**Half-Day Study Session on Karma**

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**The Day’s Schedule:**

**10 a.m.:**

1. Pass out handouts (study guide and sutta excerpts)
2. Introductions (names, in the sitting circle)

**10:00- 11:00 a.m.:** using the study guide and sutta hand-outs:

1. Intro: Why study the Karma?
2. Read the four sutta excerpts
3. The roles of Intention and Conditions

**11:15 -11:25 a.m.:** bio break and snack

**11:25-12:30**

1. Rebirth and Choices in the Bardo
2. Q&A and Discussion

**12:30-1:00 p.m.:** Lunch in noble silence

**1:00-1:25:** Working with karma

**1:25-2:00:** Q&A and Discussion

**Materials used in the preparation of this material:**

* Most of the sutta excerpts except where noted are from the ***Majima Nikaya*** (MN), ***The Middle Length Discourses***, translated by Bhikku Bodhi and Bhikkhu Nanamoli.
* ***In the Buddha’s Words***, an anthology of suttas from the Pali Cannon, translated and selected by Bhikku Bodhi.
* ***Karma: What it is, What it Isn’t, and Why it Matters***, by Traleg Kyabgon.
* ***What the Buddha Thought*** by Richard Gombrich.
* ***Early Buddhism: A New Approach***by Sue Hamilton.
* ***Mindfulness,*** by Joseph Goldstein.
* ***Shantideva’s Guide to Awakening***, commentary by Yeshe Tobden.

# Why Study Karma?

"Student,” said the Buddha in suttas MN 135 and 136, among many others, “[B]eings are owners of their karmas, heirs of their karmas, they have karmas as their progenitor, karmas as their kin, karmas as their homing-place. It is karmas that differentiate beings according to inferiority and superiority." For our time, we can if we wish, understand “inferiority and superiority” as “the quality of our lives and character.”

The study of karma strongly supports the Four Noble Truths:

1. There is suffering,

2. there is a cause of suffering (clinging/craving),

3. there is a way out of suffering,

4. which is by following and developing the Eightfold Path of ethical behavior, meditation, and concentration.

In Pali, the word often translated as “suffering” is “*dukkha.”* Suffering is also sometimes translated as “unsatisfactoriness” and refers in particular to the mental and emotional suffering or stress by caused clinging and craving – the second arrow, as it were. Clinging and craving may themselves be further defined as the ways in which we ruminate on (i.e. cling to or push away) things we like and don’t like and crave what we desire. Further, clinging and craving are mental formations often infused with ignorance (i.e. delusion), which can create additional suffering.

Karma, as we will shortly see as we read and parse through the suttas, is most commonly translated as “action.” Suffering is caused by unskillful or harmful actions of body, speech and mind (Truths 1 and 2). And the way out of suffering (Truth 4) is to follow the 8-fold path which teaches us to cultivate and maintain skillful, ethical actions and practices.

Kyagbon, pp. 42, “….[K]arma is vitally linked to Buddhism’s goal of reducing suffering; and the more we understand how we create karma, the greater the chance we have of achieving this [reducing our suffering].”

# Defining and Describing

To begin, let’s read through the sutta excerpts passed out earlier:

1. MN 57, *The Dog-duty Ascetic (Kukkuravatika Sutta)*
2. MN 41*: The Brahmans of Sala (Saleyyaka Sutta)*
3. MN 136: *The Greater Exposition of Kamma*
4. MN 98: *Vasettha Sutta (same as SN 3.9)*

Notice the emphasis on Right View and Right Conduct – over and over, the Buddha emphasizes that karma is action of body, speech and mind that has consequences according to its quality of its being beneficial or harmful.

## The Role of Intention

Kyabgon, pp. 57: “…the correct approach to karma, to cause and effect, is not to think of it too mechanically. We should not think that when we do something, we promptly and automatically experience the consequences. Rather we need to look at the different aspects of our lives, at what we might call the ‘fabric’ of our karmic existence, as it interweaves with the warp and weft of action. It does not evolve in isolation, but in a dynamic context. Nor is it a form of fatalism, or determinism, or an ideological vehicle for accepting one’s lot in life. Karmic theory is actually meant to give the opposite message, to encourage us to become even more determined to improve ourselves and move forward. Motivation [i.e. intention] is critical to the whole idea.”

Goldstein, in *Mindfulness*, on pp 186, explains, “It is the motivation associated with the intention behind the action that determines the particular karmic fruit of the action, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Although there can be many different motives underlying our actions, they can all be traced back to one of the three wholesome or three unwholesome roots: the wholesome ones are non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, and the unwholesome ones are greed, hatred and delusion.” And, “Although motivation determines the result, it is the volitional [i.e. the intentional”] nature of the act that provides the karmic energy.”

Goldstein in *Mindfulness* notes that the *Abhidhamma,* early Buddhist commentary and elucidation of the suttas, identifies 14 unwholesome factors of mind including g the main three (greed, aversion and delusion) as well as “shamelessness, fearlessness of wrongdoing,” the five hindrances and others. Of these, “four…are always present in every unwholesome consciousness: delusion, shamelessness, lack of fear of wrongdoing, and restlessness.” Goldstein suggests that it be these four in particular that we look for in our minds when we are about to do something unwholesome (or after, if we can’t catch it before).

Here are two examples of how intention and action interact from my own life. Cat and relative.

From Sue Hamilton, in *Early Buddhism: A New Approach,* pp. 63: “It is the intention behind all of our actions, [the Buddha] said, whether they be affected mentally, verbally, or bodily, that is consequential…. [Another] way of putting it is that one persists in the cycle of lives because one’s intentions produce consequences for us, and another way of putting it is that unsatisfactoriness persists because of one’s cravings.”

And: “*Intentions [tanha] and cravings [cetane] are simply different words used to point to the fact that the fuel of continuity [samsara] as we know it arises from the affective matrix of one’s state of mind*.”

From Gombrich, pp. 13: “The Buddha taught that all thoughts, words and deeds derive their moral value, positive or negative, from the intention behind them... Morality and immorality are mental properties of individuals. Metaphorically [in the Indian religious milieu of the time], they were often referred to as purity and impurity. Each good deed makes a person purer and thus makes it slightly easier to repeat such a deed… The same applies to bad qualities, such as cruelty. An intention, carried out, becomes a propensity.”

Hence the proverb: “Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

As we read on, we will return again to intention and deepen our understanding of how intention interacts with causes and conditions.

## Causes and Conditions

In the *Words of the Buddha*, from the chapter on “The Way to a Fortunate Rebirth,” P. 146., Bhikkhu Bodhi writes, “It may seem that our deeds, once performed, perish and vanish without leaving behind any traces apart from their visible impact on other people and our environment. However, according to the Buddha, all morally determinate volitional actions create a potential to bring forth results (*vipaka*) or fruits (*phala*) that correspond to the ethical quality of those actions. This capacity of our deeds to produce morally appropriate results is what is meant by ‘kamma.’ …. when internal and external conditions are suitable, the kamma ripens and produces the appropriate fruits. In ripening, the kamma rebounds upon us for good or for harm depending on the moral quality of the original actions.”

Tobden, pp. 138. “The causes of the life we are living now are ignorance, action, consciousness, attachment, craving, and existence – all causal links accumulated in previous lives. This life began with conception in the maternal womb, the development of the fetus, the subsequent development of the sensory organs, and contact. From contact, feeling came into being, and now we are experiencing the process of aging, which started at the beginning of life and will end at death. Thus, the seeds of our current lives are a group of … causal links that are bearing fruit in the present. In this life, too, we accumulate more [seeds] for future lives….”

In the suttas, the Buddha often used the analogy of a seedling growing into a plant to explain the mechanics of karma. Kyabgon, responding to that analogy, says, on pp. 34. “First, the right environment has to be present for a seed to sprout – the right (for each seedling) amount of moisture, sun, soil conditions, and so on – and yet even then its germination cannot be accurately determined, nor can the duration of the event. And it is possible that the seed will produce no effect whatsoever….There are all kinds of variables in the analogy, which point to karma’s not being a one-to-one mechanical kind of operation.”

For example, “A thought that comes into our head when our mood is low, for instance, or when we are depressed, will be contaminated by that mood. Even positive thoughts that crop up will manage to a have a negative slant put on them, and this is how karma works. The karmic seed is planted, and then, depending on the conditions, the seed may remain dormant for an extended period of time, or it may germinate in a shorter period of time. Therefore, the effect does not have to be a direct copy of the cause, so to speak….There is variance involved….”

On Karma as process: pp. 40: As we explored in the last study session on the Five Aggregates, the Buddha “interpreted the individual as a compound of many different elements, physical and mental – a psycho-physical complex. Therefore, our feelings, thoughts, emotions, memories, dispositions; our perceptual capability, our cognitive capacities, and our physical conditions – all are constantly interacting and impacting each other.

“And agents [beings who act] themselves are also continually interacting with other agents. [Thus] karma could be said to operate as streams of networking karmic processes, where all kinds of living, breathing individuals are involved.”

***Put another way: Karmic outcomes result from and interact with conditions inside and outside ourselves.***

Kyabgon, pp. 41: “This interconnectedness of everything is termed ‘interdependent arising’ in Buddhism. As everything is interdependently arisen, we do not have the perspective of a solitary agent performing a variety of actions but a complex multifaceted individual engaged with many diverse roles, intersecting with a very complex world. This is the real core of it all and is really what is behind the great emphasis on the practice of mindfulness and awareness, for if things were simple in themselves, there would be no real need of paying too much attention to them.”

Other elements in the cause and effect matrix:

Kyabgon, pp 37. “Yet not everything we experience is due to karma, which is another novel aspect to the Buddha’s thinking, and a somewhat neglected one…. We can experience things we are not responsible for. In the end, it is the way we deal with things that counts, which is a reflection of character.”

Kyabgon, p 50: “…an element of luck or fortune is allowed for….” and, pp. 52, “The role of mitigating circumstances is similar to that of intention…. For example, if we did a good deed and felt some misgivings or regret about it, then the merit attached to the good deed would be diminished. Conversely, if we performed a terrible, or even evil, deed but felt regret after the fact, then the profoundly negative karmic consequences that might accrue would be diminished.” And, “Doing something in ignorance does not have the same effect as an action performed with intent.”

### Summation of Causes and Conditions

* Karma is not one thing but a mix of these things: Intention + Action + conditions inside and outside ourselves + ripening/outcome = Karmic process
* Causes and conditions are unstable and always changing, which is why cause and effect are not always or even often linear.
* Streams of conditions are always and simultaneously interacting with other streams of conditions.
* Karmic outcomes are not pre-determined or static; by making better choices, we can reborn into better subsequent moments, hours, days, weeks, lives, etc. [all subject to numerous other conditions].

## Q & A/Discussion on Intention and Conditions

[About 20 minutes] Questions/comments about anything we’ve read or discussed so far?

# On Rebirth and Reincarnation

In the moment: I like this line from T.S. Eliot’s the *Four Quartets*: every moment, he says, “is a new and shocking valuation of all we have been.”

Kyagbon says that the Buddhist view of rebirth can be understood as a middle view between nihilism of the self (nothing of an “I” remains after death) and eternalism of the self (our soul remains after death). This view of rebirth, he says, “is an alternative to [the other views], which is not to say it is superior.”

Kyagbon, pp. 42-43. “Essentially, reincarnation refers to …. the same person coming back [in a different body] in another life, and this involves the idea of there being an intrinsic self…” In contrast, “For the Buddha, we are the same and not the same at different stages of life, and similarly, in respect to rebirth, coming back under karmic compulsion, it is not really ‘us.’ ***Consciousness is pushed along by certain dispositions that have become transferred to our mental continuum, and these tendencies are brought along to our new birth.***

## The “Stored Consciousness” View of Rebirth

There is an ancient Indian notions of a “storehouse consciousness” (*alayavijnana*) that seems to have been folded into the Buddhist view of karma to address the question of: if there is no self, then what is reborn? The answer: a “storehouse consciousness” that is a “repository of all our karmic traces and dispositions” that transmigrates from one life to the next.

Kyagbon, pp. 61-63. “The storehouse consciousness is not a permanent entity but does nevertheless persist over a period of time, and because of this, it is able to retain karmic impressions. These impressions, or psychic energy deposits, that carry over are termed *vasanas*. In traditional literature, a *vasana* is described by the analogy of putting something very smelly, like an unwashed pair of socks, into a drawer. If we were to leave it for months, upon opening the drawer, we would most likely be overwhelmed by the smell. Even throwing them out and doing our utmost to remove the smell seems to have only a marginal effect – the next time the drawer is opened, the smell is still there.”

“In a similar way, karmic impressions are said to be stored in the *alayavijnana*…which retains the impressions, or the so-called perfume of the vasanas….It is the [*alayavijnana*] which transports karmic traces and dispositions to another life.”

## Choices (Mental Actions) in the Bardo

Kyagbon, pp. 65. “Another category of teachings from Tibetan Buddhism that relates strongly to karma and rebirth is the bardo teachings….These teachings can be found most readily in the famous *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as it is known in the West.”

“’Bardo’ basically means a ‘gap,’ or ‘intermediate stage,’ and there are different kinds, though four are commonly spoken of.” In contrast, the Theravadan position is that rebirth happens shortly after death.

Currently, according to this teaching, we are in the “Bardo of Life,” which occurs from birth to death. The instructions and advice in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* address in depth the other three stages and substages and are too involved to go into here; they go deep into what is happening in our bodies and consciousnesses as we die. There are detailed instructions on what to pay attention to and what not to pay attention to. And there is advice on how to choose a new rebirth carefully. Has anyone here read George Saunders’ ***Lincoln in the Bardo***?

If our mind is not clear and contains delusions born of our ignorance, willed and unwilled, we are more likely to make poor choices during the rebirth process and be born into a more troubled rebirth. Hence, karma plays an important role here, too. The more we cultivate a mind clear of the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion, the clearer and less frightened we will be during the dying process and as we are transitioning to a new birth. Also, the more frightened we are of dying and death – and the more we resist it – the more likely we are to make poor choices and take rebirth too quickly and recklessly because we want to hurry through the death-and-dying bardos because they are uncomfortable.

Kyagbon, pp. 71: “The bardo teachings as a whole, then, are meant to instruct the practitioner in two fundamental things: death is not something to be feared and after-death experiences can be utilized for our own benefit. Not only is death not to be feared, it needs to be appreciated as affording us an opportunity for transformation. It signifies a freedom from all the constraints that contain us while alive: family obligations, social connections, physical impediments, emotional problems, and so forth.”

## Choices (Mental Actions) at the Time of Death

In all forms of Buddhism, the moment of death and the minutes leading up to death are extremely important times to practice.

Kyabgon, pp. 35: “…of all the mentation [thinking, creating and reacting to mental formations] done in our life, of paramount importance is what we think about at the time of our death. What is addressed here is the quality and depth of our sincerity as we ‘take stock’ of our life: reflecting and reviewing our past, regretting certain things, wishing we could have done better here and there….Even though there is nothing to be done at this stage, it is important to reflect in this manner.”

Other things to reflect about at time of death: “A Buddhist might reflect on appreciating the Buddha and his teachings…on opportunities to practice meditation,” on times we were helpful or kind to others. “Thinking these thoughts, according to Buddhism, significantly mitigates the circumstances of one’s life. Of course, the opposite type of attitude, that of bitterness, is very unfortunate.”

### Lunch!

30 minutes for silent eating and clean up.

Resume at 1 p.m.

# Working with Karma

Working with karma involves making choices at the intention stage, the action stage, and conditions/mitigating circumstances stage, and the outcome/ripening stage.

Kyagbon, pp. 107. “…real moral or ethical values have to emerge from within, and this is really the basis of karmic theory…Buddhism…teaches the wholesome or beneficial thing to do, not what is right or wrong. We ask ourselves, ‘What is the beneficial thing to do for ourselves and others?’ and ‘What is the least wholesome thing?’”

Kyagbon, pp. 112. “Clearly, for the Buddha, psychology and morality go together. What we think about, what we feel, what we dream about, our plans for life, and the sort of things we expect of ourselves—all these things are significant, because as human beings, we use symbols to represent reality….It is in fact the lack of attention to the psychological aspect of what is unfolding in our actions and observations that causes so much of the difficulty experienced in our lives.” Thus, if we pay more attention to what is going on in our minds, and work with it, we can transform our actions into ones more beneficial for ourselves and others.

Kyagbon, pp. 135. “In terms of prioritizing our actions, should we decide to work with our karma, we first focus on reducing negative karma. We refrain from certain actions, the actions we have identified as most harmful.”

So one fruitful area of inquiry might be to make a list of your most harmful actions. I’ve spent time considering my most harmful actions and thoughts over the course of my life – what they were/are, what they might came out of in me, and what more wholesome practices I can use to mitigate or not repeat them.

Should you do so, it is important to do this skillfully within the mind, being compassionate with oneself, not taking a punitive approach. I also wrote up a “failure C.V.” a few months ago and spent some time thinking about the thoughts and actions that led to those failures, by omission or commission, some of which were important to me and would have benefited me.

Kyagbon, pp. 139-140. “There is nothing wrong with thoughts, emotions, and feelings, but particular varieties have the capacity to disrupt our balance and confuse our mind, rendering us incapable of fully appreciating what is going on.”

“Fixation on the self leads to all manner of undesirable behaviors and outcomes. It leads to the path of self-destruction because we choose to think things that are clearly not helpful, harbor feelings we should not, and arrange activities that are clearly misguided.” All of which helps to create and reinforce harmful patterns that keep us looped in a negative cycle of samsara.

## What Generates Harmful Karma?

Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp. 146. “…unwholesome kamma is action that is spiritually detrimental to the agent, morally reprehensible, and potentially productive of an unfortunate rebirth and painful results. The criterion for judging an action to be unwholesome is its underlying motives, the ‘roots’ from which it springs.” Three primary roots: greed, hatred, and delusion. Secondary defilements: anger, hostility, envy, selfishness, arrogance, pride, presumption, irritability, and laziness.

So in sum, what generates harmful karma? [creates suffering] Two primary factors are:

* Unethical behavior
* Undisciplined emotional reactions

## What Generates Beneficial Karma?

Kyabgon, pp 30: “Through introspection, through introspective analysis one might say, Buddha discovered a way of coming to an understanding of our own nature through looking at its different elements. So for instance, we observe our body to determine how the body functions, and similarly, our feelings to see how they operate, and our perceptions to learn how we perceive things. We observe our dispositions and our volitional tendencies to determine how to continue toward the creation of certain mixed habits, and so on. …Observations of this nature are the basis for insight meditation (vipassana). [In practicing it] we are not simply engaged in passive observation but also in making connections and interconnections, observing how various factors impact each other – for instance, how our feelings are actually guiding what we see….by making connections of this kind, we come to understand how things are actually working.”

Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp. 146. “Wholesome kamma, on the other hand, is action that is spiritually beneficial and morally commendable; it is action that ripens in happiness and good fortune.” Its underlying roots are: nongreed, nonhatred, and non-delusion. Its outward characteristics include generosity, loving-kindness, joy, equanimity, and wisdom.

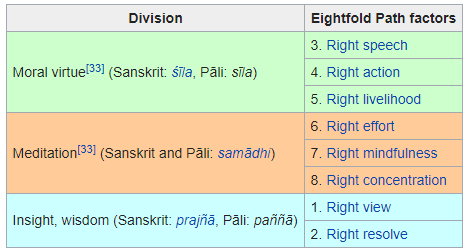
In sum, what generates beneficial karma? [reduces suffering]

* Ethical behavior
* Careful, disciplined emotional responses
* Cultivating and practicing wholesome qualities within and without the mind such as the Brahma Viharas (generosity, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity)
* Studying and practicing the Noble Eightfold Path.

### About the Eightfold Path

As we saw in the suttas we read, the Buddha put great emphasis on Right View, Right Speech, and Right Action, all of which are steps on the Noble Eightfold Path, a summary of which is shown in the following image. Note that the eight steps are grouped into three categories:

* **Moral Virtue or Sila**: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.
* **Meditation:** Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.
* **Insight/Wisdom**: Right View and Right Resolve (Intention).



A few definitions related to our study today:

* **Right View**: understanding that our actions have consequences, and understanding the importance of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.
* **Right Resolve or Intention**: Development of an internal environment of non-attachment, non-ill-will, toward loving kindness of all beings, away from cruelty and toward compassion for self and others.
* **Right Conduct or Action**: no killing or injuring, no taking what is not given, no harmful sexual activities, no material desires, don’t abuse intoxicants; the 5 Precepts.
* **Right Effort**: preventing the arising of unwholesome states, and generating the arising wholesome states. See the teaching on the Four Right Efforts.

For an excellent intro to the Eightfold Path, see Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teachings*.

Kyagbon, pp. 54: “Patience holds a primary place in the practice of *sila*. …Shantideva [author of the *Way of the Bodhisattyva*]…states… that patience is one of the most worthy of virtues to cultivate, more so than love and compassion, because, according to him, if we have patience, love and compassion will surely arise in turn. Patience in this regard does not mean that we take things slowly but that when things go wrong, we do not feel defeated. Patience and effort in fact make each other bigger; they are paired together, operating in tandum….”

Kyabgon, pp. 30: In response to the Brahmin karma sutta, MN 98, that we read earlier: “Buddha’s basic point was that we become noble through deed. Therefore, by developing good character, and cultivating the necessary mental and spiritual factors, we become in fact, noble. Even a poor, powerless person, if he or she leads a dignified way of life, is noble; and conversely, a rich powerful person leading an undignified life is ignoble.”

Kyabgon, pp. 100: “To be enlightened is to be two things: to have [fewer] emotional afflictions and to have mental clarity. This is achieved through the practice of meditation and through the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness…. At the moment, right now, there may be a lot of confusions, delusions, and obscurations, but this mind, through a process, can become more aware, more conscious, and more insightful, precisely because it is changing.”

# Best Karma: No Karma

Kyabgon, pp. 73: “Both kinds of karma [negative and positive] lead to rebirth, and it is the exhaustion of our karmic propensities and tendencies that is the ultimate aim.”

For example, in the last paragraph of MN 57, the Dog-Duty Ascetic sutta: the ideal is to create neither bright nor dark karma and neither mixed karma (bright and dark karma with dark and bright ripening). Then there is nothing to ripen and one is free to experience nirvana.

Kyabgon, pp. 82: “…karmic theory is not really designed to simply encourage people to create good karma and avoid the negative – to lead a moral life in other words. Liberation comes from shedding both kinds of shackles. Traditionally, negative karma is likened to being chained in iron shackles and positive karma in gold shackles. Even in gold shackles, we are not free; so to be free from all shackles is genuine freedom. This is stated in the original [Pali] discourses of the Buddha as well as in the Mahayana [teachings].”

Kyabgon, pp. 146 on the mind without karma: “Although buddhas may be acting and reacting and functioning like normal human beings, the thoughts in their mind are in fact like clouds—clouds come and go, but they leave no trace. Unlike them, as normal human beings, our thoughts are like the footprints we leave on the beach that get washed away somewhat but still can be seen in the outline of the sand; they are still there. Clouds, however, leave no trace of their movement. Similarly, a buddhas thoughts, feelings, and emotions are like clouds, coming and going and doing their job, but the experience leaves no trace. This is what we, as Buddhists, are aiming toward, why karma and rebirth are so important.”

## Final Q & A and Discussion

# Sutta Excerpts on Karma

**Excerpts from the suttas on Karma**

All excerpts except where noted are from Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Nanamoli’s translation of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. In Pali, this is called the *Mijjima Nikaya* (MN).

* Quick word on Pali and Sanskrit; kamma vs karma; sutta vs. sutra].
* The structure of the excerpt title format used: sutta number followed by name in English and Pali

**Suttas excerpted in this guide:**

* MN 57, *The Dog-duty Ascetic (Kukkuravatika Sutta)*
* MN 41*: The Brahmans of Sala (Saleyyaka Sutta)*
* MN 136: *The Greater Exposition of Karma*
* MN 98: *Vasettha Sutta (same as SN 3.9)*

From ***MN 57: The Dog-duty Ascetic*** ***(Kukkuravatika Sutta)***

(On the four kinds of karma)

**Setting**: Punna, the Ox-duty ascetic and Seniya, the dog-duty ascetic, come to ask the Buddha about their fate after death if they continue to practice their respective duties diligently and stringently. The Buddha delivers the bad news that even if they practice such duties ardently, etc., they will either end up reborn in a hell realm or in the womb of another animal. This upsets them and they inquire about the way to a good rebirth.

The Buddha says:

8. "Punna, **there are four kinds of karma proclaimed by me after realization myself with direct knowledge**. What are the four?

* **There is dark karma with dark ripening**,
* **bright karma with bright ripening**,
* **dark-and-bright karma with dark-and-bright ripening**, and
* **there is karma that is not dark and not bright with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening that conduces to the exhaustion of karma**.

9. **"What is dark karma with dark ripening?** Here someone produces a (karmic) **bodily process** (bound up) with affliction, he produces a (karmic) **verbal process (**bound up) with affliction, he produces a (karmic) **mental process** (bound up) with affliction. By so doing, he reappears in a world with affliction. [And] he feels afflicting feelings entirely painful…. Thus a being's reappearance is due **owing to the karmas he has performed. Thus I say are beings heirs of their karmas.** This is called dark karma with dark ripening.

10. "**And what is bright karma with bright ripening?** Here someone produces a (karmic) bodily process **not (bound up)** with affliction, he produces a (karmic) verbal process **not (bound up)** with affliction, he produces a (karmic) mental process **not (bound up)** with affliction. By doing so, he reappears in a world without affliction. Thus I say are beings heirs of their karmas… This is called bright karma with bright ripening.

11. "**What is dark-and-bright karma with dark-and-bright ripening?** Here someone produces a (karmic) **bodily process** **both** (bound up) with affliction **and not** (bound up) with affliction... **verbal process**... **mental process** both (**bound up**) with affliction **and** **not (bound up)** with affliction. By doing so, he reappears in a world both with and without affliction. **When that happens, both afflicting and unafflicting contacts touch him. Being touched by these, he feels afflicting and unafflicting feelings with mingled pleasure and pain as in the case of human beings and some gods and some inhabitants of the states of deprivation…** This is called dark-and-bright karma with dark-and-bright ripening.

12. "**What is neither-dark-nor-bright karma with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening that leads to the exhaustion of karma**? As to these: any volition in abandoning the kind of karma that is dark with dark ripening….the kind of karma that is bright with bright ripening, and …. the kind of karma that is dark-and bright with dark-and-bright ripening: this is called neither-dark-nor-bright karma with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening. [i.e. it’s the end of karma].

"These are the four kinds of karma proclaimed by me after realization myself with direct knowledge."

Excerpts from ***MN 41: The Brahmans of Sala (Saleyyaka Sutta)***

(On the different qualities of life experienced by humans due to Right View and Wrong View; on Harmful Conduct and Beneficial or Non-harming Conduct)

4. “When they were seated, the Brahmans [who were householders] said to the Blessed One: ‘Master Gotama, what is the reason, what is the condition, why some beings here, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination… and what is the reason, what is the condition, why some beings here, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world?"

7. "Householders, there are three kinds of **bodily conduct** not in accordance with the Dharma.... There are four kinds of **verbal conduct** not in accordance with the Dharma…. There are three kinds of **mental conduct** not in accordance with the Dharma….

8. "And how are there three kinds of **bodily conduct** not in accordance with the Dharma? Here someone is a killer of living beings: **he is murderous**, **given to blows and violence**… **He is a taker of what is not given**: he takes as a thief another's … property in the village or in the forest. **He is given over to misconduct in sexual desires**: he has intercourse with such (women) as are protected by their mother, father, brother, sister, relatives, …. husband …or [fiancé}… **That is how there are three kinds of bodily conduct not in accordance with the Dharma....**

9. "And how are there four kinds of **verbal conduct** not in accordance with the Dharma? Here someone **speaks falsehood**….He **speaks maliciously**; **he is thus a divider of the united, a creator of divisions, who enjoys discord** …. **He speaks harshly: he utters such words as are rough, hard, hurtful to others**…. **He is a gossip**: as one who tells …. that which is not fact, that which is not good, that which is not the Dharma… **That is how there are four kinds of verbal conduct not in accordance with the Dharma…**.

10. "And how are there **three kinds of mental conduct** not in accordance with the Dharma? Here **someone is covetous**: he is a coveter of another's … property …. **Or he has a mind of ill-will,** with the intention of a mind affected by hate…. **Or he has wrong view**, distorted vision, [does not see or practice the Dharma and related teachings]. **That is how there are three kinds of mental conduct not in accordance with the Dharma….**

11. "Householders, **there are three kinds of bodily conduct [that are] in accordance with the Dharma…**There are **four kinds of verbal conduct in accordance with the Dharma....** There are **three kinds of mental conduct** in accordance with the Dharma….

12. "And how are there three kinds of **bodily conduct** in accordance with the Dharma? Here someone, **abandoning the killing of living beings … he abides compassionate to all living beings**. **Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he becomes one who abstains from taking what is not given….Abandoning misconduct in sexual desires, he becomes one who abstains from misconduct in sexual desires**….**That is how there are three kinds of bodily conduct in accordance with the Dharma….**

13. "And how are there four kinds of **verbal conduct** in accordance with the Dharma? Here someone, **abandoning false speech, becomes one who abstains from false speech….Abandoning malicious speech, he becomes one who abstains from malicious speech**, **who is thus a reuniter of the divided, a promoter of friendships, enjoying concord, rejoicing in concord …**. **Abandoning harsh speech, he becomes one who abstains from harsh speech….Abandoning gossip, he becomes one who abstains from gossip;** he speaks ….[that] which is reasoned, definite and connected with good. **That is how there are four kinds of verbal conduct in accordance with the Dharma....**

14. "And how are there three kinds of **mental conduct** in accordance with the Dharma…? Here **someone is not covetous**…. **He has no mind of ill-will,** with the intention of a mind unaffected by hate. **He has right view, undistorted vision, thus [and lives in accordance with the Dharma and related teachings]. That is how there are three kinds of mental conduct in accordance with the Dharma....**

"So, householders**, *it is by reason of conduct*** ***in accordance with the Dharma***, by reason of [right/beneficial/harmless] conduct, that some beings here, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world.”

**MN 136: The Greater Exposition of Karma (Mahakarmavibhanga Sutta)**

**(On Mixed Outcomes and the undetermined ripening of karma)**

Setting: “1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rajagaha, in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Place. The venerable monk Samiddhi and the wanderer Potaliputta were discussing karma and became confused. They both approached the Buddha for clarification. The Buddha then gives his Great Exposition of Karma which is based upon four "types" of people and karmic outcomes:

* the evil-doer who goes to hell (or some other low state of birth)
* the evil-doer who goes to heaven
* the good man who goes to heaven, and
* the good man who goes to hell (or some other low birth).

**The Great Exposition of Karma**

15. (i) "Now.… 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….But (perhaps) the evil karma producing his suffering was done by him earlier, or … 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, etc. But since he has killed living beings here...[and] has had wrong view*,* ***he will feel the result of that here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence.***

16. (ii) "Now … 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 karma producing his happiness was done by him earlier, or … 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…. 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. (iii) "Now … **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 karma producing his happiness was done by him earlier, or … 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, etc. **But (perhaps) the evil karma producing his suffering was done by him earlier, or … 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, etc. 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.***

From ***MN 98, Vasettha Sutta*** (contents are the same as Samutta Nikaya (SN) 3.9)

(Sutta on Karma as Action; on Character conditioning Action)

Setting: Two brahmin students, Vasettha and Bharadvaja, are arguing about what makes a Brahmin (action or inheritance, meaning one is born into it). In the developing social and religious milieu of the time [which still deeply informs the social and economic Indian culture of today], a Brahmin is of the highest, most privileged caste. A person’s caste is unchanging in Hindu culture in villages and rural areas throughout India even to this day – if you are born to the lowest caste, you stay a member of that all your life, as do your children, and there are many many restrictions on whom you can talk and interact with and what you can do for a living and where you can live. Because the two brahmin students could not agree on what makes a Brahmin, they went to the Blessed One and asked for his opinion on the matter.

*Vasettha says to the Buddha:*

“2. We have attained full mastery

Over all that the Vedic experts teach;

Skilled in philology and grammar

We match our teachers in discussion.

3. A dispute has arisen between us, Gotama,

Concerning the question of birth and class:

Bharadvaja says one is a brahmin by birth,

While I hold one is a brahmin by action.

Know this, O Seer, as our debate.

6. So now we ask of you, Gotama,

The eye uprisen in the world:

Is one a brahmin by birth or action?

Explain to us who do not know

How we should recognize a brahmin."

*The* *Buddha replies:*

7. "I will explain [things] to you as they really are,

Vasettha,” said the Blessed One….

[in the 7 subsequent stanzas, the Buddha

delineates what makes each animal,

reptile, and fish unique….]

14. "…

With humans, no differences of birth

Make a distinctive mark in them.

15. Nor in the hairs nor in the head

Nor in the ears nor in the eyes

Nor in the mouth nor in the nose

Nor in the lips nor in the brows…

18. In human bodies in themselves

Nothing distinctive can be found.

Distinction [such as race and caste] among human beings

Is purely a verbal designation.

19. "Who makes his living among men

By agriculture, you should know

Is called a farmer;

He is not a brahmin.

20. Who makes his living among men

By varied crafts, you should know

Is called a craftsman;

He is not a brahmin.

22. Who makes his living among men

By merchandise, you should know

Is called a merchant;

He is not a brahmin.

23. Who makes his living among men

By serving others, you should know

Is called a servant;

He is not a brahmin.

24. Who makes his living among men

By stealing, you should know

Is called a robber;

He is not a brahmin.

25. Who makes his living among men

By archery, you should know

Is called a soldier;

He is not a brahmin.

26. Who makes his living among men

By priestly craft, you should know

Is called a chaplain;

He is not a brahmin.

27. Whoever governs among men

The town and realm, you should know

Is called a ruler;

He is not a brahmin.

28. "I call him not a brahmin

Because of his origin and lineage.

If impediments still lurk in him,

He is just one who says 'Sir.'

**[One} Who is unimpeded and clings no more:**

**He is the one I call a brahmin.**

30. Who endures without a trace of hate

Abuse, violence, and bondage too,

With strength of patience well arrayed:

He is the one I call a brahmin.

31. Who does not flare up with anger,

Dutiful, virtuous, and humble,

Subdued, bearing his final body:

He is the one I call a brahmin.

36. Who has laid aside the rod

Against all beings frail or bold,

Who does not kill or have them killed:

He is the one I call a brahmin.

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38. Who has dropped all lust and hate,

Dropped conceit and contempt,

Like mustard seed on the point of an awl:

He is the one I call a brahmin.

39. Who utters speech free from harshness,

Full of meaning, ever truthful,

Which does not damage anyone:

He is the one I call a brahmin.

40. Who in the world will never take

What is not given, long or short,

Small or big or fair or foul:

He is the one I call a brahmin…

55. "For name and clan are assigned

As mere designations in the world;

Originating in conventions,

They are assigned here and there.

56. For those who do not know this fact,

Wrong views have long underlain their hearts;

Not knowing, they declare to us:

'One is a brahmin by birth.'

57. One is not a brahmin by birth,

Nor by birth a non-brahmin.

**By action is one a brahmin,**

**By action is one a non-brahmin.**

58. For men are farmers by their acts,

And by their acts are craftsmen too;

And men are merchants by their acts,

And by their acts are servants too.

59. And men are robbers by their acts,

And by their acts are soldiers too;

And men are chaplains by their acts,

And by their acts are rulers too.

**60. "So that is how the truly wise**

**See action as it really is,**

**Seers of dependent origination,**

**Skilled in action and its results.**

**61. Action makes the world go round,**

**Action makes this generation turn.**

**Living beings are bound by action**

**Like the chariot wheel by the pin.**

….“When this was said, the brahmin students …. said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! From today let Master Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone to him for refuge for life."