



Buddha Mind, Buddha Body

Thich Nhat Hanh

KARMA: YOUR THOUGHTS, SPEECH, AND BODILY ACTIONS

In Buddhism we also speak of store consciousness as retribution consciousness, *vipaka* in Sanskrit. *Vipaka* means ripening of the fruit. For instance, the nature of a fruit, like a plum, is the process of changing and ripening. In the beginning it is small, green, and sour. And if given the chance to grow, it becomes large, purple, sweet, and it bears a seed.

There is a tendency to imagine that we are an entity that is moving through space and time towards the future. We believe that right now we are ourselves and when we reach a point in the future we will still be ourselves. But that does not correspond to reality, because we are changing all the time. The Mississippi River has a name. The name Mississippi River remains the same, but the river is always changing, the water in it always changing. A human being is also like that. When we were born, we were a very tender baby of less than twelve pounds and now, as an adult, we are quite different in all aspects.

The human being is like a cloud. When we visualize ourselves as a cloud, we have an opportunity to look, to inquire deeply into the nature of a cloud. We may visualize how the cloud has been formed, how a cloud manifests itself. The word "cloud" can bring about the idea of this cloud or that cloud. This cloud is not that cloud. And the cloud is not the wind. The cloud is not the sunshine. The cloud is not the water.

Suppose part of the cloud has become the rain. And the cloud up there can look down and recognize herself as a stream of water. This is possible. When we see ourselves as a cloud, we can look around and see that we inter-are with other clouds. Other clouds will join us and we become a larger cloud. We begin to see more of the reality of the cloud; we begin to see more of the reality of the self. It is possible for a cloud to look down and to see that part of the cloud has gone ahead in other manifestations. It is possible for the cloud to smile to herself in the form of the stream of water on the surface of the Earth.

In each moment of our life, we receive input from the environment. We receive the air, we receive the food, we receive the image, the sound, and the collective energies. In every minute of our daily life, there is input. Every day we take in nutriments in terms of edible food, in terms of sensory impressions, in terms of thinking, in terms of education, and in terms of collective consciousness. And at the same time, we are putting out energy in terms of thinking, in terms of speaking, and in terms of acting. In every moment of your daily life, you produce thought, you produce speech, and you produce actions.

The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre said, "We are the sum of our actions." Karma means action, and it can be expressed in terms of thought, speech, or bodily action. We are producing karma all the time and all of it goes in the direction of the future. That is why in our practice we should train ourselves to see ourselves in our actions, not only in this body.

Of course, actions of body, speech, and mind also influence our body and feelings. When a cloud looks down, she can recognize herself as a stream of water. When we look down, we can see that we have gone into the future. We can recognize ourselves in many places. You cannot say that when this body disintegrates, you are no longer there. You continue in many ways. When a cloud becomes the rain, the rain can be seen as countless drops of water. But when they come down to the Earth, they may join together into a stream again, or they become two streams or three streams, but that is the continuation.

TRIPLE KARMA

Karma is of three varieties, that of thought, speech, and bodily action. To say that after the decomposition of the body nothing is left, is very unscientific. Antoine Laurent Lavoisier, the eighteenth century chemist, said, "Nothing is born, nothing can die." What will happen after your body disintegrates? The answer is that you are continued by your thoughts, your words, and your physical actions. If you want to know how you will be in the future, just look into these triple actions, and you'll know. You don't need to die in order to begin to see it—you can see it now—because in every moment you are producing yourself, you are producing the continuation of yourself. Every thought, every word, every act bears your signature—you can't escape. If you produce something not so beautiful you can't take it back—it has already gone out ahead into the future and begun to produce a chain of action and reaction. But you can always produce something different, something positive, and this new action of yours, in terms of thinking or speech or action, will modify the previous negative action.

When we go back to ourselves and we know what's going on, we have the power to shape our continuation. It is in the here and the now that we have the power to shape our continuation. Our continuation will not be something in the future. Our continuation takes place right here and right now. That is why you still have the sovereignty to determine your future. If you have done something good, you are glad. You say, "I can continue to produce more thought, more speech, more action of the same kind. Because I am assuring a good future for me and for my children." And if you have by chance produced something negative, you know that you are capable of producing things of the opposite nature in order to correct it, in order to transform it. Free will is possible in the here and the now.

Suppose yesterday I said something not very nice to my younger brother. That is something done, already done. It has created damage within me and within him. And today I wake up and I realize that I have produced a karma, an action that was destructive. Now I want to rectify that. I am determined that today when I meet him, I will say something different. From my insight, my compassion, my love, I utter a sentence. This sentence is produced now, not yesterday, but it will touch the sentence I said yesterday and transform it and correct it. Suddenly I feel healing taking place in me and healing taking place in my brother or my coworker, because this second act also bears my signature.

Suppose in the morning a person, full of impatience, yells at his child. This is a mistake, a negative action. And suppose in the evening, this same person does something very good, and he saves a dog from being run over by a car. That is a very good action. Each action is

a seed planted in his store consciousness. No action, no thought, no word is lost. So where is that person going, if we combine action one and action two?

To know where you are going, in what direction, just look at the value of the seeds in your store consciousness and you will know your path. Everything depends on your karma, on your action, in terms of thinking, in terms of speaking, and in terms of acting. You decide, no one else decides your future. This is *vipaka*.

Every time you produce a thought, that's action. The Buddha proposed that we practice right thinking, thinking that goes in the direction of nondiscrimination, compassion, and understanding. We know that we are capable of producing such a thought, a thought of compassion, a thought of nondiscrimination. Every time we produce such a thought, it will have a good effect on our body and on the world. A good thought has the effect of healing your body, your mind, and the world. That is action. If you produce a thought of anger, hate, and despair that is not good for your health or the health of the world. Attention plays a very important role. Depending on the kind of environment you live in and what you pay attention to, you have a greater or lesser chance of producing good thoughts and going in the direction of right thinking.

Every thought that you produce bears your signature. You can't say it's not you. You are responsible for that thought and that thought is your continuation. Your thought is the essence of your being and your life, and once produced, it continues, it can never be lost. We can conceive of our thought as a kind of energy that will have a chain reaction in the world. That is why it's good to take care that we produce many good thoughts every day. We know that if we want, we can produce thoughts of compassion, understanding, brotherhood, and nondiscrimination and they each bear our signature, they are us, they are our future, they can never be lost. It is very clear that a thought of compassion, a thought of brotherhood, understanding, and love, has the power of healing: healing your body, healing your mind, and healing the world. Free will is possible, because you know that you can produce such a thought, with the help of the Buddha, with the help of your brother, your sister in the community, with the help of the Dharma that you have learned.

What you say also bears your signature and is your karma. Your speech may express understanding, love, and forgiveness. As soon as you use right speech, it has a healing effect. Right speech has the power of healing and transforming and can be used at any moment. You have the seed of compassion, understanding, and forgiveness in you. Allow them to manifest. You can stop reading right now and call someone and, using right speech, express compassion, empathy, love, and forgiveness. What are you waiting for? That is real action. Reconciliation can be obtained right away with the practice of loving speech. Right speech is in the direction of forgiveness, understanding, and compassion. Pick up the phone and do it. After you do it you will feel much better, the other person will feel much better, and reconciliation will occur right away. The thoughts you produced and the words that you have spoken will always be there as your continuation.

What can you do to relieve suffering? What kind of action can be taken every day to express compassion? Physical acts are the third aspect of your continuation. And we know that we are capable of doing something to protect people, to protect animals, to protect the environment. We can do something to save a living being today. It may be something small, such as opening a window for an insect to fly out of. Or it may be large, such as feeding or

clothing someone who needs help. Each day we are in control of our karma, in little and big ways, and yet so often we feel as if we have no free will or control.