

KARMA AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS

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Introduction

Buddhists believe that happiness or unhappiness in the life of living beings is a retribution of acts done intentionally in the past and that intentional acts in one's present life shape one's future destiny. Buddhists of the Theravada denomination are mainly concerned with accumulating good karma in their religious practices anticipating a better life in the future. Future means both immediate future and continuous life cycle of individual beings after the death. The majority of Buddhist believers are more concerned with this aspect than with spiritual purification to win liberation from samsāra. Since it seems that fatalistic adherence to the belief of karma stands in the way of social progress, I try to evaluate the concepts of karma and social progress within the context of Theravada Buddhism, not as a representation of related concepts from the Pali sutras, but rather a free observation of facts available in the Pali sutras.

I—THE CONCEPT OF KARMA

Karma and fate

The concept of karma may prima facie resemble the concept of fate. Fate is a metaphysical concept that defies empirical

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