

Understanding Karma—The Key to Liberation

理解業——解脫的關鍵

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亦農 中譯



I want talk about one really key concept in the Dharma: karma. Some people believe that somehow highly enlightened beings are beyond karma, beyond cause and effect, but what I want to point out tonight is that there are different kinds and levels of karma. Highly enlightened beings are not released from the law of cause and effect, but in fact, they have refined mastery over it.

In the common colloquial sense, most people understand karma as the things that happen to you for a reason, but even more judgmentally as, “you had it coming to you.” It can also just mean “action”—covering anything in business line, occupation, studies or enterprise.

我想講一個佛法中非常關鍵的重要概念，叫做「業（Karma）」。有些人相信，某些大覺悟者是超出業力、凌駕因果關係的；但我今晚想指出的是，業力有不同的種類和層次。大覺悟者並沒有從這個因果律中脫離出來，而事實是對因果律能精湛的掌握。

就一般較通俗的說法，大多數人將「業」理解為發生在你身上的事情是有原因的。但更貼標籤的說法是，「你招感了它」。「業」也可以只是意味著「行為」——涵蓋商業、職業、學業或事業中的任何作為。

In Buddhism, karma very specifically refers to *intentional* actions. It is intentional action with moral charge—a charge or thrust of actions done by body, speech, or mind. It is not just what you do, nor even what you say. Rather, it is the mental processes engaged in volitional action—it includes the realm of thought, imagination, and fantasy.

The mind is the fundamental place to look at, as speech and physical actions follow from mind. It also includes emotions, feelings, intentional actions of will, and premeditations. Any speech or action begin with the mind. Even intentional “actions” of the mind, though not followed by speech or carried out in body, still generate karmic force.

Basically, the teaching of karma means that deeds of body, mouth and mind, once enacted, do not vanish or perish without a trace. You might say they leave a residue. There is both effect and accountability for our actions. Thus, all morally determinate, volitional actions create the potential to bring forth results, or fruits.

Results—in Sanskrit called *vipāka*—have to do with the process of those actions set in motion. Once in motion, as we learn in physics with the concept of inertia, actions continue in momentum, and, in the karmic equivalent of inertia, ripen. Upon maturing, they bear fruit, they come back to us. We sometimes call that coming back “retribution”—these are the effects, or results, that correspond to the ethical quality of the original actions.

Action, reaction, and correspondence—karma implies the capacity of our deeds to generate morally appropriate results. “Morally appropriate” means that good actions will bear good results; unwholesome actions will bring bad results. The results are appropriate to the moral quality of the original action.

We may not be able to see this directly. Such “seeing” requires profound mental training. It depends on our degree of mindfulness. If we are very sensitive and mindful, we can actually start to see this happening. In general, we act blindly, we act impulsively. We talk and think without considering that larger field of action and reaction; we just let ourselves go. But by following habits and impulses, we receive the results appropriate to our moral or—more likely—immoral actions, yet we don’t necessarily connect them to have anything to do

在佛教中，「業」非常具體地指有意圖的行為。它是帶有道德指控的蓄意行為——由身、語、意主導或推動的行為。這不僅僅是你做了什麼，甚至你說了什麼，而是你參與了意向、行動，以及思緒、想像或妄念的心識過程。

心意識是要觀照的所在，因為語言和肢體行動都是由心所生；包括情緒、感覺、蓄意的行為和預謀。任何言語（語業）和行為（身業）都源自於心（意業）。只要心有所圖，即使沒有相應的語業或身業發生，業力依然會產生。

基本上，「業」的教義意味著身、語、意的行為一旦產生，就不會消失或無聲無息地消亡。你可能會說「業」會留下痕跡。我們的行為既有作用也有責任。因此，所有道德明確的意向行動，都可能產生結果（results）和成果（fruits）。

結果（異熟果）—梵文稱*vipāka*—與這些行為的過程有關。一旦開始運作，正如我們在物理學中學到的慣性定律一樣，動作會在動能中持續（慣性），並在慣性的業力等價物中成熟。成熟後，會結成果實（業果），回到我們身邊。我們有時將其稱之為報應——這些是與原所造作的道德質量相稱的效應或結果（果報）。

行為、反應和對應——「業」暗含著我們的行為有能力產生在道德上的適當結果。「道德上的適當（Morally appropriate）」意味著好的行為會產生好的果報，不好的行為會帶來不好的果報。這些果報與我們原本造作的道德品質相對應。

我們可能無法直接看到這一點，這樣的「看」需要高度的心理訓練。因為這取決於我們的正念程度。如果我們非常靈敏和專注，我們實際上可以開始看到這種情境的發生。一般來說，我們盲目衝動的行事，說話和思考都沒有顧及到行為及效應背後的更大場域（後果）；我們只是恣意妄為。但是依循習慣和衝動，我們得到符合我們道德行為——更可能是不道德行為的結果。

with what we set in motion. So we are surprised, even stunned, when “things just happen.”

Generally, the way people who are not mindful look at karma is that they think, *This befalls me*. Those who are mindful preemptively consider, *This is what I beget. This is what I am setting in motion. And once I set this in motion, it will return*. The key here is that karmic deeds are not gone or forgotten. They don't vanish or perish, but reverberate and return sooner or later.

So, since effects echo or mirror causes, I suggest that even though you cannot see karma directly, you can do what I call “reverse engineering.” When you reverse engineer a machine, you look at a finished product and by systematically deconstructing it you can figure out the original purpose and intention—where this thing came from, how it was built. It is a little bit like an autopsy where you take a corpse apart to figure out *What killed this person? What was the cause of death?*

For example, in a section of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the second ground discussed in the chapter twenty-six, “Ten Grounds,” there is a discussion of the ten wholesome (*kuśala*) and ten unwholesome (*akuśala*) deeds. The text there talks about a contemplative reflection that is akin to the reverse engineering process, which helps us see cause and effect play out in our lives as unwholesome actions bring unwholesome results and wholesome actions bring wholesome results.

For example, that chapter describes that someone who has a short life, who dies very young, and/or is plagued by many illnesses, is experiencing the ripening (*vipāka*) and fruition (*phala*) of having engaged, intentionally and volitionally, in the karma of killing. The moral retribution for killing and taking life is that after one loses one's human body, one is reborn in the lower realms, such as the ghost or animal realms. Even when one gets out of them and is reborn in the human realm again, one is plagued with many illnesses and/or only enjoys a short lifespan.

So, based on this moral logic, you can reverse engineer: knowing the effect—the circumstances of your life—you can see what causes you have planted. And knowing the causes you are planting in the present, you can pretty much foresee the effects—your future.

There is another important element here, which is that the results (*phala*) do not happen immediately. Some people wonder how did a person get away with doing evil, since there wasn't an

但是，我們並不一定將這些結果與我們所採取的行動串聯起來。因此，當「事情就這樣發生」時，我們會感到驚訝，甚至震驚。

一般來說，沒有正念的人看待業力的方式是，他們以為這些事件是剛好發生在自己身上。那些有正念的人則會先入為主的將這些事情看待成——這是我所作的。我正在造就什麼，一旦我做出行動，就會招感。這裡的關鍵是業力沒有消失或遺忘。它們並不會消失或湮滅，而是早晚會回報。

因此，由於迴聲效應或鏡像成因，我建議，即使無法直接看到業力，你也可以做我所說的「還滅門」。當你對一台機器進行逆向分析時，你看到一件成品，通過系統地解讀它，你可以弄清楚最初的目的和意圖——這個東西來自哪裡，它是如何建造的。這有點像驗屍，你檢視一具屍體，弄清楚是什麼殺死了這個人？死因為何？

例如，在《華嚴經》十地品第二十六之二〈第二離垢地〉中，有關十善業和十不善業的討論。經文談到了類似還滅門的觀照思維，這有助於我們看到生活中的因果關係，即不善的行為帶來不善的結果（惡果）；善的行為帶來善的果報（善果）。

比如，該章節中描述到有些短命，年紀輕輕就死去，或者多病的人，正有意並自願地從事殺生的業行。那些掠奪生命的人，他們在道義上應得的報應是，失去自己的人身後，會投生到鬼界或畜生界等惡趣。即使他們業報受盡，重新回到人法界，也是生來就多病和短命。

所以，基於這個道德邏輯，你可以逆向思維：從果報中——你的生活環境——你可以追溯到你種的前因。

了解你現在種的因，你幾乎可以預見到果報——你的未來。

immediate result from that action. The concept of *vipāka*, maturing or ripening, is critical to understanding this. When the internal psychic and external phenomenal conditions are suitable, only then do you have fruit (*phala*). The ripening of those conditions is called *vipāka*; the actual effect or “fruit” is called *phala*. The whole process—intentional action, ripening, and fruition (*cetanā*, *vipāka*, *phala*)—is not not fixed or fated; the effects, timing, intensity, and degree are all variable, depending on all sorts of circumstances. All the details and nuances involved could easily take an entire evening-lecture. It would bring us too far afield here.

Karma rebounds upon us in good or bad retributions depending on the moral quality and intensity of the original action, and the type of action itself. There are a lot of extenuating factors that determine whether a certain action is going to have an immediate result, or result in a future life, or result in future lives—the three dimensions of *vipāka*.

The result of an intentional action may come in this life or in next life or future lives. But the determining factors involved are not rigidly fixed. To some extent they are variable and malleable. If we practice repentance and have some real heartfelt remorse about what we have done, we can alter the severity of the retribution that was due. Even while in the act of doing something, a slight change of heart, can shift the results, for better or worse, depending.

So, karma is not just the actions or what befalls us. It has more to do with how we beget, with what we set in motion. It is actions that spring from intentions—*cetanā* in Sanskrit—an urge and intention of a sentient being. To be clear, insentient things such as rocks do not create karma. There is a passage in the Pāli canon where the Buddha makes this clear, he says:

Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, and mind.

A lot of people when hearing this for the first time think it's wrong, because they think that karma is an effect based strictly on what you do. Yet, volition is karma; and karma is created as soon as volition arises. Whether in body, speech, or mind, as soon as intention arises that action is done. For instance, you could have a hateful, angry, vicious, violent

還有另一個重要的因素，那就是果報不會立即產生。有些人想知道一個人是如何作惡卻不受惡報，因為行為並沒有立即產生結果。成熟*vipāka*的概念，對於理解這一點至關重要。當內在的心識（心境）和外在的境況（外境）條件適合時，才會有結果（果報*phala*）。這整個過程——蓄意、成熟和結果（*cetanā*, *vipāka*, *phala*）——並非固定或注定的。根據環境的不同，效果、時間、強度和程度都可以改變。所有涉及到的細節和細微差別，用整晚的講座時間也講不完，只會把話題帶太遠。

業以反作用力回到我們自身，無論好或壞，果報取決於原所造作的道德質量（動機）和強度，以及行為本身的類型。有很多情有可原（質輕）的因素，決定了某個行為是否立即產生果報（現報），或者影響未來的生活（生報），又或者影響來生（後報），這也就是果報（*vipāka*）的三種相（註：異熟果、等流果、增上果）。

蓄意的結果，可能會在今生、來生或未來生中出現，但所涉及的決定因素並不是嚴格不變的。在某種程度上，它們是可變和可塑的。如果我們修行懺悔，對曾造作真實發露慚愧，我們可以改變業報的嚴重程度。甚至正在做某件事的時候，稍微調整心態，或多或少的也會改變結果。

所以業不是僅僅是行動或我們所遭遇的事，更多是與我們如何引起、與我們行為的意圖有關。業是源於蓄意的行為，梵語中*cetanā*，為有情眾生的貪求和造作。但要清楚的是，像岩石這類無情的東西是不會產生業力。在巴利經的一段文中，佛陀清楚地闡述這一點：

我告訴你們，心的意圖即是業。一個人通過身、語、意有意為之。

很多人初次聽到這個說法時，認為是錯誤的。因為他們認為，業力是一種嚴格



thought. As soon as you purposely think that, you created karma. You may not be saying or doing anything, but as soon as you have the volitional thought, there is karma. Thus, the idea of intentionality in karma is extremely important. It bears directly on free will and accountability.

If you do things unintentionally, such as when you step on an ant accidentally, the retribution will be very weak. There is no moral force behind that because it was unintentional. So, you don't want to say to people that because you stepped on a cricket, you're going to be reborn as a cricket. It does not work quite that way. On the other hand, if you think to yourself, *I'm going to step on every bug I can!*—now, that is intentional, forceful, and there will be a corresponding serious effect.

I just want to make this really clear: the mind is the originator of all of this. This is why Buddhism largely teaches that the mind in all its states is the root of what controls not only our destiny—our bodies, life experiences, but also the worlds we live in—the whole mechanism of cause and effect is set in motion and sustained by the mind. The mind leads and proceeds all that we experience. If you speak or act with a defiled or corrupted mind, dukkha, suffering follows. As the Buddha says in the Dhammapada (1.1):

The mind precedes all things.

Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought.

If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts

Suffering follows him like the wheels of a wagon

基於你所做的事情的結果。然而，意志即是業。一旦意志（volition）生起，業力就會產生。無論是在身體上、言語上、還是在心意上，一旦意圖出現，就會被執行。例如，你可能有一個仇恨的、憤怒的、惡毒的、暴力的念頭，只要你故意這麼去想，你就創造了業力。你可能什麼都沒說，什麼都沒做，但只要你有了這樣的念頭，就有了業力。因此，意向在業力的概念中非常重要。它直接關係到個人意志和當責。

如果你是無心造作，比如不慎踩到螞蟥，那果報就會很輕。這背後沒有道德力量，因為它是無意的。所以，你不會告訴別人：「因為你踩到一隻螞蟥，你將來會投生為螞蟥。」業並不完全是以這種方式運作。另一方面，如果你對自己說：「我要盡可能踩死每隻蟲子。」這是有意的，而且會有相對的嚴重果報。

我只想把這一點說清楚：心是一切業的始作俑者（業因）。這就是為什麼佛教在很大程度上教導我

Follows the hooves of an ox.

Just as wagon wheels follow the hooves of the ox that pulls the wagon, so too does karmic retribution follow the intentional actions of the one's mind.

Thus, all experiences are preceded mind.

In the next verse in the Dhammapada (1.2), the Buddha says:

*If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts,
Happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow, like
your shadow in the sunlight.*

This is a very direct explanation of where our experience comes from: things don't just happen. All we experience comes from what we intentionally do with body, speech and mind. It is not only how we feel about things that is impacted by karma. Karma even shapes and shades how we perceive things with our various faculties of cognition. The very ways we think, feel, interpret and misinterpret—all are all formed and framed by our karma. In other words, we are actually shaping the very totality of our human experience—what we love, what we hate, and who we are. All of it is the cumulative effect of processes that originally were started by the mind. In that sense, you can say that karmic actions are comparable to seeds that will inevitably mature into a resulting experience.

However, we do not want to oversimplify this notion of “you kill and so you'll be killed.” Karma works in much more nuanced ways. There are many complex, subtle, intricate, interwoven factors at play in this. It is just as you look at a stream, at first you just see that it's flowing, but as you get closer, you can see different currents and waves going on within that stream.

If you understand the complexity of karma, you will know why some retribution doesn't come immediately. An example of this is in the *Lonaphala Sutta*, the *Salt Crystal Sutra* (AN 3.99). When the Buddha was asked about karma, he said, “If you take a teaspoon of salt, and you put it into a little cup, what does it taste like?” The disciples said, “Extremely salty, unbearably salty.” Then

們，心的所有狀態都控制著我們命運的根源——我們的身體、生命體驗，也控制我們生活的世界，整個因果機制都是由心所造。如果你用一個染污或敗壞的心來說話或行事，苦（巴利語 *dukkha*，苦諦）就會隨之而來。正如佛陀在《法句經》〈雙品〉的偈頌中所說：

心是諸法的前導，

心是主，

諸法唯心造。

若人造作身口意的不淨行，

必定受苦報，

猶如牛車緊隨著牛的足跡。

惡報會跟隨造作者的心，

就像車輪尾隨牛的足跡一樣。

一切唯心所造。

在《法句經》的下一首偈頌中，佛陀說：

若人以清淨之心言行，

樂事相隨，

猶如盛日下，

影不離形。

這是對我們的覺受源自何處的一個非常直接的解釋；事情不僅僅是發生。我們所有的遭遇都來自身語意所造作的業。業力不僅影響我們對事物的感受，甚至影響我們如何看待事物的方式。換句話說，我們實際上是在塑造我們人類經驗的全部——我們愛什麼，我們討厭什麼，以及我們是誰——所有這些都由心意識開始的累積效應。業力作用堪比一粒種子，終將成熟，並結成業果。

我們不想過分簡化這個概念——比如你殺生，所以你會被殺。業力以更微妙的方式運作。有許多複合、微妙、錯綜複雜、相互交織的因素在其中發揮作用。就像你看一條小溪一樣，起初你只是看到水在流動，但當你走近時，你可以看到不同的水流和浪花在那條溪流中流淌波動。

如果你了解業力的複雜性，你就會知道為什

the Buddha continued, “If you take the same teaspoon of salt, and put it into a pristine alpine lake, what do you think the lake tastes like?” “It’s negligible.” “In the same way,” said the Buddha, “different people have different predispositions, depending on previous karma, accumulated blessings, and their storehouse of merit and virtue. Thus, the same act can result in widely differing results.” This, then, is exactly where repentance-practices come in. Repentance changes the nature and the quality of your water, so to speak. As sincerely repenting is a deep intentional act coming from the very ground of the mind, charged with motivation, volition, attention—all the vectors of *cetanā* which moves the mind in a certain direction. in short, repentance, shifts inertia, alters the direction and course of one’s life.

Another practical point is that since karma is intention and as such originates in the mind, you can control it at the level of the mind. As you get more and more mindful, you realize you can stop intention before it becomes volition. So, on the one hand, unwholesome actions that will lead to suffering come from attachment, aversion, and ignorance. On the other hand, the absence of those forms of clinging and grasping is what will lead away from enslavement and toward liberation—that is the difference between wholesome and unwholesome.

This is the gist of what I really want to stress here, that you can develop a genuine experiential understanding and application of karma. This is essential to walking the Buddhist path. You need to have genuine understanding of karma, a knowledge that is gained over time, in order to appreciate what it means to become liberated and be free from outflows. You need to see how your actions and your outflows are actually causing you to toss and turn in this confused cycle. This is not just a matter of belief. You are not going to get liberated unless you understand the mechanism and are able to work with it and master it. Belief in karma alone does not liberate you. My understanding is that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas gained awakening primarily because they really understood and mastered cause and effect. They’re no longer confused by it, no longer habitually taken up with unwholesome intentions and actions. So, developing a clear understanding of karma, and then taking it up as a tool, as a compass, an actual way of living, is really the key to liberation. ❀

麼一些報應不會立即到來。《鹽喻經》中的一個例子是，當佛陀被問及業力時，佛說：「如果你拿一勺鹽，把它放進一個裝滿水的小杯子中，水是什麼味道？」弟子們說：「太鹹了，鹹得難以忍受。」佛陀接著說：「如果你拿同樣茶匙的鹽，放進一個原始高山的湖泊裡，你覺得湖水的味道是什麼？」「（鹹味）微不足道。」佛陀說：「同樣地，不同的人有不同的性格、前業力、累積的福報、功德等等，所以同樣的行為會有很多不同的效果。」這就是懺悔行門起作用的地方。可以說，懺悔改變了你水的性質和質量。真誠懺悔是來自內心深層的作意，加上動機、專注力，這些都是讓心往某個方向移動的能量。簡言之，懺悔可以改變慣性定律，改變一個人的人生方向和路徑。

另一個實用的要點是，既然業力是意圖的，起源於心，你可以在心的層面上控制它。隨著你的心越來越專注，你會意識到自己可以在念頭變成意志之前阻止它。一方面，不善的行為是來自執著、瞋恚和無明，會招感苦果。另一方面，沒有了執著，就能從束縛中解脫。這就是善與不善之間的區別。

這就是我今晚想強調的重點，也就是培養對「業」的真正理解和應用。這對於走修行的道路至關重要。你需要真正明白業力，這種知識是從時間的推移中獲得，以達到漏盡和解脫。你要理解你的行為和有漏的思維，是如何導致你在輪迴的洪流中，流轉不已。不僅僅只是相信而已，除非你能理解這種機制，並掌握它，否則光是相信業力，你是無法得到解脫的。我的理解是：佛菩薩能夠開悟，主要原因就是祂們真正明白並掌握因果。祂們不再昧於因果，也不再慣性地生出不善的意念和行為。因此，對業力能清楚理解，然後將它的運作法則作為一個工具、一個指引、一種實際的生活方式，即是真正解脫的關鍵。 ❀