宿命業報與因緣業報之差異

隨佛法師　2009 年 12 月說於吉隆坡

今天我们要说的是你们最关心的问题：「我这一生为甚么会这样？」

师父在此向你们讲 kamma（业）。kamma（业），它本来不是佛教的用词，在佛教之前，印度的奥义书思潮就已经提出来。奥义书思潮起于公元前十二世纪到十世纪之间，比佛教还要早将近七百年，kamma（业）的学说则确立于公元前约八世纪。那么，奥义书所说的 Kamma 是指什么呢？是指「宿命业报」，它主张：所有的现在遭遇的全部，都由过去的做为来决定。

但是请诸位想一想：如果现在的一切，全是由过去、或者过去世决定，它一定会变得很荒谬。举例来说，你在这里听佛法，听了内心很清净，下了课以后，你走出去，碰到乞丐在乞讨，一时看了不忍，慈悲心大发，掏出五十块马币，放在他手上。噢！你做了一个好的布施了。

那么，按照宿命论的观点，你布施给他（乞丐），一定是前辈子注定好的。为什么呢？时间那么晚了，早不碰到，晚不碰到，就在那个时间碰到他；而且不是碰到其他的乞丐，就碰到这一位乞丐。按照印度传统的 kamma（业）来说，一定是注定好的。既然是注定好了，就表示什么呢？表示这一位乞丐以前帮助过你，或者是你欠他，所以你现在需要回报、或者一定要偿还。既然是一定要回报或偿还，那就是应该的事了！是注定你应该偿还、回报人家！那么，这样的报恩或者还债，有没有功德？当然没功德！因为「欠债还钱」是天经地义啊！报恩或者还债，应不应该？当然应该！那么，这位乞丐需不需要向你说谢谢？当然不需要！因为还债，是应该的事！为什么要向布施者说谢谢？反而还要对你说：「怎么这么久才来还？」请问，这是合理吗？

再举一个例子：我们走在路上，突然有一部车冲过来，撞到前面的人，早不撞、晚不撞，就在这个时候撞上。路上的行人那么多，谁都不撞，偏偏就撞他！而走在前面的这个人，没被别的车撞，偏偏就被这一辆车撞！按照传统的 kamma（业）来说，这一定是前辈子注定的事。如果真是这样，撞人的是讨债，被撞的是还债。那么试问：撞人的驾驶者有罪、没有罪？当然没罪！因为讨债怎么会有罪呢？而还债也是应该的啊！所以被撞的可怜、不可怜？当然不可怜！这就是宿命论啊！请问：这种观点合理吗？

在佛陀以前，印度的 kamma（业），说的就是「宿命业报论」。这种宿命论的意思是什么呢？它认为现在都是由过去的 kamma（业）决定。这种教说会造成什么后果呢？做恶事没有罪过，行善事没有功德。因为你做了好事，就是表示是你欠人家，注定该由你还；你作了对不起对方的事，就是表示是他欠你，注定你应该向他讨债。如此一来，世间就没有所谓的善、恶！因为都只是讨债、还债而已。诸位明白吗？如果「宿命业报论」是真实，我们只要躺着就好，反正注定要死，就会死；注定不死，就不会死。注定这一生开悟，不用修就会开悟；注定不会开悟，再怎么努力修也不会开悟。你何必浪费时间的认真听法、学法，反正一切都注定好了，不用修了！这个就是宿命论。这种宿命式的 kamma（业）的说法，是荒谬的理论。　佛陀不承认「宿命业报论」。

佛陀提出了另外一种 kamma（业）的思想。为什么还是讲 kamma 呢？因为尊重原来的传统，用原来传统的 kamma 用词，但是　佛陀赋予以新的解释。这就像佛教之前的耆那教，耆那教也讲 nibbāna（涅盘），可是耆那教的涅盘是指「ātman（神我）独存的永恒存在」。　释迦佛陀不承认这种「永恒、不变的存在」，但是　佛陀也讲 nibbāna，是将耆那教所谓「永恒独存」的 nibbāna 涅盘，赋予全新的解释。Kamma 与 nibbāna，　释迦佛陀都延用原来传统的用词，用词是传统的，可是解释、说明是全新的，是完全的不同。佛教讲的是「因缘法」，这是佛法的核心教法，

释迦佛陀就是用「因缘法」重新的解释 kamma 跟 nibbāna。

用因缘重新解释 kamma（业），是怎样的说法呢？请大家注意听！因缘的意思是指：在关系当中影响的一种情况。眼前的一切，是在什么样的关系及影响当中呢？这可分为三方面来说：一、眼前的一切正在过去（现前之前）的影响当中；二、眼前的一切，在当前个人的身、口、意作为的影响当中；三、眼前的一切，在个人以外的外在的环境及人、事、物的影响当中。是影响而不是决定！决定就变成「宿命论」。

这就像三个人抬一张桌子，每个人都在出力，其中任何的一个人抬的高、低与快、慢，都会影响另外二个人。同样的，任何一个人抬的高、低与快、慢，也是受其他二个人的影响。诸位听得懂吗？在三个人抬一张桌子下，当中任何一人既影响其他二个人，也受其他二个人的影响。高或低、快或慢，或是出力的大小、轻重，既影响其他二个人，也受其他二个人的影响。所以，眼前的一切是在「过去」、「现前的个人（身、口、意作为）」、「现前外在的环境」等三方面的相互影响中呈现着。

在这三方面的影响当中，呈现出「相互的关系」：「过去」与「现前个人（身、口、意作为）」影响着「现前外在的环境」；「过去」与「现前外在的环境」也影响着「现前个人（身、口、意作为）」；特别要注意的：「现前个人（身、口、意作为）」与「现前外在的环境」的相互影响，也影响了「现在之前的一切，对于现前的影响表现」。

举一个例子来说：眼前这罐牛奶，是你昨天买回家。现在这罐牛奶你已经打开了，不能退货。表示「过去」不能改变、重来或消除了，这就是现实。现在把牛奶倒出来喝，你发现味道不好，但是你已经买了、打开了、不能退货了，不能消除昨天已买这罐「味道不好的牛奶」的事实，这是「现在」的事实。虽然这罐牛奶不能退，是不是决定：你现在一定要喝这种味道的牛奶呢？有没有「决定性」呢？事实上没有「决定性」！我们既然发现味道不好，现在可以做些什么呢？我们可以动手加点柳橙汁！这可改变什么呢？可以「影响昨天买回的牛奶的味道」。这个柳橙是从外面买回来的，是外面生产的，是外在环境形成出来的。我们以用柳橙汁（外在环境）影响昨天买来的牛奶的味道，可是柳橙汁不是你作的，而是从外面买回来，是现在的。所以，「现在的你（现前身、口、意作为）」把「现前外在环境的柳橙汁」倒入「过去买的牛奶」中，就可以影响「牛奶在现在的味道」。请问：在现在，你喝的这杯牛奶，味道是什么呢？它受昨天买的那罐牛奶的影响，受现在外面拿来的柳橙味道的影响，受现在你加柳橙汁多或少的影响，才形成现前这杯「柳橙牛奶的味道」，这个就是现在的业报，这就是「因缘性的业报」，而不是宿命决定的业报。

因此，佛教虽然讲 Kamma，却不是印度宿命论的 Kamma。宿命论的 Kamma，佛教不承认，那是没有的事！ 释迦佛陀讲的 Kamma 是因缘性的，是「过去」、「现前的个人（身、口、意作为）」、「现前外在的环境」等影响中的呈现，是「影响」，不是「决定」。从因缘性的观点来看 Kamma，才是佛教可以承认的 Kamma，宿命式的 Kamma（业），我们不能接受！

现在请问诸位，如果是「过去」、「现前的个人（身、口、意作为）」、「现前外在的环境」，三方面的影响，才形成的现在的状况。请问现在的状况是「自生」，还是「缘生」？是缘生！所以称为「缘生法」。请问「缘生」的现在状况是固定呢？还是变动？是不定、转变！这就称为「无常」。因为是因缘性，因缘性的 Kamma（业）则无常（不定）。没有确定性！

因缘性的现起（缘生法 paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma），是不是由过去「决定」现在？或是现在的个人「决定」现在？或是现前外在的环境「决定」现在？没有「决定性」！所以佛说「缘生法（因缘性的现起）」则「非我」，这就称为「无我」。没有能够决定的力量！能决定就像一神教的 God！没有！所以

佛教说因缘性的现起（缘生法），则为无常、无我（破除永恒、确定、决定等妄见）。这种因缘性的现起，我们才称为「因缘所生法」。如果是宿命式的业报，就不是因缘所生法了。诸位明白了吗？

佛陀讲因缘性的现起（缘生法），还有印度宿命式的 Kamma 业报，对人们的生活来说，有什么影响和差别呢？如果是宿命式的业报观，人们就会觉得：现在所发生的一切的痛苦，都要逆来顺受，只能全部的忍耐下来，并且要服从所有现在的一切遭遇，需要 obey，既不可以也不能抵抗，因为理所当然的应该要这样。这种生活的态度，会让人们面对现实的困境时，缺乏改变的意愿及动力，会让人不自觉的变得非常的消极、颓废，以致一事无成。谁最喜欢这种宿命论呢？自古以来就是社会上一些用不正当的手段取得利益的人，最喜欢这种宿命论。为什么呢？这表示采用不当的手段，让你痛苦而得到利益，却可以告诉你，这是命中注定的事，你需要接受，不能反抗。听得懂吗？这是过去封建时代的帝王、贵族，或社会动荡不安时代的强豪、土霸，最喜欢的信仰，因为善良的民众被不公义压在底下，却一心的相信：「这是我命中注定的」。

宿命论是谁的信仰呢？是奴隶的信仰！因为这种信仰会把正常人变成奴隶。人们受制于宿命论的想法、情感及面对生活的态度，当面对困难、面对种种不公不义的事情时，不仅不会提出异议及反思，还会像奴隶一样的服从跟接受。更可悲的是，人们在承受「不公不义」及「迫害」时，还会告诉自己：「这是应该的！我不应该抵抗，因为是命中注定。我应该作得更好，才能让来生更好。」请问这像不像奴隶？因此，当年印度民族在雅利安人统治的种姓制度下，激起反婆罗门教及雅利安至上的奥义书思潮，就是适应了被雅利安种姓所奴役的印度民族。

佛陀告诉我们因缘法，用因缘性的 kamma，修正宿命式的 kamma，绝不是让我们做奴隶。　佛陀教导我们的是：现在之前，我们没有办法否定或消除（delete），我们不能否定或消除发生于现在以前的事，但是我们可以在现在好好的努力，并且关心社会及环境，透过现前身、口、意的改变，还有现在外在环境的改变，就可以影响我们「无法否定的过去」对现在的影响。所以，我们可以透过个人现在的努力、对外在环境的关心与改变，然后改变现在的遭遇。我们可以向不当的事情（包括现前不当的身、口、意，以及外在不当的环境、不义的对待）说 NO！虽然过去做错的事情，现在可以对自己说：「我可以改变！我可以变得更好！」这是智慧的、勇敢的、前进的、进步的表现！绝不是奴隶。

诸位朋友！你要的是宿命式的业报，或者是因缘性的业报呢？你认为哪一种符合事实？哪一种只是信仰而已？你认为呢？这里有一个重点，我们深信：过去不能否定，但是可以经由现在个人的努力，以及现在外在环境的改变，来改变过去对现在的影响，让我们现前的人生及生活的环境，就在现前可以更好。我们深信这件事，这是勇敢的、这是积极的、这是奋进的，并且也是智慧的人生。

反之，如果我们相信宿命的业报，认为一切都是「注定」。那么，相信的人就会变得很软弱，碰到困难，或碰到别人用不当的方式对待我们，就会不自觉的退缩，会将自己的懦弱，隐藏在「噢！是前辈子注定」的不当信仰底下，既欺骗自己，也不敢勇敢的面对问题。

诸位朋友！面对现实人生，你们需要正确的、健康的生活智慧，并且更要记得一件事：我们现在的作为必会影响外在的环境，现在的外在环境也必会影响我们现在的处境。所以一个人不要只关心自己，也要关心环境。因为关心环境就能帮助自己。如此，自己会更好，环境也会更好，而过去的影响也能转向好的一面。这才是一个正常的、健全的现代公民应该有的认识及生活。

诸位朋友！　释迦佛陀关心的，不是人们有没有相信他；佛法要告诉诸位的，也不是让你成为佛教徒。真正的重点是要让你在人生当中能够更好，能更健全的活在人生的道路上。诸位朋友！现在不是「由过去决定」的发生，过去并没有「决定」现在；现在

也没有「决定」未来，过去只是「影响」现在，只是「影响」而已！现在也只是「影响」未来而已！其他的，还要看现在我们的努力，以及在努力的当中，环境与个人作为的相互影响、变化，所以「缘生法」则无常。

释迦佛陀教导因缘法，让我们明白：现在的修行，并不会「决定」：将来会是在什么时候开悟或解脱；不会有任何人知道、或确定：我们将在什么时候、什么地方开悟或解脱，即使是　释迦佛陀也不会知道。这不是　释迦佛陀智慧不及，所以不知道未来确定发生的事，而是因为现实是「因缘生」，缘生的现实就是如此，无有人们妄想的确定及决定，所以说无常（不定）。世间是因缘影响的呈现，不可能百分之百的确定「现在之后会发生什么事」。「百分之百的确定」是不可能的事，最多也只能说「有可能怎么样！」但是绝对不可能是「一定会怎么样！」这是不可能。　释迦佛陀就是因为有因缘智慧，所以不会告诉我们：「你将会在什么时候、什么地方开悟、解脱、证菩提。」我再说一遍，　释迦佛陀就是因为具有因缘智慧，所以告诉我们，没有人会知道你将在什么时候、什么地方开悟、解脱、证菩提。没有人知道这件事情，是因为世间缘生，因为这是事实！

佛教有一个美丽的传说，说　释迦佛陀在尚未成佛的过去世，曾经被某一个佛授记，预先告知：在往后的多久多久时间以后，将会在什么地方成佛，称为何等名号。这个故事原本是讲给相信宿命论的印度人听，向相信宿命论的印度人讲解因缘法，多数听不懂，也不容易信受，讲解宿命式的故事，容易相信。这样的说法，会让相信宿命的印度人觉得　释迦佛陀很伟大，因为他在很久很久以前，就已经被确定会成佛，并且在何时、何处成佛。这是后世佛教的布教师，为了让相信宿命论的印度人崇拜　释迦佛陀，编造出来的故事寓言，只是传教的技巧而已。这就好像化妆术，在脸上涂粉、画腮红，看起来气色会比较好，穿上高跟鞋看起来会比较高，就好像邻家小女孩化妆以后，变得像个大明星一样！只是这样而已。因为一般人崇拜伟人，相信宿命的印度人，就是崇拜理想型、神化型的圣人，那是古时印度社会的现况。因此，在　释迦佛陀灭后的百年内，后世佛弟子替释迦佛陀编了许多「宿命式的过去生故事」，但这些都不是　释迦佛陀的亲说，只是出自后世布教师的编造而附于佛说罢了！

我们不需要反对这些美丽的故事，因为即使在现在的时代，世界上还有很多人需要美丽的、理想的圣人，要不然他们不会相信 Buddha。在这个世界上，有很多普普通通的人，这是因为这些人的智慧不够，所以佛教需要一点关于　释迦佛陀的神话。但是社会上还有许多有智慧的人，为了利益引化有智的人，当然更需要智慧的佛法。现在的重点是：你是需要神化、明星的佛陀呢？或者你重视真正有智慧的佛法呢？这由你判断及抉择！在师父的内心是这样看：　释迦佛陀的智慧比长相更光明、更庄严！

最后借用几分钟时间，向大家做一个简单的介绍：　释迦佛陀入灭二个月后，佛教举行第一次的经典结集，历时三个月，时间是公元前约 387 年。「第一次结集」的时候，阿难陀代表大众集出了「经法」，优波离代表大众集出了「律戒」。

「第一次结集」以后，佛教的僧团就分成两大师承的系统：一、以「经法」为重心的阿难系，二、以「律戒」为主的优波离系。阿难系与优波离系的发展，到了佛灭百一十六年之后，因为优波离系的毗舍离僧团提出「五恶见事」，阿难系僧团与优波离系僧团为此而对立、分裂。从此以后，佛教的僧团分裂了。在公元一世纪前后，佛教在印度分裂成为十八派。虽然有十八派，可是还是两大师承系统：阿难系与优波离系。优波离系又包含两大部系，一派是大众部，另一派称为分别说部，分别说部就是现在的南传佛教系统。维持正统经法的阿难系僧团，在公元前二世纪末叶分裂、变质，公元后六世纪初破灭、隐没于世。

阿难系、优波离系分裂以后，两系的思想、信仰、教法有很大的不同，彼此对立不能和合。尤其是分派以后，佛教流传的说法变得更乱，彼此各说各

话。造成后世的佛弟子，听了这么多「对立不能和合」的法，也不知道谁对、谁错。很多人还认为说的都对，根基如此就学这个，根基那样就学那个，大家都对！事实上，这些派别教说，彼此都是不合，怎么会都对呢？

诸位法友内心一定很纳闷—师父要向大家介绍的，是依那一派为主呢？不！都不是！我不依那一派为主，我向大家介绍的不是十八派中任何一派的说法。我们不讲部派！向大家介绍的是依阿难系及优波离系传诵的经典中，属于最古老部份的经法，也即是「第一次结集」集成的经法。师父是将两边共传的最古老的经法，加以对照异、同。在对照当中，发现有一部分是相同的说法，但有一部分是不同的立场。这些不同的部份，是分派以后各自传出来的传诵；而相同的部份，多数就是还没有分派以前共同的说法，少数是后世部派间共融的「部义」。可确定的是，这些还没有分派以前共同的说法，就是「第一次经典结集」的说法，代表了　释迦佛陀在世的说法。

现在向大家介绍的禅观、禅定、经法及菩提道次第，就是「第一次经典结集」的说法，这是各部派的经典都有的、共通的说法。这个古老的说法，会不同于分派以后各部派的主张，是因为分派以后，各派祖师有自己的意见和说法。换句话说，当各派都有不同的意见时，「派」的想法一定跟古老的说法有很大的差别，要不然怎么会分十八派，派派都不同呢？现在所谓的南传分别说部佛教（Theravāda，自称长老部、上座部），或者自称是大乘（Mahāyāna），其实这些都是「部派」，彼此不同，相互对立。那这些部派自己对不对呢？也不见得是对。我说你错、你说我错、我们两个说他错、他说我们两个错！到底谁对？可能三个都错了！

所以现在要向大家介绍的是，佛教还没有分派以前，各派间共同的说法，并且是 ORIGINAL 最古老的部份，而最古老的经法，就是代表　释迦佛陀在世的说法，「部派」的说法我们都不讲、不依、不信。向诸位宣说的经法内容，既不完全等同是 Theravāda（南传分别说部佛教），更不是 Mahāyāna（大乘），也不是 Tibet（西藏）的密乘佛教。不是部派式的佛教！现在讲的是 ORIGINAL BUDDHISM。我们需要了解、学习的法，是古老的传诵，也就是　释迦佛陀在世时的说法。

注：业 kamma（巴利）karma（梵语、英文）

The difference between karma of fatalism and karma of correlative conditioning

What are we going to talk about today? I bet it's something that will cause you great concern. How have I become what I am now? I'm going to talk about Karma.

The word Karma was originally not a Buddhist term. It dates back between the twelfth and tenth century B.C. in The Upanishads. It was composed seven hundred years before Buddhist scriptures. The concept of karma in The Upanishads refers to determinism, which claims that whatever happens now is predestined by what you have done before.

It's quite absurd if the present situation is prefixed by whatever was done in the past or in previous lives only. For example, if you came across a beggar on the way out of this class and under a generous impulse, you shell out fifty Malaysian Ringgits, would it be too much? Yes? Maybe it's because your mind is filled up with dharma teaching from being here and is full of compassion at the moment. Anyway, you give away the fifty dollars and it sure is a very charitable move.

However, from the point of view of determinism, it was something that was destined to happen. It was the right moment and the right person. It was so late yet that particular beggar was still loitering, waiting for you. It was meant to be. That is the idea of determinism or fatalism. If it is so, then it means that he must have helped you before. In other words, you owe him some kind of favor and now it is time to return that favor. If it's just about returning a favor, it's your liability. In that case, will it generate any merit if you're just returning a favor to pay back your debt? Shouldn't that be a responsibility that you are expected to fulfill? Yes, you ought to pay back. Let me ask you then will there be any merit at all? Of course not. If it's destined

that your time is up, it's the universal law to pay. Does he need to say thank you for the donation? Probably not. He may even feel entitled to complain that why it took so long to pay him back.

Here is another example: While you're walking down the street, a man walking in front of you is hit by a car. It may be explained again that the timing, the place, and the persons were all pre-set. There must be some connections between the hitter and victim! The victim might be hurt or even owe the hitter a life in previous lives. Now they're even. In that case would the hitter be guilty of the crime? It then seems so justified to hit and run.

That's determinism or fatalism in India, not Buddhism. The hitter is not guilty at all. The determinism or fatalism emphasizes that the present situation is predestined by the past actions only. It could cause great damage when the unknown past is used as the excuse to justify wrongdoing and waive off merits of decent behaviors. All the charitable good deeds might be just an incident to pay off the debt. All the wrongdoings can be forgiven because you never know who has a right to claim a share that he deserves. The law and order of right and wrong is this thus lost. Do you understand? Why do we bother to put any effort at all? If I'm destined to drop dead, let it be. If I'm destined to survive, I'll live. To put it in a more simple way, if you're destined to be enlightened, you will be enlightened. If not, why bother to sit here and pay so much attention to this? You don't need to practice anymore. Therefore, this kind of argument is really a heretic doctrine in India. It's absurd and denied by the Buddha.

But the Buddha proposed a different kind of concept of karma. If the concept of karma in Buddhism is different, then why do we still use the same term? It's out of respect towards tradition, but the connotation is completely new. It's the same as how the term nibbana was already in the Jainism before Buddhism. However in Jainism, nibbana means an existence that will last forever, which was also rejected by the Buddha. It's the same term with a different meaning in Buddhism. Therefore when we refer to karma or nibbana, we have to keep in mind that these traditional terms have already developed a new connotation in Buddhism. The core of the Buddha's teaching is correlative conditioning. When it comes to the interpretation of karma and nibbana, it's based on the concept of correlative conditioning, too.

Now how do you explain karma with this idea of correlative conditioning? Now you must pay attention to what I'm going to say. Correlative conditioning refers to any occurrence that comes to change because of the interrelated influence within its related conditions. Take a look at what's under your nose. What's the relation among them? Obviously what is there at the present moment is influenced by what happened before. Notice that it's influence, but it's not solely decided by the past. If it's decided by the past only, then it's determinism.

Whatever happens now is not only influenced by the past but also goes along with the intentions and behaviors of the body, speech, and mind at the present moment. Again these elements only have certain impacts on the present moment; they cannot control everything. There are other factors: people you deal with, situations that arise with all kinds of shifting conditions surround you. All of these could play an important role in your present moment without your permission.

It's like three guys who are trying to lift a table. All of them contribute. Each of them may have his own pace and strength, but when they work together, each one is influenced by the other two so that they may keep the table at the same level and stride at the same pace. Do you get it? It's an interrelationship that continuously makes adjustments of how high they keep the table, how fast they walk, and how much strength they should use. The body, speech, and mind that formed your past actions interrelate with your present body, speech, and mind which go along with the present conditions that are formed by others.

All of these have a mutual influence on one another. Your past and present mental state and behavior would and will change your surroundings. It's the same the other way around. What I like to point out is that no matter what situation that you're in right now could also change the way that you developed from the past. Get it?

For instance, let's say you bought a bottle of milk yesterday. So this bottle of milk is the result of your action from yesterday. However, you open it, have a sip, and don't like the taste of it. You can't return it anymore. It's like how you can't remove what you've done and start all over. All you can deal with are the facts at the present moment. Let's

see: you bought a bottle of milk that you don't like. It is irritating. It's a fact that you cannot remove now. It is an irritating influence, but that doesn't mean you have to drink it. So the past does have certain impact on the present but not crucial enough to dominate the situation. Is the taste of this bottle of milk a determinant factor in your life? No, it's not. What can we do in a situation like this? We can mix it up with some orange juice. Understand? We can change the situation by pouring in some orange juice. This idea, this move will change the taste of milk that was bought yesterday. It will change the influence from the past. On the other hand, this orange juice, which was made from oranges that were farmed by others, becomes another factor in your life journey. The act of mixing milk with juice is done by you, but the oranges were supported by others. So what's the taste now? The milk is affected by the juice. What's the taste of milk now? It's affected by the milk you bought yesterday, by the taste of orange juice, and also by the amount of juice that you pour in. That's the taste of this orange milk. This is karma. This is the karma of present correlative conditioning, not the karma of fatalism.

This is the interpretation of karma in Buddhism. It's different from the karma theory in the Upanishads, which was rejected by the Buddha. Karma in Buddhism lies on the factors from the past, the manifestation of the present moment, and the influence other than oneself. All these three aspects influence each other mutually; none of them is solely in control to determine the fate. This is the karma of correlative conditioning, not the fatalistic karma. We will not accept the fatalistic karma. There is no such karma. Understand?

Now, let me ask you, if the present situation depends upon what happened in the past and upon the state of body and mind at the present moment and upon what's going on in the general environment, would the present situation always be the same or changing all the time? Yes, it's changing all the time. That's why it's impermanent. Correlative conditions are changing all the time.

Is there a dominant force that forms what's going on now? Is it something that you've done in the past? Is it your intention and behavior at the moment or is it something initialized from others? Can any of these factors decide your fate? No, the answer is none of the above. That's why there is non-self. If anyone can claim that he's fully in charge of everything in this world, then we call him God. But none is really in charge of everything. That's why we say impermanence and non-self. This kind of karma is referred to as correlative conditioning. If it's the fatalistic karma, which is solely determined by the past, then it has nothing to do with the correlative conditioning.

Now that you understand the difference of these two kinds of interpretation of karma, what has it to do with us? If we believed in the fatalistic karma, then we'd have to accept whatever is happening now. Whether it's good or bad, we'd just have to take it. We'd obey the rules without any resistance because that's what we are supposed to do. This kind of attitude will discourage people from changing and pursuing a better situation when they come across any kind of difficulties in life. It will lead to pessimistic futility and end with a bunch of losers. Who are the advocates of this kind of karma theory? People who like to take advantages of others with inappropriate schemes often embrace this kind of theory to justify their evil doings. They behave badly yet expect you to tolerate it because it's your karma. Do you understand? It's all about political tricks that the ruling class used to abuse the people in a feudal society. In the old times, ordinary people were trodden yet they accept it without complaint because they believed that it was their karma.

Fatalism is for slavery. Understand? It will turn you into a slave. Your mind and attitude will be brainwashed and put up with any kind of unfair treatments like a slave. Not only that, while taking in all these difficulties, you probably will tell yourself, I should totally surrender and do my best so that I may have a chance to have a better life next time. The point is that when facing an unfair treatment, instead of improving the situation, those karma believers sheepishly indulge the evil doings by acting like a slave.

That's not what the Buddha taught us. The Buddha's teaching is that we cannot start over again. However, by putting in more efforts and care for people and our society, we may change the present moment from the residual of the past. We can say "no" to any inappropriate treatments. We can face the mistakes that have been made in the past and try to correct them. That's a courageous attitude to embrace life. That's also a wise, sincere and modern positive attitude. That's definitely not an attitude of a slave.

Ladies and gentlemen, which one would you choose? A

Fatalistic karma or a karma based on correlative conditioning? Which one do you think is closer to the truth? Which one is the doctrine to believe? What do you think? Here is the point: We do believe that bygones can never be changed. However it's never too late to do something now to change the momentum of the past behaviors. Does this make sense to you? We can never change the past but we can change what's left over from the past and make it a better present. This is what we believe. It's a much more positive, wise, brave, and diligent way of living.

If we Buddhists mix the meaning of karma with a fatalistic view, we are doomed to be weak whenever there is difficulty. Or whenever we get unfair treatment, we'll tend to cover our cowardice with karma as a convenient excuse, pretending that everything is fine by cheating ourselves.

My younger friends, you really need wisdom to lead you on a positive road in life journey. You have to keep in mind that whatever you do will change the environment that you live in and, just as well, that your environment has a great impact on you too. You need the wisdom to see through this. A man cannot survive without any connection toward the environment he lives in. So don't just think about yourself, pay more attention to your environment too. When you become a better person, your environment should also improve. That's a normal and healthy attitude and way of living. A civilized human being is expected to know this.

My dharma friends, what the Buddha was concerned about was not that he should have a group of earnest followers to believe what he said. The purpose of dharma teaching is not to attract more Buddhists to propagate the religion. What the Buddha was concerned about was to make a better person, a wiser person who goes through life journey in a more wholesome way. My friends, right now, this moment is not decided by the past. What's happening now cannot decide your future either. There is only influence. Other than that, it's still up to how much effort you put in and the interrelationship among the people and environment that you deal with. That's why it's impermanent.

What we practice now does not guarantee that we will be enlightened and liberated at a certain point in the future. No, it doesn't work that way. No one can be sure that at certain time and place, Tom will get enlightened or Harry will be liberated. Even the Buddha himself would not predict this. It's not that the Buddha does not have the wisdom to see this. It's just how life is. Everything is changing constantly based on correlative conditions. Nothing is permanent. Therefore, it's impossible to foretell a hundred percent of anything. What we can say at most is to put the possibility on a scale and make a reasonable inference. But no one can be really sure until it happens. It's just impossible to know. That's why the Buddha never told anyone that he or she would be enlightened at certain time or place. He had the wisdom not to make such a prediction. Let me repeat this. It is because of his wisdom that the Buddha would never make such a prophecy. He would only tell you that it's hard to say. That is a fact.

There is a very beautiful legend in Buddhism. It is said that before Shakyamuni Buddha became the awakened one, he was predicted as the future Buddha by another Buddha. The time and place was specified too. It's a very romantic and beautiful story. But the story was told to those who believed in determinism or fatalism in India. They could not understand correlative conditioning. It was much easier for them to take in fatalism. That prediction certainly made the Buddha a sublime figure in the eyes of these fatalists. The Buddha was destined to be the great one. However, that kind of propagation was only a skillful mean to spread the religion. That's all. It's just like the make-up that you put on your face. The powder, the blush, and the lipstick all add up to the healthy glowing look. If you put on high heels, you'll certainly look taller and slimmer. That's all. It's like the girl next door turning into a big movie star after a makeover. It's really no big deal. But people adore movie stars. The fatalists in the ancient India worshiped these god-like omnipotent holy figures. That was Buddhism at the time. That's why some of the followers started to making up anecdotes about the Buddha after the Parinibbana. These stories were not told by the Buddha himself at all. We are not against these romantic stories. It cannot be denied that even now in this world there are people who do have a need to rely on these holy figures. They won't believe in the Buddha unless the Buddha was a God-like holy man. It's sad that their wisdom could not be further enhanced to appreciate the truth, the true treasure of the sage. A man of wisdom will not care about the appearance of the Buddha. It's the standard of a movie star fan.

There are a few wise men and a lot more ordinary people in this world. That's why we do need some beautiful stories, yet we need more dharma teachings of wisdom for the wise men too. Now the point is, do you need a Buddha who looks like a movie star? Or do you need his true wisdom? It's all up to you. In my mind I would say the Buddha's wisdom is more refined than those descriptions of his features. It's much more bright and ornamented, much more brilliant and glorious.

At last, I'd like to spend a couple of minutes to brief a short history of Buddhism. Three months after the Buddha's Parinibbana, the First Buddhist Council was held. It was 387 years B.C., the same year that the Buddha passed away. During the First Buddhist Council, it was Rev. Ananda who recited all the teachings that Buddha had given. Rev. Upali was the one who collected all the Vinaya (discipline codes).

After the First Buddhist Council, Buddhism was split into two schools or teaching traditions. The lineage of Rev. Ananda mainly focused on the teaching while the lineage of Rev. Upali strictly observes the Vinaya codes. One hundred and sixteen years after the Buddha's Parinibbana, these two schools no longer see eye to eye. After that, the Sangha community kept spinning off and developed into eighteen sects by the first century B.C. Still we can divide them up as two lineages: lineage of Rev. Ananada and lineage of Rev. Upali. Within the lineage of Rev. Upali, there are two divisions, the Mahāsānghika School and the Vibhajjavāda School, which is the Theravada Buddhism at the current time.

There is a lot of difference between their doctrines and teachings, and they just couldn't find a common ground to be unified. The schism of all of these schools really left the Buddhists of later generations in great perplexity. Who is teaching the right path? Or maybe everyone is right, and we just need to find the one that fits our level of understanding? Yet how could it be that everyone is right, when most of their theories contradict one another? Obviously this is just an excuse to cover up all the differences since the great schism took place around 271 years B.C. That was the time when the Buddha had already passed away for about one hundred years.

Then which lineage are our teachings based on? It's none of these schools. What I introduce here is based on the oldest sutras passed on by both lineages of Rev. Ananda and Rev. Upali. I have made a careful comparison between the classics of these two lineages and found the common teachings from both sides. There are differences that were added on by each school which we don't really need to learn. The common ground is the part that was collected in the First Buddhist Council, which means they are the authentic teachings from the Buddha.

Therefore, the teachings on meditation or dharma that we've discussed here are purely from the original teachings before the great schism, and they were preserved almost in all schools. Many of these teachings are different from the doctrines composed by adepts or patriarchs of later generations. All of these patriarchs have their own ideas of practice, which is different from one another and contradicts the original teachings of the Buddha most of the time too. Otherwise how could there be eighteen different schools? The current terms of Mahayana or Theravada are actually just different sects in Buddhism. Can anyone of them claim to be the right one? It's really hard to say. Every school has its own ideas of practice and they all claim that they are on the right path. It's unavoidable to deny or even criticize other schools when there is a difference. The truth is: none of these schools is completely right.

That's why what I like to introduce the original teachings from before the schism. It's something that is recognized by every school. It's the oldest teaching passed down from the Buddha. We are not going to discuss doctrines from any specific school, so that you may hear the dharma in its original sense. It's neither Mahayana nor Tibetan Buddhism. It's not Theravada either. There is difference between the original Buddhism and the Theravada tradition too. There are lots of mix-ups and add-ons in the Theravada tradition. Those are the points that we like to leave behind. We'll only pick up the oldest and the most original one. This you'll have to keep in mind. That will be all for today.