because it is already there."

All veils can be dissolved. Once they are dissolved, the Buddha nature is revealed.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 8: "The veils that obscure Buddha nature and prevent it from revealing itself are the result of an accumulation of negative karma in the past through actions motivated by the emotion of ignorance. These actions were performed on three levels: body, speech and mind. All actions were performed through the body, speech or mind; there are no other ways of acting. The karmic veils arising from these actions are therefore related to body, speech and mind, and if one

⁹ Someone with karmic tendencies, Tibetan: las-phro (pronounced: lä-tro), tends to repeat the same actions in this life due to previous habituation. They are easy for them and usually give them pleasure.

wants to move towards the Buddha state, one uses the actions of body, speech and mind in such a way that one removes the veils that have arisen from previous bad use of these ways of acting."

Veils are not only distortions in perception, but also active projections of something that does not exist at all. Such projections play a major role in interpersonal relationships and are responsible for most problems. In order to reduce projections, it is helpful to practise active, attentive listening and to develop the ability to accurately repeat what we have heard. When we talk about feelings, we should speak in the first person so that the other person realizes that we are at least leaving open the possibility that we may be caught up in a projection. With the help of these methods, we can feel our way into a less distorted perception of reality.

Paul Debes in *Begriffe der Buddha-Lehren*, p.158: "The world we experience is already the harvest of our previous actions in thought, word and deed. It is not an objective fact in itself, which exists independently of us and which we can now develop according to our wishes, but it is the harvest of our acting, which has come about in ways that are hidden from us, therefore secretly and uncannily."

52. Exercises to gauge the extent of our own karma

➤ *Karmic inventory, exercises 14-16: Before the following exercises, we first relax for a few minutes in conscious idleness. Then we think about the following questions and go back to our childhood. We allow the totality of all our actions since birth to pass before our eyes without judging them. We try to sense how the person we are today has been shaped over the years by the repercussions of countless actions, a flowing, constantly ongoing process:*

1. Actions of the body (Exercise 14)

- *We think about all the actions we have performed with the body. Although we may not have performed certain harmful actions ourselves, we can also reflect on whether we were pleased and approved of others performing them? We will go through the three areas of bodily actions mentioned in the texts of the tradition:*
- a) Have I killed in this life - from insects to larger animals and humans? Have I tortured, beaten, abused, coerced and otherwise harmed living beings through physical acts? Or have I protected their lives, eased their pain, satisfied their hunger, cared for them and treated them with respect?*
 - b) Have I stolen, appropriated things that were not given to me? Have I damaged the property of others? Or have I been generous and given what others needed?*
 - c) Have I caused suffering through my sexual behaviour, whether through a lack of sensitivity or by intruding into existing relationships? Or have I thought about the well-being of my partners and nurtured and respected existing relationships?*

2. Acts of speech (Exercise 15)

- *In a further contemplation, we look at what tendencies we have in our speech behaviour. We go through the four areas of speech actions that are traditionally mentioned and look in detail at how we have dealt with words:*
- a) Did I lie or did I speak frankly and honestly, with an open heart?*
 - b) Do I constantly argue, insult others with rude, hurtful words? Have I slandered, belittled, publicly embarrassed and insulted others? Or have I spoken supportive and sensitive words, strengthened the qualities of others and expressed criticism in an appropriate and helpful way?*
 - c) Did I instigate intrigues, divide friends through comments, sow dispute and talk badly about others? Or did I have a harmonizing effect, settle disputes and try to create understanding for others?*
 - d) Have I wasted my time with useless chatter, gossip and witless jokes? Or have I talked about meaningful things, respected the privacy of others and cultivated good humour?*

3. Mental actions (exercise 16)

- Then we look at our thoughts and emotions. Which karmic impulses have we set with the mind? We examine the three classic areas of unwholesome mental actions of ill will, greed and wrong views (as well as the five emotions of ignorance, desire, hatred, pride and jealousy):
- Are or were my thoughts characterized by malice? Was or am I rather resentful, full of anger and harmful intentions? Am I impatient, easily irritated, depressed and withdrawn? Which hateful thoughts have I already had? Do I hold grudges for a long time? Or was and am I more inclined to be wholesome, loving and compassionate? Am I patient, joyful and open-minded? Can I forgive?*
 - Are or were my thoughts characterized by greed? Am I envious of the possessions or qualities of others? Do I want everything for myself? Am I jealous or ambitious? Do I begrudge others their possessions, their happiness and their success? Can I genuinely rejoice when others do something beneficial, when they are doing well and are happy? Do I enjoy sharing my possessions with others and am I happy to do without when they want something?*
 - Are or were my thoughts characterized by clinging to wrong views? Do I stubbornly cling to dogmas and tell others what to believe? Am I conceited, always convinced that I am right? Do I feel easily wounded in my pride? Or can I listen to what people have to say and accept criticism? Am I prepared to examine my opinion and possibly change it? Is my mind open and receptive to new points of view? Is it possible for me to go unnoticed, without being praised and lauded?*

The list of questions we can ask ourselves is almost inexhaustible. If we answer them honestly, we get a fairly accurate impression of what karmic tendencies are active in this life and what forces we have already set in motion in this life. There is unlikely to be an angel among us...

Our karmic baggage is our characteristic mixture of wholesome and unwholesome karmic tendencies.

On closer inspection, the following question arises:

53. Have I ever acted free from self-centeredness?

- *Exercise 17: Reflect on this question only after a previous while of letting go and relaxing. Then try to remember: How many actions could we find in our lives that were truly free of self-centeredness? Were there any with completely pure motivation, where there was no tinge of self-interest? Did we not often feel the desire for recognition and gratitude when helping others?*

The desire for recognition and gratitude is normal, but it is an expression of our personal expectations. Ideally, in order to satisfy the description "truly free from self-centredness" and to be fully 'white', a wholesome action should be free from all expectations, however understandable these may be. We may have thought we had performed many truly wholesome actions, but how much ego can we discover on closer inspection!

So far, we have hardly ever been completely free of self-interest in any action.

54. What harmful actions am I potentially capable of?

Another aspect of our karmic make-up that we should look at is our 'spontaneous' or rather automatic-compulsive reactions when our mind gets into great emotional pressure from certain situations. What unwholesome tendencies are latent in our self-centred mind?

- *Exercise 18: With this contemplation, we engage in an unpleasant mind game. Please only do it if you feel ready and understand the meaning of the question.*

We imagine extremely bad situations that provoke our hatred, fear, desire, pride and envy. How would we act if our most sensitive emotional buttons were pushed in such a situation? Can we imagine hitting someone? Can we imagine situations in which we would take up a weapon? How much would we have to be provoked before even murder was possible? Have we perhaps already killed someone in our dreams? Have we already had murder fantasies or felt an almost murderous rage? What does it take before we steal, rape, torture, lie, start fights and wars?

We have probably not yet performed most of these actions in this life, but it is conceivable that we could do so or have already done so in previous lives. If we can believe the Buddhas, then we have already lived countless lives and have been involved in almost every imaginable situation.

Our present life is like a mirror for our actions in the past. Even the tendencies that only show up in our dreams and imaginations are part of our karmic legacy. Many, but not all, of our karmic tendencies can be seen in this mirror. Some karmic tendencies, it is said, cannot be discovered by us at the moment because the conditions that would cause them to appear on the surface of the mirror have not come together.

Our "karmic baggage" are the forces set in motion by our harmful, self-centred actions, and our "karmic treasure" are the forces brought about by our helpful, selfless actions.

We have the choice of which forces we want to strengthen. That is our freedom. But the difficulties in carrying out our preferred choice also show our lack of freedom. We are all too easily swept along by deeply ingrained self-centred tendencies. It takes a lot of strength to resist them!

The path to liberation is to cultivate more presence of mind, relaxation and compassion. They give us the strength to resist self-centred tendencies.

These enable us to carry out more and more wholesome actions. As the power of wholesome actions increases, the path gradually becomes easier, and we are no longer so stuck in ingrained reaction patterns.

When we realize how much we are in the clutches of our emotions, the highly praised human freedom seems like an illusion. As soon as something pleasant appears before our senses, we react with attachment, and as soon as something unpleasant appears, we react with rejection. This happens so quickly that we hardly have a choice. At least that's how it looks. Fortunately, there are ways to get our "foot in the door" and increase our freedom instead of falling prey to old tendencies.

55. *How does karma find its end?*

All karma has an end. Karmic effects are exhausted as they mature. But when they mature, we must be careful not to become entangled in new karma with our reactions.

Karma manifests as a thought, experience, situation or emotion. The manifestation of these mental impressions is called the "ripening of karma". The moment these impressions manifest in our mind, their karmic power has come into effect and has thus exhausted itself. In the moment immediately following, other, further karma can already manifest and be exhausted. However, this presupposes that we do not influence this process unfavourably with emotional reactions.

Any manifesting karma can either (a) simply fizzle out in our mind or (b) become the starting point for reinforcing wholesome or unwholesome tendencies.

That is where our choice lies. Let's say an angry thought arises in our mind, a memory of an insult we had to take. If we do not react to this thought, it will fizzle out without any significant further effects. But if we react, we will surely create new karma. If we get angry and imagine how we can take revenge on the person, we cultivate angry, vengeful tendencies in our minds. If instead we imagine how restricted the other person was in their behaviour and how we ourselves triggered the situation, then we cultivate tendencies of compassion, understanding, etc.

After a karma has matured, the latent effects of other actions come into play - provided we are not caught up in the constant creation of new karma. This way, one karma matures after another.

56. *Can any possible karma mature at any time?*

In a certain situation, only those karmic effects can manifest themselves that fit into the respective circumstance.

For example, if I am a monk and keep the vows, the karma of having many children cannot come to maturity. It has to wait until a suitable situation manifests. If I am a man, my women's karma cannot ripen,

and vice versa. Similarly, a more traditional example, in the god realm, the karma of past hateful actions cannot ripen as this requires conditions that do not come together in the god realm.

- *Exercise 19: Imagine what situations can prevent us from e.g. having a car accident, dying due to lightning, coming into contact with certain ideas, etc.? Can we, at least for a while, prevent certain karma from ripening and possibly create circumstances in which other karma is favoured to ripen?*

If we go to a Dharma teaching today, there is a good chance that spiritual karma will ripen in the resulting situation. At the same time, we strengthen Dharmic tendencies within us. If we go to the movies instead, dharmic tendencies may also be strengthened there, but the situation also offers many opportunities for other types of karma to ripen. Each situation offers different opportunities for the ripening of karma. If I don't go to a meeting, I won't - at least for now - get to know the people who come together there.

Which karma matures externally depends to a large extent on our decisions.
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A mountain of latent karma is said to be waiting to mature. However, karma needs appropriate circumstances in order to mature. As long as the appropriate conditions do not come together, it cannot show itself. But it will show itself immediately as soon as suitable conditions come together and the previously active karma is exhausted.

Someone who experiences the pleasures of divine joys, for example, is not aware of all the latent karma waiting to be paid off. They cannot imagine how drastically their situation can change.

That is why *Nagarjuna* writes in a *letter to a friend*, verse 69: "Having become an Indra, fit to be honoured by the world, you fall back again upon the earth through the power of karma. Even having changed to the status of a Universal Chakravartin King, you transform into someone with the rank of a servant in samsāric states."

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 15: "Even one who achieved the body and enjoyment of Indra, the king of gods, would eventually die and fall."

The same also applies to people who live in supposedly hopeless situations. When the karmic forces that are effective now are exhausted, they too will experience something different.

- *Exercise 20: How does karma exhaust itself? Have you experienced the feeling that you are now finished with the consequences of an action or a karmic tendency?*

57. Is karma involved in the creation of the world and the beings ?

It is obvious that karma (i.e. self-related actions) is responsible for the experiences of the various living beings, as Gampopa writes in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6: "You may wonder what causes the sufferings that were just explained. One should know that they come from the karma of afflicted [i.e. dualistic] action." But whether the basis of experience, i.e. the world and beings themselves, are also produced by karmic forces is perhaps not so clear. The *Karmaśataka*, the *Hundred Deeds Sutra* says: "Actions that are very diverse give rise to the diversity of beings."

The White Lotus Sutra of Great Compassion, as quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.38. states: "The world has been created by actions [karma], it is a manifestation of actions. The living beings have been created by actions, actions are the cause of their arising, and because of their actions they are different from each other."

Also in the *Abhidharma Treasury* chapter 4 p.1) states: "The different worlds have arisen from the actions (karma) of living beings."

The different areas of experience of the beings are the mirror of their karma.
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The world or the universe is understood as the sum of the realms of experience of the beings living in it. These realms of experience are traditionally divided into six major realms of existence.

58. How do the different realms of existence arise?

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 44:

"Because of the variety of wholesome and unwholesome actions that everyone has performed, there is such a variety of personal experiences."

In this diversity of experience, however, a rough classification can be made: We speak of six great families or forms of existence in which the respective beings have roughly similar experiences.

Three of these six realms of existence are characterized by the fact that a great deal of suffering is experienced in them; these are the three so-called lower realms of existence. In the other three, the higher realms of existence, there is more room for happiness and similar experiences. But all six worlds are conditioned by karma."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 16:

"Inside the hell realm itself, there is a strong gradation resulting from the severity of the unwholesome deeds that have brought about rebirth in these states. There is a gradation of duration and a gradation of severity. Duration and severity correspond to karma. No matter what hell state one is reborn in, it is only the effect of the harmful tendencies of our mind and the negative states of mind of the past coming to maturity. The sensation one experiences within these states is unmistakably that of great suffering, the intensity of which, as well as the length of time spent in such a state, is directly related to the level of severity of the deeds committed in the past."

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 5:

"Occasional Hells: There can be many beings gathered together, or two, or a single one, as is created by the individuals' karma."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 16f:

"After the hell realms, the realm of *yidaks* or hungry ghosts is the most populated. There are five types of hungry ghost realms. The experiences undergone there are different and depend on the karma that has led to such a rebirth.

This is followed by the *animal kingdom*, which is traditionally divided into three areas: the wild or free-living animals, the domesticated or subjugated animals, and the animals that fly in the air. The animal world is accessible to humans who are aware of the immense diversity of forms in the animal world, although they know that the bottom of the oceans holds the greatest variety of animals.

The hell states, the realms of the *yidaks* and the world of animals form the three lower realms. Being reborn there is the consequence of a lack of wholesome actions (virtue). The beings there only experience the effect of the unwholesome deeds that they have accumulated in abundance in the past. Once a being is reborn in one of these realms, its only experience is that of suffering resulting from the rebirth obtained, the nature of the rebirth depending on the karma of the past. And it is almost impossible to perform wholesome actions there, for one is now in a realm of existence where one is constantly confused by the five mental poisons.

Once you have been born into one of the six realms of existence, it is almost impossible to get out of this cycle. This is why it is called suffering without end. When one is in one of the lower realms of existence, one tends to accumulate even more negative karma, because the mind, which is completely imbued with the five poisons, continues to perform numerous harmful deeds.

In the *human* realm, the situation is somewhat different. Humans possess a mixture of positive and negative karma, so that human existence proves to be a succession of favourable circumstances and suffering.

...Beyond the world of humans lie the *realms of the gods*. The beings who are reborn there live in very favourable circumstances, without any suffering. The reason for this is their great accumulation of merit through performing numerous beneficial actions in past lives.

However, their merits and wholesome actions did not lead them to awakening because they had neither the ability nor the power to transform these actions into a true path to enlightenment. They did not dedicate the merits resulting from their actions to others and their wholesome actions were not motivated by the desire to attain perfect enlightenment. The effects of such undedicated wholesome actions remain in the

stream of consciousness of their originator, but do not ripen into circumstances conducive to perfect enlightenment. They have an effect in favourable circumstances, but these are limited to the god realms within samsara. The originators of these actions experience great joy as long as their life lasts in these realms.

But before they die, that is, at the moment when the positive karma accumulated in the past has been exhausted, they encounter great suffering. They become aware that the state of great happiness they have experienced so far is coming to an end. Due to their divine abilities, they can see in which state they will soon be reborn– and this is mostly in the lower realms because they have exhausted all positive karma and every blessing from the deeds of the past. The only karma they have left is the experience of the lower realms. The experience of happiness coming to an end means great suffering for them and their minds are greatly disturbed by it. Until this moment, beings in the god states had no awareness of what suffering is. Suddenly they are faced with this inevitable experience and plunge from the height of their happiness into a state of very great suffering."

Karma is also the driving force of all experiences in the human realm, beginning with the development of the embryo. Gampopa concludes his description of embryonic development in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 5, with the following sentence and quote:

"Thus, during the long period in the womb, the baby feels heat, as if being cooked in a very hot vessel, and is touched by the twenty-eight different winds. From being an oval shape until the completion of the whole body, it is developed by the essence of the mother's blood and so forth."

From the sutra *Entry into the womb*:

"From the first oval stage, a fleshy, elongated bladder develops. A lump develops from this bubble, the lump solidifies. When it has solidified completely, the head and limbs are formed. As bones form, the body is created. All this happens because of karma."

Discussion points:

- Did we create our world ourselves, or was it created by many beings together?
- Do we actually share the same world with others?
- How does the experience of concrete objects come about?
- Can the creation of the world and its realms of existence be explained by the mechanism of karmic projection?

59. How is it to be understood that karma is supposed to be "inevitable"? (Dh 127)

Buddha Shakyamuni in the *Dhammapada*, verse 127:

"Not in the air, not in the depths of the sea, not in the heart of the farthest mountain cave, nowhere in the world can you find a place where you could escape from what you have sown."

Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.40:

"All wholesome or unwholesome actions committed leave a seed in the mind, which will inevitably ripen to its corresponding fruit of happiness or suffering, whenever circumstances unite to activate it.

The effects of your actions you will exclusively experience yourself alone, they will not be shared collectively with others. The seeds of your actions will never be lost, but will remain latent for countless kalpas, and infallibly bring forth their corresponding fruits, unless they are destroyed by the application of antidotes."

We cannot escape the effects of our actions, because they leave short and long-term traces in our minds.

In *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.41, Asanga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya* is quoted:

"What is the meaning of getting one's karmic share? It means that you will experience the consequences of the actions you have committed, because wholesome and unwholesome actions have their corresponding results [of happiness and suffering]."

Even if we feel that we have got away 'scot-free' and believe that we do not have to experience the effects of our actions, the waves will eventually come back to us as the wave generator, the originator of the action. This is, it is said, "inevitable". On the one hand, the waves leave their effects directly on the person splashing in their bathtub and, on the other hand, they are also bounced back to them by their surroundings. This is easy to understand on an external, directly perceptible level: We say something, for example, and at some point, the effects of what we have said return to us not only from the inside but also from the outside.

In *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.42, the *Karmaśataka Sutra* is quoted: "The karma of embodied beings can never be lost even in a hundred kalpas. Whenever conditions come together it will ripen into effects."

In the *Small Manual of Mindful Meditation (Smṛtyupasthāna)*, as quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.41 we read: "Fire can become cold, the wind can be caught with a net, the sun and the moon can fall on the flatlands, but the ripening of karma cannot fail."

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6: "Unless the antidote to a karma appears, the result will come without waste or loss even though limitless kalpas have passed. Karma may lie dormant for a long time, but somehow when it meets with the proper conditions, the result will come out. "

The *Hundred Deeds Sutra Sūtras* quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.40 states: "The karma of embodied beings can never be lost even in a hundred kalpas. Whenever conditions come together it will ripen into effects."

Gampopa in *A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*, chapter 6: "Since all the pleasures and sufferings of sentient beings arise from *karma*, the result of actions should be treated as unfailing."

A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path, chapter 9: "Considering the unfailing results of actions, exhort yourself to abandon wrong deeds."

60. Misleading representations of the inevitability of karma

A major difference between the Buddha's doctrine of karma and the prevailing view of karma in India at the time was the emphasis on the individual's scope for action, whereby karma does not remain a fate to be endured but becomes a challenge to deal responsibly with our karmic situation. Asanga quotes the Buddha on p.89 of the *Abhidharma Compendium*, pointing out erroneous formulations that could lead to the assumption that karma is like an inescapable fate:

The Buddha said: "If the statement were true: 'Just as a person commits and accumulates actions (*karma*), so will they experience the consequences (*vipaka*)', then there would be no possibility of a pure way of life (*brahmacaryavasa*) and no possibility of completely eradicating and ending suffering. But if we say, 'Just as a person commits and accumulates actions whose consequences must be experienced, so too will they experience the consequences accordingly,' then there is the possibility of a pure way of life and the possibility of completely eradicating and ending suffering."

The point of this slightly different formulation of the Buddha is that it:

- (a) it is possible to perform actions whose effects will not have to be experienced (actions free from self-centeredness) and that
- (b) it is possible to cancel out the effects of actions already committed that are still to be experienced by the effects of other actions that are opposite to them (just as the superposition of opposing waves leads to their cancellation).

Asanga explains the possibilities of the effects of actions in a distinguished way (p.89):

"What does this statement in the sutra mean? Here the Buddha wants to refute misrepresentations such as: 'A wholesome action has only wholesome (pleasant) effects; an unwholesome action has only unwholesome (unpleasant) effects; a neutral (neither wholesome nor unwholesome) action has only neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant) effects.'

A correct rendering might be as follows: 'As for wholesome actions: wholesome effects will be seen in those that should bring about wholesome experiences; unwholesome effects will be seen in those that should bring about unwholesome experiences; neutral effects will be seen in those that should bring about neutral experiences.'

Likewise, as far as unwholesome actions are concerned: for those that should bring about wholesome experiences, wholesome effects will be seen; for those that should bring about unwholesome experiences, unwholesome effects will be seen; for those that should bring about neutral experiences, neutral effects will be seen.

Likewise, as for neutral (neither wholesome nor unwholesome) actions: For those that should bring about wholesome experiences, wholesome effects will be seen; for those that should bring about unwholesome experiences, unwholesome effects will be seen; for those that should bring about neutral experiences, neutral effects will be seen. This is the meaning of this sutra."

For us, this means that actions can, depending on what additional (neutral, reinforcing, weakening, cancelling or reversing) actions come into play, in their entirety (!) either retain their originally foreseeable effects or have stronger, weaker, no or the opposite effects (e.g. a generous gift that is regretted afterwards or even becomes the cause of violent anger or an unwholesome action that leads to deep regret and a radical change in lifestyle.

61. Responsible for our own suffering

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 13:

"Every time you come into contact with suffering, when you suffer from an illness or difficulties, you have to remind yourself that this depends on the deeds you have done in the past. We should not tell ourselves that these difficulties are caused by others, because all the situations we encounter in our lives are only the consequence of deeds we have done in the past. We ourselves are responsible for everything. Nothing should be blamed on others."

It is difficult to understand why, for example, an infant, who has barely seen the light of day, dies. There are limits to our understanding here. We do not see the context, which is probably because our vision and memory are only limited to this life. If we could see further, we would most likely discover the causal connections. But we do not have the vision of an enlightened person. So it is only natural that we ask ourselves: Is this death the karma of the infant? Is it the karma of the parents? Or of everyone involved? What actions preceded it?

Of course, the question of personal responsibility also raises the issue of the relationship between victim and perpetrator. If I am attacked today, are these the effects of past lives? How does this work? Does the perpetrator register on a subconscious mental level through contact with the karmic impressions of the victim that this is the 'right' victim?

62. Is there coincidence?

Is there coincidence or is there always personal, absolutely specific karma at play? What about a lightning strike that kills me but leaves the person next to me alive? For the average person, this is usually not recognizably different from pure coincidence. For the Buddha, this is the logical consequence of previous actions. Of course, my actions have contributed to my being in an open field during a thunderstorm, for example. But which unwholesome action is responsible for one person being struck by lightning rather than the other is completely beyond our perception. We can only trust in the Buddha's words, because we don't know what actions from the distant past may have led to this.

Is it even important to know that? Isn't it enough to simply accept that things happen to us just because we live as human beings on this earth at this time? If we knew all the reasons for everything that happens to us, would that really help us?

There may well be 'coincidences' in the context of the life situation resulting from my karma, yet they all fit entirely into the basic karmic situation. If I have the karma of a woman in this world, then I will be

able to encounter the corresponding, typical coincidences of this situation. Whether these really are coincidences, remains to be seen. But if I go into town, for example, I have to expect that coincidences typical of a city walk will happen to me. It's just strange that quite different coincidences happen to different people strolling into town on the same day at the same time.

63. Does collective karma exist? The example of war and genocide

The question of collective karma is also discussed among Buddhist scholars, because if you approach the subject from the individual experience, then there is no group experience; everyone experiences one and the same situation differently depending on their karmic tendencies. This starts with the weather for all situations we encounter together. Before we approach the question in another way, let's start with a quote from Asanga, p.87:

"The sutra mentions 'collective karma' (*sadharanakarma*) and 'non-collective karma' (*asadharanakarma*). What is 'shared' or 'collective' karma? These are the actions that bring about the various changes in the inanimate world (e.g. the creation of the world, the seasons, the climate, which are experienced collectively and do not depend on individual volition).

What is 'non-collective' karma? These are the actions that cause (the emergence and) the various changes of living beings as well as the actions of the living beings that conversely control them.

With regard to the power of these actions that dominate beings, one also speaks of the 'dominating reciprocal conditions' (*anyonyadhipatipratyaya*) of living beings. Considering (the extent of) these conversely dominating forces, they are also called 'collective karma'. So says the sutra: This corresponds to the common view etc. of beings, though it is not permissible to deny this common experience."

"Non-collective" are therefore the effects of intentional actions of an individual, which are experienced only by him or her and not together with others. In a sense, we can speak of "collective" in relation to the reciprocal relationships between individuals through which they influence each other.

There are now situations that are experienced by entire groups and to which the individual has obviously contributed nothing or at least not much in this life. These include, for example, wars or the murder and persecution of entire ethnic groups, such as the Indians, Jews, Tibetans, Huguenots, etc. Here are a few thoughts on the subject:

If I belong to a group, be it a family, a profession, a party, an ethnic group or a religious community, etc., I become the target of the projections that others have in relation to these groups without any further action on my part. As a woman, I become the target of projections simply because I belong to the group of women, just as I do as a man, German, French, etc. I will inevitably encounter these projections in contact with other people.

As soon as I belong to a group, I experience its 'group karma'. And I belong to this group because I have the fitting karma for this group.

Within a group there are many individuals who have similar karma within the context of the group. Because of this related karma, they find themselves in the same group, even though they may otherwise be very different. The 'group karma' is like the intersection of the karma of the individuals and reflects what they have in common.

Over the course of time, opinions, prejudices and the like about each and every group have been formed due to the diverse interactions between individual people in our world, which are also passed on to subsequent generations. For example, we have opinions about Russians, Indians, Jews, Mohammedans, etc., even though we may never have met a single person from this group.

These opinions and prejudices are the driving force behind, for example, the disregard for entire ethnic groups and even their persecution. How did these projections come about? They arose from the interaction of the actions of individual members of these groups with the actions and emotions of others who encountered these group members. In all these encounters, right from the outset, we are not dealing with objective but with emotionally coloured perceptions of others. Certain actions of the group members fuel the mutual projections, while others weaken and modify them.

For example, the many acts of friendship between Germans, French, English, etc. have weakened the strong enemy images of the world wars. This is due to the efforts of many individuals. The emotional perception of groups is changing.

The 'karma' of an ethnic group can be explained by these historical, social and emotional processes.

'Group karma' is something very dynamic. Small actions (e.g. by statesmen or representatives of the respective group) can have major consequences for other members of the group. For example, members of a group do not need to have committed murder, in order to be murdered themselves.

With regard to the persecution and murder of Tibetan monks by Chinese troops, for example, one of the decisive factors was simply the fact that what was preached to others was not practiced in many Tibetan monasteries for centuries. It was therefore not too difficult for Chinese propaganda to point to the monastic communities as exploiters and to stir up the mistrust that already existed.

The point here is that it has serious consequences for a religious community if it does not live up to its values. This can ultimately lead to its complete disappearance from this world. If a monk lies, for example, this has much stronger consequences than if a person lies who has not taken a vow. In the same way, the behaviour of a president has much more serious consequences than that of an ordinary citizen.

To round off the above example, it should be noted that Tibetan Buddhism experienced an astonishing dissemination after its expulsion from its homeland, which in turn is a sign of how much genuine, inspiring strength there still is in this transmission. This 'group karma' is due to all the sincere practitioners of the past.

All it takes is for a certain group to become a target for the anger, jealousy, greed, etc. of others due to their history, which often goes far back into the past, and a process of intensifying aggressive projections begins. Due to small triggers, clumsy behaviour, hurtful events and often misunderstandings, a spiral of mutual rejection is set in motion, from which it becomes increasingly difficult to escape. Many individuals contribute to this spiral with their karmic tendencies.

If many individuals in a group have similar veils and emotions, their emotions will be projected onto other groups.

The responsibility for the escalation of events to the point of war or persecution lies karmically with all those acting individually who participate in, or approve of, fuelling this spiral with body, speech and mind and in carrying out the resulting actions. (Approving the actions of others is also an action with karmic consequences). Those actively involved have a choice in each of their actions; they could use their freedom and decide otherwise instead of joining in, allowing themselves to be goaded, etc.

Actors are by no means agents of a karma that must inevitably take place in this way now. They always take decisions.

To give a concrete example: We are in the process of coming together as Buddhist practitioners in the West. Whether we like it or not, in doing so we will inherit the legacy of all the projections that already circulate about Buddhists. If we are skilful in this process, we may succeed in correcting some misconceptions about Buddhists. But we will never be able to make other groups of people who do not practise this path themselves really understand what it is all about. They will always perceive us through their own personal filters and through the filters of journalists. So it will happen that we occasionally encounter prejudices that have nothing to do with ourselves. We simply carry the karma of being Buddhist. This is our personal karma, but what results from it is also the consequence of the actions of the group of all previous Buddhists as a whole in interplay with the emotions of their environment. In this sense, we can say that we share a collective karma.

Ultimately, of course, the concept of 'collective karma' is absurd, because in whose mind should this karma mature?

Karma can only mature in the minds of individuals - and everyone will deal with it in their own personal way. Therefore, there is only individual karma. Also, the actions of this group were always carried out by

individuals. They will experience the direct consequences of their actions in their own minds. Everyone else is only affected by the indirect, external consequences.

So while millions of members of certain ethnic groups were killed, each died in their own way - some full of hatred, some full of fear, some full of sorrow or grief, some filled with compassion, some with a prayer on their lips, some with a curse... and some even escaped. As a group they experienced the same external karma of persecution, but their internal experience was individually different and the traces of these events in their minds are inevitably different too.

We should be aware that simply because we belong to a group, we will encounter situations that we cannot initially explain with our personal behaviour.

We should also avoid trying to explain the fate of individuals solely on the basis of their personal behaviour and personal history.

For example, this also applies in particular to the rape of women. Women primarily experience the consequences of belonging to the group of 'women'. To exonerate the rapist by saying that it was certainly also the karma of the woman in question to be abused, is not justified from the point of view of the Dharma. Perhaps she only had the karma, as a woman, to meet the potential rapist at the wrong time. What ultimately happens in the encounter between these two is by no means pre-programmed. Aggressive actions, like all other actions, remain the full responsibility of the doer.

The person acting always takes a decision - and is fully responsible for it.

From a practical point of view, i.e. for our practice on the Dharma path, it is relatively unimportant what kind of situations we encounter and for what reason, because all experiences can be used for Dharma practice.

What matters is not what we experience, but how we deal with it.

64. What is "affiliation of actions"? Can I experience other people's karma?

We want our actions to have an effect on others or our environment and often don't realize that the effects of our actions hit us like a boomerang.

We cannot escape the effects of our actions.

In any case - and usually in many different ways - they will come to maturity in our experience. The karmic effects of actions are intimately linked to the mind stream of the person acting. We cannot escape them, cannot get rid of them or put the blame on others. It is impossible to cut off the mind from the effects of its own actions.

In a sutra of the *Buddha*: "The actions committed by Devadatta will not ripen in the earth, in the water or anywhere else, but only in the aggregates and in the field of perception of the one who has committed them. Who else should reap their fruits!"

➤ *Exercise 21: Can I escape my own boomerang? Imagine that you are thinking thoughts of hatred, desire, etc. Can you escape the effects of these mental actions?*

It is true that I am constantly experiencing the concrete effects of the actions of others in the form of situations for which I am not directly responsible. But I alone am responsible for how I react in these situations and what tendencies remain in my mind after death and determine future experiences. No one can force me to feel and think this or that way.

➤ *Exercise 22: Can the boomerang of others hit us? Imagine what it would be like if another person had thoughts of hatred, desire, etc.? Will you have to experience the effects of their mental actions in your mind? Or the other way round: can you create the mental states of other people with one hundred percent certainty? Can you impose your emotions on others? Doesn't everything depend on what tendencies the person already brings and how they react?*

If another person involves me in a difficult situation, for example verbally attacks me, I am not forced to experience their emotions in this situation, e.g. fear, anger and the like. I can also have compassionate, understanding thoughts.

The karmic effects of this situation will depend on my own reactions in a given situation, the decisions I make and the actions I carry out.

The traces that arise in our mind depend on our own behaviour. In the same situation, different people have different experiences due to their different karmic tendencies and in turn create different karma due to their different reactions. It is impossible for my mind to be filled with the emotions of other beings after death. It will be marked by all the karmic traces I have created myself.

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6: "ascription of karma, means that you experience the results of the karma you create. Results will ripen in the skandhas related to the actor, and not to others."

Abhidharma Compendium: "Actions are called 'belonging to us' because we ourselves experience the full effects of our actions and because we do not have them in common with other beings."

Gampopa continues: "If that were not the case, the karma that was created could be wasted (i.e. the effects of actions could cease) or there could be the danger of facing a result that one had not created."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Geist des Erwachens*, page 9: "Every action brings with it a particular result and this result is inevitably experienced by the doer of the action. It is impossible to experience the results of actions committed by others."

When "results" are mentioned here, this refers mainly to the mental level and the path to liberation, because of course we experience the effects of this when, for example, our parents move house. However, the actions of others do not determine what we will think, what tendencies we will cultivate inwardly, what rebirth we will take after death, and so on. After death, it becomes very clear what our personal karma is.

I will never experience the karma of others after death. Only the traces in my own mind remain.

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.39:

"If you boast of¹⁰ or regret virtues and do not overcome wrongdoing with a remedy such as confession, the acts you have done will ripen only upon you, not anyone else. It is impossible that they be lost or depleted even if aeons have passed."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.39-40:

"... it is impossible for actions committed by others to affect your stream of being if you have not participated in both the intention and preparation."

Thus if you are able to live by the Buddha's teachings of cause and effect, doing what is to be done and giving up what must be abandoned, there is no way at all anyone else can send you to the three lower realms no matter how evil they are.

Thus in all situations examine only your own faults and expand your pure perception of others. As this is the basis of karma and result, the Kagyu forefathers have advised us to consider it very important."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.87:

"Alone you will wander to the lower realms. At that time there will be no one else with whom you can share the suffering that results from your misdeeds - you alone will experience it."

¹⁰ here refers to boasting about wholesome actions such as studying Dharma, going on retreats, etc.
Karma reading book, page 48

65. What is meant by "exactly corresponding result"? (AN III, 101)

- *Exercise 23: Using the example of wholesome and non-wholesome actions, examine whether there is a possibility that the effects are different from the cause.*

If we act with wholesome motivation, the traces in our mind will always be accordingly. If we act with self-centred motivation, it cannot suddenly happen that this action dissolves our self-centeredness. It is not possible for harmful actions to have beneficial effects and thus change their quality.

The quality of the effects of actions always corresponds to the quality of the original action itself.

However, as far as the strength or quantitative aspect of the action and therefore the strength of the effects are concerned, there are many additional factors to consider, which will be discussed elsewhere. Also, most actions are of a "mixed" nature and therefore have mixed effects.

Buddha Shakyamuni himself vigorously pointed out that actions and not their consequences are not connected in a simple one-to-one relationship (AN III, 101):

"If, bhikkhus, the assertion were true that a person experiences the same exact effect for every deed he does, then a path of liberation ("holy walk") would be impossible and there would be no possibility of realizing total freedom from suffering. However, if the assertion is true that a person experiences a corresponding effect for an act - depending on the different conditions that come into effect - then a path of liberation and complete freedom from suffering are possible."

And the Buddha continues to describe his observations:

"Here, bhikkhus, one has committed only a minor offense, and it brings him to hell. But another has committed the same small offense, yet it ripens while he is still alive, and not even the slightest effect manifests itself [in future lives], let alone a great one.

What kind of person is such a one that a small offense committed by him brings him to hell? Such a one has not developed [insight into] the body, has not developed wholesome behaviour, has not developed meditative stability, and has not developed wisdom. He is limited, narrow-minded, and even as a result of trifles he has to suffer. Even a small offense may bring such a person to hell.

But what sort of person is he in whom the same small offense ripens while he is still alive and [in future lives] has not even the slightest effect, let alone a great one? Such a person has developed [insight into] the body, he has developed wholesome behaviour, meditative stability and wisdom. He is not limited, has a noble mind, an open mind that is not limited [by emotional delusion]. In such a person, the same small offense reaches maturity while he is still alive and [in future lives] there is not even the slightest effect, let alone a great one.

What do you think, bhikkhus, if someone were to throw a lump of salt into a glass of water, would the water not be salty and undrinkable? - But what would happen if someone were to throw such a lump of salt into the stream of the Ganges; would the water then also be salty and undrinkable? - Not so, lord, for there is an enormous amount of water in the Ganges. - It is the same, bhikkhus, with offenses: One is brought to hell by a small offense, while another, having committed the same offense, experiences the effects in this life and not even the slightest effect [in future lives], let alone a great one."

It can happen, for example, that an unwholesome action causes such a shock in our mind that it becomes the starting point for many wholesome actions. However, these are not the result of the first unwholesome action, but the result of the subsequent wholesome actions of confessing, remorse, developing a different motivation, etc. These gradually cancel out the consequences of the original unwholesome action. In their strength, these gradually cancel out the consequences of the original unwholesome action and even lead to many wholesome effects.

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6: "... one will experience happiness and suffering without mistake through the results of virtuous and nonvirtuous karma. One will experience happiness through the accumulation of virtue. By accumulating nonvirtue, one will experience the result of suffering."

From the *Abhidharma Compendium*: "What does 'a result corresponding to the action' mean? We experience the full effects of what we ourselves have done, for wholesome and harmful actions have a result exactly corresponding to them."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Geist des Erwachens*, page 9: "This double connection between wholesome action and happiness and between unwholesome action and suffering is absolutely irrefutable. It is like sowing the seeds of an orange tree and an apple tree. Each seed becomes a tree when it germinates, which causes the corresponding fruit to appear: it is not possible to get oranges on the apple tree and vice versa. If we wish to avoid suffering, we will give up all forms of non-beneficial, harmful actions. If we wish for happiness, we will endeavour to practice every kind of wholesome, helpful actions."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 11: "Every kind of action corresponds directly to a result. This is the infallible law of cause and effect, which must be fully understood."

Everything wholesome that you do will sooner or later result in happiness. Every unwholesome action sooner or later leads to the experience of suffering.

This close and inescapable relationship between action and result, between cause and effect, can be compared to the maturing of a tree seed. If you plant a lemon seed, the tree that grows from it is a lemon tree and its fruit will be lemons. If you plant an orange seed, the resulting tree will be an orange tree, and its fruit will be oranges. If you taste a lemon, you may find it somewhat bitter or sour, even unpleasant. If we turn to the orange tree and taste an orange, it seems much sweeter and more pleasant. Likewise, this applies to an action and its result. If the action is beneficial, the result is pleasant. If it is a harmful act, the result is much more bitter. This is the infallibility of the law of karma."

66. What is the dynamic side of karma?

Many superficial readers of Buddhist literature remain with a purely static understanding of karma, according to the motto: "He who gives becomes rich. He who kills is killed himself. I am beaten because I used to beat someone myself, etc." This simplification is wrong and even dangerous. It is wrong because it does not consider that actions have effects on all levels of our being and because it does not consider which reinforcing and mitigating factors play a role. Such a simplification is dangerous because it stops us thinking and leads to absurd statements such as "You broke your leg because you broke someone else's leg in the past", or: "The Tibetans, the Jews, the Huguenots, etc. were persecuted because they themselves persecuted others to the same extent in the past". When and where?

These are often cheap excuses that we use to save ourselves the trouble of thinking and shift responsibility, which may lie elsewhere, possibly even with us, onto the victims.

The Old Testament equation "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" has nothing to do with karma. Karmic laws work in a much more subtle and complex way than simple one-to-one accounting.

However, karma is also sometimes quite banal. We don't always need to look far back in past lives for explanations. To illustrate this with an example: We can break our leg simply because we are too stupid to pay attention. This is the direct karmic consequence of stupidity, e.g. not having maintained the ski bindings. The same applies to car accidents caused by speeding. This is the karma of stupidity, stress, ambition, etc. If I go outside in the rain and cold without dressing appropriately, I need not be surprised that I catch a cold. That too is the karma of stupidity. Of course, this does not cover all the factors of the situation, but it is at least obvious that this karma could have been avoided.

Our historians have a lot to say about what triggers wars and genocide, for example. Their analyses and the resulting hypotheses and findings often shed light on karmic connections in a very accurate way, even if the analyses are naturally limited to what we know historically. The same applies to the analyses of human development by psychologists and sociologists. They all open our eyes to subtle karmic connections within the framework of the observations available to them. From the point of view of the Dharma, these analyses are acceptable, even if they only consider a part of the whole play of cause and effect. We simply have to be aware of their limitations in order not to absolutize these explanatory approaches.

The Buddhist masters want to draw our attention to the fact that the effects of actions are not static. The longer the traces of actions are active in our mind stream, the more power they develop, unless weakening influences take effect.

Karmic forces have a momentum of their own, similar to fast-growing plants that can overgrow everything else.

Even seemingly insignificant actions can therefore have major consequences, even if they are purely mental actions, such as hateful or covetous thoughts. For example, hateful attitudes towards others, even if they don't result in insults and murder, can still have serious consequences. This also applies to a few, seemingly insignificant words which, if not retracted, can have strong repercussions. This seems all the truer when the people involved are spiritual practitioners or influential people. The basic conditions are different in such a case.

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6: "This ...category means the maturation of a big result from a small karma [like a seed into a tree]. For example, regarding nonvirtuous deeds, it is said that one will experience a kalpa in the hell realm for each instant of negative thought."

This is what Shantideva says in *Entry into Bodhisattva Practice*, verse 34 as quoted in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6 : "The Buddha has said that whoever bears an evil thought against a benefactor such as that bodhisattva will remain in hell for as many aeons as there were evil thoughts."

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 5: "By one or two instances of negative speech, one experiences suffering for 500 lifetimes, and so forth "

From *Dharma Essence in Verse*: "Even small offenses will cause great fear and great difficulties in the next world, like a poison that has penetrated to the core."

"Even small meritorious acts lead to great happiness in the next world and bring about great benefit like the ripening of excellent seed."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.39: "Even if trifling [seemingly insignificant] at the time of the cause, the deed, karma compounds itself. Thus there is no way to measure what will come of powerful acts such as killing out of strong hatred or saving out of pure altruism the life of a being certain to die. Even the slightest virtues or wrongs we do or say thoughtlessly are multiplied hundreds of thousands of times."

And, as stated above:

"Actions of any kind - whether beneficial or harmful - may still be small at the time they are carried out. But then, when their fruits appear, they are many times greater."

In these two quotes, Djamgön Kongtrul points out that dynamic factors always join the mere execution of an action, which will also determine the effects. This applies to all actions. A single word can have unforeseen consequences if it suddenly appears in the press and also comes from the mouth of a chancellor or a church dignitary. For those who are familiar with these framework conditions and the factors that subsequently strengthen or weaken them, such effects are foreseeable, but for someone in ignorance of these laws, they come as a surprise.

Small actions can have major consequences if corresponding reinforcing factors take effect.

Large actions can have small consequences if corresponding mitigating factors take effect.

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.45: "Your wholesome actions become inexhaustible by rejoicing. Your harmful actions you should properly confess and promise to refrain from them by means of the four forces. Just like a whole forest can be burned down by a small spark, in the same way a mass of harmful actions can be destroyed by wholesome actions. Rejoice about that and apply it."

Udanavarga, as quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.45: "Even small meritorious actions will lead you to great well-being in the next world. They will cause great benefits, just like grains ripening into an excellent crop."

Discussion:

- What reinforcing and mitigating factors are we aware of?
- Which of these factors can we use consciously?
- *Exercise 24: Can you remember single thoughts that had a big impact? Can you remember intense thoughts that did not lead to major consequences? Have you noticed how certain thoughts, attitudes or tendencies can take hold in your mind? Can you recognize the involved reinforcing or weakening factors at work?*

67. How can merit increase?

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury*, p.563-564:

"The ancient masters say: It is in the nature of things (*dharmatā*) that merit increases when persons who have received a gift utilize this gift:

- the qualities of these persons [their deep goodness, their meditative contemplations, their realization, etc.]
- the benevolence that they get out of the gift for themselves and for all creatures
- the mental series [processes] (*samtatayas*) of the givers, be they of bad or of neutral minds, is found to be perfumed (*paribhāvita*) by the volition of giving which has for its object the person who receives [i.e. that the intention that preceded the action already performed, is repeatedly reinforced].

[Due to these factors] their series undergo a subtle ascending transformation and arrives at the state where they are finally capable of bringing forth many results. It is in this sense that the text says 'Merit increases in an intense and uninterrupted manner, merit adds to itself.'

But how does one explain the increase of merit in the case of nonmaterial meritorious work (*nirāupad-hika*)? [The mental series, transforms itself] by reason of the repetition of volitions having for their object [the Tathagata or the Sravakas]. Even during dreams these volitions are linked together ... merely [by] the joy experienced with regard to the Tathagata or the Sravakas."

68. Where does the law of karma apply?

Karmic laws apply wherever there are actions and doers.

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 7: "Wherever there is space, there are living beings. Wherever the sentient beings are pervaded by karma and afflicting emotions, they are pervaded by suffering. Therefore, I cultivate the mind to dispel all these sufferings"

Thus we read in Samantabhadra's *wishful prayer of the right way of life*: "Limitless is the extent of space, Limitless is the number of sentient beings, And limitless are the karma and delusions of beings— Such are the limits of my aspirations"

69. Does an awakened person generate karma? (AN IV.232; MN 57; AN III, 34)

Buddha Shakyamuni mentions in AN IV.232 and MN 57 a work that does not lead to karmic entanglement and rebirth:

"There is dark work, which brings dark results; light work, which brings light results; partly light and partly dark ["mixed"] work, which brings partly light and partly dark results; and neither light nor dark ["pure"] work, which brings neither light nor dark results and leads to the exhaustion of work (Pali: *kamma-kkhaya*)."

We read in Nyānaponika in *The Roots of Good and Evil*, p.63:

"The good actions of an arahant are the spontaneous outflow of a completely purified heart that responds without hesitation to situations in which help is necessary and possible. Although inner detachment and deep serenity prevail in the arahant's actions instead of emotional involvement, his actions are not devoid of human sympathy and compassion."

The end of karma is the end of delusion and thus the end of emotional involvement and suffering. This is Buddhahood, the state beyond all conditioning by karmic tendencies, beyond all veils, where all qualities manifest unveiled and spontaneously. All veils of self-centeredness are exhausted and can no longer arise, there is no more being born, the chain of dependent arising is broken.

A Buddha has attained complete freedom from karma. He no longer plants new karmic seeds of suffering and has purified all the fruits of past actions.

Accordingly, Gampopa describes Buddhahood in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 18, as the end of the conditionality of cause and effect:

"... this primordial wisdom clearly observes the exhaustion of the cause and non-production of the result and is called the 'awareness of the exhaustion and non-production'."

For a Buddha, there is "nothing more to learn" when it comes to mastering the connections between cause and effect. His awareness is perfect.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 9:

"Enlightened awareness has no limits. Our mind can also experience this. In whichever of the three great realms of existence beings may be, be it the realm of desire, the realm of form or the realm of formlessness - all three levels are permeated by the mind. The enlightened awareness can perceive all the details of these three worlds, every movement and intention as well as the potential, i.e. the positive or negative karma of the beings living there. This awareness is everywhere at the same time. When someone realizes the enlightened dimension of the mind, they will naturally find the appropriate means through their compassion to help other beings - quite spontaneously - so that all beings can carry out the transformation of their consciousness. Dharma is nothing other than that."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 10:

"Once you have completely purified body, speech and mind, you find yourself with body, speech and mind in a state of perfect purity: the Buddha state. The body becomes the emanation body or nirmanakaya, speech becomes the joy body or sambhogakaya, and the mind becomes the truth body or dharmakaya. Once all veils are purified and perfect enlightenment is realized, one is able to manifest the activity of a Buddha beyond ordinary activity."

Acting free from all clinging does not create karma. Acting free from clinging is enlightened activity.

In the Pali tradition, a distinction is made between worldly wholesome actions (*lokiya-kusula*) and supra-mundane wholesome actions (*lokutara-kusula*). The wholesome actions of one liberated from the world, i.e. from clinging to a supposed self, do not generate forces that lead to a fruit that would have to be experienced in new existences.

In A III, 34 it says: "As with burnt seeds that can no longer produce anything, so it is with an activity that was done free from greed, hatred and delusion. When greed, hatred and delusion have completely disappeared, then such an activity is thereby annulled, cut off at its roots, made barren like a palm stump, brought to nothingness and no longer able to appear in the future."

Karmapa writes in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.44 on the actions of Awakened Ones: "Unobscured [pure] neutral action has a fourfold classification: ripening of karma, daily activities, arts and crafts, and activity of a magician."

70. Can several actions show their effects at the same time?

Yes, if they have an impact on different levels.

Vasubandhu, chapter 4, p.624: "Does it happen that there is at one and the same time retribution of the three types of action? Yes. There can take place at the same time: (1) the retribution of an action of agreeable sensation, namely of material dharmas, [a so-called material phenomenon in the realm of sense experience]; (2) the retribution of an action of disagreeable sensation, namely the mind and the mental

states [as thought or mental perception]; (3) the retribution of an action of neither agreeable nor disagreeable sensation, namely the dharms dissociated from the mind, [effects beyond thought perception (in the non-conceptual realm)]."

71. Are all phenomena karmically determined?

The universe consists of multiple cause-and-effect relationships. According to *Buddha*, "everything happens because of a cause."

All phenomena appear depending on conditions.

All phenomena are therefore conditional. When these conditions come to an end, these phenomena also come to an end. However, this does not mean that all phenomena are *karmically conditioned*. However, it can be understood in this way because the perception of all phenomena takes place in our mind, and nothing can be said about the existence or non-existence of phenomena beyond this.

According to the Buddha, karma refers to all experiences and cause-and-effect relationships that are caused by physical, verbal or mental *actions*.

Sangharakshita in Alfred Weil's book *Karma*, page 94:

"The incessant flow of being— of material events as well as of mental states— is a process of mutually dependent phases, all of which arise through the existence of conditions and which in turn condition the phases that follow them. ... And it is our realization of this law of conditionality that gradually frees us from all conditions and leads us to the free-working, spontaneous creative power of enlightenment."

General phenomena of conditionality, such as the simple facts that an apple falls to the ground, that fire burns, the sun shines, the wind sweeps across the land, etc. are not, at first glance, an expression of karma. They are the laws of physics and not the perceptible effects of our actions. The same applies to the laws of chemistry and biology. This also includes, for example, the fact that certain processes can be triggered in the mind through targeted stimulation of certain areas of the brain.

Although they clearly influence our experience, we do not have the impression that these laws have come about as a result of our actions. We therefore never make our actions responsible for the limitations imposed by physical laws or biological necessities. And the Buddha does not ask us to somehow try to rock these laws of nature. Within these limitations that we need to accept, he shows us the path to liberation through conscious action aimed at the awakening of all beings.

However, the Buddha points out to us that the way in which the perception of these phenomena, which are conditioned by natural laws, comes about and is processed, and the reason why we live in a world where there are apples, fire, sun and wind at all, is in turn an expression of our karma. To open our eyes to this, he speaks of other realms of existence where the same laws of nature do not apply, where, for example, there is no physical body, where neither apples nor gravity exist. He talks about the fact that karmic laws are at work in each of these realms of existence and that, depending on our karma, we have certainly already spent existences in these other realms.

If we work with such an expanded vision of our human world as just one of the many possible worlds, then it stands to reason that the fact that we find ourselves in this very world and are subject to its natural laws also has something to do with our karma.

The Buddha and other great Buddhist masters go so far as to say that the world we live in is conditioned by our mind. The mind clinging to the self-illusion, feeling itself as a subject, would create this illusory body, which is the expression and mirror of the subtle tendencies that dominate our mind. In the same way, our mind clinging to the concrete existence of external objects would create the illusory external world. From this broader perspective, we could say: "Everything is an expression of our confused mind" and thus: "Everything is conditioned by karma". This implies that our entire perception, even of concrete objects, is clouded by the filter of dualistic delusion.

So, without going into these arguments in detail, we can see that there are two levels of consideration, a narrower and a broader view of karma, both of which have found expression in Buddhist literature.

Of practical relevance to us is first of all the narrower view, where we deal with the conscious actions that we can influence and work to align our physical, verbal and mental actions with the well-being of all beings.

With increasing meditation practice, we then experience karma as the entire conditioning of our point of view, whereby our belief in the supposedly concrete existence of a self and in a universe that supposedly exists outside of us is revealed as a delusion.

It does not matter which laws of nature govern our universe. As long as we engage with the relative reality of this universe, we are subject to the cause-and-effect relationships that operate in it on a relative level. And it is pointless to ask ourselves how they came about. We simply have to accept them until one day, with increasing freedom of the mind, new free spaces may also open up on the relative level. If the laws of nature of our universe were indeed created by the mind trapped in delusion, then the mind completely freed from delusion should no longer be bound by them.

The extent to which this also affects the body is another question. It seems that even the body of an enlightened person whose mind is completely free of delusion behaves according to the laws of nature most of the time, at least some of the time. However, there always seem to be situations with enlightened beings where these conditions are overridden by the power of the mind.

72. Does karma also work on the ultimate level of reality?

The teachings on karmic laws are all about the relative level of reality.

This is the level where there are beings who experience happiness and suffering, the level of dualistic perception. Karma only works on this level.

In nonduality, the ultimate level of reality, there is no karma.

Karma is linked to the illusion of an ego or self. Karmic forces are set in motion by self-centeredness. Actions that are completely free of egocentricity and self-illusion are called enlightened activity. They do not give rise to karma. The karmic forces accompany us as long as we dwell in self-identification. They are not effective when someone dwells in the nature of mind but become effective again when that person re-identifies with a self. The teachings on karma familiarize us with the laws that operate on the relative level, where we are caught in egocentricity, however subtle.

In the Sutra *Unshakable True Nature (Diamond Sutra)*:

"By their very nature, all phenomena are unborn, inherently non-abiding, free from all limitations of karma and action, beyond the realm of thought and non-thought."

However, we expressly warn against a false understanding of these teachings.

The Torch of True Meaning, p.161-162:

"Respect and protect against even the subtlest karmic cause and effect. Otherwise you might base your confidence on a dry [conceptual] understanding of emptiness thinking, "Nothing will affect the [true] nature." Paying lip service to practice, your behaviour will become rough and crazy. It is possible some people with impure karma might see you as a siddha [realized person], but it is really the basis for ruining yourself and others, so it is important to be careful."

Padmasambhava in the *Dakini teachings*:

"Although you meditate on emptiness, make sure that it becomes an aid to virtuous practice and a remedy against your disturbing emotions."

Kyeme Shang, as quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.128: "The instant of immediately recognizing a thought is called Mahamudra understanding, it is called experience of concentration or born of meditation. The very instant a thought is recognized, all the unwholesome actions accumulated since beginningless samsara are overcome and purified."

73. Our present existence as a mirror of past actions

Gendün Rinpoche in *Geist des Erwachens*, page 8/9:

"All beings without exception try to avoid suffering and attain happiness. Despite these efforts, happiness and suffering are completely beyond our control, because our present situation and experience depend entirely on our past actions and the karma we have accumulated in our previous lives. *Buddha Shakyamuni* said:

If we want to know what our past actions were, it is enough to look at our present situation. If we want to anticipate our future living conditions, we need only imagine the consequences of our present actions.

Through a mindful examination of our present life conditions - health, illness, happiness, sadness, etc. - we can conclude quite clearly what our past actions were. Everything we experience is the direct result of past actions. The power of these actions creates all the life conditions we are currently experiencing.

Karma is neither something desired nor something that happens arbitrarily. It is a naturally and spontaneously operating law. Whatever action is performed, it entails karma. Everyone tries to avoid suffering and attain happiness, but despite all efforts, the expected results do not materialize, because our momentary happiness or suffering does not depend on the actions we perform *now*. We cannot control happiness. Even if we occasionally manage to achieve a little happiness and avoid suffering, most of the forces at work in a situation are not under our control. This is because all conditions are governed by the law of karma."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 15:

"...Every experience we go through in this life depends on karma; it is the result of the interaction of deeds we have done in the past. This applies not only to human beings, but also to all living beings. Whatever state we find ourselves in is the fruit of past deeds. When a living being acts in a certain state of mind, this creates a potential result that matures according to the law of karma. The result is birth in one form of existence or another, in which what happens to you also depends on karma:

All situations you encounter are just illusions created by previously accumulated karma."

74. Is our attachment to the body a source of negative karma?

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 4:

"... it [the body] will cause harm [quarrels, entanglement, etc.] in this life and hereafter. The harm in this life is that this body cannot tolerate sickness, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, the fear that someone will hit or beat it, the fear that someone may kill it, the fear that someone may torture it, or the fear that someone may skin it [i.e. due to our attachment to the body]. Hereafter, by this body's faults, we are thrown into the lower realms through the maturation of the result."

75. How does karma continue into the next life? (Dh 219f.; M 60)

Buddha Shakyamuni in the *Dhammapada*, verses 219 and 220:

"The long-lost dear man, who comes safely from distant lands, is greeted by all his loved ones on his return. So truly, he who did good will be received in his new being by all his good deeds, like friends receive a dear friend."

The Buddha describes in various places how this realization of the workings of karma beyond death came to him: through meditation. He says of himself and other awakened practitioners in *A Safe Bet* (MN 60:53, *Apannaka Sutta*):

"After his heart-mind has become thus unified, purified, clear, spotless, unclouded, gentle, docile (usable) and without arbitrariness (steady) and perfectly still (unshakable), he directs it to the realization of the death and reappearance of beings. Thus, with the celestial eye, the purified eye that reaches beyond human limits, he can see beings die and reappear: common and noble, beautiful and ugly, happy and miserable beings. He understands how beings move on according to their actions:

"These cherished beings are inclined to what is harmful in deed, inclined to what is harmful in word, inclined to what is harmful in thought, disapproving of the noble ones, harbouring wrong view, and from wrong view they come to wrong conduct. When the body dies, after death, they enter a bad path, circumstances characterized by deprivation, misfortune and ruin, even the depths of the world of pain.

But those esteemed beings are devoted to the wholesome in deed, devoted to the wholesome in word, devoted to the wholesome in thought. They do not disapprove of the noble ones, hold right views, and from right views come right conduct. When the body dies, after death, they enter a good path, happy circumstances, even celestial worlds. - Thus he sees the beings wandering on according to their work."

How can we understand that we should still experience in later lives the effects of our action, so for example of this life?

An attempt at explanation: with every mental, verbal or physical action impressions arise in our mind. Most of us are only aware of impressions on a conceptual level, on the level of conscious memory. However, traces are also left on a deeper level in our mind stream, on a non-conceptual level, traditionally called the *Alaya memory consciousness*. Every action has immediate effects on this non-conceptual level, which lies beyond the intellect, just as waves on the surface of a lake reach the bottom as fine vibrations similar to them, leaving their finest traces. These traces in our non-conceptual consciousness will shape our view and tendencies to act also in later lives, i.e. as long as they are not expunged, and predispose us to experiences and situations similar to the original actions of previous lives.

Of course, the question immediately arises: What happens in death?

In death, all gross forms of consciousness dissolve. Only the two aspects of non-conceptual consciousness, the nature of the mind and Alaya consciousness, continue. Death is like the eye of a needle. When passing through the eye of the needle, all gross conceptual identifications, memories and the like must be left behind. The normal self cannot survive beyond death. But the unpurified, subtle traces of the actions carried out by this mind stream continue to work in the non-conceptual consciousness. After the passage through the Clear Light (luminosity) or the total loss of all conceptual consciousness immediately after death, which dissolves the bond of identification with the past life, these traces come again into effect. The dynamic inherent in the mind causes the impressions present in the store consciousness, traditionally called "seeds", to be gradually activated. Their activation causes the appearance of thoughts, i.e. conceptual activity in the mind, dream images, emotions, etc. And so the journey continues. It is not the same person and yet there is a subtle, unchanging continuity.

The thoughts we experience when meditating, the impressions that suddenly arise, all appear as a result of the activation of this store consciousness. The conceptual and non-conceptual levels of our mind are in constant exchange with each other. The old is activated, the new is stored. Old traces are erased; new ones are created. In this way, some karmic patterns become more and more deeply entrenched, while others are weakened through corrective intervention or conscious non-reaction. In this way, a process of continuous transformation takes place on a non-conceptual level of consciousness.

Throughout life, karma is the shaping force of our experiences and perceptions. This continues into death and beyond.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 14:

"At the moment of death, the physical body is destroyed, the mind continues to exist and produces another body in accordance with our karma. This body is the result of past deeds, and everything that happens to it is only the fruit of these deeds. It is therefore pointless to project our difficulties onto the outside world and blame others of our misfortune."

In the traditional teachings it is repeatedly pointed out that what we may call the "Lord of Death", the "Grim Reaper" of the Middle Ages, is always only our karma.

Thus it says in the sutra *Advice to the King*:

"Great King! When the Lord of Death (your karma) sticks you up to the stake and tortures you, all arrogance will vanish. There is then no refuge, no protectors and no allies. You are stricken with sickness your mouth is dry, your face changes. Your limbs give way, you can do nothing, and you sully your body

with saliva, snot, urine and vomit. Your voice becomes brittle, the doctor gives you up. For the last time you sleep in your bed. You sink down into the stream of the cycle of existence and the messengers of the lord of death frighten you. Your breathing stops, your mouth and nostrils gape wide open. You leave this world behind and enter the next, the great procession leads you on.

You enter the great darkness, fall into an abysmal depth and are swept away by a mighty sea. The winds of karma drive you - you go where there is no solid ground. There are no more possessions, no more clothes to distribute. 'Oh no, mother! Oh, father! Oh, my children!' you will cry. But know, Great King, at that time there is no other refuge, no protector and no ally except the noble teaching."

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.35: "Their minds, separated from their bodies, roam powerlessly in the bardo [of the after-death state], following the karma they have accumulated, and through the power of their karma they will take hold of their future birthplace."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.27:

"Meditate intensely, thinking, 'Falling rocks, collapsing buildings, lightning, seizures, unbearable abdominal pain, and so forth - there are so many causes of death that we do not know how it will come. We do not know when it will come. If it is karma, there is no way to prevent it. I don't even know whether my food, wealth, clothing, friends, associates, servants, and so forth will become causes of death. The time of death is uncertain, so what will happen to me even now?'"

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.86-87

"It is not so that you must do wrongs that are unavoidable and will definitely benefit you, whether for the sake of subduing enemies and protecting friends; for the sake of wealth, possessions, or reputation; or for the sake of food, clothing and so forth. No matter how much you have, those will not benefit you even a sesame seed's worth [this will not be of any use] at the time of death. Forget about reputation, possessions, children, spouses, and so forth—you will be powerless to take with you even a single morsel of food or a set of clothes."

and: "... It is not hard for an enemy to change into a friend or a friend into an enemy [i.e. nothing can be relied on], so daring to commit wrongs is to be caught by the maras and crazed by insanity—it is great stupidity and ignorance. But up to now, we have not recalled even a single drawback and never said, 'I can't let myself do this. I shall not.' Think to yourself, 'I could die at any time— will I even have time to purify my misdeeds?'"

For example, think about: "If I die without purifying any of them, what suffering will occur to me in the lower realms?" and so forth. Drive yourself to shame. You must meditate until you cannot sit still and are disconsolate [(i.e. until you realize the extent of the consequences of your harmful actions waiting for you, and you immediately begin Dharma practice)]."

76. Karma and the doctrine of non-self

Nyānatiloka in *The Word of the Buddha*, p.36f:

"It is desire that underlies all of human beings' life-affirming activity (Pali: *kamma*, Skt. *karma*); and it is this activity in deeds, words and thoughts that, depending on its nature, determines the character and destiny of the human being and allows him to experience the consequences of this activity in ever new existences. Existence, or rather the "process of becoming", is thus divided into an active, causative karma process (*kamma-bhava*) and its effect, the rebirth process (*uppati-bhava*).

When considering karma, the doctrine of not-self must not be ignored. Just as the wave hurrying along the surface of a pond is nothing more than a process generated by the wind, which manifests itself as continuous rising and falling: In the same way, it is not a real self that rushes through the sea of existence, but only a process of becoming produced by desire, which, depending on the nature of the karmic action, appears sometimes as a human being, sometimes as an animal, sometimes as an invisible being, whereby the constantly repeating revival and demise of these beings may be compared to the incessant rising and falling of the water."

77. *What is death actually?*

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 60: "We often speak of death in worldly terms, but what is death actually from the point of view of the Dharma? Death is a change of perception. All the phenomena that we perceive in this world cease to make way for another form of perception. But there is no real interruption: the mind perceives in the same way and has the same kind of experiences; the context is different, but basically it is the same process. In truth, death is an illusion. It does not exist in the sense that we perceive it, as "the end of life and then there is nothing more".

Death is continuity: although one changes the level of perception and no longer perceives the same things, one still perceives with the same tendencies. What is perceived after death is the continuing manifestation of the karmic potential that comes to maturity.

One experiences it through the senses as a mental experience (in a subtle body) and depending on whether it is positive or negative karma, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, frightening or peaceful, one reacts with attachment or rejection.

Death can be compared to moving house. You live in a house where you have certain habits, and one day you die; you move and take your karmic suitcases to live somewhere else, in a different situation and context."

Die drei Siegel, page 60: "One speaks of "bardo" when one means the after-death phase, but the word bardo in itself only means "intermediate space", and at this very moment we are also in an intermediate state, the one between birth and death. All our present experiences are also bardo experiences. The only difference to the bardo after death is that our experiences then will be more intense than they are now. What we are experiencing right now and what we have lived for countless existences is the result of the good and bad karma we have accumulated; our present experiences are the ripening of the karmic seeds we have sown in countless lifetimes. We have experienced many things since our birth. We have lived in a certain environment, met certain people, done many different things and experienced pleasant and unpleasant conditions. All this is the fruit of the karma we have accumulated in our previous lives."

The Torch of True Meaning, p.86: "[Due to our unwholesome actions] At the time of death, there is intense agony, fear, and suffering, and there is intense confusion in the bardo. And after death we will experience for a long time the agonizing suffering of the three lower realms in accord with the severity of our wrongdoing.

Even if at some point we are born in the high realms, we will have short lives and ill health. Though you are innocent, enemies and lawsuits will appear, and there will be crop failures, epidemics, and war in your country. As the causally compatible result, you will enjoy wickedness, and your suffering will increase unceasingly."

The practical application of the karma teachings

Buddhist ethics and the path to liberation

78. *What is our space of free decision?*

Most of the time, I am not forced to carry out certain actions. I could often decide differently if only my emotions gave me more leeway. But as long as I have hardly any leeway, my actions are quite easy to predict, and I act as if under duress. There is (see Asanga, p.84) also a category of actions whose execution becomes necessary or unavoidable as a result of previous actions (karma). This raises the question: How free am I actually? And to what extent am I responsible for my situation?

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 44:

"We have very little freedom when it comes to the impact of our past. This heritage shapes our world and our experiences. We have little room for manoeuvre. We cannot create anything else or change our karmic

track at will. We have created certain conditions and can only make the best of these conditions to change the future track towards greater freedom. As for the legacy of the past, we can only learn to respond differently and transform our tendencies."

However, we do have some scope of freedom as far as our present actions are concerned, which may be very small at the moment because our karmic tendencies are strong. But Dharma practice will help to increase this scope more and more. In this way, more and more options for action will be open to us in situations. A Buddha has one hundred percent freedom of action. At the moment, we have perhaps five percent. Or is that already too high?

- *Exercise 25: Play through difficult situations with several alternatives: As an example, choose situations in which you feel you have very little room for manoeuvre, even almost hopeless situations. Think about what options there are still open to you on the levels of body, speech and mind in such a situation. This can also be played out as a group, with everyone contributing their own ideas. Try to discover the scope for decision-making that is still available in the given situation. What skills would we need to develop internally in order to be able to use this room for manoeuvre? (Suggestion from R. Leisner)*

The ethical guidelines for Dharma practitioners are all derived from the following considerations:

- Which actions lead to suffering and should therefore be avoided?
- Which actions lead to happiness and liberation for everyone involved and should therefore be encouraged?

The criterion for all actions is the openness of the mind. An open mind is characteristic of wholesome actions, a narrow mind of unwholesome actions.

- *Exercise 26a: Shaping my future: Now let's give full rein to our ideas about our life's dream. What would it look like if your life's dream were to come true? How would I like to be? together with whom? where? what occupation? etc. For the exercise it does not matter whether these are Dharma dreams or completely worldly dreams. The point is: What is the connection between me today and a possible fulfilment of this dream? How would it be possible to get there? What do I have to do for it? (Suggestion R. Leisner)*
- *Exercise 26b: A similar exercise for shaping the future is to write down a list of qualities and skills that we would like to develop, and then ask ourselves: What can I do in the next few weeks to promote these? And on top of that, how can I promote the qualities in myself that I would like to see in others? (Suggestion by S. Wetzel)*

The general guideline with regard to the increase of happiness and the avoidance of suffering is:

- By directing all our actions towards the wholesome and unselfish, we increase the proportion of auspicious forces in the overall potential of all forces that determine our future.
- And to the extent that we accept our difficulties and do not react to them with renewed negativity, the proportion of forces that cause suffering in the overall potential that determines the future is reduced.

If we understand this, we can use our freedom and take our destiny into our own hands. However, it takes a little perseverance in carrying out the wholesome and patience in enduring the unpleasant. Then we become "the smith of our own happiness", though not in a self-important sense, but by gradually dissolving our self-centeredness.

79. What about actions that we have not carried out ourselves or voluntarily?

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*:

"Harmful actions include everything that we ourselves have done that is harmful, that we have incited others to do, harmful actions that we have rejoiced in and praised, and the like." and:

"Since much suffering arises from these actions, do not perform them yourself under any circumstances, discourage others from doing them, and repent those you have already committed."

Asanga, p.84: "In the Buddha's teachings, intentional action (*cetanakarma*) is mentioned. What are such intentional actions? They are:

- (1) intentional actions conditioned by the command of another,
- (2) intentional acts caused by the influence, suggestion or intimation of another,
- (3) intentional actions performed without knowing (the difference between wholesome and unwholesome),
- (4) intentional actions performed under the influence of the roots (the unwholesome, *akusulamula*)
- (5) intentional actions caused by wrong views.

Of these, the consequences of intentional actions under the influence of the roots (of the unwholesome) and of intentional actions conditioned by wrong views, committed or acquired, are experienced in any case. 'Committed' means 'caused by behaviour' and 'acquired' means 'accumulated by the traces (*vasana*).'

80. The ten unwholesome actions

Gampopa writes in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6 (slightly abridged):

"Generally, there are numerous unwholesome actions, but they are briefly summarized as ten—three from the body ... four from speech ... and three from the mind. "

Asanga, p.83: "What is unwholesome? These are the ten kinds of unwholesome actions: Killing (*pranati-pata*), taking what has not been given, i.e. stealing (*adattadana*) and sexual misconduct (*kamamithy-acara*), lying (*mrsavada*), slander (*pisunavak*), hurtful speech (*parusavak*) and gossip (*sambhinnapra-lapa*), greed (*abhidya*), malice (*vyāpadā*) and wrong views (*mithyadrsti*)."

81. What are non-wholesome actions with the body ?

Killing

<i>Definition:</i> To kill is to knowingly interrupt the life stream of a being.
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An attempt to kill does not yet count as killing; the act must be successful and intentional. In the case of unintentional killing, such as stepping on an ant without realizing it, the effects are different than if you do it deliberately.

- *Exercise 27: Think of plausible reasons why killing is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*:

"There are three types:

- taking life through the door of desire [attachment]: to take life for meat, pelts and so forth, for sport, for one's own wealth, and to maintain oneself and loved ones.
- taking life through the door of hatred [aversion]: to take life through the arising of hatred, out of resentment, or in competition.
- taking life through the door of ignorance refers to making sacrifices and so forth."

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of the act of killing, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, but its execution is done solely through hatred [aversion]."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.33:

"Taking life is killing anything intentionally, even something as small as an ant or beetle, since there is no big or small when it comes to life."

"The fully matured effect of killing is rebirth in the hell realm. The effect corresponding to the cause is that in the case of rebirth as a human being, life will be short and full of disease. The effect of influence is rebirth in an unattractive area of a country with many misfortunes."

The most serious form of killing is murder of one's own father or mother as well as of a bodhisattva or arhat. Bodhisattvas are beings who have generated bodhicitta. Arhats are highly realized practitioners. The worst thing would be to kill parents who are Bodhisattvas or Arhats.

Bodily harm in any form is of course also a karmically serious physical act. The worst of these actions is said to be injuring a Buddha, a fully awakened master, and causing them to bleed. Killing a monk or a nun is mentioned as an almost equally extreme action.

Discussion points:

- Are there situations where a bodhisattva would kill someone?
- What about self-defence? Can a Buddhist defend himself, and how?
- What about defending a country or one's relatives?
- Should Buddhist states have an army?
- What if the Dharma was in danger of being eradicated?
- Is gardening killing? Do farmers constantly accumulate the karma of killing?

Taking what was not given (Stealing)

<p><i>Definition</i> (according to Djamgön Kongtrul): "Stealing is taking others' possessions covertly, without them being given."</p>
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➤ *Exercise 28: Think of plausible reasons why stealing is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

According to Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6, this includes robbery, stealing and fraud:

- "Robbery: to rob by force without any reason
- Stealing: to steal things by breaking into a house without others noticing and so forth.
- Fraud: refers to deceit through measurements, scales, and so forth."

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of the act of stealing, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, but its execution is done solely through desire [attachment]."

The fully matured effect is birth as a hungry ghost. The effect corresponding to the cause is to lose one's possessions if one is born as a human being (as well as being poor and often afflicted by robbers and thieves). The effect of influence is being born in a land with lots of frost and hail.

The most serious form of theft is stealing the property of a spiritual teacher or the Three Jewels.

These serious acts include stealing food that belongs to someone in meditative retreat and stealing a yogi's ritual objects.

Violence against objects is also classified as a karmically grave act. The most serious forms of such violence are the destruction or mutilation of images of the Buddha and of Dharma texts, temples and practice rooms.

Discussion points:

- What about pirate copies of computer programs?
- Is photocopying books a form of stealing?
- What do I do if I have accidentally taken something with me?
- What about concealing taxable income?

Sexual misconduct

<p><i>Definition:</i> Sexual misconduct includes forms of sexual relationships that lead to suffering for the participants or third parties and reinforce tendencies to inflict pain. It includes having sexual intercourse with someone without having the right to do so.</p>

In *The Torch of the True Meaning*, p.33-34, Djamgön Kongtrul distinguishes four types of sexual misconduct: with regard to the partner, the time, the place and the manner of behaviour:

- Inappropriate partners for a sexual relationship are:
 - (1) Those who have vows of chastity, even for a short time, or who are under the protection of the Dharma, such as the Lama's consort;
 - (2) Mother, father, sister and brother as well as all other direct blood relatives;
 - (3) Persons who are already in a stable relationship;
 - (4) Persons where it is forbidden due to legal situations, e.g. previously the queen or other members of a harem. This also includes minors who are still under guardianship.

These references are also an expression of respect for the principles and rules of the respective society.

- Pregnancy and sometimes breastfeeding are cited as inappropriate times for sexual union, as well as times during which one has taken vows of chastity. It is also said that you should not unite in broad daylight and not more than five times in a row.
- Inappropriate places are, for example: near a lama or spiritual teacher, in a shrine room or a building that houses the supports of dharma practice, at a stupa or temple, and in places where many people are gathered.
- Inappropriate behaviour includes the use of force and violence as well as anal or oral intercourse with persons of the same sex, with eunuchs or with hermaphrodites (bisexuals).

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of acts of sexual misconduct, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, but their execution is done solely through desire [attachment]."

The fully matured effect of sexual misbehaviour is rebirth as a hungry ghost. The effect corresponding to the cause is that you get a hostile partner if you are born human, or that your partners and coworkers show themselves indifferent and, in many ways, ungrateful. The effect of influence is to be born in a very dusty place.

The most serious sexual offenses are sexual misconduct with one's own mother or forcing sexual intercourse with an arhat or arhatī (a highly realized nun). Rape in any form is also included, and seducing ordinary monks or nuns is considered almost as bad.

- *Exercise 29: Think of plausible reasons why, for example, cheating, i.e. intruding into or dishonestly leaving an existing relationship, is an action that we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Discussion points:

- Why is it said that oral and anal sex is inappropriate behaviour? --- Because the special thing about the union of people is that you can look at each other and meet from heart to heart?
- Does this also apply to heterosexual relationships?
- Are such recommendations perhaps culturally conditioned and no longer appropriate in our society today?
- Why are pregnancy and possibly even breastfeeding inappropriate times for sexual union?
- Why not in broad daylight?
- What is the value of vows of chastity? And what dangers?

82. What are unwholesome actions of speech ?

(see MN 58)

Padmasambhava in Dakini teachings:

"If you can't tame your tongue, you won't be happy."

Lying

Definition: Lying means presenting something as true that is not true. Lying means actively pretending. Concealing the truth is not yet considered a lie.

- Destructive lies are feigning spiritual realization (or special spiritual abilities and perceptions). They are called "destructive" because they break the vows.
- With big lies we harm others and benefit ourselves (at least that's what we intend).
- Small lies bring neither harm nor benefit (such as those of an old man suffering from dementia).

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of the act of lying, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, its execution is then carried out by one of the three."

The fully matured effect of lying is, it is said, birth as an animal (but one can also be reborn in the other lower realms of existence). The effect corresponding to the cause is that if you are born as a human being, false claims are often made about you (and your own words are powerless and ineffective). The effect of influence is unpleasant bad breath (although this can also simply be a temporary digestive problem).

The most serious lies are slanderous lies about a fully awakened Buddha and also lying to the spiritual teacher or venerable Sangha members. Swearing a false fact in order to conceal one's guilt is also considered a serious lie.

- *Exercise 30: Think of obvious reasons why lying is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Slander (sowing discord)

<i>Definition:</i> Slander means to divide friends through turbulent talk that is stirring up strife.

- Severe slander divides friends through direct slander, i.e. undermining friendships in the presence of the friends themselves.
- Indirect slander divides friends through insinuating and paraphrasing, i.e. you create prejudices by inconspicuously and covertly speaking badly about someone.
- Secret slander divides friends through rumours, i.e. one secretly sows discord and intrigues through third parties who spread the rumours.

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of the act of slander, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, its execution is then carried out by one of the three."

The fully matured effect is birth in the hell realm. The effect corresponding to the cause is that if you are born as a human being, you will be separated from your friends. You will have few friends and instead a lot of quarrels and arguments. You will often be sued, be unpopular and your words will be ineffective. The effect of influence is being born in a rough, rugged and remote region.

The most serious of all types of slander is to divide the noble community (Sangha) by slander and cause schism.

- *Exercise 31: Think of plausible reasons why slander is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Hurtful speech

<i>Definition</i> (according to Djamgön Kongtrul): Hurtful speech is speech that hurts another unnecessarily, i.e. spoken with the intention of hurting someone, e.g. calling them 'thief', 'cripple' and the like, exposing their faults and upsetting them deep inside.

- Public hurtful speech is making fun of another person's faults and weaknesses in various forms in the presence of outsiders.
- Indirect hurtful speech refers to the various types of sarcastic speech that hurt others and are sometimes mixed with light-hearted, joking speech.

- Spreading hurtful words is understood to mean venting about the faults and weaknesses of a (non-present) person in the presence of their friends or others.

Asanga, p.87: "Desire, hatred and ignorance play a role in preparing the action of hurtful speech, but its execution is done solely through hatred (aversion)."

Padmasambhava in Dakini teachings:

"Tsogyal, the fire of harsh words burns the heart of both yourself and others. The weapon of harsh words kills the life force of liberation."

The fully matured effect is birth in the hell realms. The effect corresponding to the cause is that in the case of a human birth, you will hear a lot of unpleasant things. One's own words will be perceived by others always as offensive and an annoyance. The effect of influence is being born in a dry, hot country where people do a lot of harmful things. (According to *Khenpo Chödrak*, people there are forced to make a living through harmful actions such as killing many animals through fishing and slaughtering because of the meagre living conditions).

The most serious kind of hurtful speech is insulting father and mother, realized beings and members of the Sangha.

- *Exercise 32: Think of plausible reasons why hurtful speech is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Gossip

Definition (according to Djamgön Kongtrul): Gossip is to waste time with useless speech. It is idle talk about war, business, women and men, as well as singing, pastime, foolishness and the like.

- False talk is the recitation of magical formulas, shamanic incantations, rituals and the like by people with misleading beliefs whose teachings do not lead to liberation from suffering.
- Worldly talk is frivolous entertainment, meaningless chatter, word games, rambling speech and the telling of silly stories.
- True but useless talk is to explain the noble teaching to someone who has no respect for it and is not a suitable vessel for it.

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of the action of chatter, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, its execution is then done by one of the three."

The fully matured effect is birth as an animal (or in lower realms). The effect corresponding to the cause is that the words of such a person, should they be born as a human, will not be taken heed of at all. Their speech will be incoherent and make little sense. The effect of influence is to live in a place where the seasons get mixed up or where the climate changes rapidly.

The most serious of all kinds of chatter is gossip, which distracts those who want to practice the teaching and meditate on the essence of non-duality.

- *Exercise 33: Think of plausible reasons why chatter is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 9:

There are many opportunities to commit harmful actions through speech. The worst of these are speaking ill of the Dharma, belittling the Lamas and the Sangha. All negative words spoken in relation to the Dharma and Sangha are actions of far-reaching import.

Furthermore, there are harmful actions through speech that are committed under the influence of pride. When this emotion permeates the mind, we think we are the most important living being, we look down on others and finally making them understand that they are inferior to us. Under the influence of anger, we may use bad words towards them, insult them or say completely negative things to them.

Jealousy can also cause us to utter words that are a source of tension and strife, because when we are influenced by jealousy, we delight in creating difficulties for others. These are clearly unwholesome actions. This also includes, for example, babbling senselessly in pleasant company, i.e. using one's language to say things that basically have no value or meaning.

Another case of unwholesome talk is, for example, profiteering or shopping. You discuss and try to manipulate the other person to get what you want or to get them to do what you want. This creates an accumulation of negative karma through speech."

83. What are unwholesome actions with the mind ?

Greed (desire)

Definition (according to Djamgön Kongtrul): Greed is the longing for beautiful, desirable things, expressed in thoughts such as: "I wish I had the other person's property or wife/husband, reputation, etc."

- Greed with regard to ownership is desire and attachment to the status of one's own family, physical appearance, qualities and possessions and is expressed in thoughts such as: "No one is equal to me!" Greed does not want to share one's possessions with others.
- Greed with regard to things that belong to others, is desire for the excellent things that others possess, and is expressed in thoughts such as: "Why shouldn't his be mine?"
- Greed with regard to things that do not belong to anyone is, for example, the desire for natural resources that belong neither to oneself nor to others and is expressed in thoughts such as: "If only I could have that!"

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of greedy actions, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, but their execution is done solely through desire (attachment)."

Padmasambhava in Dakini teachings, p.42:

"Tsogyal, do not hold on to ownership of material things. Dharma practitioners with no understanding of impermanence have no happiness."

Fully matured effect means birth as a hungry ghost. The effect corresponding to the cause in the case of human birth is to be full of greed and desire. The effect of influence is to be born in a land with poor crops, small fruits and little food, where there is much hunger and thirst.

The worst form of greed is the desire to deprive those who have renounced the world of their possessions and to greedily hanker after possessions donated to the Three Jewels.

- *Exercise 34: Think of plausible reasons why greed is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Malice

Definition: Malice is a hostile attitude and the intention to harm someone.

- Malice due to hatred is wanting to kill someone because you regard them full of hatred as an enemy, like in times of war.
- Malice due to envy (jealousy, rivalry) is wanting to kill someone or harm them because you are afraid that they might be superior to you as a rival.
- Malice due to resentment is having feelings of revenge against someone who has harmed you in the past - like a knot that has tightened - and therefore wanting to kill or harm them.

Asanga, p.87: "Desire, hatred and ignorance play a role in the preparation of malicious actions, but their execution is done solely through hatred (aversion)."

The fully matured effect is birth in the hell realms. The effect corresponding to the cause in the case of birth as a human being is to be full of hatred and rejection. Others will disapprove of you for no reason,

complaints will be made against you, and you will be constantly confronted with hostility. The effect of influence is to be born in a harsh area with bitter fruits and poor-quality food.

The most serious form of malice is an attitude of mind that leads to the five extreme offenses with immediate consequences (killing father, mother or highly realized ones, shedding the blood of a Buddha or splitting the Sangha).

A sign of budding malice is not being able to rejoice in the happiness and well-being of others.

- *Exercise 35: Think of plausible reasons why malice is an action we should give up. What states of mind does this action promote? What consequences does it have?*

Wrong views

Definition: Wrong views mean not having faith in rebirth, karma, the qualities of the jewels, etc. False beliefs distort reality by adding to or denying something of it.

Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6:

- "Not believing that suffering and happiness are caused by nonvirtue and virtue
- not believing that one attains the Truth of Cessation even if the Truth of the Path is practiced
- not believing in the Three Jewels and slandering them."

Padmasambhava in *Dakini Teachings*, p.44 reckons as false beliefs:

- "The wrong view of holding the non-Buddhist beliefs of eternalism or nihilism
- The wrong view of holding a rule or ritual to be paramount, such as 'asceticism of dogs and chickens' [a Hindu doctrinal system in which it is claimed that one can attain enlightenment by imitating the behaviour of animals]."
- 3. The wrong view of holding the belief of the 'transitory collection' [the false belief that the five aggregates (heaps) contain a hole that has an inherent existence of its own]."

The eight confusions are also an expression of wrong views: Despising the wholesome, glorifying the harmful, obstructing seekers of truth, abandoning the spiritual teacher, splitting the Sangha, abandoning spiritual brothers and sisters, and desecrating a sacred mandala.

Asanga, p.87: "In the preparation of acts of wrong view, desire, hatred and ignorance play a role, but their execution is only through ignorance."

The fully matured effect of wrong views is birth as an animal. The effect corresponding to the cause in the case of birth as a human being is great stupidity or birth among uncivilized people in areas where the Dharma is not known. The effect of influence is to be born in an area where there are no fruits, crops and food at all.

The most serious type of wrong view is to stubbornly consider one's own view to be the highest, to disregard the true meaning and to hold on to wrong views despite having received explanations, i.e. to be unwilling to even question one's own conviction leading others to wrong practice. This makes the path to awakening impossible for oneself and for others, because a dogmatic attitude prevents any inner development.

- *Exercise 36: Think of obvious reasons why false beliefs, dogmatic attitudes and the like are actions we should give up. What states of mind do these actions promote? What consequences do they have?*

Arrogant behaviour towards others is also considered a serious act, especially looking down on learned people (in the Dharma) and treating holy figures as well as monks or nuns in a condescending manner.

There are many other unwholesome actions that have not been listed here. These include all the *transgressions of commitments and promises* we have made, whether with other people or with the Dharma, such as the vows of personal liberation, bodhisattva vows and vajra bonds.

84. What is the effect of refraining from unwholesome actions?

According to Padmasambhava in the *Dakini teachings*, anyone who refrains from these ten unwholesome actions will be reborn in the higher realms of existence, have a pleasant appearance and voice and be wealthy. They will be learned and intelligent and will encounter and practice the Dharma. They will also strive to avoid the ten unwholesome actions in all subsequent lives.

- *Exercise 37: Imagine your own life how it would be if you no longer performed any unwholesome actions. What states of mind would this promote? What long-term consequences would this have?*
- *Exercise 38: Imagine your own life how it would be if you were to refrain from all wholesome actions and only act in a self-centred way. What states of mind would this promote? What long-term consequences would this have?*

85. What are "mixed actions"?

In the case of mixed actions, the motivation and type of action are not the same.

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.38-39:

"Acts with a positive intention but negative action (such as killing as an offering to the Jewels, or beating or speaking badly of someone in order to benefit people who are significant to you) and

acts negative in intent but positive in application (such as building sacred objects out of a wish for fame, studying out of an urge to compete, or masquerading as a good monk out of fear of embarrassment) are indirectly included among the nonvirtues."

Asanga (p.93) and Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.43, describe four possibilities:

1. Black actions - unwholesome in intention and unwholesome in execution (such as killing to eat meat) - which accordingly produce black fruits, are unwholesome actions (*akusalakarma*) in the realm of the senses. These actions lead to the suffering of living beings in the sorrowful realms of existence, where they also, almost without exception, continue to act in this way.
2. White actions - white in intention and white in execution (such as generosity out of pure motivation) - which accordingly produce white fruits, are wholesome actions in all three realms of existence (*traidhatuka akusalakarma*). These actions lead to the happiness of a living being in the happy realms of existence, where there is the possibility of continuing to act in this way.
3. Black and white ("mixed") actions with black and white fruits (*krśnasuklam kṛśnasuklavipakam karma*) are actions in the realm of the senses with a wholesome and an unwholesome part. There are two possibilities:
 - (3a) unwholesome in intention and white in execution, such as generosity as a reward for killing. This first variant is related to the happiness of living beings in the three sorrowful realms of existence.
 - (3b) white in intention and not wholesome in execution, such as the captain who, out of great compassion, kills someone who would otherwise murder many people. This second variant is related to the suffering of living beings in the three happy realms of existence.
4. Actions that produce neither black nor white fruits (*akṛśnasuklavipakam karma*) and that cause (ripening) karma to disappear (*karmaksaya*) are so-called 'non-leaking' or pure/flawless actions (*anasravakarma*) performed on the path of application and junction / the immediate path that lead to the dissolution of persistent emotional delusion (*kleśa*) and thus to realization and liberation. The karma that comes to fruition is either pleasant, unpleasant or mixed, while the 'immaculate karma' causes this previous karma to be exhausted.

Karmapa in the *Ocean of True Meaning*, p.40-41: "If apparently wholesome actions such as keeping an ethic discipline, listening, reflecting and meditating, are carried out with a defiled motivation, they are a feigned imitation of the Dharma, not the genuine Dharma."

Kongtrul, p.39: Mixed actions "are indirectly included among the nonvirtues. If even such acts should be rejected like poison, there is no need to speak of those that are actually unvirtuous."

86. The practice of wholesome behaviour: The 5 Silas (Dh 246, 247)

The foundation of a life dedicated to awakening and the well-being of all beings is wholesome behaviour (Pali: *sīla*, Tib: *tsultrim*). Wholesome conduct is the first of the three trainings (*sikkha*) of all Dharma practitioners: *sīla* - samadhi - prajñā: wholesome conduct - deep meditation - wisdom. The indispensable basis of wholesome behaviour, in turn, is the fivefold practice of wholesome behaviour - *pañca-sīla* - the "five *sīlas*" of all Dharma practitioners. They are practiced by all Buddhist traditions.

Here it is important to understand that this is a completely natural (*pakati*) practice of the wholesome: all awakened ones naturally refrain from these actions and naturally abide in the corresponding wholesome attitudes. As practitioners who are not yet awakened, we get closer to the wholesome behaviour of the awakened ones by training ourselves in the corresponding wholesome behaviour as training rules (*sikkhapada*) and practicing the **five silas**. Refraining from actions that obviously cause suffering is the foundation for performing wholesome actions:

1. refraining from any form of killing living beings (including animals and insects)
2. refraining from any form of taking what has not been given (stealing)
3. refraining from any form of sexual behaviour that causes suffering (intrusion into partnerships, seduction of minors, etc.)
4. refraining from any form of lying and deceptive speech
5. not taking any intoxicants or other substances that reduce clarity of mind and self-control

These rules imply 1. following them oneself, 2. not causing others to transgress them, and 3. not condoning their transgression by others. (A IV, 261; A X, 212; S 55.7)

Buddha Shakyamuni (in the *Dhammapada*, verses 246, 247):

"Anyone who destroys lives, lies, steals, breaks marriages or gets intoxicated is tearing out their own roots."

87. The 10 wholesome actions (MN 41)

The **ten wholesome actions** consist of giving up the ten unwholesome actions and devoting oneself to the corresponding wholesome actions (see Asanga, p.83-84):

- (1) not to take life, but to respect and protect the life of all beings in every way
- (2) not to take anything that has not been given to you, but to pass on your own food and possessions freely and generously
- (3) not to cheat [on your partner], but always - in public as well as in private - to maintain pure discipline and also cultivate pure sexual behaviour
- (4) not to lie, but to tell the truth honestly
- (5) not to stir up discord, but to settle disputes, resolve malicious gossip and reconcile those who are at odds with another or are enemies
- (6) not to use hurtful speech, but to use kind, gentle words and to speak calmly and in a trustworthy way
- (7) not to talk nonsense, but to talk meaningfully
- (8) instead of being full of desire, to delight in the well-being of others, desire little and be content
- (9) instead of being full of malice, to act solely with a motivation directed towards the benefit of others, practicing patience, love and compassion
- (10) instead of harbouring wrong views, to have faith in the words of the Buddha, and also when we hear about the qualities of members of another religion or view of life, not to belittle them, but to turn to the true meaning: the Dharma, or the full realization of the nature of mind that enables us to help others.

Buddha Shakyamuni speaks about this in various places in the Pali Canon (MN 41; DN 33 X; AN X, 176).

Here the *Discourse to the Brahmins of Sala* (MN 41, *Saleyyaka Sutta*) in a somewhat abridged form:

The Brahmins of Sala ask Buddha Shakyamuni:

"Master Gotama, what is the cause and condition that some beings, after their body failed, after death, reappear in circumstances of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in disaster, even in hell? And what is the cause and condition that some beings, after their body failed, after death, reappear in a happy destination, even in the celestial world?"

Buddha Shakyamuni explains to them that sorrowful rebirth is experienced due to unwholesome behaviour that is not in accordance with the Dharma¹¹ and that happy rebirth is the result of wholesome behaviour that is in accordance with the Dharma. On further inquiry, he explains:

"There are three types of bodily behaviour that are not in accordance with the Dharma and are not wholesome:

(1) Someone kills living beings; he is out to kill, with blood on his hands, inclined to fighting and violence, merciless towards living beings.

(2) Someone takes what has not been given to him; he thievingly takes the wealth and property of others in the village or forest.

(3) A person engages in misconduct in sensual pleasures; they have sexual intercourse with women (men) who are under the care of mother, father, brother, sister or other relatives, with women (men) who have a permanent husband (wife), with women (men) who are protected by law (or by vows of chastity), or with women (men) who wear the jewellery of the betrothed (live in permanent partnerships).

There are four types of verbal behaviour that are not in accordance with the Dharma and are not wholesome:

(4) A person tells an untruth; he bears false witness in court, before an assembly, before his relatives, before his guild or the royal family. He deliberately speaks falsely for his own benefit, for the benefit of another, or for the benefit of some petty worldly matter.

(5) Someone speaks maliciously; he spreads what he has heard to divide people who were previously united. He causes division, sows the seeds of discord and takes pleasure in discord.

(6) Someone utters rude, harsh, hurtful, insulting words that are close to anger and detrimental to concentration.

(7) Someone is a babbler; he talks at the wrong time, says what is not true, says useless, immoderate, unreasonable or senseless things, and speaks against the Dharma and wholesome behaviour.

There are three types of mental behaviour that are not in accordance with the Dharma and are not wholesome:

(8) Someone is greedy; he desires the wealth and possessions of others, thinking, 'O may what belongs to others be mine!

(9) Someone has a mind full of ill will and hateful intent, thinking, 'May these beings be killed and massacred, may they be dismembered, perish, be destroyed!'

(10) Someone has wrong views, distorted views, such as, 'There is no [fruit of] offerings, nothing offered or sacrificed; there is no fruit, no result of good and bad deeds; there is neither this world nor other worlds; there is no [fruit of our conduct towards the] mother, no father, no spontaneously born beings, no good and virtuous monks, and pure beings in the world who have experienced and expound this world and the other world through realization with higher mind-power.

So, householders, it is because of such unwholesome behaviour that some beings reappear after death in circumstances of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in disaster, or even in hell."

¹¹ Dharma here is the realization of truth (how things are) through which we can attain liberation from suffering.

88. *The effects of wholesome actions*

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 6:

There are also three effects of wholesome actions:

- The “result similar to the cause” is that one will experience a long life by avoiding taking life and so forth as related to all the rest.
- The effect corresponding to the cause is the opposite of what is described for unwholesome actions. For example, someone who gives up killing and protects the lives of others will themselves live long.
- The “general result of the force” is that by avoiding taking life one will be born in a good place with strong properties, a special environment, and so forth as related to all the rest.”

A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path says:

Non-attachment, non-aggression, an unobscured mind,
And the karma created thereby are virtues
All the higher realms come from virtue,
As do peace and joy in all other lifetimes.”

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.39: “If one accomplishes the ten wholesome actions, one will obtain a body in the pleasant forms of existence having happiness, and one will be born in a pleasant country.”

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p. 36-38:

“Do these as much as you are able. Get others to do them as well. Rejoice in those that have been done.”

“The result will be rebirth in the higher realms with a long life and so forth—there are many benefits. Spending time doing various neutral actions such as walking, standing, sleeping, and sitting, which are neither virtuous nor unvirtuous, does not ripen into good or bad experiences, but it pointlessly wastes this human life. Thus do not fall under the influence of distraction and laziness and spend your time only practicing virtue with mindfulness and awareness. Abstain from carelessly committing even the slightest wrong—remember that even a small amount of poison can be fatal. Likewise do not disregard even the slightest virtue—remember that gathering barley grain by grain will fill a basket.”

“Furthermore, you must secondarily achieve what are known as the *eight qualities of the higher realms*, as they are the basis for a vast accumulation of merit in future lives:

- (1) A long life due to giving up harming others
- (2) A pleasant appearance due to offering lamps and giving away clothing and so forth
- (3) A high social status due to serving your guru and companions without any pride
- (4) Prosperity due to giving everything desirable to people who have positive qualities, the sick, the destitute, and so forth
- (5) Authoritative speech due to only speaking virtuously
- (6) Great power due to making positive aspirations and presenting offerings to the Three Jewels, your parents, and so forth
- (7) Being born male due to befriending men and protecting beings from castration
- (8) Abundant powers due to assisting Dharma activities without expectations¹² will give strength.

Train in the causes of these qualities. Therefore once you no longer want to be in samsara, you must train in giving up its cause, nonvirtue. Thus you should practice without hypocrisy the virtues that lead to merit taught here and elsewhere as well as the virtues that lead to liberation—the vows, samayas, and so forth. Do not pull the wool over your own eyes [i.e. do not deceive yourself].”

¹² *Dharmic actions* include meditation practice as well as all other actions that help others, such as building Dharma centres, etc.
Karma reading book, page 71

Padmasambhava mentions in the *Dakini teachings*, p.47 "ten supports that cause the virtues to remain in your stream of being:

- have faith in the true teachings
- keep self-respect and pure conscience
- refrain from gambling and quarrelling
- refrain from watching market gatherings
- always act conscientiously
- cast away laziness
- not associating with immoral friends
- train in the pliancy of body, speech, and mind
- cultivate the four-fold spheres of perception [the four formless realms]
- and in particular to focus your mind on the path of noble beings."

Furthermore, the wholesome actions include all forms of the practice of the six or ten liberating qualities (*paramitas*): Generosity, discipline, patience, joyful perseverance (energy), meditative stability and wisdom, as well as strength, skilful means, aspirational prayers and timeless awareness.

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.45: "You must not confuse wholesome actions one should accomplish with harmful actions one should refrain from. Earnestly apply yourself to spiritual practice, never leaving the three doors [body, speech and mind] neutral, and continually examine your three doors."

89. Why is it useful to carry out wholesome actions?

Without wholesome actions, it is impossible to dissolve the self-centred tendencies of our mind. Without wholesome actions, it is impossible to attain liberation from suffering and enlightenment. Without wholesome actions, there would be no happiness in the world. We would not even enjoy the possibilities of human existence.

Gampopa, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 2:

"Why is a precious human life difficult to find? This body of leisure and endowments is gained through the accumulation of virtuous deeds, and those who are born in the three lower realms do not know how to accumulate virtue. Rather, they constantly commit evil deeds. Therefore, only those born in the three lower realms with a very small amount of negative karma, and whose karma could ripen in another lifetime, are the ones who have an opportunity to be born in a human life."

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.45-46: "If you refrain even from the smallest harmful action, carry out even the smallest wholesome action, and persistently train your mind in love, compassion and bodhicitta, you accomplish the purpose of the Buddha's teaching: Do not commit any harmful actions, accomplish plenty of wholesome actions, and completely tame your mind, this is the teaching of the Buddha."

Discussion:

- *Are there actions that can be beneficial if performed infrequently and that become non-beneficial if performed frequently?*
- *What determines whether and when an action is beneficial or not?*
- *What is the effect of constantly performing wholesome actions?*

90. wholesome action as a prerequisite for mental calm

Mental calm arises when body and mind are released from busyness. Buddha Shakyamuni says in the Pali Canon, *Potaliya Sutta*, MN 54:4-13, "The Discourse to Potaliya", which deals with wholesome action as the basis for the dissolution of busyness:

"Householders, there are these eight things in the Noble One's discipline that lead to the cutting off of busyness. What are these eight? 'Based on non-killing of living beings, the killing of living beings is to be overcome. Based on taking only what has been given, the taking of what has not been given is to be abandoned. Based on truthful speech, false speech is to be overcome. Based on non-hateful speech, hateful

speech is to be overcome. Based on refraining from greed (covetousness), greed is to be overcome. Based on refraining from malicious scolding, malicious scolding is to be abandoned. Based on refraining from angry despair, angry despair is to be overcome. Based on non-arrogance, arrogance is to be overcome."

...

"Based on non-killing of living beings, the killing of living beings is to be overcome. Thus was it said (by the Awakened One). And with reference to what was this said? Then a noble disciple considers this: 'I am practicing the way to overcome and cut off those fetters by virtue of which I might kill living beings. If I were to kill living beings, I would blame myself for it; and the wise who investigated would blame me for it; and at the dissolution of the body, after death, an unhappy destination is to be expected because of the killing of living beings. But this killing of living beings is itself a fetter and a hindrance¹³. And while urges (emotional delusion), anger and fever (restlessness) might arise from the killing of living beings, there are no urges, anger and fever in one who abstains from killing living beings.'"

And in the same way, the Awakened One continues, the practice of the other seven things that lead to the cutting off of busyness is to be understood. Then he explains to the householder Potaliya the dangers and suffering inherent in attachment to sensual pleasures, and how he can develop true equanimity and the final cutting off of busyness.

91. How can the doctrine of karma help me to develop patience ?

Awareness of karma can help us to see that our own actions play a decisive role in a situation. In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapter 14, Gampopa mentions the contemplation of our own karma as an aid to developing patience in difficult situations:

"In my previous lives I have harmed others in the same way that I am now experiencing harm. Therefore, since this is the fault of my own negative karma, there is no reason to retaliate. It is said: 'Previously I must have caused similar harm to other sentient beings. Therefore, it is right for this harm to be returned to me who is the cause of injury to others.'"

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 43:

"The person who attacks us or is aggressive towards us is only an executor of a karmic debt that we ourselves have created. If we don't see that we have caused the situation ourselves, we start reacting to aggression and create new karmic seeds. Any aggression that happens to us is born out of karma, the causes that we ourselves once created. When we understand this, we can deal with the situation in an intelligent way. We understand that we are being offered a good opportunity to end this karma now."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 44:

"Everything we experience now is the result of how we acted before. If we understand this, we can no longer blame others for anything, because everything arises from our own past actions. We should try to accept this legacy of the past and work with it to prepare for the future, that is, to take the past as an example and see what has led us here.

Why do we experience such constant alternations of happiness and unhappiness? Because we have alternated between wholesome and harmful actions. Now, in the present, we can try to develop discipline and not react to attacks with counterattacks. In this way we avoid creating new suffering and can stop this constantly running machine - otherwise it will continue to run indefinitely. Embracing the legacy of the past and using the present to make the future different is the best way to awaken."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 15:

"When someone develops anger towards us, we can also realize that this anger and aggressiveness does not come from that person but is the ripening of previously committed harmful actions: In the past, we have developed anger and aggressiveness towards other beings and these past actions have created causes that lead up to the current situation turning against us. Through such a view, we are able to recognize the aggressor as someone who is very useful and filled with kindness towards us, because through their attack

¹³ *Fetter and obstacle* in the sense that such behaviour stands in the way of any spiritual progress because it shakes its basis - wholesome behaviour (sīla).

they enable us to purify ourselves and free ourselves from the consequences of harmful actions we have committed in the past. Through such an understanding of the phenomena, we also feel gratitude towards this person and try to act beneficially towards them, developing the wish that the negative karma they accumulate through their anger may not be experienced by them, but by us."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 56:

"For an authentic bodhicitta, the quality of patience is essential. Therefore, we should use all circumstances of life to practice patience. We almost need enemies and situations in which others try to harm us, because they offer an opportunity to practice patience.

When someone is angry with us and tries to harm us, we must first become aware of the situation as it is. This person is trying to harm us because we have tried to harm them in the past. The present experience is only the result of our past karma. The moment of anger is the moment when our past karma is purified. The respective person now offers us the opportunity to prevent this karma from ripening in more difficult circumstances. We develop the wish that the anger they feel towards us does not grow into negative karma for them in the future. On the contrary, we wish to take on the anger and the karma that could follow from it.

If we can truly accept a situation like this in a wholesome way, we are able to practice patience and transform situations. If, on the other hand, we cling to it in the usual way and react with anger, this will increase our negative karma, the effects of which we will one day experience.

If, despite everything, we feel anger towards someone, we should not see them as an enemy, but as someone who shows us that we still lack patience. They are giving us valuable advice and therefore we should regard them respectfully and thank them. To be able to use a conflict situation in this way, it is necessary to be very attentive all the time. You have to be fully aware of each situation and very attentive to each of its aspects so that you can use them; otherwise you will fall back into your usual reactions. Attention prevents us from reacting thoughtlessly."

92. Karma and mindfulness

If we want to have control over our actions, we need mindfulness. We need to be aware of how we act and with what motivation. When situations become difficult, we need mindfulness in order to make the right decisions and then carry them out according to our intentions.

Without mindfulness - no control over karma.

Gampopa in *A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*, chapter 16:

"To uphold the result of the karmic action carefully accepting the truth like that of protecting the pupils of one's eyes is the mark of a holy person."

➤ *Exercise 39: For example, pause abruptly once an hour (when your watch beeps) to look at your current motivation, what you are thinking and doing. (Suggestion from Rei Shin Sensei)*

93. Karma and renunciation

Gendün Rinpoche in *Meditation jenseits von Hoffnung und Furcht*:

"Until now - from birth to the present moment - we have been entangled in completely useless actions with which we have constantly continued samsara. Now we have the opportunity to free ourselves from the temptations and habits that bind us to samsara. To do this, we need to develop true renunciation and detach ourselves from them inwardly in an authentic way, not just in words. We should therefore take a close look at the results of all the actions we have performed so far and admit to ourselves how pointless all these actions performed out of attachment were.

We acted worldly because we were under the influence of ignorance, but now we can evolve towards enlightenment thanks to the teaching. We see that all beings are under the influence of this ignorance and therefore act in a harmful way. Most of them have no contact with the teaching and therefore have no way of recognizing their ignorance and liberating themselves. This allows us to develop compassion.

We have accumulated a lot of negative karma in the past, which now binds us to samsara. But now, thanks to our teacher, we have the opportunity to get to know and practise the teaching. This in turn allows us to develop trust in the teacher and in the teaching. If we succeed in freeing ourselves from attachment to the cycle of existence, the mind will come to rest on its own."

Renunciation means refraining from unwholesome actions with body, speech and mind.

94. Karma and the bringing forth of the spirit of awakening

The best application of the doctrine of karma is to generate the spirit of awakening in order to then carry out all actions with this motivation.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Geist des Erwachens*, page 2:

"When we develop the wish to realize perfect enlightenment, we need to consider certain points. First, we realize that wherever there is space, there are living beings who are subject to their various karmas, who are driven by manifold emotions, and who therefore experience all kinds of suffering. Then we remember that all these living beings - human or non-human - have been our father or mother several times in our previous lives."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 42:

"Due to karmic tendencies, personal karma, everyone creates their own personal suffering, and so we see the most diverse variations of suffering and at the same time the commonality of suffering of all beings. This should not lead to depression or sadness but should release enormous energy to work for the liberation of all beings and to provide for as many beings as possible the key to liberation."

95. How do we apply "karma" on the path to liberation?

The path to the dissolution of all suffering, the "Great Joy", is about the skilful application of karmic laws:

- First of all, we should not accumulate more negative karma by giving up unwholesome actions.
- Then it is about accumulating positive karma by accumulating beneficial actions.
- At the same time, we do everything we can to purify old and new karma by practicing insight into the true nature of things. We begin to realize that there is no self as the core of our being.
- As the delusion-based self-illusion in our mind diminishes, our actions are less and less characterized by duality. Our actions increasingly transcend the realm of karmic conditionality, eventually manifesting complete liberation.

Summarizing it once again in other words:

First, we transform the bad dream (nightmare) into a good dream by performing wholesome actions instead of unwholesome ones. And then we are able to recognize the dream as a dream and are no longer trapped by it.

It is not possible to jump from nightmare to liberation because our self-centeredness is simply still too great. We therefore need the intermediate step of the wholesome dream.

When we carry out harmful, self-centred actions, suffering will be the result. When we perform wholesome actions that are directed towards the well-being of all beings, happiness and liberation will be the result.

Discipline is abstaining from harmful actions and devoting oneself to beneficial ones.

Alfred Weil in *Karma*, page 13:

"The teaching of the Awakened One is unreservedly a teaching of liberation. It is not meant to occupy and entertain the mind. We are not to ponder incessantly over the law of karma or merely exchange opinions about it. This teaching does not value fancy theories and subtle arguments. It is not intended to be

witty, to attract special attention or to be admired. Its importance lies exclusively in its practical consequences and its emancipatory effect."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.38:

"The first cause of attaining liberation is maintaining pure discipline [ethics] grounded in the steadfast intention to emancipate yourself from samsara. Based on that, you will develop the samadhi [meditation] of a one-pointed mind. This produces the prajñā [wisdom] that realizes selflessness through which you can know the universal and specific characteristics of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and so forth. This purifies previously accumulated obscurations, which will never again be able to produce a result. Thus the suffering of samsara will be exhausted, and you will be able to rest in the nature of the awareness free of extremes. This is called by the name "liberation" [beyond all suffering] — attaining liberation or nirvana does not mean going to some other place or becoming someone different."

No deep meditation without ethics.
No wisdom without deep meditation.
No liberation without wisdom.

Ethics, deep meditation and wisdom (in Sanskrit: *sīla*, *samadhi* and *prajñā*) are called the *three trainings*. They are the essence of all Buddhist paths.

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.138:

"In your mind, cultivate devotion and pure view only, without falling into mistaken views for even an instant. Should something disagreeable happen to you due to bad karma arising and so forth, immediately catch it with mindfulness and never express it physically or verbally."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.70-71:

"Your intention [motivation] alone is primary in the bodhisattva vow, so whatever your activity of body and speech, internally always strive to guard your mind. Train as extensively as you can in the cause of increasing bodhicitta, the two accumulations."

In the *Sutra requested by Sagaramati* as quoted in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.71 ten tips are given that we can take to heart:

It is said that there are "ten tasks of a bodhisattva:

1. Dwelling on the foundation of faith, serve a spiritual friend.
2. With intense diligence, seek the True Dharma everywhere.
3. With intense desire, never put aside striving at virtuous acts.
4. With carefulness, do not waste your actions [good karma][on nonsensical and harmful things].
5. Guide beings to spiritual maturity without attachment to your own virtue.
6. Uphold the True Dharma without regard for life or limb.
7. Do not be satisfied with the merit [wholesome power] you have accumulated.
8. Assiduously gather the accumulation of wisdom.
9. Never be separate from the true meaning.
10. Through skill in means [i.e. using all the Dharma methods available to you in all situations], seek whatever way is feasible."

96. How does considering karma help me to deal with suffering ?

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.75:

"When you are beset by illness and dons [mental problems] or pained by slander, when the afflictions increase and so forth, gather everything sentient beings do not want and heap it on top of that."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Geist des Erwachens*, page 9:

"Whatever suffering we encounter - illnesses, obstacles or problems - we often get stuck in it, cling to it and grasp at it. When we do this, the suffering takes on considerable importance, it becomes huge and

takes over the entirety of our field of consciousness. Holding on to suffering only increases the feeling of pain and causes despondency to grow.

In contrast, suffering can be seen as the ripening of negative karma that takes place in this life thanks to the kindness of the Three Jewels. In this human life, the extent of our suffering is relatively limited compared to the suffering we would endure in the other states of existence. The suffering we encounter here is infinitely less than the suffering we would have to encounter in the hell realms if this karma is not purified in this life: Our present suffering is nothing compared to the torment in the hells. Understanding and accepting our small sufferings enables us to effectively purify all the negative karma we have accumulated so far.

Page 10: When we experience suffering, we should acknowledge the reason for it, which is the performance of past actions that are directly related to our self-clinging: Due to the desire to protect our ego, we have performed a lot of self-centred actions in the past, and these actions now entail suffering. So we can see suffering as a teaching that shows us the result of self-centred actions. Thus, suffering becomes a catalyst to deter us from continuing to act under the influence of self-centred clinging. Since we value suffering as a precious teaching, we face it with a cheerful attitude. There are many methods we can apply in the face of suffering. Their immediate result is increasing liberation from that suffering, and at the highest level they lead us to the awakening that is free from all suffering."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 14:

"When you encounter suffering, illness and obstacles in this life, everything gets worse if you hold on to the difficulties. Clinging to suffering is not a solution; on the contrary, there is a danger that the situation might even get worse. It is better to see illness, obstacles and suffering as a whole as a mere result of what we have done in the past. We are fully responsible for it and must take it upon ourselves. Since we are human, our sufferings are extremely minor compared to the sufferings experienced by those beings who live in the lower realms of existence. When we are aware of the relativity of suffering, we can rejoice in living as human beings. And we realize that it is only because of the influence of the Lamas and the Three Jewels that we are in this position where we, all in all, endure very little suffering. It is therefore important to become aware of this blessing of the Three Jewels, because all the difficulties that affect our lives are only the ripening of negative karma. We rejoice that through these difficulties our negative karma is gradually exhausted, just as the negative tendencies within our mind exhaust themselves. Facing adverse circumstances and contemplating them in this way helps us to purify the inner tendencies that cause us to commit harmful deeds."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 56:

"Under no circumstances should we cling to your suffering, be it physical, such as illness, or mental, such as anxiety, because this only increases the suffering. When tension and attachment of the mind are added to the suffering itself, the suffering worsens and becomes habitual. We gradually forget what it is like to be free from suffering. As a result, we become easily susceptible to suffering in all kinds of situations and end up perpetuating it ourselves.

To avoid this vicious circle, we must come to realize every time we suffer that all beings in the universe have to endure the same suffering as we do. In addition to our own suffering, we take on the suffering of others. We create the wish that our painful experience will include the suffering of others and put an end to it so that they, thus liberated, can open up to happiness.

If we practice in this way every time we encounter a painful situation, we will no longer really suffer, as we will be ready to joyfully accept the suffering, transform it and use it as a means to help others. Since we accept the situation joyfully and regard it as useful, we no longer suffer.

If we feel pain in various parts of the body during meditation, it is important not to blame the Dharma practice, but to realize that any physical difficulties we experience in meditation stem from our past karma. We must not reject the Dharma at the slightest pain. If we experience suffering during Dharma practice, we are cleansing our veils and impurities, which are the result of our harmful actions in previous lives. If we feel a physical pain during meditation, we must regard it as the result of the compassion of the Three Jewels, because through this small suffering we turn away from future karma that would otherwise ripen after death, when we would run the risk of falling directly into the lower realms of existence. That we can

experience this suffering now, during this human life, in which the extent of suffering is limited, is the sign of compassion of the Three Jewels, and we must be grateful to them for this. Confidently accepting the present suffering allows us to purify all the negative karma we have accumulated since beginningless time. Trust and confidence are the most effective form of purification when suffering.

Another method to apply to illness or suffering due to obstacles is to realize that all the difficulties we encounter are merely difficulties or obstacles from the self's point of view. The presence of this suffering reminds us of the disadvantages of the ego by showing us that we will experience this kind of suffering again and again as long as we still have an ego. For this reason, every moment in which we suffer is very precious to us.

We must use all painful experiences on the path to awakening - be they physical or mental, pain or illness, obstacles or problematic experiences. They should spur us on to make faster progress.

When we suffer, we usually immediately look for someone to blame and think that the fault lies with this or that person who created the situation from which we are now suffering. This increases our anger, which in turn increases our suffering. Such an attitude multiplies the suffering until we finally have to endure much greater suffering than the original karmic suffering would have been.

It is important to remember that suffering is not really serious. It is merely karma, which, like everything else, is impermanent; this suffering is temporary. You must therefore not allow to be influenced by it but simply wait for the karma to exhaust itself. You have to detach yourself from it and let it fade by itself when the karma has exhausted itself. Karma is not something that can be created or rejected: It appears when one has karmic debts to pay, and when these are exhausted, it disappears by itself. There is no need to reject it.

97. *Not reacting, but letting go more deeply*

Gendün Rinpoche in *Der Weg des Bodhisattva*, page 35:

"We are the result of what we have done before, and everything we will experience in the future is dependent on what we do now.

With this understanding, it is possible to simply let all the experiences of our lives come and go without grasping at them. When our karma brings us difficult situations or emotions, we see them as an expression of our mind, as the fruit of our own tendencies. We recognize them as movements of our mind that we simply let come, look at and let disappear again. We do not cling in the slightest and do not intervene, because these emotions arise precisely because of attachment in our own mind. We should simply let everything happen, let the process unfold undisturbed, because otherwise we will continue to be the slaves of our emotions and will not achieve freedom. If we see things as they are, we will not remain the slaves of our emotions, because we will not react as before and thus not accumulate new karmic seeds. If we simply let thoughts and emotions come and go, they will free themselves. Then we can recognize everything as a movement of the mind and let it pass. Purification takes place by experiencing one karmic seed after the other and letting it free itself without adding new ones."

98. *Can I purify karma? (Dh 173, 239)*

Buddha Shakyamuni says, citing the example of the serial killer Angulimala, who realized arhatship in the same life (*Dhammapada*, verse 173):

"He who overcomes his harmful actions with the wholesome illuminates the world like the moon that comes out from behind the clouds."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 33:

"All the karma we have accumulated was created by body, speech or mind. Therefore, we need to purify these three aspects of our being. In the indestructible vehicle, the Vajrayana, in order to free the mind from self-centred patterns, we use methods that allow the mind to dwell in deep meditation on the true nature of all things. This purifies the mind. To purify our body, we meditate as a meditation deity (yidam), and to purify speech, we recite its mantra. Through this threefold process, we gradually dissolve all the

karmic veils that make our body, speech and mind ordinary and impure. In this way, a complete dissolution of all veils gradually takes place, enabling us to see our true body, our true speech and our true mind, which are those of a Buddha.

When we speak of generating the pure body, speech and mind of Buddhahood, it does not mean that we are generating something new, but we are merely recognizing the true nature of what has always been there: body, speech and mind as they really are from beginningless time, when the mind is not under the influence of confusion."

Buddha Shakyamuni (*Dhammapada*, verse 239):

"Wise people remove their impurities bit by bit, moment by moment, just as silversmiths remove impurities from silver."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 8:

"If one acts harmfully, whether through body, speech or mind, it is important to recognize the negative aspect of one's actions. One must then purify this negativity that threatens to defile the mind and free oneself from the harmful action. If one is not mindful, one may think that one is behaving decently and believe that one has good qualities; one develops pride and sees no reason to confess or regret anything. If one is not aware of the negativity one creates and is therefore not inclined to repentance and purification, this leads to an accumulation of negative karma, which can result in being reborn in one of the three lower realms of existence, which are characterized by great suffering. If one acts in a negative way, one must recognize and regret. Once there is recognition and remorse, once one admits one's mistakes, the negative karma is purified, and one eliminates the suffering that would result.

We often think that the thought of all the harmful actions we have committed since a very long time causes great suffering and that, faced with their multitude, we are in danger of being depressed. You would be tempted to cover your face and think about them as little as possible! However, this attitude is not right. We must refrain from such behaviour and realize that we cannot purify the errors we have committed without acknowledging them. Even if one prefers to remain in ignorance, the harmful actions will mature! So it is better to try to think about them so that we are able to eliminate them; otherwise, when death comes, we will be faced with a burden of harmful deeds that accompanies us.

In fact, the only thing that accompanies the mind at the time of death are the traces and consequences of unwholesome actions, which sooner or later mature into suffering. If one has committed many harmful deeds and these have not been purified, one can be reborn in one of the three lower realms of existence. It is therefore very important to remember as many of the harmful deeds one has committed as possible and to become aware of their level of severity and their intensity, because then it is possible to purify them. Purification means being aware of one's actions, regretting them and avoiding committing them again. By doing so, the fruit that should ripen in the form of suffering can disappear. And the more one clears off the ripening of negative karma, the more the veils disappear, until the moment one realizes Buddhahood.

We must be aware of all the harmful actions accumulated in this life and keep them in mind. We recognize that we have this ability to remember thanks to the kindness of the Three Jewels and the Lamas. If the Three Jewels did not give us this opportunity to be aware of our unwholesome deeds, to regret and confess them, sooner or later they would mature. The gratitude for this is linked to the certainty that it is possible to purify the harmful actions. This is absolutely necessary for purification to be effective."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 10:

"To eliminate the harmful effects of negative states of mind, one must practice meditation, be it the meditation of mental calm or that of Mahamudra. These two types of meditation help to eliminate any mental activity based on the idea of duality: Duality of subject and object, of self and other. Meditation practice thus makes it possible to remove the negative veils that ripen from actions committed in the past." and:

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 12:

"If one turns to practice and learns how to find protection in going for refuge, if one prays to the Three Jewels, if one endeavours to practice the Dharma, it is possible for every living being to transform their

unwholesome deeds. By practicing the Dharma, the potential sufferings arising from previous harmful deeds are transformed into something wholesome. One also has the ability to transform the habitual tendencies that would have led us to commit other harmful deeds. In this way, one transforms not only the deeds of the past, but also the tendency to commit harmful actions in the future. And if the practice is truly sincere, by praying to the Three Jewels and Going for Refuge, one develops the ability to transform the suffering and karma of other beings. If one engages in the path of the teachings of the Dharma with great sincerity, it becomes possible to lead all beings to the path of liberation."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.83-84:

"The signs of having purified misdeeds are explained in the texts. Some particular ones include your body becoming light and needing little sleep, experiencing good health and a clear mind, having some minor experiences and realizations, and so forth.

As for the meaning of the practice: we must give up wrongdoing and accomplish virtue. Only the perfect Buddha knew correctly what to abandon and what to adopt and advised others about it. Believing his words and putting them into practice is internalizing their essential meaning."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.87-91:

"If you hide your wrongs and keep them secret, they will grow more and more powerful—that is combining the seed of misdeeds with the water and fertilizer of deception. If you do not conceal your faults, but recognize them and admit them openly to others, they will not increase but will weaken instead. "The truth brings it to a close," it is said.

If in addition you apply yourself to the methods of purifying misdeeds with deep regret and confession, you will have no difficulty purifying misdeeds and downfalls completely [literally: "from the root"]. Furthermore, if embraced by skilful means, even a single virtue can overcome a great heap of wrongs.

To say, "I did this wrong" is to admit it. To have intense regret and mental anguish about it is confession. The meaning of confession is that you are disheartened and ashamed by the wrongs you have done and say from the depths of your heart with great admiration and respect to those who have not committed such wrongs, "Think of me with compassion—I pray that you purify this karma."

For this, the four powers must be fulfilled [to bring about a complete purification]:

1. The *power of remorse* is to have such intense regret toward former misdeeds that you feel as sorry as if you had drunk poison.
2. The *power of turning away from wrongs* is to have a mind that firmly resolves never to do that harmful action again, even if your life is at stake.
3. The *power of support* is to go for refuge and generate bodhicitta.
4. The *power of applying the antidote* is to accomplish whatever virtue you can—such as the six methods of remedy and so forth—with the intention of purifying misdeeds.

- zu 1) If you do not regret what you have done and just go through the motions of confession, your misdeeds will not be purified.
- zu 2) If you lack the resolve to never do them again, all the confessions and virtues you do will be pointless.
- zu 3) A single confession by someone who has authentically taken refuge and developed bodhicitta has more power to purify negative actions than one hundred thousand confessions by someone who has neither taken refuge nor developed bodhicitta. One day of confession by someone who has received empowerment purifies more negative actions than years of confession by someone who has only received the refuge and bodhisattva vows. This is because the powers of support are progressively higher. Misdeeds and virtues are magnified in the same way as well.
- zu 4) There are six methods of remedy:

1. Memorizing the names of the buddhas and bodhisattvas specifically praised for their ability to purify obscurations, such as Amitabha, the Medicine Buddha, and Akshobhya, and reciting them to others
2. Fashioning statues, texts, and stupas
3. Presenting offerings to those three representations [statues, texts and stupas], serving the Sangha, offering mandalas and ganacakras [festival offerings] if a vajrayāna practitioner, and especially practicing the five methods of pleasing the guru.¹⁴
4. Reciting [audibly] the sutras and tantras taught by the Victor, such as the *Prajnaparamita sutras* and *The Sutra of Great Liberation*.
5. Reciting profound dharanis such as the hundred-syllable mantra of the Tathagata or the mantras of Vairocana, Akṣobhya, and so forth
6. Having confidence in buddha-nature and meditating on the meaning of selflessness: devote yourself to resting in a state free of focus on the three spheres—the misdeeds and obscurations to be purified; [free from clinging to] the deity and mantra that purify; and [free from clinging to] yourself, the person purifying—and meditate on either the actual profound yoga or the attitude compatible with it that all things are unreal, like an illusion.

Although any of these, if practiced effectively, is capable of completely purifying the causes and results of wrongdoing, the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva is taught here in order to swiftly purify coarse misdeeds and obscurations that obstruct the arising of experience and realization in the main practice of mahāmudrā." (End of the quote from Djamgön Kongtrul)

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.72-75:

"By confessing all your harmful actions, they are purified. The confession should be done by means of four forces:

1. the force of remorse, regretting the harmful actions committed in the past
2. the force of applying antidotes
3. the force of turning away from wrongdoing
4. the force of support.

1. *The force of remorse*

a. Develop regret by considering, how meaningless harmful actions are, how frightening their consequences, and how necessary it is, to get rid of them quickly.

Reflect about the following: The unwholesome actions I commit, such as annihilating enemies, or protecting friends, or for the sake of wealth, are exclusively for the sake of this present life. But at the time of death they will not accompany me. Only my karma will follow me like a shadow. Even if I accomplish those projects, the immense difficulties and hardships will be good for nothing. *The Sutra requested by the householder Viradatta*:

‘Your parents, brothers and sisters, children, your wife, your servants, wealth, and your gathering of friends will not follow you after your death. But all your karma will follow you.’

Bodhicaryāvatāra:

‘Not understanding that I have to go, leaving everything behind, I have committed all kinds of harmful actions for the sake of friends and enemies.’

b. The effects of harmful actions are very frightening: the interruption of life at the time of death, the messengers of the lord of death immediately after that, and after having died taking birth in the lower

¹⁴ The five behaviours that please the Lama are: (1) offering reverence (2) offering service (3) developing devotion and trust (4) obedience (5) practicing his teachings (i.e. the Dharma)

realms, the hells or the others.

It is necessary to get rid of them quickly. Frightened by the consequences of your harmful actions, you must purify them immediately, because if you die suddenly, without having purified them, you take a great risk of falling into a hole, from which there is no liberation.

Bodhicaryāvatāra:

'I may die before my harmful actions have been purified. Please protect me quickly, so that I am definitely freed from them ...

The lord of death is not trustworthy. Whether I have finished my work or not, he will not wait. Whether ill or not, nobody can trust this fleeting life.'

For these three reasons, you should develop regret and confess in front of a sacred object. This is like requesting a powerful person to clear your debts.

2. *The force of applying antidotes*

The second force consists of carrying out wholesome actions as an antidote for harmful actions. Many harmful actions can be destroyed by just a single wholesome action.

Mahaparinirvana Sutra:

'Even performing a single wholesome action will destroy many harmful actions.'

The Sutra of the Pure Golden Light:

'Someone who has committed during thousands of kalpas extremely terrifying harmful actions, can purify all of them by thoroughly confessing them once:'

This is like washing something dirty and sprinkling it with perfume.

3. *The force of turning away from wrongdoing*

The third force is the promise to refrain from harmful actions from now on, being terrified by their consequences.

'Spiritual guides, please pay heed to me. I know that my unwholesome actions are faults. They are no good, from now on I will never do them again.'

This is like deviating water pipes.

4. *The force of support*

The fourth force is to take refuge in the Three Jewels and develop bodhicitta. *Sukarikavadana:*

'Those who have taken refuge in the Buddha will not go to the lower realms. Having left behind this human body, they will obtain the bodies of gods.'

Bodhicaryāvatāra:

'Why do conscientious people not rely on bodhicitta, which frees them instantly, even if they have done extreme harmful deeds, like being freed from great fear by relying on a hero?'

This is like a weak person seizing the hand of a very powerful person, or like poison being neutralized by mantras.

In former times, Angulimala, who had killed 999 humans, Udayana, who had killed his mother, Nanda, who was attached to woman, and Ajatasatru, who had killed his father, purified their harmful deeds through one of the four forces, and reached the states of arhats or stream enterers:

'Someone who has been careless in the past, and later becomes conscientious, will become as beautiful as the moon in the cloudless sky. Just like Nanda, Angulimala, Ajatasatru, and Udayana.'

“ (end of quote)

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 22:

"The request to teach the Dharma: As another part of the fundamental practices, we express the request that the Buddhas may turn the wheel of the noble teaching so that all the various respective teachings according to the differently evolved beings may continue to be available. This request helps to purify the negative karma that we accumulated in the past when we were unaware of the Buddha's teachings and thought that our views and philosophies were superior to all others."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 23:

"Purifying our harmful actions also means openly confessing them. We do this with the desire to become free of harmful behaviours and tendencies because we recognize that they are the cause of all suffering. As we strive for full awakening, we must become free from the consequences of our harmful actions. As long as we have not purified this negativity, it is not possible to attain liberation. Therefore, we confess all our harmful actions and tendencies. We can do this with the help of a prescribed structure such as the Dorje Sempa practice.

We can read in detail how to perform this practice of disclosure and purification in one of the commentaries, where it is described in detail.¹⁵ We begin by visualizing Dorje Sempa above our head, as described in the text of the preliminary exercises. In his presence, we confess all the harmful actions we have committed in the past."

The conditions for an effective confession

"For this confession to be effective, various conditions must come together:

Awareness: First of all, we must become aware of the unwholesome actions we have committed. To do this, it is necessary to look back as far as possible in this life, to our earliest childhood, and to examine exactly what harmful acts we have committed in all these years. We should become aware of even the smallest details, as this is the only way to realize how much time we have already spent on harmful actions. If we do not look very closely, we remain convinced that we have never done anything really harmful and think that there is no need to confess anything.

Remorse: Then we consider the consequences of these harmful actions, and we realize how urgent it is to purify them. If we do not purify them, we run the risk of being reborn in realms of great suffering, such as the realms of incessant torment, the so-called hells, or the realm of those tormented by hunger and thirst. Becoming aware of the consequences of harmful actions in this way awakens fear and apprehensions and spurs us on to truly purify our unwholesome tendencies before they ripen into new suffering. Only by becoming fully aware of our harmful behaviours and tendencies can we purify them. For this reason, reflection on past actions is essential.

Confidently apply antidotes: Of course, we can only remember actions from this life, but we can conclude from them that we have acted in similar ways in previous lives. We have a great deal of negative karma to purify. We do this by openly acknowledging our actions. The best practice for this is Dorje Sempa (Vajrasattva). We visualize him above the crown of our head and imagine that strong light radiates from his body, merges with us and purifies us of our negative karma. If we have deep faith in Dorje Sempa's compassion and his ability to bring about purification, then it will actually happen.

Promise: The purification is further enhanced by our promise not to perform such actions with body, speech and mind in the future. If we keep this promise, we can be sure that all the negative actions we have accumulated since beginningless time will be purified through and through. A confession without

¹⁵ These commentaries are called *The Ocean of True Meaning* and *The Torch of True Meaning*
Karma reading book, page 83

this inner commitment not to carry out such harmful actions in the future remains incomplete. If we think that we can purify them again, should we commit them again, this is only an indication that we are not really able to purify our past harmful actions due to a lack of resolve. We may also not have enough faith in Dorje Sempa and doubt, even after meditation, that our harmful actions are truly purified. With such doubts, we may be able to purify our minor harmful actions, but not the major offenses.

For a complete and final purification of all our harmful actions, two things are needed: a very firm resolve not to commit such actions in the future, and an unshakeable trust in Dorje Sempa's ability to purify all our negative karma."

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 47:

"At the end of each session, we imagine rays of light emanating from the Buddha's body, speech and mind, melting into our own body, speech and mind as a blessing and purifying all our veils and negativity. Then we imagine that the Buddha's body dissolves into light and merges with us so that there is no difference between him and us. It is like pouring water into water - it mixes inseparably. Our mind dwells completely unaffected and settles into the ultimate reality in great relaxation and without any attachment.

This practice allows us to develop mental stability and at the same time receive the blessing of the Buddha. As a result, experiences and insights arise and we purify our karma. This meditation is therefore very useful."

99. How can I purposefully purify actions of the body?

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 9:

"One purifies unwholesome actions of the body by performing wholesome actions with the body, such as bowing down, which is a practice of great value and removes the ripening of all actions committed in the past under the influence of pride. Often, we show harmful behaviour with the body out of pride, and this becomes liable to ripen in the form of suffering. Bowing down or prostrating removes the veils and ripening of wrong actions because we are prostrating to something authentic that is better than ourselves, and that is what removes the consequences of pride. One does not prostrate for the sake of the Lama or the Buddha; prostration is simply a way of purifying the veils of the mind. Another wholesome action of the body is to circumambulate sacred objects, such as stupas, temples, etc. A final way to purify the veils of unwholesome actions of the body is to practice meditations in which one visualizes one's own body as a deity. Our ordinary dimension is then completely eliminated and swept away by meditation on the purity of the deity's body."

100. How can I purify actions of speech ?

Gendün Rinpoche in *Das Gesetz des Karma*, page 10:

It is necessary to purify the harmful deeds committed at the level of speech. This is done through the correct use of speech, for example through the recitation of mantras, a very wholesome action. One can recite various mantras: the mantra of compassion or the hundred-syllable mantra of Dorje Sempa. This wholesome activity of speech has the effect of removing the veils and potential ripening of harmful actions due to previous bad use of speech.

101. We need to experience our karma in order to purify it

Gendün Rinpoche (in a conversation):

"Through your practice you will experience all the past tendencies, all the past karma in this body so that it can be purified in this lifetime. This surfacing of past karma can be very powerful, very upsetting, because it has been accumulated for so long. It is not an easy matter, but a hard business. You should remember that all that you are experiencing now in this life, in this body, is the result of past lives....

You should have complete faith that you need to purify all these tendencies in order to attain enlightenment, nothing else. In order to purify these tendencies, you have to experience them. And you experience them through the practice and the blessing of the lama. The question is whether you fully accept it and even ask for it by sincerely asking the Lama, "I want to be purified of all these tendencies, this karma in

this life. Please grant me your blessings, grant me refuge. I surrender to you completely and wholeheartedly accept to be purified. May all these tendencies emerge, be experienced and purified until there is nothing left of them!

And you should really hope and rejoice deeply that all the karma comes up. Pray that you will experience more of it, so that you can purify more of it and experience more joy and more blessings from the Lama."

The Torch of True Meaning, p.159-160:

"When you persevere in practice, bad karma from the past may arise in unwanted ways as physical illness, mental suffering, and so forth. However just as stains appear when you wash a pot, this is a harbinger of your being becoming pure, it is said, so do not let your practice be snatched away by adversity; increase your diligence instead."

102. The practice in dream and after-death state

Die drei Siegel, page 59:

"If we succeed in practising in this way during the waking state, we can also work with dreams, because we also experience difficult situations there. We can free ourselves from nightmares and fears in dreams by making prayers and wishes to the lama. Once we have made it a habit to take refuge in the Three Jewels and the lama during the day, taking refuge also becomes an automatic reaction of the mind during sleep and dreaming, and so we can free ourselves from all fear and terror. If we learn to do this naturally and automatically during life, then at death and in the bardo we have a chance to free ourselves from the appearances and fears that we will then perceive as a result of our karma. It is important to practice this from now on in order to be prepared for the moment of death and the after-death phase."

103. Personal resolve

As part of our daily practice, we can speak the following sentences to ourselves:

At the hour of death, I will not attain freedom, because due to the law of cause and effect, my karma will continue to accompany me. Therefore, I should give up unwholesome actions and devote myself unceasingly to wholesome actions. Every day, in all activities, I will pay attention to what actions I perform and with what motivation I act, and work towards becoming more and more mindful of the effects of my actions.

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.46: "A summary of this contemplation. Think about the following: If I had control over my next birth after dying, this in itself would be sufficient. But since my next birth depends on the actions I have committed, I will practice according to the law of cause and effect, not confusing what I should do and what I should not do. I shall examine my mind and strive to refrain from harmful actions and accomplish wholesome actions."

Bodhicaryāvatāra was quoted in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.72:

"Suffering arises from unwholesome actions. How can I definitely free myself from this. To think about this day and night is the only thing that makes sense."

104. Mental training mnemonics on the subject of karma:

Start by accepting yourself

See your own suffering, accept it fully, and purify it before you begin exchanging with others. Make the wish for your bad karma to mature as quickly as possible in this lifetime so that it can be purified while there is still time. Stop hiding from yourself. Open up and give up any ego-sovereignty.

Whichever of the two happens, be patient

Whether happiness or suffering, remain balanced and use everything for the practice. In difficulties, take all suffering upon yourself, and in happiness, dedicate everything to others. Use every situation to purify

painful karma and build up positive karma directed towards awakening. Do not despair when suffering and do not lose yourself in happiness, because both are the result of previous actions.

105. What are the fruits of meditation on karma?

- Thinking about karma is an essential aid to understanding why this or that happens to us in life and why we are the way we are. It shows us the causes of happiness and suffering.
- An understanding of karmic laws enables us to consciously shape our future and learn from the mistakes of the past, because an understanding of the karmic conditionality of situations allows us to recognize our scope for freedom as well as the limitations imposed by forces and conditions that are already in effect. It allows us to appreciate this precious human existence, which enables us to free ourselves from suffering and attain liberation from karmic constraints.
- Understanding the laws of cause and effect is an elementary factor in our taking refuge in the Dharma, which explains these laws as well as the methods necessary to apply them skilfully for liberation. There is a sense of urgency in spiritual practice when we realize what a "mountain" of negative karma is waiting to ripen.
- Understanding the causes of suffering and happiness also deepens our compassion and puts an end to all self-pity. It enables us to help others because we now know how to do so.
- An understanding of karma helps us to develop patience and to strive for meaningful long-term goals that are not based on the ever-unfortunate search for worldly, personal happiness.
- An understanding of karma gives us an idea of what a Buddha is and what enlightened activity is.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Die drei Siegel*, page 6:

When we become aware of what is really at stake by contemplating karma and impermanence, a sense of urgency arises.

The fear of dying and being reborn in lower realms of existence becomes the impetus to act immediately. We no longer think of anything other than the Dharma, and our mind calms down and becomes clear. It is no longer agitated by worldly ambitions and meditation becomes much easier.

From the above compilation it is obvious that the doctrine of karma occupies an eminent position within Buddhist Dharma practice. Without the explanation of the connections between actions and their consequences, the Buddha's teaching would be deprived of the important link that connects our present state of confusion with the state of complete liberation. The *Buddha* taught:

Change your actions and you will gain liberation from all suffering.

106. Summary of the karma teachings

As a summary of all that is important on the subject of "Actions and their consequences", the following teaching should be quoted in conclusion.

Gendün Rinpoche in *Eine Quelle der Wohltat und der Freude*, pp. 53-56 (revised):

"What is the actual cause of all the suffering we experience? We should understand that suffering arises because of actions performed due to involvement in emotions. These then ripen into painful experiences for the doer.

The different situations of beings are caused by their different actions. The universe itself is illusion produced by action (karma), and the great diversity of the experience of beings in it is due to the diversity of their actions.

In general, we can say that every action has two stages:

a) the formation of general attitudes in the mind and b) the formation of an intention to perform certain actions, which can then be expressed through body or speech.

There are three groups of actions:

(1) Unwholesome actions: Initially, appearances occur in our mind. This arising of thoughts always involves the possibility that we react inappropriately or negatively to them. If we cling to these thoughts, we experience feelings such as desire, hatred or ignorance. The realization of these feelings through the ten unwholesome or "inappropriate" actions ultimately results in us experiencing the sufferings of the three lower realms of existence.

(2) Wholesome actions: Giving up attachment to potentially harmful thoughts, we practice wholesome action. That is, we perform the ten wholesome or "appropriate" actions. All these actions contribute to the accumulation of merit. This accumulation of wholesome power, in turn, results in our attaining an advantageous human or divine body.

(3) Immovable actions (in meditative absorption): In the four saṃsāric states of meditative absorption, in which the meditator clings to his meditation experience, great joy can arise. Through the power of this feeling of well-being, the practitioner enters a state of deep absorption. As a result, he is later born as God in a spiritual realm of meditative concentration.

Happy or unhappy, all the different experiences in this universe arise from the accumulation of karma that we ourselves have created through our various actions in previous lives. It is important to understand that wholesome actions always result in happiness for the doer and that unwholesome actions always result in suffering for the doer. This law of cause and effect of actions is infallible.

Anyone but the doer himself will experience the effects of his actions as they mature. The law of cause and effect is infallible. And however beneficial the actions of others may be, you yourself will never experience the consequences of the actions of others. Every action has its effect. Even if an entire era passes before it matures, it is completely impossible for an action not to have an effect. Everything we experience is the result of the ripening of the accumulation of our own previous actions.

If we act in a harmful way, we should always admit this to ourselves, because the law of cause and effect is infallible. We should then resolve not to act in this way from now on. After confessing it, we should be pure, free from negativity.

We should never crave for relief for our physical well-being, never desire to possess the wealth or happiness of others and never be malicious towards others. We should simply be content with whatever we have and what we are. The only thing we should not be satisfied with is the small amount of merit we have accumulated so far.

As our falsehood towards others decreases, we become able to give up unwholesome actions towards them. Then we should start to benefit them however we can. If we do what helps others, we will eventually attain the great happiness of enlightenment.

Take the following spiritual attitude to heart as an essential teaching on the law of cause and effect and adhere to it at all costs:

Do not harbour even a trace of enmity towards others, but the desire to always and exclusively help them."

107. Questions for further discussion:

- Which consequences of our actions are immediately and unequivocally recognizable in this life?
- Karma and interdependence - is there actually an independent karma of individual persons? Isn't everything a constant play of mutually dependent influences? Aren't perpetrators also victims and vice versa...?
- What role do subtle or unconscious processes play?
- Do certain actions (always) have certain results?
- Can or should one "intervene in the karma of others"?
- Why are ethics and morals alone not enough?
- How does karmic activity come to rest?
- Is there "grace"?

- *How can I train in wholesome behaviour?*

Questions posed in writing by course participants (Croizet, New Year 1999):

- *Is karma something unchangeable?*
- *Do I have to experience all my karma, or can I free myself from it today? If so, how?*
- *What can I do if my worldly and spiritual karma contradict each other?*
- *Isn't it somewhat superficial, cold-hearted and even irresponsible towards society to explain major crimes, such as the Holocaust and sex crimes, with karma?*
- *Having to endure the loss of a loved one and living sadly without them is difficult enough. Having the term karma attached to it is no consolation for me. Is that all the Dharma has to offer?*
- *Can I act at all in the present moment without creating karma? Is there such a thing as karma-free action? How can it be achieved?*
- *Are perpetrators merely vicarious agents of their victims' karma? Do neither perpetrators nor victims have a choice? Are we totally at the mercy of karma? Life would then be terribly restricted, but we could also make it terribly easy for ourselves. No one would bear any responsibility.*
- *Is my life and how I lead my life predestined from birth through my actions until my death?*
- *Why is the world the way it is? Why do the effects of constantly recurring cause-and-effect not lead to an improvement in coexistence? Why do we so often repeat mistakes we have already made, with all their fatal consequences? Is cause-and-effect a never-ending spiral? Or where does the path lead?*
- *How is it that the more I think about this topic, the more questions I have?*
- *Is there any point in speculating about the karmic causes of strokes of fate? Is there any point in asking: Why?*
- *How can karmic causes actually be detected?*
- *How can/should we deal in our practice with collective karma from the past, e.g. fascism in Germany? How can we purify it?*
- *If we practice letting go, surrendering to the Lama, what effect does that have on our karma? Will our lives not become much less predictable?*
- *Should we put our trust in karma, as we do in our Lama?*

Concluding advice from Karmapa in *The Ocean of True Meaning*, p.45:

"A more detailed exposition of these topics and the elucidation of the scriptural words can be found in the chapter on karma of the *Abhidharmakosha*, in the *Karmasataka Sutra* and in the *Ratnavali*. You should put it into practice as explained there."

So it is up to us to read there to understand more deeply...

108. More subtle aspects of the doctrine of karma: information and non-information

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury*, chapter 4 p.552: "Bodily action and vocal action are informative (*viññapti*) and noninformative (*avijñapti*); we then have bodily informative action, vocal informative action,⁵ bodily non-informative action, and vocal non-informative action."

"Information" (*viññapti*) is an action that "lets something be known", the visible or audible manifestation of a thought, be it through gestures as physical communication (*kāyaviññapti*) or through the sounding of the voice as linguistic communication (*vagviññapti*).

"Non-information" (*avijñapti*) is an action that "lets others know nothing" and which can only be perceived mentally (in *dharmayatana*). (Perhaps this term could also be translated as "information that is not directly visible or audible" or "extremely subtle information". This refers to the subtle aspect of actions that corresponds to a deliberate, mental action.)

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury*, chapter 4 explains this subtle information ("non-information") as an invisible, non-vulnerable form (*rūpa*) that is "pure" (*anasrava*), in the sense of: "not a trigger for clinging and aversion". The presence of this subtle information accompanying a stream of mind explains the growth of merit regardless of the current state of mind. It also explains why someone who commands

an action has to bear the full karma, i.e. the full "path of action" (*karmapatha*) of the action performed on their behalf. It also explains why a yogi in meditative absorption (*samadhi*) acquires the karma of right speech, right action and right living, and how refraining from action (e.g. through the vows of individual liberation) is an actual action with karmic consequences.

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury*, chapter 4: This subtle information is never indeterminate, but always wholesome or unwholesome. Indeterminate intentions are too weak to give rise to such a strong force as this "non-information", which goes on and on after the initial cause is over.

But even weak meritorious material actions (which are at least strong enough to constitute a visible action) produce such subtle information, as do all actions ("paths of action") performed with full karmic force. Actions performed towards a strong "field" (e.g. highly realized ones), taking vows and actions performed with earnestness, devotion or passion produce such "non-information".

Example 1: Someone who commits murder or someone who takes monastic vows physically or verbally produces "informative" actions on the basis of an intention with gestures or words. At the same time, he produces an invisible action on the basis of which he is a murderer or monk, which will continue to accompany him and grow .

The invisible action that is caused by certain visible and audible actions and that informs (in a non-visible and non-audible sphere) is called "non-information". Depending on whether this "not directly visible and audible information" accompanies a physical or a verbal action, it is called "physical non-information" or "verbal non-information".

Example 2: When someone orders a murder, he does not perform the gesture by which the murder is carried out. His order is only a preparation for the murder and no "physical information of the murder" is attached to it. But at the moment when the victim dies, a "non-information of the murder" arises in the person ordering the murder, which is attached to him as the guilty party. (This is explained by the Vaibhāṣika - quoted by Vasubandhu, chapter 4 - in such a way that the mental processes of the person ordering the murder undergo a subtle transformation at the moment of the execution of the murder, i.e. caused by him, as if he had carried out the murder himself).

Example 3: When someone enters into deep meditative absorption (*dhyana*) - beyond all involvement in clinging and rejecting sense impressions and the like - he does not utter any vows through which he would generate the "linguistic information" as well as the accompanying "linguistic non-information" of developing discipline (*samvara*). But the action of absorption is strong enough on its own to generate, without any other actions, the "non-information" of discipline that will accompany that practitioner from then on.

Vasubandhu chapter 4: "Bodily information" (*kāyavijñapti*) is not actually change of place or movement but is more correctly described as "figures" (*samsthana*) arising from moment to moment.

Vasubandhu chapter 4: "Physical action" has the body as its object, i.e. intention (*cetanā*) sets the body into activity in various ways . "Verbal action" has speech as its object and "mental action" is the action of the mind (*manas*) or action connected with the mind.

109. Initial drive and secondary drive of actions

Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharma Treasury* chapter 4 p.576:

"There are two things that bring about an action (*samutthana*): These are (a) the cause that brings it about (*hetu-samutthana*), which is the initiator or initial drive (*pravartaka*) of the action, and (b) that which brings about the actual action (*tatsana-samutthana*), the secondary drive (*anuvartaka*), without which the actually intended action would not be carried out. ... The initial drive already leads to "information" (or "non-information"), which however is clearer (*sputa, vyakta*) if a secondary drive follows."

This corresponds to (a) developing the intention ("intentional action") and (b) carrying out the intention ("intended action"). Now the question arises (Vasubandhu chapter 4):

Is the secondary drive of the same nature as the initial drive? (Answer): A wholesome initial drive can be followed by three types of secondary drive: wholesome, unwholesome or indeterminate. The same applies to an unwholesome or indeterminate initial drive. As far as a Buddha is concerned, however, initial and secondary drives are always of the same nature and unwholesome drives do not occur in a Buddha.

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Appendix 1: The shorter sutra on actions

The shorter explanation of the actions (MN 135)¹⁶

(Cūlakammavibhaga Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 135)

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapindika's Park.

Then Subha the student (brahman), Todeyya's son, went to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side. When he had done so, Subha the student said to the Blessed One:

2. "Master Gotama, what is the reason, what is the condition, why inferiority and superiority are met with among human beings, among mankind? For one meets with short-lived and long-lived people, sick and healthy people, ugly and beautiful people, insignificant and influential people, poor and rich people, low-born and high-born people, stupid and wise people. What is the reason, what is the condition, why superiority and inferiority are met with among human beings, among mankind?"

3. "Student, beings are owners of kammās, heirs of kammās, they have kammās as their progenitor, kammās as their kin, kammās as their homing-place. It is kammās that differentiate beings according to inferiority and superiority."

4. "I do not understand the detailed meaning of Master Gotama's utterance spoken in brief without expounding the detailed meaning. It would be good if Master Gotama taught me the Dhamma so that I might understand the detailed meaning of Master Gotama's utterance spoken in brief without expounding the detailed meaning."

"Then listen, student, and heed well what I shall say."

"Even so, Master Gotama," Subha the student replied. The Blessed One said this:

5. "Here, student, some woman or man is a killer of living beings, murderous, bloody handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings. Due to having performed and completed such kammās, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation¹⁷, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. If, on the dissolution of the body, after death, instead of his reappearing in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell, he comes to the human state, he is short-lived wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to short life, that is to say, to be a killer of living beings, murderous, bloody handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings.

6. "But here some woman or man, having abandoned the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings, lays aside the rod and lays aside the knife, is considerate and merciful and dwells compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. Due to having performed and completed such kammās, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. If, on the dissolution of the body, after death, instead of his reappearing in a happy destination, in the heavenly world¹⁸, he comes to the human state, he is long-lived wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to long life, that is to say, to have abandoned the killing of living beings, to abstain from killing living beings, to lay aside the rod and lay aside the knife, to be considerate and merciful, and to dwell compassionate for the welfare of all living beings.

¹⁶ Source: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.135.nymo.html>

¹⁷ When the kamma of killing is the most important factor in determining the place of rebirth, it results in rebirth in a lower realm of existence. If there is wholesome kamma that leads to human rebirth, the bad kamma of killing modifies the circumstances of human existence and leads to adverse circumstances such as a short life. The other sections are to be understood similarly.

¹⁸ Wholesome kamma, such as ethical behaviour, leads either to good human birth or to heavenly birth, depending on what other wholesome kamma is present, such as the practice of generosity, meditation practice, and the like.

7. "Here, student, some woman or man is one who harms beings with his hands or with clods or with sticks or with knives. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation... If instead he comes to the human state, he is sickly wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to sickness, that is to say, to be one who harms beings with one's hands or with clods or with sticks or with knives.
8. "But here some woman or man is not one who harms beings with his hands, or with clods, or with sticks, or with knives. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... If instead he comes to the human state, he is healthy wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to health, that is to say, not to be one who harms beings with his hands or with clods or with sticks or with knives.
9. "Here, student, some woman or man is angry, much given to rage; even when little is said, he is furious, angry, ill-disposed, resentful, he shows ill-temper, hate and surliness. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation... If instead he comes to the human state, he is ugly wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to ugliness, that is to say, to be furious, angry, ill-disposed, resentful, and to show ill-temper, hate and surliness.
10. "But here some woman or man is not angry or much given to rage; even when much is said, he is not furious, angry, ill-disposed, resentful, nor does he show ill-temper, hate or surliness. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... If instead he comes to the human state, he is beautiful wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to beauty, that is to say, not to be angry or given to much rage; even when much is said, not to be furious, angry, ill-disposed or resentful, or to show ill-temper, hate or surliness.
11. "Here, student, some woman or man is envious; he envies, begrudges and harbours envy about others' gains, honour, veneration, respect, salutations and offerings. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation... If instead he comes to the human state, he is insignificant wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to insignificance, that is to say, to be envious, to envy, begrudge, and harbour envy about others' gain, honour, veneration, respect, salutations and offerings.
12. "But here some woman or man is not envious, he does not envy, begrudge or harbour envy about others' gain, honour, veneration, respect, salutations and offerings. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... If instead he comes to the human state, he is influential wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to influence, that is to say, not to be envious, not to envy, begrudge or harbour envy about others' gain, honour, veneration, respect, salutations and offerings.
13. "Here, student, some woman or man is not a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, perfumes, unguents, bed, roof and lighting to monks or brahmins. Due to having performed and completed such karma, on the dissolution of the body, after death he reappears in a state of deprivation... If instead he comes to the human state, he is poor wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to poverty, that is to say, not to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, perfumes, unguents, bed, roof and lighting to monks and brahmins.
14. "But here some woman or man is a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, perfumes, unguents, bed, roof and lighting to monks and brahmins. Due to having performed and completed such karma, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... If instead he comes to the human state, he is rich wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to riches, that is to say, to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, perfumes, unguents, bed, roof and lighting to monks and brahmins.
15. "Here, student, some woman or man is obdurate and haughty; he does not pay homage to whom he should pay homage, or rise up for whom he should rise up, or give a seat to whom he should give a seat, or make way for whom he should make way, or worship him who should be worshipped, or respect him who should be respected, or revere him who should be revered, or honour him who should be honoured. Due to having performed and completed such karmas, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation... If instead he comes to the human state, he is born low wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to low birth, that is to say, to be obdurate and haughty, not to pay homage to whom he should pay homage,

nor rise up for..., nor give a seat to..., nor make way for..., nor worship..., nor respect..., nor revere..., nor honour him who should be honoured.

16. "But here some woman or man is not obdurate or haughty; he pays homage to whom he should pay homage, rises up for whom he should rise up, gives a seat to whom he should give a seat, makes way for whom he should make way, worships him who should be worshipped, respects him who should be respected, reveres him who should be revered, honours him who should be honoured. Due to having performed and completed such kammass, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... If instead he comes to the human state, he is high-born wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to high birth, that is to say, not to be obdurate or haughty, to pay homage to whom he should pay homage, to rise up for..., to give a seat to..., to make way for..., to worship... respect... revere... honour him who should be honoured.

17. "Here, student, some woman or man when visiting a monk or brahman, does not ask: 'What is wholesome, venerable sir? What is unwholesome? What is blameable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, by my doing it, will be long for my harm and suffering? Or what, by my doing it, will be long for my welfare and happiness?' Due to having performed and completed such kammass, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation... If instead he comes to the human state, he will be stupid wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to stupidity, that is to say, when visiting a monk or brahman, not to ask: 'What is wholesome?... Or what, by my doing it, will be long for my welfare and happiness?'

18. "But here some woman or man when visiting a monk or brahman, asks: 'What is wholesome, venerable sir?... Or what, by my doing it, will be long for my welfare and happiness?' Due to having performed and completed such kammass, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... If instead he comes to the human state, he is wise wherever he is reborn. This is the way that leads to wisdom, that is to say, when visiting a monk or brahman, to ask: 'What is wholesome, venerable sir?... Or what, by my doing it, will be long for my welfare and happiness?'

19. "So, student, the way that leads to short life makes people short-lived, the way that leads to long life makes people long-lived; the way that leads to sickness makes people sick, the way that leads to health makes people healthy; the way that leads to ugliness makes people ugly, the way that leads to beauty makes people beautiful; the way that leads to insignificance makes people insignificant, the way that leads to influence makes people influential; the way that leads to poverty makes people poor, the way that leads to riches makes people rich; the way that leads to low birth makes people low-born, the way that leads to high birth makes people high-born; the way that leads to stupidity makes people stupid, the way that leads to wisdom makes people wise.

20. "Beings are owners of kammass, student, heirs of kammass, they have kammass as their progenitor, kammass as their kin, kammass as their homing-place. It is kammass that differentiate beings according to inferiority and superiority."

21. When this was said, Subha the student, Todeyya's son, said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! The Dhamma has been made clear in many ways by Master Gotama, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing the hidden, showing the way to one who is lost, holding up a lamp in the darkness for those with eyes to see forms.

22. "I go to Master Gotama for refuge, and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. From today let Master Gotama accept me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life."

Appendix 2: The longer sutra on actions

The longer explanation of the actions (MN 136)¹⁹

(*Mahākammavibhaṅga Sutta*, Majjhima Nikāya 136)

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha, in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Place. Now on that occasion the venerable Samiddhi was living in a forest hut.

Then the wanderer Potaliputta, walking and wandering for exercise, came to the venerable Samiddhi and exchanged greetings with him, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side. When he had done so, he said to the venerable Samiddhi:

2. "I heard and learned this, friend Samiddhi, from the monk Gotama's lips: 'Bodily kammās are vain, verbal kammās are vain, only mental kammās are true'²⁰. But there is actually that attainment having entered upon which nothing (of result of kammās) is felt at all."

"Not so, friend Potaliputta, do not say thus, do not misrepresent the Blessed One; it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One; the Blessed One would not say so: 'Bodily kammās are vain, verbal kammās are vain, only mental kammās are true.' And there is actually that attainment having entered upon which nothing (of result of kammās) is felt at all."

"How long is it since you went forth, friend Samiddhi?"

"Not long, friend, three years."

"There now, what shall we say to the elder bhikkhus, when the young bhikkhu fancies the Master is to be defended thus? After doing intentional kamma, friend Samiddhi, by way of body, speech or mind, what does one feel (of its result)?"

"After doing an intentional kamma, friend Potaliputta, by way of body, speech or mind, one feels suffering (as its result)."

Then neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the words of the venerable Samiddhi, the wanderer Potaliputta got up from his seat and went away.

3. Soon after the wanderer Potaliputta had gone, the venerable Samiddhi went to the venerable Ananda and exchanged greetings with him, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side. When he had done so, he told the venerable Ananda all his conversation with the wanderer Potaliputta.

When this was said, the venerable Ananda told him: "Friend Samiddhi, this conversation should be told to the Blessed One. Come, let us go to the Blessed One, and having done so, let us tell him about this. As he answers, so we shall bear it in mind."

"Even so, friend," the venerable Samiddhi replied.

Then they went together to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, they sat down at one side. When they had done so, the venerable Ananda told the Blessed One all the venerable Samiddhi's conversation with the wanderer Potaliputta.

4. When this was said, the Blessed One told the venerable Ananda:

"I do not even know the wanderer by sight, Ananda. How could there have been such a conversation? The wanderer Potaliputta's question ought to have been answered after analysing it, but this misguided man Samiddhi answered it without qualification.

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.136.nymo.html>

²⁰ This misrepresentation may have come about due to the dispute with the Niganthas' concept of kamma. The Niganthas claimed that physical action was the most decisive, while the Buddha taught that mental action was the most decisive, because mental action precedes every verbal and physical action (cf. M56). Potaliputta's statement could be based on a distorted rendition of this point of view.

When this was said, the venerable Udāyin said to the Blessed One: "But, venerable sir, supposing when the venerable Samiddhi spoke, he was referring to this, namely, 'Whatever is felt is suffering'²¹."

5. Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ananda: "See, Ananda, how this misguided man Udāyin interferes. I knew, Ananda, that this misguided man Udāyin would unreasonably interfere now. To begin with it was the three kinds of feeling that were asked about by the wanderer Potaliputta. If, when this misguided man Samiddhi was asked, he had answered the wanderer Potaliputta thus:

'After doing an intentional kamma by way of body, speech and mind (whose result is) to be felt as pleasure, he feels pleasure; after doing an intentional kamma by way of body, speech and mind (whose result is) to be felt as pain, he feels pain; after doing an intentional kamma by way of body, speech and mind (whose result is) to be felt as neither-pain-nor-pleasure, he feels neither-pain-nor-pleasure'

Besides, Ananda, who are the foolish thoughtless wanderers of other sects that they will understand the Tathagata's Great Exposition of Kamma? (But) if you, Ananda, would listen to the Tathagata expounding the Great Exposition of Kamma (you might understand it).

"This is the time, Blessed One, this is the time, Sublime One, for the Blessed One to expound the Great Exposition of Kamma. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the bhikkhus will bear it in mind."

"Then listen, Ananda, and heed well what I shall say."

"Even so, venerable sir," the venerable Ananda replied. The Blessed One said this:

6. "Ananda, there are four kinds of persons existing in the world. What four?

(i) "Here some person kills living beings, takes what is not given, misconducts himself in sexual desires, speaks falsehood, speaks maliciously, speaks harshly, gossips, is covetous, is ill-willed, and has wrong view. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.

(ii) "But here some person kills living beings... and has wrong view. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.

(iii) "Here some person abstains from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from misconduct in sexual desires, from false speech, from malicious speech, from harsh speech, from gossip, he is not covetous, is not ill-willed, and has right view. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.

(iv) "But here some person abstains from killing living beings... and has right view. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.

7. (i) "Here, Ananda, in consequence of ardour, endeavour, devotion, diligence, and right attention, some monk or brahman attains such concentration of mind that, when his mind is concentrated, he sees with the heavenly eyesight, which is purified and surpasses the human, that some person kills living beings here, takes what is not given, misconducts himself in sexual desires, speaks falsehood, speaks maliciously, speaks harshly, gossips, is covetous, is ill-willed, has wrong view. He sees that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. He says: 'It seems that there are evil kammās and that there is the result of misconduct; for I have seen that a person killed living beings here... had wrong view. I have seen that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he had reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.' He says: 'It seems that one who kills living beings... has wrong view, will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge.' So he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true, anything else is wrong.'

8. (ii) "But here in consequence of ardour, endeavour, devotion, diligence and right attention, some monk or brahman attains such concentration of mind that, when his mind is concentrated, he sees with the heavenly eyesight, which is purified and surpasses the human, that some person kills living beings here... has wrong

²¹ This is a statement by the Buddha that says that all kinds of feeling (like all fabrications in general) are ultimately unsatisfactory (*dukkha*); this does not mean, however, that all feelings are painful or painful (in Pāli also *dukkha*). In this translation, depending on the application, the word *dukkha* is translated as "painful" and "suffering", or it remains untranslated as the word *dukkha*. However, the venerable Samiddhi seems not only to have made an etymological error, but also to have misunderstood the Dhamma, since Potaliputta's question quite obviously referred to the "painful-neutral-pleasant" aspect.

view. He sees that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. He says: 'It seems there are no evil karmas, there is no result of misconduct. For I have seen that a person killed living beings here... had wrong view. I have seen that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.' He says: 'It seems that one who kills living beings... has wrong view will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge.' So he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true, anything else is wrong.'

9. (iii) "Here in consequence of ardour, endeavour, devotion, diligence and right attention, some monk or brahman attains such concentration of mind that, when his mind is concentrated, he sees with the heavenly eyesight, which is purified and surpasses the human, that some person abstains from killing living beings here... has right view. He sees that, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. He says: 'It seems that there are good karmas, there is result of good conduct. For I have seen that a person abstained from killing living beings here... had right view. I saw that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he had reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.' He says: 'It seems that one who abstains from killing living beings... has right view will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge.' So he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true; anything else is wrong.'

10. (iv) "But here in consequence of ardour, endeavour, devotion, diligence and right attention, some monk or brahman attains such concentration of mind that, when his mind is concentrated, he sees with the heavenly eyesight, which is purified and surpasses the human, that some person abstains from killing living beings here... has right view. He sees that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. He says: 'It seems that there are no good karmas, there is no result of good conduct. For I have seen that a person abstained from killing here... had right view. I saw that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he had reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.' He says: 'It seems that one who abstains from killing living beings... has right view, will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge.' So he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true; anything else is wrong.'

11. (i) "Now, Ananda, when a monk or brahman says thus: 'It seems that there are evil karmas, there is the result of misconduct,' I concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'For I have seen that some person killed living beings... had wrong view. I saw that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he had reappeared in states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell,' I concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'It seems that one who kills living beings... has wrong view, will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; and insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true; anything else is wrong,' I do not concede that to him.

"Why is that? The Tathagata's knowledge of the Great Exposition of Karma is different.

12. (ii) "Now when a monk or brahman says thus: 'It seems that there are no evil karmas, there is no result of misconduct,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'For I have seen that a person killed living beings... had wrong view. I saw that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he had reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world,' I concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'It seems that one who kills living beings... has wrong view, will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; and insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true; anything else is wrong,' I do not concede that to him.

"Why is that? The Tathagata's knowledge of the Great Exposition of Kamma is different.

13. (iii) "Now when a monk or brahman says thus: 'It seems that there are good kammās, there is a result of good conduct,' I concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'For I have seen that a person abstained from killing living beings here... had right view. I saw that on the dissolution of the body after death, he had reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world,' I concede that to him.

"When he says: 'It seems that one who abstains from killing living beings... has right view will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he says: 'Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen, and felt; and insisting on that alone he says: 'Only this is true: anything else is wrong,' I do not concede that to him.

"Why is that? The Tathagata's knowledge of the Great Exposition of Kamma is different.

14. (iv) "Now when a monk or brahman says thus: 'It seems that there are no good kammās, there is no result of good conduct,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'For I have seen that a person abstained from killing living beings here... had right view. I saw that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he had reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell,' I concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'One who abstains from killing living beings... has right view will always, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he says thus: 'Those who know thus know rightly; those who know otherwise are mistaken in their knowledge,' I do not concede that to him.

"When he obstinately misapprehends what he himself has known, seen and felt; and insisting on that alone, he says: 'Only this is true; anything else is wrong,' I do not concede that to him.

"Why is that? The Tathagata's knowledge of the Great Exposition of Kamma is different.

"Now, Ānanda²², there is the person who has killed living beings here... has had wrong view. And on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. But (perhaps) the evil kamma producing his suffering was done by him earlier, or the evil kamma producing his suffering was done by him later, or wrong view was undertaken and completed by him at the time of his death. And that was why, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. But since he has killed living beings here... has had wrong view, he will feel the result of that here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence²³."

16. "Now there is the person who has killed living beings here... has had wrong view. And on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. But (perhaps) the good kamma producing his happiness was done by him earlier, or the good kamma producing his happiness was

²² This is where the actual presentation begins.

²³ The kamma that leads to bad rebirth can be the observed bad kamma, but it can also come from previous lives. Similarly in the following sections: good kamma from previous lives can override bad kamma in this life and lead to good rebirth. Good rebirth is the fruit of good kamma, but it is not certain that it is the observed good kamma of the last life, it can also come from previous lives. Likewise, bad kamma from previous lives can overlay the good kamma in this life and lead to bad rebirth. However, the Buddha confirms that all good and bad kamma will eventually come to fruition. The many karmic connections between cause and effect cannot be grasped with a simplifying consideration. However, the fact that many Buddhist teachers, especially in Asian countries, still teach in such a simplified way is probably more for pedagogical reasons.

done by him later, or right view was undertaken and completed by him at the time of his death. And that was why, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. But since he has killed living beings here... has had wrong view, he will feel the result of that here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence.

17. "Now there is the person who has abstained from killing living beings here... has had right view. And on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. But (perhaps) the good kamma producing his happiness was done by him earlier, or the good kamma producing his happiness was done by him later, or right view was undertaken and completed by him at the time of his death. And that was why, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world. But since he has abstained from killing living beings here... has had right view, he will feel the result of that here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence.

18. "Now there is the person who has abstained from killing living beings here... has had right view. And on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. But (perhaps) the evil kamma producing his suffering was done by him earlier, or the evil kamma producing his suffering was done by him later, or wrong view was undertaken and completed by him at the time of his death. And that was why, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappeared in the states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell. But since he has abstained from killing living beings here... has had right view, he will feel the result of that here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence.

19. "So, Ananda, there is kamma that is incapable (of good result) and appears incapable (of good result); there is kamma that is incapable (of good result) and appears capable (of good result); there is kamma that is capable (of good result) and appears capable (of good result); there is kamma that is capable (of good result) and appears incapable (of good result)²⁴."

This is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ananda was satisfied, and he rejoiced in the Blessed One's words.

Appendix 3: Special cases of the doctrine of karma

Vasubandhu in *Abhidharma Treasury* chapter 4: In special cases it is even uncertain whether any effects of an action will be experienced at all. However, this refers only to the effects of the previous actions of arhats who, due to their abiding in nonduality, can escape the ripening of karma for the time of their absorption. Vasubandhu mentions that the school of darstantikas distinguishes four types of actions on the basis of this additional possibility:

1. Actions for which there are no definite effects, but if there are, then in one of the three periods mentioned above. (However, their effects are not experienced only if one is never again born in the corresponding realm of existence due to samadhi or realization.
2. Actions where there are definite effects, but where the time period is indefinite. (These normally come to maturity in this life.)
3. Actions that are certain to have an impact and where the time period is also determined.
4. Actions for which both the effects and the time period are indefinite.

It must be considered that the effects of actions "to be experienced in this life" occur in every case with certainty and that only the effects of undetermined actions do not necessarily have to be experienced.

Unmoving actions or actions with a fixed effect

"Unmoving" action (*aninjakarma*) refers to actions with a fixed ('immovable') effect. Asanga p.86: "What is immovable action? Wholesome action within the realms of subtle form and formlessness."

Djamgön Kongtrul in *The Torch of True Meaning*, p.33: "Unmoving karma—dhyana meditation that involves clinging—leads to rebirth in the Form and Formless realms."

²⁴ An exception is the so-called immediate kamma, which is so potent that it determines the immediately following existence. Here, the following actions lead directly to bad rebirth: killing a father or mother, killing an arahant, harming a Buddha, splitting the Sangha. Conversely, reaching one of the stages of enlightenment precludes low rebirth.

Asanga, p.92: "What are actions that lead to the experience of neither happiness nor suffering (or equanimity) (*aduhkhasukhavedaniyakarma*)? These are all the (wholesome, "unmoving") actions from the fourth stage of meditative absorption of the realm of subtle form upwards (including the formless realms)."

Unmoving actions are states of meditative absorption within the realms of subtle form and formlessness. They are 'immovable' (*aninjya*) because the location of their effects is fixed.

This special form of wholesome action is not found in the human realm. Asanga, p.86:

"What is unmoving action (*aninjakarma*)? Wholesome action within the realms of subtle form and formlessness."

Vasubandhu in *Abhidharma Treasury* chapter 4: "In contrast (to mobile actions), no cause can cause the effects of actions in the realms of subtle form and formlessness to be experienced anywhere other than on their corresponding stages (*bhūmi*) (which is why they are called unmoving)."

The persistent cultivation of dualistic (!) states of absorption leads in the next life, according to Gampopa in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, p.36, to a rebirth among the seventeen kinds of gods in the realm of form or among the four kinds of gods in the formless realm. All these gods dwell at different levels of meditative absorption.

In general terms, the prerequisite for such a rebirth is the performance of the ten wholesome actions. The specific prerequisite for each of these stages of meditative concentration is the practice of its respective preliminary and main stage. In doing so, the gross attachments to sensory experiences and intellectual considerations are first abandoned and then the increasingly subtle attachments to purely mental experiences are dissolved. However, a subtle dualism remains, a subtle distinction between self and other remains, as this form of practice is not accompanied by insight into the emptiness of all phenomena. But they are nevertheless wholesome states of mind. Thus writes *Gampopa*, p.37:

"Generally, all eight of these actual meditative concentrations are based on a one-pointed, virtuous mind."

The Ocean of True Meaning, p.52:

"Even in the four realms of concentration [realms of the subtle form] and in the four formless realms of [four experiences of] infinite perception, the suffering of conditioned existence has not been overcome. The veils of the afflictions remain present in a dormant way, and intoxicated by their state of concentration, they feel no wish to get liberated. Although they temporarily experience no suffering, being not free from birth and death, they will have to leave this state as soon as the effect of their wholesome actions from previous lives is exhausted. Once they have been born in lower realms, they experience suffering again."

Appendix 4: What remains to be incorporated into this manual

Still to be included in this reader:

- the second half of Vasubandhu's teachings in the p.128-255).
- Quotations from the Dhammapada: (bold = already incorporated) **1-2**, 15-18, 50, 66-69, 71, 84, 116, 117, 118, **119, 120**, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, **127**, 129, 130, 133, 134, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 161, 163, 172, **173, 183, 219, 220**, 231, 232, 233, 234, **239**, 240, **246, 247**, 248, 281
- Further sutras from the Pali Canon