

WBU SUNDAY FORUM

Let us come to know the karma in Buddhism

Guest Speaker: Phrakru Ghositbuddhisat Ph.D

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On the First Sunday of the Month of August, 2010 (Sunday, August 1st, B.E. 2010), Phrakru Ghositbuddhisat Ph.D was the guest speaker of the Buddhist Forum talking on "Let us come to know the karma in Buddhism" Phrakrughositbuddhisat, assistant abbot of Wat Rakangghositaram, Bangkok, is currently a lecturer of Department of Religion and Philosophy, Faculty of Buddhism, Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Bangkok. He got his Ph.D.(Indian Philosophy) from the University of Madras, Tamil Nadu State, India.

Phrakru Ghositbuddhisat began his lecture with the importance of karma. It is an energy created by willful action, through thoughts, words and deeds. As Buddhism does not require the belief in any gods, it is a non-theistic spiritual philosophy meaning that it does not have any gods to give kindness and punishment to anybody. Buddhist people thus believe in the karma. He then continued his lecture in the form of question and answer.

What is karma?

The karma is human action, it arises from human intention. The karma is formless. It is not in the air. It is not in the water; it is not in or on the earth. Man is the owner of karma as it arises from man himself.

The kinds of action

There are two karmas: one is wholesome action, and another is unwholesome action. The wholesome action is good deed which arises from wisdom. This means the action arises from non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. It supports both bodily and mental quality of man. The unwholesome action is bad deed which doesn't arise from wisdom. It arises from greed, hatred and delusion. It makes man lose his good quality of life.

There are three kinds of the wholesome action; they are good conduct in act, good conduct in word and good conduct in thought. There are three kinds of the unwholesome action; they are bad conduct in act, bad conduct in word and bad conduct in thought.

How do actions arise?

Wholesome action and unwholesome action arise from three ways, e.g. body, word and mind. The karma arises from body is called bodily action. The karma arises from word is called verbal action. The karma arises from mind is called mental action. The roots of karma are wholesome roots and unwholesome roots. They arise when the internal sense-fields contact the external sense-fields, such as we are seeing visible objects. If the visible object is an attractive object, we desire it (Lobha/greed), we want to be the owner of it, and then we seek for it. To be an owner of it, if he is a moral man, he has to work by his right effort so as to get the thing that he likes and desires it; but if he is a non-moral man, he seeks for it in the wrong way that may be the evil conduct in act, evil conduct in word or evil conduct in thought. The evil conduct in act is to make harm to others, to take what is not given, or to do sexual misconduct. The evil conduct in word is false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, or vain talk. The evil conduct in thought is greed, ill-will, or false view.

How is the karma understood?

Some Buddhist people understand that the karma is something which is given to them by unseen power. So, they go to the sacred places to pray and to beg for the unseen power to give them only good

things; therefore, they offer sacrifices to the unseen power so that he will give them luck, so, the sacrifices which are offered should be good. This is not different from the people in the ancient age. Some people understand the karma as something being with us, which can be cleaned off. So, they seek for one who can purify them from the karma. Some people understand the karma as an effect of action, but it can be escaped; so, they are not afraid of deed, but they are afraid of effect of the deed. They have to perform a ritual according to their belief so as to escape from the karma.

How does it give an award or a wicked thing?

The karma will give an award or a wicked thing to us. It is based on the karma that is wholesome or unwholesome. If it is the wholesome deed, it will give its effect as happiness. If it is the unwholesome deed, it will give its effect as suffering. The principle of Buddhist teaching is doing good begets good, doing bad begets bad. It may affect suddenly or slowly that depends on the conditions such as: - If a man is living in a good environment, in the society of morality, he does good, begets only good.

If he is living in the time of a righteous leader, when he does good, is encouraged to do more good.

If he is not a deformed person, he is able to do good things, and encouraged to do more good.

If he is a person who has the right view, he does not illegal thing, and so, he is not punished.

Whereas, if he is living in a bad environment, in the society of not morality, he does good or bad, begets only bad.

If he is living in the time of a leader who is not righteous, even he does good, but he may beget bad.

If he has wrong view, he will do only illegal thing, and is punished.

So, the man himself does the bad; the man is impure by himself, there is no one who comes to make him pure or impure.

Can we come to know the karma through the practice of insight meditation?

Now, we are coming to know the karma through the practice of insight meditation. The insight meditation is an observation of body and mind. First of all, we have to develop our concentration and mindfulness for using them to control mind to stay with natural phenomena of body or mind to know relation between body and mind. So, the Buddha taught the Four Foundations of mindfulness : mindfulness of bodily process, mindfulness of feeling, mindfulness of thought and mindfulness of mind object.

For the mindfulness of bodily process, the meditators have to be mindful of bodily process, that is, movements of their bodies such as they are walking; they have to be aware of walking mindfully. However, while they are walking, they will be aware of relations between body and mind that is the cause and the effect to each other. If there is only body without mind, there is no bodily movement; if there is only mind without body, there is no action.

So, the practice of insight meditation is development of mindfulness to know the nature of mind and body. For example, when the itchy sensation occurs to the meditator, and he intends to scratch it, he has to observe intention in his mind, "intending to scratch, intending to scratch, intending to scratch..." He pays attention to his hand, and mindfully lifts his hand by saying in his mind "lifting, lifting, lifting..." until he starts to scratch. He does it slowly by saying in his mind "scratching, scratching, scratching".

The process of scratching arises from attachment to the meditator's body "My body is feeling itchy", this is shown that self has arisen; and the attachment to the self as "an I" arises later. So, he intends to scratch it in order that he can escape from the symptom of itchy sensation that is suffering; the suffering arises from attachment; the attachment arises from ignorance.

Scratching is action of karma that arises from meditator's intention as the Buddha said "Cetanaham bhikkhave kammam vadami/ Oh monks! I said that intention is the effect of his action. So, generally, this action is the wholesome deed, it affects as happiness; but if it is the unwholesome deed, it affects as suffering.

The man commits action or the karma for keeping away from suffering; to avoid the suffering. Therefore, the man should eradicate ignorance by practicing insight meditation to build right understanding of the body and the mind; then only he can get rid of his suffering forever.