

How Good Kamma May Ripen

as edited by
David Dale Holmes

Narada Maha Thera, in *The Buddha and His Teachings* (1998) translates and narrates what the Buddha said about good *kamma* leading to good results:

“There are ten kinds of such meritorious actions (*kusala kamma*):—namely,

- (1) Generosity (*dāna*),
- (2) Morality (*sīla*),
- (3) Meditation (*bhāvanā*)
- (4) Reverence (*apacāyana*),
- (5) Service (*veyyāvacca*).
- (6) Transference of merit (*pattidāna*),
- (7) Rejoicing in others’ good actions (*anumodanā*),
- (8) Hearing the doctrine (*dhamma savana*),
- (9) Expounding the doctrine (*dhammadesanā*) and
- (10) Straightening one’s own views (*ditthijjukamma*).

“Sometimes these ten moral actions are regarded as twelve by introducing subdivisions to (7) and (10).

“Praising of others’ Good Actions (*pasamsā*) is added to rejoicing in others’ merit (*anumodanā*). Taking the Three Refuges (*sarana*) and mindfulness (*anussati*) are substituted for straightening of one’s views. *Generosity* yields wealth. *Morality* gives birth in noble families and in states of happiness. *Meditation* gives birth in realms of form and formless realms, and helps to gain higher knowledge

and emancipation. *Transference of merit* acts as a cause to give in abundance in future births. *Rejoicing in others' merit* is productive of joy wherever one is born. Both *expounding and hearing the Dhamma* are conducive to wisdom. *Reverence* is the cause of noble parentage. *Service* produces large retinue. *Praising others good works* results in getting praise to oneself. *Seeking the Three Refuges* results in the destruction of passions. *Mindfulness* is conducive to diverse forms of happiness. (Narada 290)

Kusala Kamma May Ripen In The Realms of Form:

“These are the following five kinds of (*Rūpa-Jhānas*) or ecstasies which are purely mental:—

- i. The first *jhāna* moral consciousness which consists of initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), pleasurable interest (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*), and onepointedness (*ekaggata*).
- ii. The second *jhāna* moral consciousness which consists of sustained application, pleasurable interest, happiness, and one-pointedness.
- iii. The third *jhāna* moral consciousness which consists of pleasurable interest, happiness and one-pointedness.
- iv. The fourth *jhāna* moral consciousness which consists of happiness and one-pointedness, and
- v. The fifth *jhāna* moral consciousness which consists of equanimity (*upekkhā*) and one-pointedness.

These *jhānas* have their corresponding effects in the realms of form. (Anguttara Nikāya, part i. 249)

Kusala Kamma Which May Ripen in the Formless Realms:

“These are the four *Arūpa Jhānas* which have their corresponding

effects in the Formless Realms – namely: (Narada 291-292)

1 Moral consciousness dwelling in the ‘Infinity of Space’

(*akāsānañcāyatana*),

2 Moral consciousness dwelling on the ‘Infinity of Consciousness’

(*viññānañcāyatana*),

3 Moral consciousness dwelling on ‘Nothingness’ (*akiñ*

caññāyatana), and

4 Moral consciousness wherein ‘Perception neither is nor is not’ (*n’eva saññān’āsaññāyatana*)

(For details See Narada *Manual of Abhidhamma*)

The Nature of Kamma

“As you sow the seed so shall you reap the fruit.”

Samyutta Nikāya

“Is one bound to reap all that one has sown in just proportion?
Not necessarily! In the Anguttara Nikāya the Buddha states:

‘If any one says that a man must reap according to his deeds, in that case there is no religious life nor is an opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of sorrow. But if any one says that what a man reaps accords with his deeds, in that case there is a religious life and an opportunity is afforded for the entire extinction of sorrow.’

“In Buddhism, therefore, there is every possibility to mould one’s *kamma*. Although it is stated in the *Dhammapada* that

‘not in the sky, nor in mid-ocean nor entering a mountain cave is found that place on earth, where abiding one may escape from (the consequence of) an evil deed,’

yet one is not bound to pay all the arrears of past *kamma*. If such were the case, emancipation would be an impossibility. Eternal suffering would be the unfortunate result. One is neither the master nor the servant of this *kamma*. Even the most vicious person can by his own effort become the most virtuous person. We are always becoming something and that something depends on our own *actions*. We may at any moment change for the better or for the worse. Even the most wicked person should not be discouraged or despised on account of his evil nature. He should be pitied, for those who censure him may also have been in that same position at a certain stage. As they have changed for the better he may also change, perhaps sooner than they. (Narada 293)

Who knows what good Kamma he has in store for him?

Who knows his potential goodness?

Angulimāla, a highway robber and the murderer of more than a thousand of his brethren became an Arahant and erased, so to speak, all his past misdeeds.

Ālavaka, the fierce demon who feasted on the flesh of human beings, gave up his carnivorous habits and attained the first stage of Sainthood.

Ambapāli, a courtesan, purified her character and attained Arahantship.

Asoka, who was stigmatised, *Canda* (wicked), owing to his ruthlessness in expanding his empire, became *dharmāsoka*, or Asoka the Righteous, and changed his career to such an extent that today, amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the

columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses, serenities royal highnesses and the like the name of *Asoka* shines, and shines almost alone, a star.

These are few striking examples which serve to show how a complete reformation of character can be effected by sheer determination.

It may so happen that in some cases a lesser evil may produce its due effect, while the effect of a greater evil may be minimised.

(Narada 294)

The Buddha says:

“Here, O Bhikkhus, a certain person is not disciplined in body, in morality, in mind, in wisdom, has little good and less virtue, and lives painfully in consequence of trifling misdeeds. Even a trivial act committed by such a person will lead him to a state of misery.

“Here, O Bhikkhus, a certain person is disciplined in body, in morality, in mind, in wisdom, does much good, is high-souled and lives with boundless compassion towards all.

“A similar evil committed by such a person ripens in this life itself and not even a small effect manifests itself (after death), not to say of a great one. (The reference is to an Arahant who is not subject to any future sorrow.)

“It is as if a man were to put a lump of salt into a small cup of water. What do you think, O Bhikkhus? Would now the small amount of water in this cup become saltish and undrinkable?

“Yes, Lord.

“And why?

“Because, Lord, there was very little water in the cup, and so it became saltish and undrinkable by this lump of salt.

“Suppose a man were to put a lump of salt into the river Ganges. What think you, O Bhikkhus? Would now the river Ganges become saltish and undrinkable by the lump of salt?

“Nay, indeed, Lord.

“And why not?

“Because, Lord, the mass of water in the river Ganges is great, and so it would not become saltish and undrinkable.

“In exactly the same way we may have the case of a person who does some slight evil deed which brings him to a state of misery, or, again, we may have the case of another person who does the same trivial misdeed, yet he expiates it in his present life. Not even a small effect manifests itself (after death), not to say of a great one.

“We may have the case of a person who is cast into prison for the theft of a half-penny, penny, or for a hundred pence or, again, we may have the case of a person who is not cast into prison for a half-penny, for a penny, for a hundred pence. (Narada 295)

“Who is cast into prison for a half-penny, for a penny, or for a hundred pence? Whenever any one is poor, needy and indigent, he is cast into prison for a half-penny, for a penny, or for a hundred pence.

“Who is not cast into prison for a half-penny, or for a penny, or for a hundred pence?

“Whenever any one is rich, wealthy, and affluent, he is not cast into prison for a halfpenny, for a penny, for a hundred pence.

“In exactly the same way we may have the case of a person who does some slight evil deed which brings him to a state of misery, or again we may have the case of another person who does the same trivial misdeed, and expiates it in the present life. Not even a small effect manifests itself (after death), not to say of a great one.”

(Anguttara Nikāya pt. i. p. 249)

Reference

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