

A SURVEY OF BUDDHIST KAMMA

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“*Buddhist philosophy is an epistemological field and belongs to the direct aspect of wisdom enlightenment. The concepts of reincarnation, rebirth, and karma you have heard, make for you self-identify for yourself to ask a question, so refer to this research paper, a valuable study, a useful spiritual food to help you better understand the aspect of karma:*

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- Thich Giac Chinh, Chief Editor.

The Buddha's doctrine of *kamma* maintains the aspect of intentional action (*cetanā-kamma*), which can be investigated in the ordinary sensory level. According to this doctrine, intentional action is the primary factor which determines suffering (*dukkha*) or happiness (*sukha*) for the doer in this lifetime

and future. It does not limit misery or happiness within the dimensions of time.

The whole teaching of the Buddha is established essentially on the doctrine of the *Ariya Sacca* (the Four Noble Truths) and that of the *Paṭicca-samuppāda* (Dependent Origination). These teachings were realized by the Buddha himself from deep meditation.¹

Specially, the doctrine of *kamma* and rebirth has been originated from these essential doctrines and plays an important role in Buddhist ethics and individual moral responsibility. The Buddha realized this doctrine through two first insights on the night of his Awakening. It can be said that this teaching is represented in all walks of life.

II. 1. ***Cetanā* (intention, volition) is *kamma***

The content of the Buddha's enlightenment delineates his knowledge about

¹ These teachings realized by the Buddha at the night of his Enlightenment. See footnote No.3.

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kamma and rebirth. He also discovers the Four Noble Truths which can help beings to escape from the bondage of *kamma* and rebirth.²

It is through the first insight that (*Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: retro-cognition) the Buddha remembered his whole spans of past lives. The *Bhayabherava Sutta*³ (Fear and Dread) says:

“I recollected my manifold past lives, that is one birth, two births, third births, ... a hundred thousand births, many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion: ‘There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere, and there too I was so named, of such a clan, ... ; passing away from there, I reappeared here.’ Thus with their aspects and particulars I recollected my manifold past lives.”

² M. Bhayabherava Sutta (Fear and Dead), Sutta No. 4, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), United States, Boston: Wisdom Publication, p. 105f.

³ Ibid. p. 105.

In the second insight (*dibbacakkhu*: divine eye) of the Buddha’s Awakening, the picture of beings floating on the ocean of death and rebirth according to their *kamma* is illustrated. The *sutta* says:

“With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. I understood how beings pass on according to their actions thus: ‘These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of noble ones, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination, in perdition, even in hell; but these worthy beings who were well-conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of noble ones, right in their views giving effect to right view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world.’”⁴

⁴ M. Bhayabherava Sutta (Fear and Dead), Sutta No. 4, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1960) &

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In this passage, we see clearly the process of cause and effect of mental and physical action.

Good view (skill intention: *kusala cetanā*) will lead to good action (*kusala-kamma*). Owing to good action one will get comfort in this life as well as a state of good rebirth.

On the contrary, evil view (unskillful intention: *akusala cetanā*) will lead to evil action (*akusala kamma*). Because of evil action one gets suffering in this life and future life.

Volition (*cetanā*) manifests in man's will, behavior and actions. Its role is illustrated concisely in the first couple of verses of *Dhammapada*:

1. Phenomena are preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made of the heart.
If you speak or act with a
corrupted heart,
then suffering follows you --

as the wheel of the cart
follows
the track of the ox that pulls it.

2. Phenomena are preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made of the heart.
If you speak or act with a calm,
bright heart,
then happiness follows you,
like a shadow
that never leaves.⁵

It is also clear that the Buddha discovered the mind's role in the second insight (*dibbacakkhu*: divine eye). This discovery shows that mental functions dominate bodily and verbal functions. It is, in other words, the key agent in creating *kamma*. Thus, the Buddha has laid stress on the importance of intention or volition.

Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), United States, Boston: Wisdom Publication, p. 106.

⁵ DHP, No. 1-2, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Thanissaro (Reference to <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/khuddaka/dhp/index.html>)

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“I declare, O Bhikkhus, that volition (cetanā) is Kamma, having willed one acts by body, speech and thought.”⁶

“Housefather (Anāthapiṇḍika), when the thought is unguarded, bodily action also is unguarded; speech and mental action also are unguarded. In him whose bodily action, speech and mental action are unguarded they are saturated with lust. When these are thus saturated with lust they are rotten. When they are rotten one’s death is not auspicious, one has no happy ending.

But, housefather, when thought is guarded, bodily action is also guarded... In him whose bodily action and the rest are guarded, bodily action, speech and mental action are not saturated with lust. When that is so they are not rotten. When they are not rotten one’s death is auspicious, he has a happy ending.

Just as when a peaked house is well thatched, the peak, roof-beams and wall are protected, they are not saturated, they are not rotten; even so, housefather,

when thought is guarded... one has a happy ending.”⁷

On the other hand, *cetanā* is cause and condition for consciousness. Consciousness exists then rebirth comes to be.

“That which we will, brethren, and that which we intend to do and that wherewithal we are occupied:-this becomes an object for the persistence of consciousness (*kammaviññāṇa*). The object being there, there comes to be a station of consciousness. Consciousness being stationed and growing, rebirth of renewed existence takes place in the future, and here from birth, decay-and-death, grief... and despair come to pass. Such is the uprising of this entire mass of ill.”⁸

Cetanā is acknowledged as Buddhist *kamma* by Pāli Scholars.⁹ Gombrich writes: “the Buddha redefined of ‘action’ as ‘intention’

⁶ A. vol. iii, trans. from Pāli by E. M. Hare, London: PTS, rpt. 1988, p. 296. See also BHT. p. 349.

⁷ A. Vol. I, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1989, p. 240.

⁸ S. Vol.II, Nidāna-Vagga, Cetanāsuttam, trans. from the Pāli by Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS, rpt. 1992, p. 45.

⁹ See Paul James McDermott (1984), p. 26; L. De la Vallee Pousin, ‘*The Way to Nirvāna*’, Delhi 7: Sri Satguru Publications, rpt.1982, p. 68; Herbert V. Guenther (1971). p. 66; EB. Vol. IV, p. 89; Roy W. Perrett, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 15 (1987), p. 78; All of those Scholars inclined to define “kamma as exclusively cetanā (volition)” (*kammāham cetanaṃ vadāmi*).

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(*cetanā*)...” then he comments: “I do not see how one could exaggerate the importance of the Buddha’s ethicization of the world, which I regard as a turning point in the history of civilization.”¹⁰ Von Glasenapp’s statement is that intention determines decisively *kammic* reward or punishment.¹¹ Kenneth Ch’en states that intention was “a significant point” added by the Buddha to “the prevailing views concerning karma.”¹²

In fact, the concept of intention as the agent of action already existed in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14. What a man becomes on departing from here after death is in accordance with his resolve in this world. Likewise, *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4 says that a man’s actions are determined by his intention. These actions have an effect on what he becomes. The Buddha was not the first one in pointing out the connection between intention and *kamma*. However, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of the role of intention.¹³

¹⁰ HBB. p. 51.

¹¹ James Paul McDermott (1984). ‘*Development in the Early Buddhist Concept of Kamma/Karma*’, Delhi 110055: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. p. 28.

¹² Ch’en, *Buddhism: The light of Asia*, p. 32

¹³ James Paul McDermott (1984). ‘*Development in the Early Buddhist Concept of Kamma/Karma*’, Delhi 110055: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. p. 29.

II.2. Nature of *Kamma* and individual moral responsibility

According to the *Natumhasutta*,¹⁴ the entire body is a physical manifestation of *kamma*. *Kamma* relates to actions of the past, by plan, by volitions, by feelings. Thus, body is the appearance of former *kamma*, compounded, willed, and made sensitive.

“This body, brethren, is not your own, neither is it that of any others. It should be regarded as brought about by action of the past, by plans, by volition, by feelings.”¹⁵

And intentional actions comprise of body, speech, and mind at present will lead to results immediately in this life and the future. Therefore, beings are the owners of their *Kamma*, heir to their *Kamma*, born of their *Kamma*, related through their *Kamma*, and have their *Kamma* as their refuge.¹⁶ *Kamma* is what forms a variation among beings in terms of coarseness and purification...

The Buddha suggested his disciples:

¹⁴ S. Vol. II. *Nidānasamyutta*, trans. from the Pāli by Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS, rpt. 1994, p. 44.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 44.

¹⁶ Loc. Cit. M. Sutta No. 135. & See also A. Vol. III, V. 57, trans. from the Pāli by E. M. Hare, London: PTS, rpt. 1988. p. 59.

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“Monks, it is said: “Action must be discerned, their tie-source, variety, fruit, ending, and the steps leading thereto.”¹⁷

Kamma can be discerned by contemplation. It is to say that *kamma-vipāka* is unpredictable.¹⁸ The cause of *Kamma* is contact, and the result of *Kamma* is of three sorts:¹⁹ that which arises right here and now, that which arises later (in this life)²⁰ and that which arises following that...

There is divergence in *kamma*. *Kamma* can be ruled out right this life. Contact (*phasa*) is the condition for *kamma* arising. By cutting off contact *kamma* can be cut off. The way to cease contact is to practice the Noble Eight Fold Path²¹ (*Aṭṭhangika magga*) viz. right-view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right-thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*), right-speech (*sammā-vācā*), right-livelihood (*sammā-kammanta*), right-action (*sammā-ājīva*), right-

effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right-mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and right-concentration (*sammā-sambodhi*). Of which, right-view and right-thought are regarded as fundamental foundation for the development of mental and material phenomena. On the other hand, lust (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*) are also considered as three causes for arising of *akusala-kamma*. Thus, by cutting off these causes *kamma* can be faded away.

‘Monks, there are these three causes of the origin of actions (kammās). What three?’

Lust, malice, and delusion are the cause of the origin of actions.

An action done in lust, born of lust, caused by lust, originated by lust is not profitable: it is blameworthy, it has sorrow for its result, it conduces to the arising of (further) action, not to the ceasing of action.

So also with regard to actions done under the influence of malice and delusion. Such actions ...conduce to the arising of further actions, not to the ceasing thereof.

¹⁷ A. Vol. III, VI, 63, Nibbedhikasutta, trans. from the Pāli by E. M. Hare, London: PTS, rpt. 1988, p. 294.

¹⁸ A. Vol. ii, IV, Unthinkable, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, (rpt. 1992), p. 89

¹⁹ In another context the Buddha claimed that the retribution of *kamma* is unthinkable. See A. Vol. II. IV. 77, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1992, p. 89.

²⁰ M. Angulimāla Sutta, Sutta No. 86, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇmoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), USA, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 710-722.

²¹ *Ibid.*

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These, monks, are the three causes of action.’²²

On the contrary, there are three causes for arising of *kusala-kamma*. It is said that whenever these three *kusala-kammās* arise then three *akusala-kammās* have been faded away.

“Monks, these are these three causes of the origin of actions.

What three?

Absences of lust, absence of malice, absence of delusion are the causes (which prevent the arising) of actions.

An action done without lust, not born of lust, not caused by lust, not originated by lust is profitable, it is praiseworthy, it has happiness for its result, it conduces to the ending of (further) action, not to the arising thereof.

So also with regard to actions done without malice and delusion ... Such actions ... conduce to the ending of

(further) action, not to the arising thereof.’²³

In addition to that the *Dutiyanidānasutta*²⁴ maintains that desire for things in the past, the present, and the future are also three causes for arising of *kamma*.

“Monks, there are these three causes of the origin of actions. What three?

Desire is generated for things, which in the past were based on desire, for the like things in the future, as well as at the present time.

And how, monks, is this desire generated for things in the past?

One remembers and turns over in his mind thoughts about things based on desire in the past. As he does so desire is generated. Become desirous, he is fettered by those things. I call this a fetter, monks, - that heart full of lust. That is how desire is generated for things which in the past were based on desire.

²² A. Vol. i, III., Causes, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt.1989, p. 241.

²³ A. Vol. i, III., Causes, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt.1989, p. 241-242.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 242-243

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And how, monks, is this desire generated for like things in the future?

One thinks about and turns over in his mind thoughts of things based on desire in the future. As he does so, desire is generated ... (*as before*).

And how, monks, is this desire generated in the present?

One thinks about things ... in the present. As he does so, desire is generated. Become desirous he is fettered by those things. I call this a fetter, monks, - that heart full of lust. That is how desire is generated for things which in the past were based upon desire.

These, monks, are the three causes of the origin of action.'

The Buddha put forth *kammic* doctrine by the rational and pragmatic approach. Buddhist ethics scrutinizes a being within the reflection on his bodily, verbal and mental actions. Human beings can practice their individual moral responsibility in social works.

The *Ambalaṭṭhikārahulovāda Sutta*²⁵ which the Buddha advises to *Rāhula* as the following passage:

“What do you think, *Rāhula*? What is the purpose of a mirror?”

“For the purpose of reflection, venerable sir (the Buddha).”

“So too, *Rāhula*, an action with the body should be done after repeated reflection; and action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.

“*Rāhula*, when you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: ‘Would this action that I wish to do with the body lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful result?’ When you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences,

²⁵ M. Sutta No. 61, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), USA, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 524-5.

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with painful results,’ then you definitely should not do such an action with the body. But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,’ then you may do such an action with the body.”

The bodily action continues to reflect on body, speech and mind while it is being done and even after having done. So also with regard to action of speech and of mind.

On the other hand, the *Sutta* pointed out the unskillful actions such as no shame at telling a deliberate lie as an evil example which is harmful to doer, to others and to both. Thus, such evil habit should be got rid of it by the practitioners.

II.3. Classification of *kamma*: *kusala-kamma* and *akusala-kamma*

Accordingly, ‘intentional act is exclusively *Buddhistic kamma*’. In this manner, the intention can be classified into two sorts: the intention with skill (*kusala*) direction or right-

view that can be called righteous intention. There are some typical *suttas* to classify the quality of actions into skillful intention and unskillful intention.

Here the *Yh±nasutta*²⁶ (Occasions) gives us four courses of action and their results.

Monks, there are these four occasions. What four?

“There is, monks, the occasion when action is unpleasant and unprofitable to the doer; that when action is unpleasant but profitable to the doer; that when action is pleasant but unprofitable to the doer; and the occasion when action is both pleasant and profitable to the doer.

“Now, monks (in the first instance), in a case when action is both unpleasant and unprofitable to the doer, one deems action inadvisable for both reasons, for it is both unpleasant and unprofitable.

“Then again, in the second instance, that is, when action is unpleasant but profitable, one may know who is a fool and who is a wise man in the matter of

²⁶ A. vol. ii, IV, 115, *Yh±nasutta*½ (Occasions), trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1992, p. 122-3.

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manly strength, manly vigour and energy. For, monks, the fool have no such consideration as this: Though this is an occasion when action is unpleasant, yet it brings profit to the doer. Accordingly he does not act, and his inaction brings him loss. But the wise man thus considers: Though this is an occasion when action is unpleasant, yet it brings profit to the doer. Accordingly he acts, and profit result.

Now in the third case when action is pleasant but unprofitable, -in this case also one may know who is a fool and who a wise man in the matter of manly strength, manly vigour and energy. For, monks, the fool does not thus consider: Though this act is pleasant, yet it brings loss. Accordingly he acts and the result is loss. Whereas the wise man thus reflects: Though this act is pleasant, yet its results bring loss. So he acts not and the result is to his profit.

Lastly, monks, in the case where action is both pleasant and profitable, one deems action advisable for both reasons, for it is both pleasant and profitable; that is why one deems action advisable.”

The *Sāleyyaka Sutta*²⁷ shows the ten courses of practicing wholesome *kamma*. These ten courses are also called the moral progress of developing *kāya-kamma* (*bodily-kamma*), *vīcā-kamma* (*verbal-kamma*), and *mano-kamma* (*mental-kamma*). They should be strengthened, tamed them frequently so that they may become habitual. With this perpetually intentional training, one not merely obtains harmony and happiness in this life but also will be born in the existence as he wishes. Briefly, these ten courses of skillful training can be divided into three groups, namely, bodily training group, verbal training group, and mental training group:

A. Bodily training group is again subdivided into three kinds of conduct as follows:

- (1) Restraint from killing beings in any form
- (2) Restraint from stealing what is not given
- (3) Restraint from misconduct to beings

²⁷ M. Sutta No. 41, *Sāleyyaka Sutta* (The Brahmins of Sāla), trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), p. 382-3.

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B. Verbal training group is again subdivided into four kinds of conduct as follows:

- (1) Abandoning false speech
- (2) Abandoning malicious speech
- (3) Abandoning harsh speech
- (4) Abandoning gossip

C. Mental training group is again subdivided into three kinds of conduct as follows:

- (1) Restraint from covetousness in any aspect
- (2) Restraint from affliction and anxiety
- (3) Restraint from ill-will

These ten training conducts are regarded the utmost completion for development righteous intention or good *kamma*. And the retribution of these righteous intentions will lead the practitioners to happy state in this lifetime and the future as the *sutta* said:

“So, householders, it is by reason of such conduct in accordance with the *Dhamma* (the principle of *kamma*), by reason of such righteous conduct that some beings here, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a

happy destination, even in the heavenly world.”²⁸

It is very interesting to note here that these ten conducts interrelate obviously with the Noble Eightfold Path in practical way. Right-view and right-thought must be in these ten conducts if they were not then these ten conducts could not be carried out. Specially, right-speech of the Noble Eightfold Path is identical with the four kinds of verbal training. It is the reason why David J. Kalupahana states: “The specific character of the doctrine of karma, which is part of the middle path or the Noble Eightfold Path, cannot be comprehended unless it is placed in the above background. Right living (*sammā-ājīva*), right action (*sammā kammanta*), right speech (*sammāvācā*), and right effort (*sammā vāyāma*) are important constituents of a path intended to bring about both individual well-being and social welfare. This gives a utilitarian coloring the Buddha’s doctrine of karma.”²⁹

²⁸ M. Sutta No. 41, *Sāleyaka Sutta* (The Brahmins of Sāla), trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), p. 383.

²⁹ EB. Vol. VI, Fascicle 1, p. 113.

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Now, we turn to the sort of unskillful intention (*akusala-cetanā*). In the foresaid *Sutta*, there mentions also ten unwholesome *kamma* or the ten unskillful intentions are habituated by man's wrong view. They are respectively opposed to ten righteous intentions namely (1) killing beings; (2) stealing what is not given; (3) misconduct oneself and to beings; (4) speaking falsehood; (5) speaking maliciousness; (6) speaking harshness; (7) speaking gossip; (8) to be covetous; (9) having a mind of ill-will; and (10) having wrong view.

The *Sāleyyaka Sutta* also said:

"So, householder, it is by reason of such conduct not in accordance with the *Dhamma* (the principle of *kamma*), by reason of such unrighteous conduct that some beings here on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell."³⁰

In another case, *kamma* is divided into new *kamma* and old *kamma*. Six organs *viz.*

eye,³¹ ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are considered as expressive of old *kamma* whereas bodily, verbal, and mental action are identical with new *kamma*. In order to cease such *kamma* the Noble Eightfold Path is considered as the proper way.

The *Kammanirodhasuttaṃ*³² describes the above issue as follows:

"I will teach you, brethren, action (*kamma*) both new and old, the ceasing of action and the way leading to the ceasing of action. Do ye listen to it. Apply your minds and I will speak.

And what, brethren, is action that is old?

The eye, brethren, is to be viewed as action that is old, brought about and intentionally done, as a base for feeling. And so with the tongue and mind. This brethren, is called 'action that is old'.

And what is action that is new?

³⁰ Loc. Cit. p. 381.

³¹ Eye in itself is not old, but it has come about by former action. At the same manner in the cases of the rest five of organs *viz.* ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. See: S. vol. iv, *Kammanirodhasuttaṃ*, trans. from the Pāli by F.L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1993, p. 85.

³² S. vol. iv, *Kammanirodhasuttaṃ*, trans. from the Pāli by F.L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1993, p. 85.

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The action one performs now, brethren, by body, speech, and mind,- that is called 'action that is new.'

And what, brethren, is the ceasing of action? That ceasing of action by body, speech, and mind, by which one contacts freedom,- that is called 'the ceasing of action.'

And what, brethren, is the way leading to the ceasing of action?

It is this Ariyan Eightfold Path, to wit: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Doing, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This, brethren, is called 'the way leading to the ceasing of action.'"

In the *Kukkuravatika Sutta*,³³ The Buddha expressed all the groups of *kamma*.

These are four groups of *kamma*:

- (1) Dark action with dark result
- (2) Bright action with bright result

(3) Dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result

(4) Neither dark nor bright action with neither dark nor bright result

The Buddha explained the first group of *kamma* as follows:

"And what, Puṇṇa, is dark action with dark result? Here someone generates an afflictive bodily formation, an afflictive verbal formation, an afflictive mental formation; he reappears in an afflictive world. When he has reappeared in an afflictive world, afflictive contacts touch him. Being touched by afflictive contacts, he feels afflictive feelings, extremely painful, as in the case of the beings in hell. Thus a being's reappearance is due to a being: one reappears through the actions one has performed. When one has reappeared, contacts touch one. Thus I say beings are the heirs of their actions. This is called dark action with dark result.³⁴

³³ *M. Kukkuravatika Sutta* (The Dog-duty Ascetic), *Sutta* No. 57, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), USA, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 493-7.

³⁴ Loc.Cit. p. 495.

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Then he continued to explain the second group as follows:

“And what, Puṇṇa, is bright action with bright result? Here someone generates an unafflictive bodily formation, an unafflictive verbal formation, an unafflictive mental formation. Having generated an unafflictive bodily formation, an unafflictive verbal formation, an unafflictive mental formation, he reappears in an unafflictive world.³⁵ When he has reappeared in an unafflictive world, unafflictive contacts touch him. Being touched by unafflictive contacts, he feels unafflictive feelings, extremely pleasant, as in the case of the gods of Refulgent Glory. Thus a being’s reappearance is due to a being; one reappears though the actions one has performed. When one has reappeared, contacts touch one. Thus I say beings are the heirs of their actions. This is called bright action with bright result.³⁶

³⁵ An unafflictive world is a heavenly world

³⁶ Loc.Cit. p. 495.

The Buddha then comes to explain the third group of *kamma* as follows:

“And what, Puṇṇa, is dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result? Here someone generates a bodily formation that is both afflictive and unafflictive, a verbal formation that is both afflictive and unafflictive, a mental formation that is both afflictive and unafflictive. Having generated a bodily formation, a verbal formation, a mental formation that is both afflictive and unafflictive, he reappears in a world that is both afflictive and unafflictive. When he has reappeared in a world that is both afflictive and unafflictive, both afflictive and unafflictive contacts touch him. Being touched by both afflictive and unafflictive contacts, he feels both afflictive and unafflictive feelings, mingled pleasure and pain, as in the case of human beings and some gods and some beings in the lower worlds. Thus a being’s reappearance is due to a being:

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one reappears through the actions one has performed. When one has reappeared, contacts touch one. Thus I say beings are the heirs to their actions. This is called dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result.³⁷

The third group of *kamma* seems to be difficult to conceive. In fact, intentional action, unwholesome or wholesome, can not take place at the same time but it must be either one or the other. The action is engaged in a medley of wholesome and unwholesome volitions, none of which is particularly dominant. Secondly, in a certain period, wholesome actions are engaged in, and in another period unwholesome actions are engaged in. Thus, the results come with mixture of infictive and afflictive states.

Let us have a look at the following passage in the *sutta*:

“Therein, the volition (*cetanā*) in abandoning the kind of action (*kamma*) that is dark with dark result, and the volition in abandoning the kind of action that is bright with bright result,

abandoning the kind of action that is bright with bright result, and the volition in abandoning the kind of action that is dark-and-bright with dark-and-bright result: this is called action (*kamma*) that is neither dark nor bright with neither-dark-nor-bright result, action that leads to the destruction of action.”³⁸

II.4. The philosophical significance of Buddhist *kamma*

In the *Mahākammavibhanga Sutta*³⁹(The Greater Exposition of Action), the Buddha specially interpreted the way in which *kamma* inevitably works itself out. In this *sutta*, there are four kinds of action and their retribution that have been explained philosophically by the Buddha.

1. “Here Ānanda, some person kills living beings, takes what is not given, misconducts himself in sensual pleasures, speaks falsehood, speaks maliciously, speaks harshly, gossips; he is covetous, has a mind of ill will, and holds wrong view. On the dissolution of the

³⁷ Loc. Cit. p. 496.

³⁸ Loc.Cit. p. 496.

³⁹ M. Sutta No. 136, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), USA, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 1058-1065.

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body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell.

2. "But here Ānanda, some person kills living beings... and holds wrong views. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world.

3. "Here Ānanda, some person abstains from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from misconduct in sensual pleasures, from false speech, from malicious speech, from harsh speech, from gossip; he is not covetous, his mind is without ill will, and he holds right view. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world.

4. "But here Ānanda, some person abstains from killing living beings... and he holds right view. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell.

Passages of the number one and three express common ideas that good things are followed by good results; evil things are followed by bad consequences. As passages of number two and four maintain contrary ideas.

In the context of the passage number two the Buddha added the following:

"Therein, Ānanda, as to the person here who kills living beings... and holds wrong view, and on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappears in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world: either earlier he did a good action to be felt as pleasant, or later he did a good action to be felt as pleasant, or at the time of death he acquired and undertook right view. Because of that, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world. But since he has here killed living beings... and held wrong view, he will experience the result of that either here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence.

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In the context of the passage number four the Buddha added the following:

“Therein, Ānanda, as to the person here who abstains from killing living beings... and holds right view, and on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappears in a state of deprivation... even in hell: either earlier he did an evil action to be felt as painful, or later he did an evil action to be felt as painful, or at the time of death he acquired and undertook wrong view. Because of that, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a state of deprivation... even in hell. But since he has here abstained from killing living beings... and held right view, he will experience the result of that either here and now, or in his next rebirth, or in some subsequent existence.

The Buddha’s explanation of the passages two and four are of great significance, for it allows room for a person who has done evil in the past to attain enlightenment and freedom from this very life. The story of

Āṅgulimāla,⁴⁰ the murderer, is the best example of this idea. Furthermore, this issue is represented philosophically in the *Loṇakapalla sutta*⁴¹(A Grain of Salt).

The Buddha said:

‘Monks, if anyone should say: “Just as this man does a deed, so does he experience it,”- this being so there is no living of the holy life, there is no opportunity manifested for the utter destruction of ill.

But if one should say: “Just as this man does a deed that is to be experienced, so does he experience its fulfillment,”- this being so, monks, there is living of the holy life, there is opportunity manifested for the utter ending of ill.”⁴²

The foregoing quotation can be illustrated by an apt metaphor. If a person threw a grain of salt into a small cup of water, the water in that cup would become salty and

⁴⁰ M. *Āṅgulimāla Sutta*, Sutta No. 86, trans. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1960) & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), USA, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 710-717.

⁴¹ A. Vol. I, III, *Loṇakapalla Sutta*, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1989, p. 227-8.

⁴² Loc. Cit. p. 227-8.

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undrinkable because of that salt. If a person were to throw a similar grain of salt into the river Ganges, because of the great mass of water therein, the water would not become salty and undrinkable.⁴³ Similarly, some trifling evil action of a person may lead him to hell. But a similar trifling evil action committed by another person may bring consequences experienced in this very lifetime, indeed, that may be barely noticeable. Here we find two people performing similar actions but reaping consequences in different ways as the same *sutta* states:

“Now monks, a certain person is careless in culture of body, habits and thought. He has not developed insight, he is insignificant, his soul is restricted, his life is restricted and miserable. Of such a person, monks, even a trifling deed evil done brings him to hell.

Now monks, of what sort of being is a similar small offence to be experienced in this very life, - for what sort of being is not much of it, nay, not a jot of it, seen?

In this case some person or other has carefully cultured body, habits and thought: he has developed insight, he is not insignificant, he is a great soul, his life is immeasurable. By such a being, monks, a similar small offence is to be experienced (by expiation) in this very life, and not much of it, nay, not a jot of it, is seen.”⁴⁴

It is important to note that the consequence of an action is not determined solely by the action itself, but also by many other factors, such as the nature of the person who is responsible for the action and the circumstances under which it is done. This again is an application of the Buddha's conception of dependent arising, or conditionality, to the explanation of human action.

There are three views of *kamma* mentioned in the *Titthāyatanādisuttaṃ*⁴⁵ (Tenets *sutta*) which are:

⁴³ Loc. Cit. p. 228.

⁴⁴ Loc. Cit. p. 227-8.

⁴⁵ A. Vol. I, Māhavaggo: Titthāyatanādisuttaṃ, trans. from the Pāli by F. L. Woodward, London: PTS, rpt. 1989, p. 157-158.

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- (i) Whatsoever weal or woe or neutral feeling is experienced, all that is due to some previous action (*pubbe katahetū*).
- (ii) Whatsoever weal or woe or neutral feeling is experienced, all that is due to the creation of a Supreme (*Issaranimmaanahetu*).
- (iii) Whatsoever weal or woe or neutral feeling is experienced, all that is uncaused and unconditioned (*ahetuappaccayā*).

The Buddha rejected all of the three views. For first case, he argued that:

“So then, owing to a previous action, men will become murderers, thieves, unchaste, liars, slanderers, abusive, babblers, covetous, malicious, and perverse in view. Thus for those who fall back on the former deed as the essential reason there is neither desire to do, nor effort to do, nor necessity to do this deed or abstain from that deed so then, the necessity for action or inaction not being found to exist in truth and verity, the term ‘recluse’ cannot reasonably be applied to yourselves, since you live in a

state of bewilderment with faculties unwarded.”⁴⁶

For the second, and the third case, the Buddha argued similar ways. On this occasion, he presented his philosophical view of action. For him, six elements (earth, water, heat, air, space and consciousness), six contacts (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind contact), and eighteen applications of mind are the cause, condition for arising of *kamma* as well as for ceasing of *kamma*.

“...Now, monks, this Dhamma do I teach, one not refuted, not tarnished, unblamed, uncensured by intelligent recluses and brāhmin. And what is the Dhamma?

“These are the six elements,”- that Dhamma do I teach...

“There are these six spheres of contact... these eighteen applications of mind...these four Ariyan truths.” That Dhamma do I teach ... one uncensured by intelligent recluses and brāhmin.

⁴⁶Loc. Cit. p. 157

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Now as to the first of these, in what connexion did I speak of six elements?

The six elements are these: The element of earth, the element of water, that of heat, that of air, the element of space, and the element of consciousness...

And in what connexion did I speak of spheres of contact?

The six spheres of contact are these: The sphere of eye contact, that of ear contact, nose contact, body contact, and the sphere of mind contact...

And in what connexion did I speak of these eighteen application of mind?

Seeing an object with the eye one's thoughts are concerned with the object, whether it give ground for pleasure, pain or neutral feeling. The same as regards ear, nose, tongue and the other sense-organs... contacting a mental object with mind one's thought are concerned with the object, whether it give ground for pleasure, pain or neutral feeling. That is what I meant when I spoke of the eighteen applications of mind.

And as to these four Ariyan truths, in what connexion did I mention them?

Based on the six elements, monks, there is descent into the womb. This descent taking place, name-and-shape come to pass. Conditioned by name-and-shape is the sixfold sphere (of sense). Conditioned by the sixfold sphere is contact. Conditioned by contact is feeling. Now to him who has feeling, monks, I make known: This is Ill. I make known: This is the arising of Ill. I make known: This is the making Ill to cease. I make known: This is the practice that leads to the making Ill to cease.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Loc. Cit. p. 159-160.