

## The Four Karmas

The presentation of the Four Karmas is a traditional topic and very straightforward. It is found toward the end of Chapter 7 of Reginald Ray's *Secrets of the Vajra World*, which we have copied onto our web site. It would be good to read this before class.

The Four Karmas are natural or magical powers (*siddhis* in Sanskrit) that develop as one acquires wisdom. Organizationally, the four karmas can be placed within the Karma family, but the four can also be associated with four of the five wisdom families, omitting the Buddha family in the center of the mandala, as shown here. We shall talk about them in class, so the following table is simply a time saving tool showing the overall scheme.

<i>Karma</i>	<i>Associated Family</i>	<i>Associated Mara</i>
Pacifying	Vajra	Devaputra Mara
Enriching	Ratna	Skanda Mara
Magnetizing	Padma	Klesha Mara
Destroying	Karma	Yama Mara

## Transmuting Confusion into Wisdom

Grant your blessing so my mind may be one with the dharma.  
Grant your blessing so that dharma may progress along the path.  
Grant your blessing so that the path may clarify confusion.  
Grant your blessing so that confusion may be transformed into wisdom.

### Four Dharmas of Gampopa

There seems to be little time to draw this course together so as to unify the discussion of mandala and sacred world presented at the beginning with the vivid manifestation of the samsaric qualities of the five families that followed. *The Aspiration of Samantabhadra* does this quite well if we read it enough times so that the wisdom of it starts to speak to us. But we need to repeat this message here.

**The central theme of this course is the transmutation of confusion (neurosis, samsara) into wisdom.** If we take the presentation of the five families as mainly an interesting theory of personality types and interpersonal psychology, this misses the point. Buddhist practice is all about transcending samsara altogether rather than improving it, and this has been clearly stated again and again since the first teachings on the Four Noble Truths.

The entry point into Buddhadharma is always suffering. Inevitably so, since if we weren't hoping for a better deal, why would we try something as effortful as sitting practice? Gradually, sitting and becoming familiar with our mind at deeper and deeper levels works a transformation on our entire view. We start to question the very self that wants this better deal, we examine more deeply the nature of experience altogether, and examine the nature of suffering, effort, and liberation.

There is much that we do not like in our selves and in the world, and our hope is that we can learn to change all that, either get rid of it or rearrange things so that it doesn't hurt us. Gradually, through kindness to our selves we start to see that our bad habits and emotional tendencies (kleshas) are not merely something to regret and push away hoping to replace them with something better. Rather, they are the energetically charged powerhouse of our wisdom waiting to be liberated.

The way we bring about this transformation is seeing the world that we already live in and experience as a sacred mandala. In actual practice this means not separating the world in any way into sacred and profane. Whatever we do, making love, taking out the garbage or preparing our income tax, the activity and the environment in which it takes place is sacred. There is no part of our life that is excluded, no dark corners in which to hide or take a vacation from awakened energy. This commitment to live our lives on a greater dimension is also the essence of the Shambhala teachings of Chögyam Trungpa which uses the imagery of emergence from the cocoon, which is a place where one hides, into the light of the Great Eastern Sun. When we do this, our lives become uplifted, we ride the ceaseless energy of windhorse, and are able to bring about enlightened society.

The teachings on Buddha Nature assure us that the awake energy of a Buddha is already within us. It can be viewed as a potential, just as a seed is a potential tree. But it is more than that. Our lives are already functioning on a greater dimension than we realize, and our practice is to awake to this. Kleshas are transmutable into wisdom because they already are a manifestation of wisdom. It is by leaning into our uncomfortable places and not running away from them that we are able to work the alchemy. Transmutation happens within the nitty-gritty of our ordinary experience rather than on some lofty plane apart from it. Reginald Ray writes (p. 149):

Mundane reality, then, which usually seems so solid, monolithic, and impenetrable, is actually an open, ever-changing manifestation of primordial wisdom. Through connecting with the wisdom inherent in the most ordinary experiences of our lives, we can find liberation. The wind, taken in and of itself and from its own side, breaks open our ego world, and so do earth, fire water, and space. The arising of perception, feeling, or any of the skandas within us likewise sets us free, if we can simply let them manifest without mental interference.

## **In Conclusion**

It is our hope that this course has provided a glimpse of Vajrayana. It is only a glimpse. It is taught that to travel this path fully one needs a guru. Devotion to the guru opens the door to a true understanding of the teachings, and it is only by means of a guru that one can gather the energy, and overcome the barrier of fear and preservation of the self needed to proceed. However, even this little spark of acquaintance with these teachings is of value. Any time that we hear teachings that point to wakefulness, it has planted a seed, and where and when that seed sprouts and what sort of fruit it produces is beyond our knowledge.