Karma

The cause and effect relationships of karma and dependent arising are subtle

There is no contradiction between the ultimate emptiness of all phenomenon and their dependent nature of arising due to causes and conditions. If things were absolutely real, then they could not change; they could not be created or destroyed and therefore the cause and effect of karma could not function. It is because things are not ultimately real, but have a dependent nature, that they are able to function, to arise and disintegrate due to causes and conditions. This is the correct way to understand the compatibility of emptiness and dependent nature.



Chapter 15
Cultivating Ethical Behaviour

a" A general presentation

The point of this practice is to learn from the teachings and recognise how your own actions depart from that standard. You need to hear, study, and learn the teachings on karma; then you must look toward your own daily actions and thoughts, with the intention of bringing them into harmony with those teachings. Once you do that, you can begin to make progress on the path

day and night keep watch on your three doors of body, speech, and mind, evaluating each thought and deed according to whether it will bring you happiness or suffering in the future, then you can prevent rebirth in a lower realm

When you compare your behaviour to the standards found in these teachings on karma and ask yourself, “How much is my action in harmony with the Dharma?” you may find that your behaviour is almost totally out of line. Be honest with yourself.

The point of this practice is to learn from the teachings and recognise how your own actions depart from that standard. You need to hear, study, and learn the teachings on karma; then you must look toward your own daily actions and thoughts, with the intention of bringing them into harmony with those teachings. Once you do that, you can begin to make progress on the path.

To break through the mind’s habitual patterns and weaken the grip of powerful afflictions, you have to develop new ways of thinking. You do this by concentrated meditation on the deeper understanding gained from the teachings. You focus repeatedly on the reasons for changing your mind and your behaviour. By means of this type of analytical meditation, gradually your habitual ways of thinking and acting come under the power of your Dharma understanding.

You begin to see how your thoughts and deeds are not in harmony with the teachings, which are the true path to happiness. When that realisation arises strongly, the pure practice of the teachings begins. You become more attentive to what you are doing and you make the effort to correct your own actions. Slowly your life comes closer and closer to the Dharma.

How do the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the Dharma have the power to destroy suffering? They lead you to stop creating new causes of suffering. For the incomplete negative causes you have already created, they teach antidotes to reduce the results that will ripen from that karma. They show you how to produce powerful positive causes that will create conditions in which negative karmic seeds will not ripen. By teaching such methods the buddhas and bodhisattvas lead you out of suffering.

Don’t be foolhardy or reckless in thinking that you can behave any way you like. Don’t be so presumptuous as to think you understand all the consequences of your actions, because the details of the cause and effect relationships of karma and dependent arising are so subtle.

“The Buddha said that whatever faults or miserable conditions you experience should not be blamed on an inauspicious place or on the construction of some building; rather, it is simply that by doing a certain action you were born into these circumstances.”

People are always looking for some external cause to blame when things go badly for them. It never occurs to them that they are experiencing the results of their own previous actions. The Buddha never puts the blame anywhere else: he always explains that by doing certain kinds of actions in the past you were born here and now and you have to go through this kind of experience. He never explains a person’s experience any other way than by referring to their karma.

This 3’ follows the 2’ in Chapter 14, Both are part of b” begun in Chapter 14. b” in turn is the part of b’, 1’ begun in Chapter 13. That b’ is part of ii) begun in Chapter 11. That ii) is part of b., a) begun in Chapter 9, which is part of 2. begun in Chapter 8 which is part of B. begun in Chapter 7 which is part of IV begun in Chapter 4.

3’ Having contemplated the principles of karma, how to engage in virtue and desist from non-virtue

All four powers of purification depend on a lucid understanding of the cause and effect of karma.

b” In particular, how to purify by means of the four opponent powers

Vows

Six afflictions always creating negative actions

three levels of vows: prātimoka vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows. All these vows and precepts at the different levels of practice are methods of counteracting and preventing negative karma

Each level of vows includes methods to remedy any downfalls

Each of the three systems of vows has its own methods for rectifying downfalls—usually centred around special rituals. When you take one of the vows you should learn these methods and then apply them whenever it is necessary.

For actions not covered by vows or for people who have not taken vows apply the four powers

1” The first power: remorse

This is profound regret for negative actions you performed in the past.

Afflictions drive you to act in harmful ways. Your mind is so habituated to attachment, malice, and a basic misunderstanding of your true nature and every day you accumulate more and more non-virtue.

Just imagine the wealth of misdeeds you must have collected during those innumerable lives when you totally lacked this level of understanding--all the negative karma accumulated since beginning-less time must be limitless.

You must begin by seeing the fault of your harmful action and produce genuine remorse. Out of that sincere sense of regret you must resolve that you will not repeat that action in the future, and then you have to apply a strong antidote (2nd power)

Until you acknowledge the fault, you cannot regret it.

If you lack the remorse power, the remaining three powers will be weak and ineffective.

Once powerful remorse arises about your own past negative deeds, you are ready to seek out and apply an antidote

2” The second power: applying antidotes

If you practice these four powers to counteract negative karma, there is no non-virtuous action that cannot be purified. Even if you have committed great negative actions, if you have enough time and energy to apply these opponent powers seriously and intensively, even those grave negative potentials can be destroyed completely. Even if you are not able to destroy a karmic potential from the root, you can suppress it so that it is not able to bring its result in the near future, or you can mitigate it so that its result is very mild. There are many different levels at which this practice can be effective, but the point is to interrupt the ripening of harmful results.

All six of these practices are effective methods of purifying past karma when they are based on a deep understanding of the perfected qualities of buddhahood. You need to know the nature of a buddha’s activity—wisdom, compassion, and power—and how all of a buddha’s actions are for the sake of other beings. When your practice is based on that understanding, then building images or reciting the names of the buddhas can be of great benefit to yourself and others.

1. Relying on the profound sutras.

Sutras such as Perfection of Wisdom (or Heart) Sutra

By reading, memorising, listening to teachings, or explaining to others these sutras, you can purify negative karma.

The main subject of these sutras is emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality. Therefore, praising, reading, or hearing these texts has the power to purify negative karma.

The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras address the wisdom that realises emptiness, the ultimate nature of phenomena. The realisation of emptiness is the supreme weapon cutting out all negativities from the root.

2. Having an interest (confidence) in emptiness.

Ultimately, all negative mental states and actions arise from ignorance—not knowing the truth. Realisation of the truth severs the root of ignorance, and hence severs all negative karma that stems from that ignorance. This is why the best antidote, the direct antidote, the ultimate weapon against negative karmic seeds, is the realisation of emptiness.

The mere suspicion that ultimately things are empty of inherent existence has the power to shake the foundations of cyclic existence. It is the first glimpse of the truth, and opens the way to the direct realisation of emptiness, which destroys the karmic seeds that cause our suffering.

3. Relying on recitation.

This refers to purification by means of reciting certain mantras in the context of special rituals.

4. Relying on images

show respect to the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind

create images of the buddhas in the form of statues, thangkas, tsa-tsas, and other representations

5. Relying on worship

making offerings of various substances to the buddhas, and to images that represent the buddhas

offer pure water, as when we offer water bowls on the altar every day, or you can offer just one flower

6. Relying on names

The practice of reciting **Oṃ māṇi padme hūṃ**, the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, was practically universal in Tibet. The effectiveness of these syllables to purify negative karma comes from the dedication that Avalokiteśvara himself made.

the name of a buddha as a powerful antidote to negative action

3” The third power: turning away from faults

The power of turning away from committing those same misdeeds in the future “I will never do that again.”

The resolve to avoid performing unwholesome actions in the future. You make a decisive commitment to restrain yourself from doing any of the ten non-virtuous actions.

If you see the faults of your previous bad actions and you feel sincere regret, and based upon that you resolve that you will not repeat those actions, that resolve, that turning away, has the power to destroy many non-virtuous karmic seeds.

The strength of your resolve to turn away from an action will ultimately depend on the strength of the regret you feel for having done it.

4” The fourth power: reliance

Since you have created a negative cause that may have very severe consequences, you look for a basis of protection, someone you can rely on to protect you from the results of your negative actions. The most reliable source of refuge and protection is **the Three Jewels**.

The second support is meditation on bodhicitta.
Bodhicitta means wanting to attain the highest goal of buddhahood in order to help other sentient beings. You want to help them because you see how they are trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of misery perpetuated by their own misunderstanding, attachment, and hatred.

The altruistic mind of bodhicitta is itself a powerful tool to remove negative karma.
Bodhicitta has that kind of power because negative karma comes from harming other beings and taking pleasure in their suffering. Bodhicitta is precisely the opposite attitude—the wish for all living beings to have the highest happiness. Such an attitude of course has great power.
Therefore, **meditating on bodhicitta, together with taking refuge in the Three Jewels, constitute the power of reliance.**

Antidotes to ‘extinguish bad karma

karma that cannot be purified does not exist. Even karma that is called “definite” in the scriptures can be purified when a sufficient countervailing antidote is applied

by applying the antidotes you can essentially destroy the ability of negative karmic seeds to ripen into their full, potential, negative consequences

you have weakened those seeds so that they will only yield very minor results, or their results have been put off to the far distant future

It is a bad plan to engage in non-virtuous behaviour thinking that you can extinguish it with antidotes. You cannot extinguish it completely. Remnants will cause your delayed enlightenment, buddhahood.