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| Issue Date |  |

# Influence of Meritorious and Demeritorious Deeds on Individual

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Abstract

This paper is a presentation of living beings under the influence of meritorious and demeritorious deeds. It is intended to know that the living beings enjoy or experience according to their past actions. The importance of volition (*Cetanā*) in performing action is presented by drawing from Pāli Canon, commentaries and sub-commentaries. Although living beings are found to perform good deeds with difficulty and they are found to perform bad deeds easily. They drawback good deeds but are happened to be delighted in bad deeds because they are influenced by defilements such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), conceit (*moha*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*) etc. and they ignore evil consequences of bad deeds. Knowing that the resultant effects are produced on account of their bad actions according to the Law of *Kamma*, living beings should avoid bad deeds and to perform good deeds. In this way one can become a person of morality in social life.

## Introduction

The performance of good actions gives rise to merit (*puñña*), a quality which purifies and cleanses the mind. Merit purifies the mind of the evil tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion. Merit is important to help us along our journey through our life. While the material wealth a person gathers can be lost by theft, flood, fire, confiscation, etc., the benefit of merits follows him from life to life and cannot be lost, although it can be exhausted if no attempts are made to perform more merits. A person will experience happiness here and now as well as hereafter through the performance of merit. Merit is a great facilitator. It opens the doors of opportunity everywhere. A meritorious person will succeed in whatever venture he puts his effort into. If he wishes to do business, he will meet with the right contacts and friends. If he wishes to be a scholar, he will be awarded with scholarships and supported by academic mentors. If he wishes to progress in meditation, he will meet with a skillful meditation teacher who guides him through his spiritual development. His dreams will be realized through the grace of his treasury of merit. It is merit which enables a person to be reborn in the heavens, and provides him with the right conditions and support for his attainment of *Nibbāna*. If the mind is unchecked, it has the tendency to be ruled by evil tendencies, leading one to perform bad deeds and getting into trouble. The greedy mind encourages a person to desire, accumulate and hoard; the hating mind drags him to dislike and anger; and the deluded mind makes one become entangled in greed and hatred, thinking that these evil roots are right and worthy. Demeritorious deeds give rise to more suffering and reduce the opportunities for a person to know and practise the Dhamma.

## **Meritorious deeds (*Kusalakamma*)**

There are several fields of merit which give rise to bountiful result to the performer of the good deeds. Many fields of merits including Saṅgha or holy people, mother, father, and needy. Good deeds performed to these persons will manifest in many ways and be the

fountainhead of many wondrous results. The Buddha taught ten meritorious deeds for us to perform in order to gain a happy and peaceful life as well as to develop knowledge and understanding. The ten meritorious deeds are: charity (*dāna*), morality (*Sīla*), mental culture (*bhāvanā*), reverence or respect (*apacāyana*), service in helping others (*veyyāvacca*), sharing merits with others (*pattidāna*), rejoicing in the others (*pattānumodana*), preaching and teaching the Dhamma (*Dhammassavana*), listening to the Dhamma (*Dhammadesanā*), straightening one's wrong views (*dhiṭṭhijukamma*).

The performance of these ten meritorious deeds will be beneficial not only one, but also others, besides giving benefits to the recipients. Moral conduct gives benefits to all beings with which one comes into contact. Mental culture brings peace to others and inspires them to practise the Dhamma. Reverence gives rise to harmony in society, while service improves the lives of others. Sharing merits with others shows that one is concerned with others' welfare, while rejoicing in others' merits encourages others to perform more merits. Teaching and listening to the Dhamma are important factors for happiness for both the teacher and listener, while encouraging both to live in line with Dhamma. Straightening one's wrong views enables a person to show others the taste of Dhamma.

## **Demeritorious Deeds**

There are ten demeritorious deeds from which Buddhists are advised to keep away. These deeds are rooted in greed, hatred and delusion etc., and will bring suffering to others but especially to oneself in this life and hereafter. There are three bodily actions which are kammically unwholesome. They are: (1) killing of living beings, (2) stealing, and (3) unlawful sexual intercourse. These bodily deeds correspond to the first three of the Five Precepts for people to follow.

The effects of killing deed are brevity of life, ill-health, constant grief due to the separation from the loved, and living in constant fear. The bad consequences of stealing are poverty, misery, disappointment, and a dependent livelihood. The bad consequences of sexual misconduct are having many enemies, always being hated, and union with undesirable wives and husbands.

Four verbal actions are kammically unwholesome, and they are: (1) lying, (2) slander and tale-bearing, (3) harsh speech and (4) frivolous and meaningless talk. Except for lying, the other unwholesome deeds performed by speech may be viewed as extensions of the fourth of the Five Precept.

The bad consequences of lying are being subject to abusive speech and vilification, untrustworthiness, and physical unpleasantness. The bad effect of slandering is losing one's friends without any sufficient cause. The results of harsh speech are being detested by others and having a harsh voice. The inevitable effects of frivolous talk are defective bodily organs and speech which no one believes.

The three other demeritorious deeds are performed by the mind, and they are: (1) covetousness, or eager desire to possess things belonging to others, (2) ill-will, and (3) wrong view. These three deeds correspond to the three evil roots of greed, hatred and delusion. The non-observance of the Fifth Precept, abstention from intoxicants can lead to

the performance not only of these three demeritorious mental actions after the mind is intoxicated, but also of other demeritorious deeds performed by body and speech.

The undesirable result of covetousness is the non-fulfillment of one's wishes. The consequences of ill-will are ugliness, manifold diseases, and having a detestable nature. Finally, the consequences of false view are having gross desires, lack of wisdom, being of dull wit, having chronic diseases and blameworthy ideas.

In order to comprehend above easily, the *Cūlakammavibāṅga Sutta* should here be presented. It was while the Buddha was residing at the *Jetavana* monastery in *Sāvatti*. *Subha* the young man approached the Buddha, talked wards of greeting, sat a suitable place and supplicated to the Buddha:

“Buddha, people are clearly seen that they are different in birth. There are short-lived people. There are long-lived people. There are people afflicted with diseases. There are people who are healthy without diseases. There are ugly people. There are beautiful people. There are highly influential people. There are people with little influence. There are poor people. There are wealthy people. There are people who are of high birth and of low birth. There are people who are deficient in wisdom and who are wise. Why are they different?

“The Buddha replied; “living beings have *kamma* as their own property. They are inheritors of the *kamma*. *Kamma* is the only cause. *Kamma* is the relative. *Kamma* is the only refuge they have got. The *kamma* determines the inferiority or superiority of the living beings.

“In this world, he, who kills the lives of living beings cruelly and mercilessly, goes to hell when he dies. If not to hell, human world he will be short in lifespan. Life-span will be short in whatever life he attains. The short life is the resultant effects of the cause of killing the lives of beings. Who avoids killing other beings, and wishes for the welfare of all beings, goes to celestial heaven. If not be celestial heaven, he will be born again in the human world when he dies, he will live long. His life-span will be long in every life he attains. The long-life is the result of abstaining from killing of beings, mercy and wishing for the welfare of all beings.

“A person torments living beings with his hand, with a stone, with a stick or with a sword. When he dies, he is destined to hell. If not to hell, he will be reborn in human world. He will be afflicted with many diseases. He will be afflicted with diseases in every life he attains. This lot is the resultant effect of tormenting other living beings.

“A person does not cruelly torment other living beings with his hand, with a stone, with a stick or with a sword. When he dies, he will reach a celestial heaven. If not to heaven, he will be reborn in human world. He will be healthy without ailments. This good luck is the result of not tormenting other living beings cruelly.

“A person easily angered. He gets violently angry when a few words are spoken to him. When he dies he will reach hell. If not to hell, he will be reborn in human world. He will be ugly. He will be ugly in every life he comes into existence. The ugliness is the result of *kamma* which is anger and hatred.

“A person is not angry or hateful even though many words are spoken to him. When he dies, he will reach a celestial heaven. If not to heaven, he will be reborn in human world. He will be good looking. He will have good looks in every life he comes into existence. This blessing is the fruitfulness of the *kamma* which is lack of anger or hatred and bearing patience.

“In this world, being overwhelmed by jealousy and envy a person feels jealous and bears malice when the other gets gifts, good treatment, respect, adoration, homage and offering. When he dies he is destined to hell. If he is not cast in hell, he will be born in the human world. He will have no influence in the human life. He will not have influence in every life he comes into existence. This is the result a life being overwhelmed by jealousy and envy.

“A person feels only happiness when other people get gifts, good treatment, respect, adoration, homage and offering. When he dies, he will reach a celestial heaven. If he does not reach to heaven, he will be reborn in human world. He will be powerful and influential in human life. He will be powerful and influential in every life he comes into existence. This good fortune is the result of lack of jealousy and envy and bearing of sympathetic joy for other’s success and wealth.

“A person does not offer alms, juices, robes, carriages, flowers, perfume, beds, dwellings, oil lamps, etc. to a holy person or monk. When he dies, he will be cast in hell or he may be reborn in human world. He will be poor in human life. He will be poor in every life he comes into existence. This bad luck is the result of lack of charity in the former life.

“A person does not offer alms, juices, robes, carriages, flowers, perfume, beds, dwellings, oil lamps, etc. to a holy person or monk. When he dies, he may reach a celestial heaven or he may be reborn in human world. In human life he will be prosperous. He will be prosperous in every life he comes into existence. This good fortune is the result of *kamma* which was the charitable work he performed in previous life.

“A person is arrogant, proud, does not respect others, does not pay obeisance, does not welcome, does not give place of honor and obstructs road. When he dies, he will be cast in hell or he may be reborn in inferior social class. He will be inferior in birth in every life he comes into existence. This bad fortune is the result of a life given to arrogance, and conceit in the previous existence.

“A person is gentle and not proud. He may reach a celestial heaven or he may be reborn in a noble family. He will be of noble birth in every life he comes into existence. Being born in a noble family is the result of the past *kamma* which is being gentle and lack of arrogance and conceit.

“A person does not approach any person, a woman, a man, a monk or virtuous one and ask “What is wholesome deed?” or “What is an unwholesome deed?” when he dies, he may be cast in hell or he may be reborn in human life. He will be deficient in wisdom. He will be dull in intelligence in every life he comes into existence.

“Living beings are short-life because they make effort to practise short way of life. Living beings are long-lived because they make effort to practise the way of long life. Living beings are afflicted with diseases because they practise the way of many diseases. Living beings are affected by few diseases because of practise of reduction of diseases. The living beings are ugly because they practise the way of ugliness. Living beings are clear in looks because they practise the way of clean beauty. Living beings have little influence because they practise the way of ill-influence. Living beings are influential because they practise the way of influence. Living beings are poor in property because they practise the way of poverty. Living beings are wealthy because they practise the way of prosperity. Living beings are low in birth because they practise the way of inferior life. Living beings are high in birth because they practise the way of noble birth. Living beings are ignorant because they practise the way of ignorant. Living beings are wise because they practise the way of wise. Living beings have *kamma* as their own possessions. *Kamma* determines the inferiority and superiority of the living beings.”

The term *kamma* simply means action or behaviour. *Kammavāda* or *Kammaniyāma*, therefore, means volition (*Cetanā*) that stimulates the actions and behaviours. The acts of giving donations, observing precepts and helping others have wholesome volition in association with them. The volition that stimulates a wholesome deed is called *kusalakamma*.

In the same way, unwholesome acts such as torturing others, killing and destroying others benefits had unwholesome volition in associated with them. That volition stimulates unwholesome actions. That unwholesome volition is called *Akusalakamma*. Therefore wholesome *kamma* produces wholesome results and unwholesome *kamma* produces unwholesome results.

Therefore, everyone is the creator of their own lives-good or bad. According to *Kammavāda*, one’s wholesome and unwholesome *kamma* create one’s own life enjoyable or painful. A person cannot determine another person’s destiny. Therefore the Buddha taught, *Atta hi attano nātho ko hi nā tho paro siyā, attanā hi sudantena nātham labhati dullabham*

“Your own self is your own mainstay, for who else could your mainstay be? With you yourself well-trained you obtain the mainstay hard to obtain.”

### **Same *Kamma*, Different Result**

In this world there are good virtuous persons as well as bad, evil ones. Let us suppose a good person and a bad one did the same petty evil deed. The good one will not suffer much because his good *kamma* will over-rule the single misdeed. But the bad person, since he has no good *kamma* to cover him, will be fully affected by the evil results.

For example, at night, a rich man’s son and an opium-addict prowled around to snatch some chicken. The rich man’s son actually stole a hen and ran away but was caught by the owner let him go because he dared not accuse him as a thief; he even apologised to the lad. But he charged the opium-addict with theft and put him in jail.

*Kusalakamma* and *Akusalakamma* can counteract each other. A small evil can in no way hinder a large quantity of good *kusalakamma*. But if you have only a small evil

will render your good *kamma* null and void. The moral lesson for the righteous is to do as many good deeds as possible and accumulate as much *kusala* as one can.

### **Conclusion**

A person should always perform good actions and restrain himself from doing evil actions. If, however, a person has performed an evil action, it is necessary for him to realize where he has done wrong and make an effort not to repeat the mistake.

First, he realizes the nature of his deed and the extent of the harm incurred. Next, he realizes that this deed is unwholesome, learns from it, and makes the resolution not to repeat it. Then, he performs many good deeds to the affected party as well as to others, as much as possible. In this way, he overcomes the effect of bad deed with a shower of good deeds. It will only cause him to continue to remain ignorant and morally complacent. This misplaced belief can, in fact, do a person much more harm than the effects of the wrong deed he feared so much.

Buddhist morality is not the invention of human minds. Neither is it based on tribal ethics which are gradually being replaced by humanistic codes. It is based on the universal law of cause and effect (*kamma*), and considers a 'good' or 'bad' action in terms of the manner it affects oneself and others. An action, even if it brings benefit to oneself, cannot be considered a good action if it causes physical and mental pain to another being.

If a person performs an action through greed, hatred, and delusion, his action is considered to be unwholesome. On the other hand, if he performs an action out of love, charity, and wisdom, his action is a wholesome one. Greed, Hatred and Delusion are known as the 'Three Evil Root', while love, charity and wisdom as the 'Three Good Roots'.

In Buddhism, a person's first duty is to cleanse himself of the mental defilements of greed, hatred and ignorance. To minimize the occurrence of troubles and problems in his life, he makes effort to refrain from doing evil. He performs good actions because he knows that these will bring him peace and happiness. Since everyone seeks happiness in life, and since it is possible for him to provide the condition for happiness, then there is every reason for him to do good and avoid evil. Furthermore, the uprooting of these mental defilements, the source of all anti-social acts, will bring great benefits to others in society. A good Buddhist should remind himself or herself to follow the Five Precepts daily.

The precepts are the basic practise in Buddhism. The purpose is to eliminate crude passions that are expressed through thought, word and deed. The precepts are also an indispensable basis for people who wish to cultivate their minds. Without some basic moral code, the power of meditation can often be applied for some wrong and selfish motive.

Observance of precepts (both the Five and Eight precepts) when performed with an earnest mind is certainly a meritorious act. It brings great benefits to this life and the lives

hereafter. Therefore, a person should try his best to observe the precepts with understanding and as often as he can.

The Buddha taught the doctrine of cause and effect. Besides, He encouraged the disciples to avoid unwholesome actions and to perform wholesome actions. Therefore, the Buddha's *kammavāda* encourages people to do only wholesome deeds. Anyone who follows this advice of the Buddha will certainly enjoy peace.

The Buddha encourages the disciples to avoid unwholesome actions and perform wholesome actions instead. The Buddha usually taught "Avoid all unwholesome deeds; do wholesome deeds; purify the mind." This is the teaching of all Buddha.

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