

## THE FOUR THOUGHTS – KARMA

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The Tibetan text I have used for the third of the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind translates to:

Third,  
At death there is no freedom,  
Karma takes its course,  
As I create my own karma,  
I should therefore abandon all unwholesome action.  
With this in mind,  
I must observe my mindstream each day.

Karma has been a buzz word for decades, gradually working its way into the popular idiom. What is meant by karma I am sure varies widely, but the basic idea is that for every action there is a reaction, for every statement, a response.

And yes there is good and bad karma, although what we worry about as bad karma may not be what really takes a toll. The Ten Commandments in the Bible are definitely karma producing when they are violated, but habitual micro-karma appears to be even more overwhelming for us in the long run.

Of course actions like killing and stealing create what we could agree is bad karma, but what really adds up is the gradual accumulation of low-level karma due to our own thought processes. Let me give an example.

You might say something accidentally (or purposefully) that hurts my feelings. I walk away from our conversation thinking about what you said, going over and over it in my mind. I am recording this in my mindstream. This might go on for hours, all day, or even persist for weeks on end. Every time I review it in my mind I am inscribing this event deeper and deeper in my mind, digging a groove until it becomes a trench. This too is karma, big time.

And this particular kind of micro-karma really adds up. It not only obscures our mind as it goes down, but like all karma, it has an afterlife. It grows and eventually ripens in our mind, creating even more obscuration. And unfortunately, most of us do this all the time, day in and day out. And it is mindless, meaning we are not even aware of it. Or we may

be dimly aware of it, but think nothing of it.

One concept to take to heart is that karma, large or small, is infallible. What goes up comes down, and what goes down in our mindstream will eventually come up as ripened karma. You can count on it.

What was harder for me to understand, at least in the beginning, is that karma is infinitesimally fine, as exact as exact can be. And it is not just limited to what we might have a conscience about. Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to karma. You don't have to be aware that you are creating "bad" karma to accumulate it. This should be obvious to any reasonable person. Just consider what various societies (in particular our own) are accumulating. Look around you. Global warming and ozone holes are probably examples of collective karma that the entire earth is accumulating, whether or not we are aware of it, whether we believe in it or not.

My point here is that karma does not depend on our ability to distinguish right from wrong. It is way finer (and more insidious) than that. Karma goes beyond ourselves (the Self), so great care is required when considering actions, like each and every one.

Not to upset you, but in evaluating actions, we can't just assume we have good sense when it comes to our actions and the karma they accumulate. After all, we are not examining the world outside ourselves, but in mind training we are examining the mind itself (our attitude) that projects this world around us. Even a tiny change in attitude (a slip of the mind) can produce a big change in how we see things, and influence our actions.

My point here is that we may want to err on the safe side of karma, and not just assume that our mind (just as it came out of the box) is good-to-go, and that we actually know what is best for us, and can tell the good from the bad. Can we? We may be walking a high-wire karmic tightrope hundreds of feet in the air and not even know it. That's how vulnerable we are in this area.

The older I get, the more I realize that my approach to karma has been way too general and that, while avoiding the "big-bad actions," I have consistently engaged in a myriad of smaller karmic actions (of which I am only somewhat aware) that I never take very seriously. And karma sneaks up on you.

And while I don't want to become a mind-Nazi to my own life by second-guessing every last decision, I need to clean up my actions and stop laying waste to my own potential clarity through micro-karmic accumulation.

To use a phrase from Aleister Crowley... "To snatch at a gnat and swallow a camel." In this analogy, I have to reverse Crowley's phrase to something like:

While watching to avoid the big karmic mistakes, I habitually (and often consciously) accumulate and record an avalanche of micro-karma, my every passing like and dislike.

It is possible to stop recording all this micro-karma, but it takes some serious mind training, which I am not about to detail here. Suffice it to say that it involves relaxing the mind and learning to drop the obsessive thoughts or see through them. If you don't record them, the karma does not accumulate. Less karma accumulation means less obscuration. Less obscuration means greater clarity. It is that simple, but easier said than done.

In this short blog I have only scratched the surface of this topic. The bottom line is that it would help if we can become more aware of what we are doing in each and every action. As we better understand the laws of karma, we stop acting like the bull in a china shop and find ourselves walking on tiptoe.

I am reminded of the cliché often used to explain chaos theory, that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil sets off a tornado in Texas. Karma is sensitive like that.