

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

KARMA To think about karma you must understand several things which are theorized in Buddhism. The first of these is vipaka-vijnana and the second is the five ways. These are the cause-and-result of karma. To understand about karma you must also comprehend two or three elements which exist in relation to the consequentive causation which is called karma. I shall tell you about vipaka-vijnana first.

Vijnana is consciousness. Vipaka means a maturity different from the cause. For instance, an infant has blonde hair, but later has black hair. When the result is ripe it appears entirely different from the cause. Vijnana, consciousness, possesses such a nature.

According to Buddhism, our eyes are a consciousness, but the eye does not produce results different from the cause. For instance, when we see a red banner, we realize its color is red. No one, unless he is colorblind, perceives red color as green. The red banner is the cause, our perception of the red color is the result. The banner is the cause of red; we perceive it as red and we don't call it green.

But vijnana performs so queerly sometimes. In the past a man was tortured; in this life he is born an honest man; in the next life, according to his karma, he will be a rich man. Thus the cause matures into different results.

We call this vipaka-vijnana by another name also--alaya-vijnana. The closest literal translation of this is "mother-consciousness," because this consciousness has six children. The first child of this mother-consciousness is called mano-vijnana, which means "mind." The second is the physical body, this entire body, including hands and legs. The third child is the mouth; the fourth child is the nose; the fifth child is the ear; and the sixth child is the eye--one mother and six children.

The first child, mano-vijnana, according to another sect of Buddhism, is divided into two: one part is called mano-vijnana and the other manas. So some people think there are seven children, but in our counting there are only six.

The alaya-consciousness keeps the seeds of karma as a pond keeps in its water the seeds that happened to come into it. Someone comes along and dips up the water in his pail, carries the pail away, and

uses the water in many places. The seeds sprout in the places where the water has been spilled. So one might say, also, this alaya-consciousness is like the earth which keeps the seeds of many fruits. Men come and dig up the earth and carry it away to fertilize their fields. Next spring all of a sudden a persimmon tree begins to grow from that field, or a pine tree sprouts on the terrace near the kitchen. Many metaphors are used to describe this. For instance, someone sells a garment to a second-hand shop. The second-hand shop sells it to a store in the slum district. A slum woman comes and buys it for an evening festival. It is already soiled, having passed through the hands of many people, and the color is faded. Originally it was the garment of a rich man's daughter, but now a slum woman wears it on a festival night.

Speaking about this accurately, it is a result. But I have to use other ways to explain it to you. Soul dwells in this alaya-consciousness which keeps many seeds. It brings in, according to its action, more seeds, and then leaves this consciousness. Again soul comes in and dwells in this consciousness. The old seeds sprout. The new soul does not know what kind of consciousness it is in, where it is dwelling. All of a sudden it realizes "Oh, this was some other one's consciousness, some poor man's consciousness." When it tries to speak, gently and delicately, "How do you do!" because the alaya-consciousness in which it is dwelling had in it those old seeds, when the voice comes out it is a shout: "HOW DO YOU DO!" The soul did not mean to speak so loudly, but the alaya-consciousness's seeds had a coarse quality so the result is that the voice is different from the intention. Then, when soul moves into another alaya-consciousness, when it means to speak gruffly, the voice which comes is a whisper, for the alaya-consciousness had been keeping feminine seeds which sprouted. This is how the Buddhist explains that a cause may bring forth unexpected results. The Buddhist thinks that such a result is neither what you know as virtue nor what you know as vice, and he doesn't call the cause good or bad.

Now you must imagine there is one more basic consciousness. This consciousness does not accept seeds. The soil of this consciousness is like earth which has never received any kind of seed. We call it pure consciousness, amala-vijnana. It is like an earth formation of very hard soil which nothing can penetrate. This soil is covered with a softer soil, the alaya-consciousness, which as I told you, when we are speaking about karma we call vipaka-consciousness. These are the same, but called by different names in different connections.

In the still softer strata is the mano-consciousness. It conceives seeds, not only the past seeds, but also present seeds. It corresponds to the samskara of the five skandhas. This mano-consciousness develops into still softer soil in which the present seeds are sown--our present mind which thinks and talks. This is called samjna in the five skandhas. That consciousness develops a still softer

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strata which feels pain, pleasant feeling, and that which is neither pain nor pleasure. I wear a collar, clothes, all day long and feel neither pain nor pleasure. But if I wear coarse stockings, I feel pain, and if I wear a silk scarf I feel pleasure. The body feels the vibration of air, but not the vibration of ether: the vibration of ether is felt by our eye. This is the foundation of our consciousness.

The six children go out and carry back the seeds and put them into the soil. The coarse seeds stay there but the finer seeds filter through to the lower consciousness. The finest seeds filter through to the alaya-consciousness and remain there forever. The amala-consciousness, like water, is everywhere. When it comes to a particular well, it creates a particular taste. The water in New York is very nice, the water in New Jersey is muddy, the water in the Catskills is metallic. When this consciousness is born, according to the earth and according to the seeds that earth is keeping, it grows in each individual, carrying the karma of past life.

We shall speak about reincarnation another time, but I shall say one word now. Buddhists think the soul which has dwelt in a certain consciousness does not go very far away from there, does not go into an entirely different place. Of course this is just hypothesis. When the soul drops off from consciousness, therefore, they believe it is born in another consciousness where there is some relation. So the soul does not go to some entirely different place, but to a place where it has some relation. It goes according to its instinct. For it is believed that the soul has some home-returning instinct, some nature of orientation.

In the *Vibhava* sastra this theory is carefully explained. I shall not speak about it any more now, but you think about it yourselves. For myself, I don't mind where I will be born in the next incarnation, or in what karma. It is not my business.

Well, I have one more thing to speak about. The ancient Buddhists carefully considered the different natures of the results, that is, where consciousness acts to create more karma. According to one way of counting, there are five places or ways, to go, the five modes of existence, called gati.

The first is the place of torment, in a word, hell.

The second is preta, the state which has no nourishment. The spirits born in that place are always hungry, always thirsty.

The third is the place of beasts, especially beasts of burden--the horse, ox, and so forth. It seems to me it doesn't include cats or dogs, but only those beasts which perform labor. But the burden is not only physical labor. It might be like that of a mother who must conceive all her life long. "I have given birth to six children, but you ask me for more. I have given birth to twelve children, but you ask for more."

The fourth is the way of manu, or man, lazy human beings, who for-

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tunately have some thinking capacity so they can avoid some labor, also trouble, before it comes.

And the fifth is deva. The devas of this gati are not like the devas of the rupa-dhatu, the pure devas. These devas are in kama-dhatu. They are the devas who keep the seeds. They have the nature to keep seeds, so they are the guardians of earth. And the devas who nourish sentient beings are the gods who give birth to the spirit which brings forth the seeds. And there are the devas which warm the seed as the sun warms the earth. Then the heat of the earth makes the seed sprout. There are also devas who give light to sentient beings--like the eye of enlightenment. But they are still in the lower class of devas in the world of devas.

According to their karma, spirits will be born in these different places. According to past karma which you did not create at all, you come into the soul as a seed is dropped into the ground. It did not mean to come there at all, but was carried there by the wind and dropped there. In the terrific heat, for instance, the seed of the tall pine tree may be carried to a place where there is no water. Twisted and thirsty and hungry, it has been blown there, and must live in the torment of hell.

When you carry karma in the state of vipaka-vijnana, you cannot call it bad or good. But the karma you create in mano-consciousness may be called evil or virtue, because there was the intention of doing.

One more thing. In this body, all the gati are included. Some sentient beings in this body are living in hell, some in preta. Don't think this body is just one man. This one man is composed of many different beings.

I was thinking very carefully about "sentient beings." The Buddha said a sentient being is not a man, but each center of the living elements which organize to create one man. Each sentient being, each element of a being, carries karma differently. So all the centers of your being which dwell together in your body carry a different karma. This way you can understand karma and think about karma.

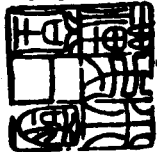
A man who has a philosopher's mind, but a warrior's hand, what can he do? According to his karma, these two natures are in him. In this body all the natures are always living together and each element lives a different karma.

Well, I think this is the end for now. But there is no end of talking of this in detail.

NOTE When the gati are counted as six, the additional one is asura, angry spirit or demon. Another description of these states is given in ZEN NOTES, Vol. IV, No. 2, p. 4. The six gati are referred to also in Vol. IV, No. 7, in the Song of Zazen, l. 11, as the Six Ways.

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