

Wholesome and Skillful Causes and Conditions

善妙因緣

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A Dharma Talk by Bhikshu Jin He, delivered online from the Dharma Realm Guanyin Sagely Monastery in Malaysia on July 7, 2025
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Every day in the Buddha Hall, we engage in many forms of cultivation—reciting sutras, chanting mantras, and bowing in repentance. Throughout the monastery, we also diligently perform various wholesome deeds. But how do we know if our practice and good deeds truly generate merit? And when we dedicate this merit, how can we be certain that we are genuinely transferring it to sentient beings to bring them benefit?

To begin, I would like to share a well-known story from the Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp: a dialogue between Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty and Great Master Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of the Chan lineage in China.

Emperor Wu asked Bodhidharma, “Since ascending the

在佛殿裏，我們每天做很多修行，比如唸經、誦咒、拜懺；在道場裏，我們力行各種善事。可是，我們怎麼知道我們的修行和善事真的能帶來功德呢？迴向的時候，又怎樣才能確信自己真的可以把功德迴向給衆生，利益他們呢？

首先，我想跟大家分享《景德傳燈錄》裏很有名的故事——梁武帝和禪宗初祖達摩大師的對話。

梁武帝問達摩祖師：「我登基以來，建了許多寺廟、抄寫很多佛經、度化無數僧人，這樣有什麼功德嗎？」達摩祖師很直接地回答：「沒有功

throne, I have built many temples, transcribed countless Buddhist scriptures, and ordained innumerable monastics. What merit have I gained from this?”

Bodhidharma answered directly, “No merit.”

The Emperor pressed further, “Why is there no merit?”

Bodhidharma explained, “These are merely the rewards of the human and heavenly realms. They are conditioned causes with outflows, following you like a shadow—appearing to exist, yet lacking true reality. They can only be called ‘blessings,’ not ‘merit.’”

The Emperor then asked, “What, then, is true merit?”

Bodhidharma replied, “It is pure wisdom: subtle, perfect, and complete. Its essence is empty and still. Such merit cannot be obtained through worldly pursuits.”

Although the Master Bodhidharma’s answer captures the essence of the Mahāyāna “Sudden Teaching,” it can be difficult for beginners to grasp. It relies on the distinction between “merit” and “blessings.” While both arise from wholesome deeds, their natures are fundamentally different. To clarify this, we can turn to the “four kinds of karma” described in the Theravāda scriptures.

This passage comes from the Theravāda Buddhist scripture, the *Anguttara Nikāya* (4:232), and was translated into English by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

§ § §

The Four Kinds of Karma

There are, O monks, these four kinds of kamma (Sk: karma) declared by me after I had realized them for myself by direct knowledge. What four?

There is dark kamma with dark results;

There is bright kamma with bright results;

There is kamma that is dark and bright with dark and bright results;

There is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright results, which leads to the destruction of kamma.

And what, monks, is dark kamma with dark results?

Here, monks, someone generates an afflictive volitional formation of body, speech, or mind.

Having done so, he is reborn in an afflictive world.

德。」皇帝追問：「爲什麼沒有？」祖師解釋說：「這些都只是人天福報，屬於有漏的因，像影子一樣跟著你，看似有，卻不是真實的。這只能算是『福德』，而不是『功德』。」皇帝又問：「那怎樣才是真正的功德呢？」祖師回答：「清淨的智慧圓滿微妙，本體空寂，這樣的功德，不是從世間追求可以得來的。」

達摩祖師這段開示，雖然是大乘頓教的精髓，但對初學者來說，可能不容易體會。這牽涉到「功德」和「福德」的區別：「功德」和「福德」雖然都來自善行，但本質很不一樣。爲了搞清楚這一點，我們可以參考南傳經典中所說的「四種業」。

這是一篇出自南傳佛教經典《增支部》（*Anguttara Nikaya* 4:232）的經文，由菩提比丘（Bhikkhu Bodhi）英譯。

§ § §

四種業

諸比丘，有這四種業，是我在親自證悟後向你們宣說的。是哪四種呢？

有「黑業」，招感「黑報」（痛苦的果報）；

有「白業」，招感「白報」（快樂的果報）；

有「黑白雜業」，招感「黑白雜報」（苦樂交織的果報）；

有「不黑不白業」，招感「不黑不白報」，這種業能導向業的滅盡。

諸比丘，什麼是「黑業黑報」呢？

在這裏，有人造作了帶有傷害性的身業、語業或意業。因為這樣做，他投生到一個充滿傷害與痛苦的世界。當他投生到那裏，充滿傷害的觸感便會接觸他。因受到傷害性的接觸，他感受到了帶有傷害性的「受」——那是極度的痛苦，就像地獄裏的眾生所經歷的一樣。這就叫做黑業黑報。

諸比丘，什麼是「白業白報」呢？

在這裏，有人造作了不帶傷害性的身

When he is reborn in an afflictive world, afflictive contacts touch him. Being touched by afflictive contacts, he experiences afflictive feeling—extremely painful, as, for example, the beings of hell experience. This is called dark kamma with dark results.

And what, monks, is bright kamma with bright results?

Here, monks, someone generates a non-afflictive volitional formation of body, speech or mind.

Having done so, he is reborn in a non-afflictive world. When he is reborn in a non-afflictive world, non-afflictive contacts touch him. Being touched by non-afflictive contacts, he experiences a non-afflictive feeling—extremely pleasant, as for example the devas of refulgent glory experience. This is called bright kamma with bright results.

And what, monks, is dark and bright kamma with dark and bright results?

Here, monks, someone generates both an afflictive volitional formation of body, speech, or mind and a non-afflictive volitional formation of body, speech, or mind. Having done so, he is reborn in a world that is both afflictive and non-afflictive. When he is reborn in such a world, both afflictive and non-afflictive contacts touch him. Being touched by such contacts, he experiences both an afflictive feeling and a non-afflictive feeling, a mixture and conglomeration of pleasure and pain, as for example human beings and some devas and some beings in the lower world experience. This is called dark and bright kamma with dark and bright results.

And what, monks, is kamma that is neither dark nor bright, with neither dark nor bright results, which leads to the destruction of kamma?

The volition to abandon this dark kamma with dark results, and to abandon the bright kamma with bright results, and to abandon the dark and bright kamma with dark and bright results.

This is called the kamma that is neither dark nor bright, with neither dark nor bright results, which leads to the destruction of kamma. (*Anguttara Nikaya* 4: 232; II 230-232. As translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *In The Buddha's Words*, pages 155 - 156.)

§ § §

Dark karma comprises actions of body, speech, and mind that harm ourselves or others, inevitably leading to suffering. Bright karma consists of wholesome actions that yield pleasant results.

業、語業或意業。因為這樣做，他投生到一個沒有傷害與痛苦的世界。當他投生到那裏，安樂無害的觸感便會接觸他。因受到安樂無害的接觸，他感受到了不帶傷害性的「受」——那是極度的快樂，就像光輝燦爛的天眾（遍淨天人）所經歷的一樣。這就叫做白業白報。

諸比丘，什麼是「黑白雜業黑白雜報」呢？

在這裏，有人造作了帶有傷害性的身業、語業或意業，同時也造作了不帶傷害性的身業、語業或意業。

因為這樣做，他投生到一個既有痛苦又有安樂的世界。當他投生到那裏，傷害性與非傷害性的觸感都會接觸他。因受到這兩種接觸，他經歷了傷害性與非傷害性的感受——那是苦樂參半、悲喜交雜的體驗。就像人類、部分天人以及部分惡道眾生所經歷的一樣。這就叫做黑白雜業黑白雜報。

諸比丘，什麼是「不黑不白業、不黑不白報，且能導向業的滅盡」呢？

那就是：決意捨棄上述的黑業黑報，決意捨棄上述的白業白報，以及決意捨棄上述的黑白雜業黑白雜報。（編按：即透過修習八正道來斷除造業的意向。）

這就叫做不黑不白業、不黑不白報，它能導向業的徹底止息。（見《增支部》4:232，第二卷；英譯見菩提比丘在《佛陀的語錄》第155-156頁。）

§ § §

黑業，是我們身口意傷害自己或別人的行為，一定會帶來苦果；白業則是善的行為，會帶來樂報；黑白夾雜的業，就會感受到苦樂交雜

Mixed karma, a combination of both, results in experiences of both suffering and happiness.

What, then, is “neither-dark-nor-bright karma”? This fourth type is intrinsically linked to the noble eightfold path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Among these, right intention is particularly crucial.

The Buddha taught that karma is intention—our inner volition and motivation. It is intention that drives our deeds of body, speech, and mind.

From this, we see that while bright karma is wholesome, it merely accumulates worldly blessings. True merit, however, arises from neither-dark-nor-bright karma, which leads to liberation and breaks the cycle of rebirth.

Let us look closer at right intention within the noble eightfold path. The sutras describe it as having three qualities:

Renunciation (Letting Go): Reducing desire and attachment. When the mind learns to let go, generosity arises naturally, and one finds joy in giving.

Non-ill Will (Loving-kindness): Cultivating a benevolent heart. One first wishes well for oneself, then extends that same wish to others.

Non-harming (Compassion): Upon witnessing the suffering of others, a sense of empathy arises. Grounded in loving-kindness, one cannot bear the suffering of sentient beings, and compassion naturally comes forth.

From the perspective of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna discusses a parallel concept in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra*. He identifies three “wholesome roots” that guide living beings toward goodness and the accumulation of merit:

Non-greed (corresponding to Renunciation);

Non-hatred (corresponding to Loving-kindness, and Compassion);

Non-delusion (corresponding to Wisdom).

All wholesome practices spring from these three “wholesome roots,” just as trees grow from their own roots. Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, places a unique emphasis on non-delusion—which is to say, wisdom. In truth, wisdom encompasses all other factors of the noble eightfold path; it is the very heart of Mahāyāna practice.

For instance, when we dedicate merit at the end of our daily Dharma assemblies, we should do so with wisdom, guiding

的果報。

那麼，什麼是「非黑非白的業」呢？這就關係到八正道——正見、正思惟、正語、正業、正命、正精進、正念、正定。其中，「正思惟」特別關鍵。

佛陀說「業」就是「思」，也就是我們內心的意圖、動機——是它推動着我們身口意的行爲。

這樣我們就明白了：第二種「白業」雖然是好的，但它只能積累世間的「福德」；而真正的「功德」，是來自第四種「非黑非白的業」，它讓我們解脫，走出輪迴。

接下來，我們仔細談談八正道裏的「正思惟」。經典中說，正思惟包含三種特質：

出離（捨）：減少內心的慾望和執着；心裏能放下，外表自然就變得慷慨，樂意布施。

無恚（慈）：就是慈心。先祝願自己快樂，再把這樣的祝願延伸到他人。

無害（悲）：看到別人受苦，心裏自然生起悲憫。以慈心為基礎，因為不願衆生苦，所以產生悲心。

如果對照北傳大乘的觀點，龍樹菩薩在《大智度論》裏提出了三種能夠引導人行善積德的「善根」：

無欲（對應「捨」）；

無瞋（對應「慈」和「悲」）；

無癡（也就是智慧）。

一切善法都從這三個善根生起，就像草木從根生長一樣。大乘特別強調「無癡」——智慧，它其實涵蓋了八正道裏其他部分的內容。所以，智慧是大乘修行非常核心的部分。

比如每天法會結束迴向時，我們應該以智慧來攝持，讓功德導向圓滿。我們不只是追求解脫生死，更是以成佛為最終目標。

that merit toward its ultimate fulfillment. We do not seek only liberation from the cycle of birth and death; our ultimate goal is Buddhahood.

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra* explains that “wholesome roots” are not merely about moral goodness. More importantly, they possess the power to cultivate skillful conditions. Actions such as offering flowers, incense, or lamps; observing precepts; and reciting sutras—these may be morally neutral in themselves. But when performed with pure aspirations and guided by wisdom, they are transformed into genuine roots of goodness.

This reminds me of when I first arrived at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Although I bowed and recited sutras daily, I rarely reflected on my true motivation. We must realize that offerings do not automatically produce liberative merit. Only when an act of giving diminishes our self-centeredness does it become a wholesome root. The essence of cultivation lies not in outward forms, but in inner transformation—turning greed, anger, and delusion into renunciation, compassion, and wisdom.

Consider the story of Dharma Master Fada from the *Platform Sūtra*. When Fada paid respects to the Sixth Patriarch, his head did not touch the ground as he bowed. His arrogance stemmed from the fact that he had recited the *Lotus Sutra* three thousand times—a monumental effort. Yet the Sixth Patriarch reprimanded him, saying, “When the mind is deluded, the *Lotus Sutra* turns you; when the mind is awakened, you turn the *Lotus Sutra*.” If the mind is clouded by pride, you are merely being carried along by the words; only when you truly understand their meaning do you bring the sutra to life.

This is like the relationship between a needle and thread. A needle guides the thread to sew a garment, but without the thread, the garment can never be finished. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* points out that actions—offering, reciting, or meditating—are like the needle. They must be paired with “pure and wholesome intention”—the thread of right intention and wisdom. Only then can merit be woven into the path that leads to Buddhahood.

Therefore, all cultivation must be grounded in Right Intention if it is to generate true and genuine merit. Amitabha! ❀

《大智度論》解釋說：善根不只代表行為本身是好的，更重要的是它能成就善妙的因緣。比如供花、供香、供燈，還有持戒、誦咒、誦經等等，這些行為本身在道德上可能是中性的，但如果我們做的時候，懷着清淨的善願和智慧，它們就能轉變成真正的善根。

想起我剛來聖城的時候，雖然每天拜佛、誦經，卻很少去反省自己內心的動機到底是什麼。我們必須明白：供養本身不會自動產生解脫的功德；只有當布施的行為能夠消除我們的自私心，它才能成為善根。同樣地，修行的關鍵不在於形式，而在於它是否帶來內心的轉變——把貪、瞋、癡，轉變成捨離、慈悲和智慧。

這讓我想起《六祖壇經》裏「法達法師」的故事。法達去參拜六祖，磕頭時頭不着地，態度很傲慢，因為他覺得自己已經誦了三千部《法華經》。熟悉這部經的人都知道，這是很大的功夫。但六祖卻斥責他：「心迷法華轉，心悟轉法華。」意思是，如果你的心被傲慢迷住了，你就是被經文帶着轉；如果能領悟經文的真義，纔是你在轉動經文。

這就像針和線的關係：針可以引線織成衣服，但如果只有針沒有線，衣服還是做不成。《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》指出，單純的行為（比如供養、誦經、打坐）就像那根針，必須配合「清淨良善的意向」（也就是正思惟和智慧）這條線，才能把功德串聯起來，為我們鋪成佛的道路。

所以，一切修行，都必須以正思惟為基礎，才能成就真實的功德。阿彌陀佛！ ❀

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