

The Four Powers of Purification of Negative Karma

We may unknowingly make a mistake during any activity. After we make a mistake, however, it is extremely important to confess and purify it. No more than a few people will willingly commit bad karma with full awareness of what they are doing. All negative karma and moral downfalls happen through four gateways:

- 1) Not knowing,
- 2) Not respecting,
- 3) Lack of care, and
- 4) Predominance of delusion.

Generally speaking there is nothing positive about negative karma, yet the fact that it can be purified is said to be its good quality. Accordingly, with strong regret, we should purify negative karma by means of four powers.

The four powers are:

- 1) The power of the basis,
- 2) The power of remedial action,
- 3) The power of rejection,
- 4) The power of not reverting to faulty conduct.

First, the power of the basis is the object before whom we confess and purify, such as the supreme of deities for purification, Vajrasattva, or any Guru, Deity, Buddha, or Bodhisattva visualized in the space before us as the witness to our confession.

Guide to the Bodhisattvas Conduct says:

*From today henceforth I go for refuge in the Buddhas, Lords of beings,
Who persevere in protecting living beings,
Who powerfully dispel danger with great power...
...Previously I transgressed your instructions,
Now, seeing the great danger, I take refuge in you,
Please quickly dispel the danger!*

Thus, seeking refuge in the assembly of deities before whom we make our confession, recognizing the harmful nature of our action, with intense regret, we should purify that very karma which we have created. Like an emergency trip to the doctor when we have mistakenly eaten some poison.

Secondly, as for the power of the remedial action, a seriously sick person must listen to the doctor's advice and take the prescribed medicine. Likewise, we have been suffering during beginningless lifetimes from the worst of sicknesses, the three poisonous delusions, for which the supreme of medicines are wisdom, love, compassion, and realization of shunyata. With such practices we must free ourselves from the terrible disease of the delusions!

In the context of tantra, meditate on Vajrasattva, the Deity for purification of negative karma, at the crown of your head. From his body white nectar pours down, dissolving into your crown purifying your negative karma and obscuration of your body. Your body becomes the body of Vajrasattva. The nectar then flows down to your throat, purifying negative karma and obscuration of your speech, transforming your speech into the nature of Vajrasattva's speech. The nectar then dissolves into your heart purifying negative karma and obscuration of your mind, transforming your mind into the nature of Vajrasattva's mind. Finally your impure body, speech, and mind have transformed into the nature of Vajrasattva's body, speech, and mind. Contemplating this is a very powerful method for purifying negative karma and obscuration.

Third is the power of regret. Like someone who realizes they have eaten poison, having mistaken it for food, with intense regret we confess all non-virtue we have created in life, whether physically by killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct; verbally, by lying, speaking divisively, harshly or meaninglessly; or mentally, by covetousness, malice, or distorted views. In short, whatever negative karma we have committed, since our own mind is not hidden from ourselves, we can mentally bring it to mind, recognize the faulty as faulty, and with intense regret, ashamed and scared of the karmic consequences of our unwholesome actions, we confess it.

Fourth is turning away and refraining from faults. Like having absolutely no wish to eat poison in the future, we develop a strong determination to not, through ignorance, commit poison-like negative karma even at the cost of our life. We must confess past negative karma and make a strong promise not commit unwholesome deeds again in the future.

As said in Guide to the Bodhisattva Conduct:

*Negative karma is not good,
I will not commit it again in the future.*

Accordingly, recognizing negative karma as faulty, we must strive to purify past negative karma and make a strong promise not to repeat it in the future. Negative action arises out of ignorance and lack of conscientiousness; therefore if we remain mindful, alert, and conscientious in all times and situations we will not be stained by negative karma.

Sutra states:

*With care, through virtue, happiness arises.
Careless, through non-virtue, suffering arises.
Those who wish to have happiness
Should always try to be conscientious.*

Accordingly, if we are always mindful, alert, and conscientious, the door to negative karma and downfalls is already closed. Conscientiously persevere in virtuous action.

Colophon:

May the sunlight of the four powers
clear gloom of negative karma and downfalls!
May living beings never be parted for a moment
from the light of happiness and wisdom!

Khenpo Karten wrote this brief explanation of the four powers in an easily understandable manner for new students, on November 6, 2016, in his room at Manjushri Dharma center.

May all be virtuous!