

# The Modifiability of Karma

釋見可

*We are the heirs and owners of our karma.*

*Through being present and awake to our intention at the beginning of an action, we can reshape and direct the patterns of our mind, and then change the karma in our life.*

## Introduction

More than two thousand and five hundred years ago, Buddha sent a hopeful message addressing the caste hierarchy of India: it is not your birth that decides if you are noble or lowly; it is your karma (kamma in Pali) that decides what you will be. Karma is a vast and profound topic in Buddha's teaching.

## What is karma?

The word karma comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *kr* which means "to make, perform, accomplish, prepare, undertake." The noun form 'karman' literally means "action, performance, activity." or "religious act or rite".

To gain a better understanding of karma in Buddha's teaching, it will be helpful to relate it to the cultural and historical context first. At the time of the Buddha, the notion that karma brings result and the doctrine of transmigration were deeply ingrained in Indian religion. According to the classic Vedic sacrificial religion, if the gods are pleased, they will grant good fortune. The fundamental rationale of the whole sacrificial system is that correct ritual actions will bring about desired results: the well-being of the individual, society and universe. The good or bad deed that one performs in this life will decide if one's next life is fortunate or unfortunate. However, how to tell if the deeds are good or bad is based on correctly or incorrectly performing the ritual action.

The Buddha assimilated the notion of rebirth in a series of lives, but transformed the concept of karma from the ritual level to the ethical level, from outer performance to inner power. In Anguttara-Nikaya Buddha gave this definition: "It is volition (*cetana*), monks, that I call kamma. For hav-

# 業可以轉變嗎？

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我們是自己業的繼承者及主人。

藉由活在當下及覺察自己的起心動念，

我們可以重塑及主導心向，進而改變我們生命的業。

## 前言

兩千五百多年前，佛陀為印度的階級制度帶來希望的信息：並非你的出身決定你是高貴或貧賤，而是你的業(巴利文稱之為kamma)決定你的一切。在佛陀的教導裡，業是一又廣又深的論題。

## 何謂業？

「karma」(業)這個字出自於梵文「kr」這個動詞詞根，意指造作、執行、完成、準備、從事，它的名詞「karman」，字面的意思為行為、履行、活動，或是宗教行為或儀式。

如果我們先了解佛陀時代的文化歷史背景，就更能了解佛陀所說的業。在佛陀時代，業會產生果報以及輪迴轉世等觀念，已深植於印度的宗教。根據古典吠陀的祭祀宗教，如果神對所獻的禮滿意，就會賜給人們好運。這整套祭祀儀典的理論基礎就是——正確的儀式規範就會帶來如願的果報，包括為個人、社會和宇宙帶來福祉。今生行為的好壞決定來生的幸或不幸。然而，行為的好壞卻是取決於是否遵守正確的儀式規範。

佛陀吸收了印度多世再生的輪迴觀念，但把業的概念從儀式層面提昇到倫理道德層面，從外在的表現提昇為內心的力量。在《增支部》(Anguttara-Nikaya)裡，佛陀為業下了定義：「比丘們，我把思(cetana)稱之

ing willed, one performs an action through body, speech and mind.” Buddha said that karma is volition, because it is the motivation behind the action that directs the karmic result. Through our volition we can shape the patterns of our mind and perform the action of mind, the action of speech and the action of body.

In the context of Buddha’s teaching, karma is not only a single action, but also a dynamic process in our life. The law of karma is the law of cause and effect. Everything we do must produce results which we will have to experience sooner or later. Two twin verses indicate precisely the principle of karma in the opening sentences of the great Dhammapada :

All the phenomena of existence have mind as their precursor, mind as their supreme leader, and of mind are they made. If with an impure mind one speaks or acts, suffering follows him in the same way as the wheel follows the foot of the drawer (of the chariot).

All the phenomena of existence have mind as their precursor, mind as their supreme leader, and of mind are they made. If with a pure mind one speaks or acts, happiness follows him like his shadow that never leaves.

The Buddha’s teaching inspires us to pay attention to how our mind creates our own world and shapes our destiny. Karma is certain and definite. The consequence of our actions will definitely be experienced. Thus, men become heirs of their own deeds.

## Is karma modifiable?

When we consider the strict lawfulness of karma, another question arises. “Is karma fatalism?” “Is it modifiable?” I would like to answer this question by relating the following fable:

In a small village lived two people. Because of their stealing, they were punished by having two big letters, “ST” , carved on their foreheads. One of them thought that he was doomed to failure all the time; then, he abandoned himself to drinking and committing more robberies. Consequently, he was sentenced to life imprisonment and was called “Super Thief” . However, another one believed that he could create a new life. Even though at first abuse rained down on him again and again, he didn’t resist it. He considered the scolding as an alarm to warn him to be benevolent diligently towards people. After ten years, people respected and loved him; they called him “SAINT” .

The story shows us the law of cause and effect: in one short moment, an individual can respond poorly to a situation and begin a negative chain

為業。因為必先作意，才能引發身、口、意的行為。」佛陀說，業就是思，因為業的果報是由行為背後的動機來決定的。經由我們的意志，我們可以形塑心的樣貌，引發身、口、意的行為。

在佛陀的教誨裡，業並非單一的行為，而是我們生命互動的過程。業的法則就是因果律。我們所做的一切必定會產生果報，而我們遲早要承受這份果報。在法句經(Dhammapada) 雙品開頭的兩句偈頌就精確地詮釋出業的法則：

「心是諸(名)法的前導者，心是主，諸(名)法唯心造。若人以邪惡之心言行，痛苦將跟隨著他，有如車輪跟隨拉車之牛的足蹄。

心是諸(名)法的前導者，心是主，諸(名)法唯心造。若人以清淨之心言行，快樂將跟隨著他，如影隨形。」

佛陀的教導啟發我們覺察到：心是如何創造我們自己的世界，及塑造我們的命運。業是確切且必然的，我們必得經驗自己行為所產生的後果。因此，我們就是自己行為的繼承人。

## 業可以改變嗎？

當我們思及業的定律時，另一個問題就產生了：「業是命定的嗎？」「業可以改變嗎？」我想先藉由一則寓言故事回答這個問題。

在一個小村莊裡住了兩個人。因為偷盜，他們被懲罰在額頭上烙印兩個大字母「ST」。其中一個人認為自己這輩子註定是失敗了，因此就自暴自棄，酗酒並累犯多次搶劫。結果他被判了無期徒刑，大家稱他為「超級強盜」(Super Theft)。另一個卻相信自己可以洗心革面。雖然剛開始時，他一再遭人譴責，但他都沒有反抗。他將人們的唾罵當成警訊，是來提醒他更要精進行善。十年後，他終於受到人們尊敬及愛戴，大家稱他為「聖者」(SAINT)。

這個故事對我們揭示因果律的法則，那就是：在片刻間，我們可對某個情況作出不當的反應，而開始引發一連串負面的業；也於片刻

of karma. And in one short moment, he can make a wise choice through right mindfulness. The “saint” character took all the responsibility for what was happening to him (the karma of result), and did not form new ill intentions toward the people who insulted him nor did he underestimate himself (the karma of cause). On the contrary, he respected every new moment of his life (the karma of cause), and was able to find a path filled with opportunity (the karma of result).

Thus, we can see two dimensions of karma: (1) Our past karma, which is unchangeable. (2) Our future new karma, which we can change by our present actions. Asserting that all the effect of the bad karma can be mitigated, Francis Story said “People believe in determinism, fatalism, merely because they see results, but do not see causes.”

The Ven. Nyanaponika also states clearly that the lawfulness of karma is not rigid. Karma is modified as it ripens by both external and internal factors. Between the cause and effect, a lot of changeable conditions exist. A karma event may have its result strengthened by supportive karma, weakened by counteractive karma, or even abolished by destructive karma. If the combination of all the causes and conditions required has not ripened yet, the result can also be delayed. At the same time, the delay may give another opportunity for supportive karma, counteractive karma, and destructive karma to operate. In addition, the Ven. Nyanaponika said, “The ripening also reflects the kamma’s ‘internal field’ or internal conditions—that is, the total qualitative structure of the mind from which the action issues. To one rich in moral or spiritual qualities, a single offence may not entail the weighty results the same offence will have for one who is poor in such protective virtue.”

The fact that karmic results are modifiable frees us from determinism and fatalism, and keeps the road to liberation constantly open before us.

## Conclusion

The Buddha’s interpretation of karma had the profound meaning of making us responsible for our own spiritual progress. We are the heirs and owners of our karma. Through being present and awake to our intention at the beginning of an action, we can reshape and direct the patterns of our mind, and then change the karma in our life. Therefore, through simple awareness of intention moment to moment, we can transform our personalities, overcome the limitation of our lives and create new patterns of well-being.

間，我們可因正念，而作出智慧的抉擇。故事中的「聖者」承擔了自己過去所做的一切(業果)，因此對於他人的羞辱，他不再產生新的惡意，也不因此而貶低自己(業因)。反而他珍視生命的每一個新時刻(業因)，也為自己鋪出一條充滿可能的新道路(業果)。

由此我們可看到業有兩個層面：第一，過去的業無法改變。第二，我們未來的新業可由現在的行為而改變。事實上，法蘭西斯·史托利主張：所有不好的業報都有可能被減輕。他說：「人們會相信決定論、宿命論，那純粹是因為他們只看到果，沒看到因。」

向智尊者也清楚表示：業的法則不是僵化的。業是可轉的，因為業的成熟與否，是由外在和內在的因素所決定。在因與果之間，還存在著許多可被改變的因緣。支助業使其增強，阻礙業使其削弱，甚至毀壞業使其廢止，都可能影響著業使其產生後來的結果。如果該具足的因緣未成熟，後果也會延遲出現。而這份延遲可能又提供了支助業、阻礙業和毀壞業運行的機會。此外，向智尊者也說：「業的內在條件，也就是行為源頭的整體心性品質結構，也影響著業的成熟與否。對於富有道德與靈性修養的人，不會因犯了單一的錯誤而牽涉到嚴重的後果。但是對於缺乏良善品德保護的人，一樣的過錯卻讓他們承受嚴重的後果。」

業果是可以轉變的事實，讓我們不再受制於決定論與宿命論，並讓解脫之道永遠為我們敞開。

## 結論

佛陀對於業的詮釋，著重於要我們為自己心靈成長負責。我們是自己業的繼承者及主人。藉由活在當下及覺察自己的起心動念，我們可以重塑及主導心向，進而改變我們生命的業。因此，只要我們時時刻刻覺照自己的心念，我們就可以轉化自己的品格，超越生命的限制，同時創造新的福祉。🔊 (上網聆聽此篇英文朗讀<http://www.gaya.org.tw/magazine>)