

Transformations Of Karma

From July 1989 Issue:

*Transformations Of Karma*¹

(Nothing Is Predestined)

By Pandit Ugra Sen Jain

Many individuals think that karmas cannot be altered. The kind of karmas associated with an individual soul will definitely bear fruits at the appropriate time and will give us happiness or unhappiness, pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow. In fact, this is only part of the story as is clear from the present article that is based on the Jain scriptures.

In the article 'Jain Theory Of Karma', Anop R. Vora has presented:² Karmas are invisible ultra fine particles of matter which are attracted by a worldly soul on account of the combined activities of body, speech and mind (YOGA) and which get attached to the soul because of passions (KASHAAYAS) of anger, pride, intrigue and greed. There are eight kinds of karma: Knowledge-obscuring (JNAANAAVARNI), perception-obscuring (DARSHANAAVARNI), feeling-producing (VEDANEEYA), deluding (MOHANEYA), life-span-determining (AAYU), physique-determining (NAAM), status-determining (GOTRA), obstructing (ANTARAAYA).

The various kinds of karma are divided into subclasses. Each set of karma particles bound to the soul has four attributes: kind or nature (PRAKRITI), amount or number of particles (PRADESH), duration (STHITI) and intensity of fruition (ANUBHAAG). - D. C. J.

It is a common experience that when we eat some food, it may cause stomachache. When we take some other food [or some medicine], the pain is relieved. It shows that the second food [medicine] relieves the unpleasant feeling caused by the first food item. On the other hand, sometimes we eat some food that gives us pleasure. After that we may consume some other food that may be unpleasant. Additionally, it may also cause the first item to produce unpleasant effect. It is seen that in the case of a person who suffers from cold and cough, many foods

¹ English adaptation of the article 'KARMON KA ULATANA PALATANA', published in Charitra Nirman, Volume 3, published by A. B. Digambar Jain Parishad, Delhi. 1980. It has been slightly edited without altering the basic concepts.

² Jain Study Circular, volume 7, October 1986.

Please also see 'Scriptural View Of The Jain Theory Of Karma, Studies In Jainism: Reader 2, pages 123-125.

Transformations Of Karma

aggravate his suffering. These examples illustrate the interactions between living bodies and other substances. The interactions between worldly souls and the karma particles associated with them are similar. On account of some new karmas, the past karma particles may undergo transformations.³ The past karma particles can also influence the influx of new karmas in a similar fashion.⁴

Ancient Jain scholars (ACHARYAS) have described the following ten processes associated with karma particles that support these facts:

Bondage (BANDH): This is the binding of karma particles with an individual soul. (It should be noted that only certain ultra fine particles of matter of a particular kind can become karma particles.)

Augmentation (UTKARSHAN): This means increase in the duration and intensity of fruition (degree of influence on the soul) of past karmas due to the influx of new karmas.

Diminution (APKARSHAN): This is the decrease in the duration and intensity of fruition of past karmas due to the influx of new karmas.

Mutation (SAMKRAMAN): This is the conversion of one sub-class of karma into another sub-class of the same kind of karma. For example, the feeling-producing (VEDANEEYA) karma has two sub-classes: pleasant-feeling-producing and unpleasant-feeling-producing. The implication of mutation is that pleasant-feeling-producing karma can be converted into unpleasant-feeling-producing karma and unpleasant-feeling-producing karma can be converted into pleasant-feeling-producing karma.⁵

It should be noted that one kind of karma cannot be converted into another kind of karma. For instance, knowledge-obscuring (JNAANAAVARNI) karma cannot be converted into feeling-producing (VEDANEEYA) karma. Similarly, deluding (MOHANEEYA) karma cannot be converted into obstructing (ANTARAAYA) karma. Only karma of one sub-class can be converted into same kind of karma of another sub-class. For example, there are five sub-classes of knowledge-

³ There are two aspects of karmas: Abstract (BHAAV) karma and material (DRAVYA) karma. The thoughts and feelings of a worldly soul constitute its abstract karma, which are largely responsible for transformations of karma.

⁴ The influx of new karmas is caused and controlled by the combined activity of body, speech and mind (YOGA) and by anger, pride, intrigue and greed (KASHAAYAS). Thus, in fact, it is our present feelings, thoughts and emotions that cause the transformations of karma.

⁵ See, for example, the article "About Feeling-Producing Karma" by Pandit Phool Chandra Jain Siddhantacharya, published in Jain Study Circular, Volume 8, April 1987.

Transformations Of Karma

obscuring (JNAANAAVARNI) karma, and one sub-class of knowledge-obscuring karma can be converted into another sub-class of knowledge-obscuring karma. For example, certain karmic particles of sensory-cognition-obscuring (MATI JNAANA-VARNI) karma can be changed into extraordinary-knowledge-obscuring (AVADHI JNAANA-VARNI) karma but they cannot be converted into deluding (MOHANEYYA) karma or obstructing (ANTARAAYA) karma.

There is an exception to this rule. There are two sub-classes of deluding (MOHANEYYA) karma: Perception-deluding (DARSHAN MOHANEYYA) and conduct-deluding (CHAARITRA MOHANEYYA). One sub-class of deluding karma cannot be converted into the other sub-class of deluding karma. Conduct-deluding karma is further divided into 25 categories according to various shades of passions and mutation occurs between these categories.

Operation (UDAYA): Karma particles, after influx and bondage, remain dormant for certain duration. This duration is called dormant stage (ABAADHA KAAL). At the end of the dormant stage, groups of karma particles become operative each moment (SAMAYA). The group of karma particles, which comes to fruition each moment, is called NISHEK. Each NISHEK comes to fruition for one moment and then it is shed by the soul. In the earlier stages of fruition, a NISHEK consists of greater number of karma particles and as fewer and fewer operative karma particles remain in the possession of the soul, fewer particles of karma constitute a NISHEK. Thus, gradually, all operative karma particles are shed by the soul.

Under certain circumstances (substance - DRAVYA, environment - KSHETRA, time - KAAL, feelings - BHAAV), karmas produce their consequences and then are shed by the soul. Under a different set of circumstances, some karma particles may be shed without fruition. For example, let us take the case of an individual whose anger-producing (conduct-deluding) karma is going to be operative. The individual may not be aware of this fact. Now if, by chance, that individual is sitting in seclusion doing SAAMAAYIK (equanimity), because of circumstances [his/her frame of mind], the operative anger-producing karma may be shed without fruition (that is without producing anger).⁶ However, if the intensity of the operative anger-producing karma is high, even during SAAMAAYIK the individual may

⁶ Compare this with the ideas contained in Anop Vora's article "Anger", published in Jain Study Circular, Volume 10, April 1989.

Transformations Of Karma

develop aversion towards his 'enemy' and the effect of the operative anger-producing karma will be more severe.⁷

Premature operation (UDEERNA): This is the process by which groups (NISHEKS) of karmas are made operative prematurely. In this process, the karmas are made operative and are shed faster.

Subsidence (UPSHAM): The groups of karmas that are inoperative at a given instant of time are said to be in subsidence. In this stage, it is not possible to bring about the premature operation of karma particles. [For example, at some instant of time when the perception-deluding karma is in subsidence, an individual has rationalism (SAMYAKTVA). Later, the perception-deluding karma may become operative and the individual may indulge in blind faith.]

Prevention (NIGHATTI): In this stage, the karma particles are prevented from becoming operative for a limited time. During this time, they are neither brought into operation prematurely, nor converted into another sub-class, but they may be made to undergo augmentation or diminution, that is their duration and intensity of fruition may be increased or decreased.

Invariance (NIKAACHANA): In this stage, the karma particles are prevented from becoming operative for a limited time. During this time, the karma particles cannot undergo premature operation, mutation, augmentation or diminution.

Existence (SATVA): In this stage, the karma particles just remain attached to the soul without any transformation.

It is clear from the above discussion that, to a great extent, a worldly being can produce changes such as augmentation, diminution, mutation, premature operation in the karma associated with the soul. The individual is responsible for his/her own suffering or lack of it. We are responsible for our own progress or downfall.

If one indulges in undesirable thought-activity and accumulates bad karma, and later, he performs absolution (PRATIKRAMAN) with pure feelings and thoughts, he can change his undesirable karma (PAAP) into desirable karma (PUNYA). If one performs a good deed, accumulates desirable karma, and, later, thinks that he spent the time and effort which he could have spent otherwise, his desirable karma is converted into undesirable karma. [This is quite reasonable and logical.] A medicine alleviates the

⁷ For details of these features of transformations of kamras, please see Acharya Nemi Chandra Siddhant Chakravarti's GOMMATSAR KARMA KAAND, GATHAS 440-450.

This indicates that according to the Jain theory of karma, nothing is predestined. There is no fate.

Transformations Of Karma

discomfort and cures the disease that one might have acquired through unhealthy diet. Similarly, an individual can change his undesirable karma into desirable ones through his own efforts by having good thought-activity.⁸ A diligent person employs the capability of his soul and practices religion. He/she develops the necessary circumstances, which enable him/her in the practice of religion. He seeks the company of good people and true gurus so that he can get involved in the study and discussion of the teachings of religion and of the nature of reality. He stays away from bad company, which may intensify his state of delusion, the deluding karma being the most powerful of all karma. So we should endeavor to remove delusion. The ultimate goal of a worldly soul is to shed the deluding karma through its own efforts by employing logical thinking and willpower. As soon as the deluding karma is shed, all other karma are gone. A mundane soul can accomplish this goal through its own effort and achieve liberation (MOKSHA).

The above aspects of the theory of karma indicate that the worldly souls are not at the mercy of karma. They have their future in their own hands. Those who believe in the theory of karma are not fatalists. According to the Jain theory of karma, nothing is predestined.

⁸ This implies that mere actions of performing a prayer or worship, fasting, giving donations, etc., do not bring good karma or help change bad karma into good ones. It is the purity of thoughts (absence of anger, pride, intrigue and greed) that is beneficial.