

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLITION FOR THE FORMATION OF KARMA

"I declare, O monks, that volition ( `Cetana´ ) is Kamma. Having willed Kamma (action) is done through body, speech and mind." -Buddha, Anguttara Nikaya.

The Pali word Kamma, derived from the root "Kara" denotes action (to-do). Although we normally relate this word to mean bodily actions, Kamma includes actions performed through all three doors - body, speech and mind. Yet, it should be understood that each and every deed is not included in the term Kamma. In Buddhism, the term Kamma relates to action willed by wholesome or unwholesome thought. Actions void of volitional intentions do not fall into this category.

For the formation of a Kamma, intentions and deliberations should necessarily precede action. For a deed or word or thought to be wholesome or unwholesome, it should of necessity accompany volition. For this reason, Lord Buddha identified volition as Kamma. Thus He has said unintentional actions do not constitute Kamma, this is made clear in His sermon.

For a Kamma to be formed, intention alone is not adequate. This is why He has said; `having willed one performs Kamma (actions) through body, speech and mind.´ To form a Kamma, intention must be executed through body, speech or mind. However, intention is the forerunner of Kamma.

The story concerning the wife of a hunter who lived in Savatthi during the time of the Buddha is a good illustration to prove that consciousness, intent and action goes to make a Kamma. She was a Sotapanna (who had attained the first step of sainthood) lay woman. Yet on one morning, she was preparing the hunting kit of her husband for him to set out to the forest. This action created a doubt in the minds of monks as to whether her action could tantamount to encourage killing. Lord Buddha cleared their doubt, by pointing out through the practical example that if there was no injury on the palm, even if poison was handled, it would not harm the body. Thus, if there is no unwholesome intention, the action also will not be unwholesome either.

Furthermore, in the code of ethics for monks (Vinaya), it is mentioned that even one of the most serious offences (Parajika) committed by insane, mentally defused, and physically suffering monk, due to unmindfulness is not considered as such a serious offence. Accordingly, it is clear that in the case of Kamma, the most important factor is intention.

Tiny creatures may be killed unknowingly by a pedestrian walking on the road. But it is not an unwholesome action, as there is no intention in it for killing.

If a person drops some money on the floor unknowingly and if another person picks it up, it is not correct to assume that the first person has done a wholesome action, since

there is no intention of a donation. If a person is given something with the intention of donating, then that becomes a wholesome action.

These facts make it clear that actions void of volition does not become Kamma, and that volition is the forerunner to form a Kamma.

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