

# Present View




**What karma suggests** to us is not that “we reap what we sow,” but rather that we do right because it is right. Karma teaches us to always act with an upright mind.

Our practice is to practice without greed, thus we don't sow intent on reaping. That would be counterproductive. In fact, karma—the understanding of which clearly arises during meditation—tells us something quite different. Karma tells us that we need to set our mind-state with right intention and then do right action, rather than focusing on the outcome.

If something doesn't have a right outcome, we should allow regret to arise. Regret is a positive mind-state in the Mahayana understanding of how our mind works, as Asanga points out in his *Abhidharma Samuccaya*, one of the earliest Mahayana abhidharma texts, by listing regret as one of the eleven wholesome mind-states. \* Regret leads us to evaluate our intentions and actions when an unexpected outcome arises, allowing us to make changes in our understanding of what to do when similar conditions arise again. With regret as our mind-state, the change is recrimination-free and beneficial. Regret leads us to change without forcing us to linger. In Buddhism, regret replaces guilt.

Guilt is seen in the Abrahamic traditions as God's way of telling us that we have not met up to His expectations, reminding believers that they are sinners. From a Buddhist perspective, though, guilt reinforces the Self at a time we most need no-self to see what is really happening. Guilt leads to guilty feelings, to blame for missteps and to wallowing in perceived misdeeds, all of which are negative mind-states. And all of which reinforce, rather than diminish Self. If we view Buddhism as a system for purifying the mind in order for us to end our dukkha and reach liberation, then there is no room for guilt.





Karma, as Asanga's brother, Vasubandhu, explains in his *Abhidharmakosha*, another early abhidharma text of great import, results from us doing the ten non-virtuous actions, three of which are physical (taking life, stealing, and sexual misconduct), four of which are verbal (lying, speaking abrasively, using harsh words, and senseless chatter) and three of which are mental (covetousness, harmful motivation, and wrong view). Venerable Master Jen Shun outlines these in his article on karma in this issue.

As Venerable Nyanaponika Thera points out in *Buddhism and the God-Idea* in this issue of *Rightview*, what is right, in other words: basic moral law, is inherent in life itself. It arises from the law of karma, needing neither a divine law-giver nor depending upon fluctuating human ideas and conventions. And as Reverend Zuiko Redding says in *Practice in Practice*: It's difficult to do it just to do it, with no agenda. Nonetheless, that's what karma teaches us.

To purify ourselves, then, and end the karma that keeps us in samsara, we must always do right, beginning with the intention of always exerting right effort to follow the noble eightfold path.

\*The eleven wholesome psychological states are: trust, diligence, humility, regret, no greed, no hatred, no ignorance, tranquility, attentiveness, equanimity, and no harm.



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