

Different Kinds of Kammic Results

as edited by
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Narada Maha Thera, in *The Buddha and his Teachings* (1998) translates and narrates what the Buddha said about the karmic results of different types of actions. Following are some illustrations:

The result of a good kamma reaped in this life:

“A husband and his wife possessed only one upper garment to wear when they went out-of-doors. One day the husband heard the Dhamma from the Buddha and was so pleased with the doctrine that he wished to offer his only upper garment, but his innate greed would not permit him to do so. He combatted with his mind and, ultimately overcoming his greed, offered the garment to the Buddha and exclaimed 'I have won, I have won.' The king was delighted to hear his story and in appreciation of his generosity presented him thirty-two robes. The devout husband kept one for himself and another for his wife and offered the rest to the Buddha.

(Buddhist Legends Dhammapadatthakathā, pt. 2, p. 262)

The result of a bad kamma reaped in this life: (Narada 280)

“A hunter who went hunting to the forest, followed by his dogs, met by the wayside a Bhikkhu who was proceeding on his alms round. As the hunter could not procure any game he thought it was due to the unfortunate meeting of the Bhikkhu. While returning home he met the same Bhikkhu and was deeply enraged at this second encounter. In spite of the entreaties of the innocent Bhikkhu the hunter set the dogs on him. Finding no escape therefrom, the

Bhikkhu climbed a tree. The wicked hunter ran up to the tree, and pierced the soles of the Bhikkhu's feet with the point of an arrow. The pain was so excruciating that the robe the Bhikkhu was wearing, fell upon the hunter completely covering him. The dogs, thinking that the Bhikkhu had fallen from the tree, devoured their own master.
(Buddhist Legends p. 282)

Subsequently Effective Kamma:

“A millionaire's servant returned home in the evening after his laborious work in the field, to see that all were observing the Eight Precepts as it was the full moon day. Learning that he also could observe them even for half a day, he took the precepts and fasted at night. Unfortunately he died on the following morning and as a result of his good action was born as a Deva. (ibid., pt. i. p. 278)

“Ajātasattu, son of King Bimbisāra, was born immediately after his death, in a state of misery as the result of killing his father.

Indefinitely Effective Kamma:

“No person is exempt from this class of *kamma*. Even the Buddhas and Arahants may reap the effects of their past *kamma*. (Narada 281)

“The Arahant *Moggallāna* in the remote past, instigated by his wicked wife, attempted to kill his mother and father. (According to some books he actually killed them.) As a result of this he suffered long in a woeful state, and in his last birth was clubbed to death by bandits.

“To the Buddha was imputed the murder of a female devotee of the naked ascetics. This was the result of his having insulted a Pacceka Buddha in one of his previous births.

“The Buddha's foot was slightly injured when Devadatta made a

futile attempt to kill him. This was due to his killing a step-brother of his in a previous birth with the object of appropriating his property.

“*There is another classification of kamma according to function (kicca):*

- 1 *janaka kamma* (reproductive *kamma*),
- 2 *upatthambaka kamma* (supportive *kamma*),
- 3 *upapīdaka kamma* (counteractive *kamma*),
- 4 *upaghātaka kamma* (destructive *kamma*).

“Every subsequent birth, according to Buddhism, is conditioned by the good or bad *kamma* which predominated at the moment of death. This kind of *kamma* is technically known as reproductive (*janaka*) *kamma*.

“The death of a person is merely 'the temporary end of a temporary phenomenon.' Though the present form perishes another form which is neither absolutely the same nor totally different takes its place according to the thought that was powerful at the death moment since the kammic force which hitherto actuated it is not annihilated with the dissolution of the body. It is this last thought-process which is termed ‘reproductive *kamma*’ that determines the state of a person in his subsequent birth. (Narada 282)

“As a rule the last thought-process depends on the general conduct of a person. In some exceptional cases, perhaps due to favourable or unfavourable circumstances, at the moment of death a good person may experience a bad thought and a bad person a good one. The future birth will be determined by this last thought-process, irrespective of the general conduct.

“This does not mean that the effects of the past actions are obliterated. They will produce their inevitable results at the appropriate moment. Such reverse changes of birth account for the

birth of vicious children to virtuous parents and of virtuous children to vicious parents.

“Now, to assist and maintain or to weaken and obstruct the fruition of this reproductive *kamma* another past *kamma* may intervene. Such actions are termed ‘supportive’ (*upatthambhaka*) *kamma* and counteractive’ (*upapīdaka*) *kamma* respectively.

According to the law of *kamma* the potential energy of the reproductive *kamma* can be totally annulled by a more powerful opposing past *kamma*, which, seeking an opportunity, may quite unexpectedly operate, just as a counteractive force can obstruct the path of a flying arrow and bring it down to the ground. Such an action is termed ‘destructive’ (*upaghātaka*) *kamma* which is more powerful than the above two in that it not only obstructs but also destroys the whole force.

“As an instance of the operation of all the four, the case of Venerable Devadatta who attempted to kill the Buddha and who caused a schism in the Sangha may be cited. His reproductive good *kamma* destined him to a birth in a royal family. His continued comfort and prosperity were due to the action of the supportive *kamma*. The counteractive *kamma* came into operation when he was subjected to such humiliation as a result of his being excommunicated from the Sangha. Finally the destructive *kamma* brought his life to a miserable end. (Narada 283)

“The following classification is according to the priority of effect (*vipākadānavasena*):

- 1 *garuka kamma*,
- 2 *asanna kamma*,
- 3 *acinna kamma*, and
- 4 *katattā kamma*.

“The first is *garuka kamma* which means a weighty or serious action. It is so called because it produces its effects for certain in this life or in the next.

“On the moral side the weighty actions are the *jhānas* or ecstasies, while on the immoral side they are the subsequently effective heinous crimes (*anantariya kamma*) – namely, matricide, parricide, the murder of an Arahant, the wounding of the Buddha, and the creation of a schism in the Sangha.

“If, for instance, any person were to develop the *jhānas* and later to commit one of these heinous crimes, his good *kamma* would be obliterated by the powerful evil *kamma*. His subsequent birth will be conditioned by the evil *kamma* in spite of his having gained the *jhānas* earlier. For example, Venerable Devadatta lost his psychic powers and was born in a woeful state because he wounded the Buddha and caused a schism in the Sangha.

“King *Ajātasattu*, as the Buddha remarked, would have attained the first stage of sainthood if he had not committed parricide. In this case the powerful evil *kamma* obstructed his spiritual attainment.

(Narada 284)

“When there is no weighty *kamma* to condition the future birth a death-proximate (*āsanna*) *kamma* might operate. This is the action one does, or recollects, immediately before the dying moment. Owing to its significance in determining the future birth, the custom of reminding the dying person of his good deeds and making him do good on his death-bed still prevails in Buddhist countries.

“Sometimes a bad person may die happily and receive a good birth if, fortunately, he remembers or does a good act at the last moment. This does not mean that although he enjoys a good birth he will be

exempt from the effects of the evil deeds he has accumulated during his life-time. At times a good person, on the other hand, may die unhappily by suddenly remembering an evil act or by conceiving a bad thought, perchance compelled by unfavourable circumstances.

“Habitual (*ācinna*) *kamma* is the next in priority of effect. It is the *kamma* that one constantly performs and recollects and towards which one has a great liking. Habits whether good or bad become second nature. They more or less tend to mould the character of a person. At leisure moments, we often engage ourselves in our habitual thoughts and deeds. In the same way at the death-moment, unless influenced by other circumstances, we, as a rule, recall to mind our habitual thoughts and deeds.

“The last within this category is cumulative (*katattā*) *kamma* (Literally, 'because done') which embraces all that cannot be included in the foregoing three. This is as it were the reserve fund of a particular being.

(Narada 285)

“The final classification is according to the plane in which the effects take place. They are:—

- 1 Evil actions (*akusala*) which may ripen in the sense-sphere (*kāmaloka*).
- 2 Good actions (*kusala*) which may ripen in the sense-sphere.
- 3 Good actions which may ripen in the realms of form (*rūpaloka*), and
- 4 Good actions which may ripen in the formless realms (*arūpaloka*).”

(Narada 286)

The above breakdown suggests points we can concentrate upon and

techniques we can cultivate within the gradual development of our practice.

Reference

Narada Maha Thera. 1998. The Buddha and His Teachings. Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.