

Three Levels of Understandings of Kamma

I. Introduction

1. "It is volition that I call action (*kamma*). Having willed, one performs an action through body, speech, or mind."
2. There are three gradual levels of how one's volitions are reflected. First; one understands kamma on a mundane level.
Secondly; one understands kamma on a supra-mundane level.
Third; there is another level on which one abides neither in the samsaric world as unenlightened beings do, nor detaches oneself from the samsaric world and abides in nirvana.

II. The Mundane Level of Understanding Kamma

A. The definition of kamma

B Understanding kamma on the mundane level

1. Taking responsibility for one's actions

Understanding the law of the kamma is the understanding of "**the ownership of action**" (*kammassakata sammaditthi*)

All beings are the owners of their deeds, the heirs of their deeds: their deeds are the womb from which they sprang, with their deeds they are bound up, their deeds are their refuge. Whatever deeds they do-good or evil-of such they will be the heirs.

2. It is also necessary to understand: (i) the ethical distinction of kamma into the unwholesome and the wholesome; (ii) the principal cases of each type; and (iii) the roots from which these actions spring.

(ii) The ten courses of unwholesome and wholesome action:

1. Destroying life
2. Taking what is not given
3. Wrong conduct in regard to sense pleasures
4. False speech
5. Slandorous speech
6. Harsh speech
7. Idle chatter
8. Covetousness
9. Ill will
10. Wrong view

The ten courses of wholesome kamma are the opposites of these.

(iii) Meaning of roots (*mula*).

The roots are threefold for each set.

The unwholesome roots-- greed, aversion, and delusion.

The three wholesome roots : non-greed (*alobha*), non-aversion (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*).

Non-greed implies renunciation, detachment, and generosity; non-aversion implies loving-kindness, sympathy, and gentleness; and non-delusion implies wisdom.

2. How to reflect on one's actions

[The Buddha:] "What do you think, Rahula: What is a mirror for?"

[Rahula:] "For reflection, sir."

[The Buddha:] "In the same way, Rahula, bodily acts, verbal acts, and mental acts are to be done with repeated reflection.

"Whenever you want to perform a bodily act, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily act I want to perform — would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily act with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily act of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then any bodily act of that sort is fit for you to do.

"While you are performing a bodily act, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily act I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

"Having performed a bodily act, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily act with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities.

...[similarly for verbal and mental acts]...

"Rahula, all the priests and contemplatives in the course of the **past** who purified their bodily acts, verbal acts, and mental acts, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily acts, verbal acts, and mental acts in just this way.

"All the priests and contemplatives in the course of the **future**... All the priests and contemplatives at present who purify their bodily acts, verbal acts, and mental acts, do it through repeated reflection on their bodily acts, verbal acts, and mental acts in just this way.

"Therefore, Rahula, you should train yourself: 'I will purify my bodily acts through repeated reflection. I will purify my verbal acts through repeated reflection. I will purify my mental acts through repeated reflection.' Thus you should train yourself." (MN. 61)

III. The Supra-mundane Level of Understanding Kamma

1. Four Kinds of Kamma

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 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 the 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.” (AN. IV, 232)

2. Why should one abandon all the kamma, including the good kamma with good results?

3. How one abandons all kamma: by a penetrative understanding of Kamma

a. "And what is the conditioned origin of kamma? It is contact that is its conditioned origin.

"And what is the cessation of kamma? Through the cessation of contact there is cessation of kamma. (AN. VI, 131)

And it is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way leading to the cessation of kamma, namely right view, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. (AN. VI, 131)

b. What is 'contact'?

IV. Conclusion