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Discussing the Ten Wholesome Deeds with the Fear of the Ten Evil Deeds as The Centerpiece

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I. Introduction

As a disciple of the Buddha, since I first entered Buddhism, I have the intention to cut off evil and do good deeds in my heart. Whether it is Buddhist scriptures or Buddhist treatises, there are many topics about the Ten Wholesome Deeds, which shows the importance of the Ten Wholesome Deeds. Just as *the Discourse on The Ten Wholesome Ways of Action* says: "With these ten wholesome ways of actions it is the same, all humans and heavens are depending on them. The illumination of all the Sravakas, of all the Pratyekas, the way of the Bodhisattva, all Buddha-dharmas they all are attained and come to fruition due to these ten wholesome great grounds."¹ It can be seen that the Ten Wholesome Deeds are the foundation of all wholesome deeds, so upholding the Ten Wholesome Deeds has become a compulsory homework for Buddhist disciples. However, most of the literature emphasizes the importance and the excellence of the Ten Wholesome Deeds such as *On the Influence of the Ten Wholesome Deeds of Buddhism on the Moral Thought of the Tibetan People* by Douge Tsetang², which guides sentient beings to practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds. Based on this, this article attempts to discuss the Ten Wholesome Deeds from the perspective of knowing the Ten Evil Deeds, fearing the Ten Evil Deeds, and aspiring to the virtue of the ten good karmas, so that one can naturally practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds and be free from suffering and gain bliss. In the author's view, "the mind is the root of all creation"³, and it is only when the mind does not dare to create the Ten Evil Deeds, that it can better uphold the Ten Wholesome Deeds and get rid of suffering and gain bliss. This is the way to achieve the Ten Wholesome Deeds by starting from the root, so as to get rid of suffering and achieve bliss.

¹ Translated by Shicha Nanda: the Discourse on The Ten Wholesome Ways of Action, Dazheng Store, vol.115, p. 159.

² Written by Douge Tsetang, *On the Influence of the Ten Wholesome Deeds of Buddhism on the Moral Thought of the Tibetan People*, <http://m.tibet3.com/Culture/zcfj/2018-11-01/91799.html>, retrieved June 23, 2022.

³ Translated by Tan Wuchan: Sutra of the Precepts for Upasakas, Dazheng Store, vol.24, p. 1069.

There are many Buddhist scriptures about the evil retribution brought about by the Ten Evil Deeds, such as *The Sutra of the Ten Unwholesome Deeds*, *The Sutra on the Ten Good Precepts*, *Sutra of the Buddha's Explanation for the Layman Śuka of Distinctions in Karmic Retribution*, *The Mahayana Sutra of the Great Assembly of Tī-tsang's Ten Wheels*, *The Sutra of the Past Vows of the Earth Store Bodhisattva*, *The Sutra spoken by the Mahasatyā-nirgrantha*, *The Flower Adornment Sutra*, *The Sutra of the Foremost Shurangama at the Great Buddha's Summit Concerning the Tathagata's Secret Cause of Cultivation, His Certification to the Complete Meaning and all Bodhisattvas' Myriad Practices* (later referred to as *The Shurangama Sutra*). This article is a comprehensive analysis of the karmic retribution recorded in some of the scriptures, with the purpose of understanding the Ten Evil Deeds retributions in a more comprehensive manner, fearing the Ten Evil Deeds, and achieving the natural practice of the Ten Good Deeds to leave suffering and attain happiness. The main text is divided into three chapters.

(I) The definition and excellence of the Ten Wholesome Deeds.

(II) The definition of the Ten Evil Deeds.

(III) Fear of the Ten Evil Deeds and the natural practice of Ten Wholesome Deeds to be from suffering and obtain bliss. This chapter is analyzed from two aspects.

1. A general description of the Ten Evil Deeds. Based on the Ten Habitual Causes and Six Crossing Retributions in Volume 8 of *the Shurangama Sutra* and *the Mahayana Sutra of the Great Assembly of Tī-tsang's Ten Wheels*, and other classics, it is comprehensively analyzed that the Ten Evil Deeds bring about extremely painful retributions and endless obstacles.

2. In particular, the examples of "killing" and "bad karma on the speech" are used to analyze why the fear of the Ten Evil Deeds can naturally lead to the practice of the Ten Wholesome Deeds, which will lead to happiness and freedom from suffering.

The final conclusion is a summary of the previous chapters, hoping that with a clear understanding of the Ten Evil Deeds and the fear of the Ten Evil Deeds, one will be able to achieve the natural practice of the Ten Good Deeds and be free from suffering and gain bliss.

II. The Definition and Excellence of the Ten Wholesome Deeds

The definition of the Ten Wholesome Deeds is well documented in the scriptures. For example, *The Discourse on The Ten Wholesome Ways of Action* states that,

Dragon King, you must know that Bodhisattva has one method which enables him to cut off all sufferings of evil destinies. What kind of method is this? It is constantly, day and night, to recollect, to reflect on and to contemplate on the wholesome dharma so as to cause the wholesome dharma to increase from thought-moment to thought-moment, without allowing the least unwholesome thought to mingle in. This will then enable you to cut off all evil forever, to bring the wholesome dharma to completion and to be constantly near all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other holy communities. Speaking about wholesome dharma, the bodies of men and devas, the Illumination of the Shravakas, the Illumination of the Pratyekas, and the Highest Illumination, they are all accomplished depending on these dharma which are to be considered as fundamental. Therefore, they are called wholesome dharma. These dharma are the ten wholesome ways of actions. What are these ten? They are the ability to give up forever killing, stealing, wrong conduct, lying, slandering, harsh language, frivolous speech, greed, hatred, and false views.⁴

⁴ Translated by Shicha Nanda: *The Discourse on The Ten Wholesome Ways of Action*, Dazheng Store, vol.15, p.157-158.

This sutra not only states that the Ten Wholesome Deeds is the most excellent and can cut off all the sufferings of the evil path and are the foundation of the Five Vehicles (Human Beings Vehicle, Heavenly Vehicle, Shravaka Vehicle, Pratyekas Vehicle and Mahayana Vehicle), but also defines the content of the Ten Wholesome Deeds, that is, to be free from the Ten Evil Deeds, i.e. to leave killing, stealing, wrong conduct, lying, slandering, harsh language, frivolous speech, greed, hatred, and false views forever. Since this article focuses on the Ten Wholesome Deeds from the perspective of the Ten Evil Deeds, the definition of the Ten Evil Deeds will be explained in detail later, so that the reader can understand the Ten Wholesome Deeds from the opposite perspective. Here I will not elaborate too much on the Ten Wholesome Deeds.

As for the excellence of the Ten Wholesome Deeds, it is said in the *Sutra of the Buddha's Explanation for the Layman Śuka of Distinctions in Karmic Retribution*: "In the Ten Wholesome Deeds, none of them is missing or incomplete, and with these Ten Wholesome Deeds one obtains the reward of the human path. There are ten more karmas that enable sentient beings to attain the reward of Desire Heaven, which is called the practice of the increasing Ten Wholesome Deeds. There are ten more karmas that lead to the reward of the Form Heaven, it is said that the practice of Ten Wholesome Deeds of omission corresponds to the meditation.⁵ It can be seen that the more perfect the Ten Wholesome Deeds are practiced, the higher they will rise. If someone perfectly practices the Ten Wholesome Deeds, he or she can also become a Cakravarti King⁶, and the Seven Jewels will always follow him or her. This point is recorded in Volume 3 of the Sutra spoken by the Mahasatya-nirgrantha⁷.

To sum up, leaving the Ten Evil Deeds and doing the opposite of them is the Ten Wholesome Deeds. Ten Wholesome Deeds are the root of

⁵ Translated by Fa Zhi: Sutra of the Buddha's Explanation for the Layman Śuka of Distinctions in Karmic Retribution, Dazheng Store, vol.1, p.893.

⁶ Translated by Bodhiliuzhi: Sutra spoken by the Mahasatya-nirgrantha, Dazheng Store, vol.9, p.343.

⁷ Translated by Bodhiliuzhi: Sutra spoken by the Mahasatya-nirgrantha, Dazheng Store, vol.9, p.331.

all good deeds, and they can break all suffering. The more perfect the Ten Wholesome Deeds are, the higher they rise. The more you know about the merits and benefits of the Ten Wholesome Deeds, the greater your aspiration, the easier it will be for you to practice Ten Wholesome Deeds and leave suffering and achieve bliss.

III. The Definition of the Ten Evil Deeds

Continuing from the previous paragraph, the opposite of the Ten Wholesome Deeds is the Ten Evil Deeds, and the Ten Evil Deeds are killing, stealing, wrong conduct, lying, slandering, harsh language, frivolous speech, greed, hatred, and false views. The following will use the Ten Unwholesome Deeds to analyze the definition of Ten Unwholesome Deeds in detail. It is recorded in the *Ten Unwholesome Ways of Action Sutra*:

What is killing? It means seeing a sentient being first, then examining its name, deciding to kill it, moving to kill it, and cutting off its life root. In this way, the five kinds of conditions are fulfilled in a sequence, resulting in the sin of killing, and the fixed karma of killing a living being will bring about that kind of result. What does it mean not to take? It is said that when one has first seen the object, and then has thought about it and decided to take it, and then has done something with his body, he has stolen it immediately. If you have these five conditions, the sin of non-taking is caused. What is the desire for evil behavior? In this sin, there are four categories: not in the right place, not in the right time, not in the right status, and not in the right going. Those who are not in the right place are those who should not be in the vicinity of the statues of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the monks and priests, the parents, or those who are near to them. It is not proper to do so in the daytime, or in case of a monthly event, or in case of

a new birth, or in case of unhappy desire, or in case of sickness, or in case of taking the eight precepts of purification. It is not to be done in the face of the door and in the way of the ungodly, and it is not to be done by a boy or a girl who holds himself or herself. It is not right to set oneself up for non-virtuous acts in the realm of other wives, bhikkhunis, kinsmen, and other people, as well as in the realm of the sales. As you know above. What is lying? It means that when one sees something or another fallen object, he knows it and decides to take it, and if he seeks to make a false statement, with these five conditions, he becomes the sin of lying. What is slandering? It means to speak to others with a stained mind, adding to their faults. What is frivolous speech? To say things that are not reasonable to others, such as the secrets of others, and to make a separation. What are harsh words? It means to speak in a harsh voice with impure words in the context of covetousness and harmony. What is greed? The love of other people's wealth and possessions is not a reasonable hope. What is anger? It means to be angry with sentient beings and to be annoyed and to beat them. What is evil view? It means that there is no giving, no afterlife, no offerings, no Buddha, no sound-hearer, no crime, no blessing, no work, and no reward.⁸

From the above scriptures, we can define the Ten Evil Deeds as follows:

Killing refers to the act of wanting to kill and doing the act of killing so that it will die.

Stealing (not to take) means that one wants to get something that belongs to someone else without their permission and makes it available to oneself.

⁸ Translated by RiChen: The Sutra of the Ten Unwholesome Deeds, Dazheng Store, vol.17, p.457-458.

The term "wrong conduct" refers to the act of committing lust at a time and place that is not in accordance with the object of the desire, and in certain circumstances. However, it is important to note that one should not judge it as an evil act simply because one has followed another person.

The term "lying" refers to a false statement made in order to achieve one's goal, which is contrary to the truth.

The term "slandering" means to say something bad to someone with a polluted mind.

The term "frivolous speech" refers to talking about the rights and wrongs of other people and sowing discord between people.

The term "harsh language," (wicked speech) means to speak roughly with a wicked heart.

The term "greed" refers to the desire to obtain something that belongs to someone else but is not as good as the law.

The term "anger" refers to the act of hurting others through anger and hatred.

The term "false view" refers to all sorts of perverse views, such as those that set aside cause and effect.

The above is a brief definition of the Ten Evil Deeds. Only when you have a clear definition of the Ten Evil Deeds can you know whether you have committed the Ten Evil Deeds, so that you can better practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds and be free from suffering and achieve happiness.

IV. Fear of the Ten Evil Deeds makes it natural to uphold the Ten Wholesome Deeds

(I) Generally speaking, the retribution of Ten Evil Deeds

As mentioned in the introduction, the Ten Evil Deeds Retributions have been recorded in many scriptures. In this paper, I will first analyze the Ten Evil Deeds Retributions by referring to the Ten Habitual Causes and Six Crosses of Retributions in Volume 8 of *the Shurangama Sutra*.

The Ten Habitual Causes mentioned in Volume 8 of *the Shurangama Sutra* refer to the ten habits of lustful intercourse, greed, arrogance, hatred, deception, lying, enmity, expressing (wrong) views, injustice, and litigation. These ten bad habits are all bad karma and will result in the "Six Crosses of Retribution". The so-called "six interactions of retribution" refers to the consequences of evil karma felt by the six roots. Next, let's analyze the "six interactions of retribution".

According to the description of the Six Crossing Retributions in *the Shurangama Sutra*, the Six Crossing Retributions are the six senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, perceiving, and thinking that arise when the six roots face the six dusts and then create evil karma, which will lead to countless disasters and sufferings.

When receiving karmic retribution, each of the six roots feels different kinds of pain at the same time, and the intensity of this pain reaches its limit. For example, in hell, this pain is the pain of ten thousand births and deaths in one day.⁹ Combined with the description of the Ten Habit Causes in the sutra (which is too long for commentary), it is clear

⁹ Translated by Emperor Pramita: *the Shurangama Sutra*, Dazheng Store, vol.8, p.144-145.

that these retribution phenomena are not original, but are caused by the Ten Habits, which are caused by delusion and vexation. The karma created by the six roots alone will be rewarded alone, while the karma created in full will be rewarded in full.

In the *Sutra of the Buddha's Explanation for the Layman Śuka of Distinctions in Karmic Retribution*, the Buddha said that if you do any kind of evil karma, you will be sent to the three evil paths, and if you do heavy evil karma, you will be rewarded in hell, if you do medium evil karma, you will be rewarded in animals, and if you do light evil karma, you will be rewarded in hungry ghosts.¹⁰

According to the *Mahayana Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels*, Volume 8 and Volume 9 of this sutra are devoted to the various obstacles brought about by the Ten Evil Deeds. Based on the contents of these two volumes, the author has summarized them in a more systematic way. They are as follows:

In general, the obstacles brought about by the Ten Evil Deeds are: all bad karma obstacles (obstacles formed by the creation of bad karma, which prevent all good things and accomplish all bad things), annoyance obstacles (obstacles formed by vexation, which make it difficult to get out of the state of vexation), sentient obstacles (obstacles formed between people, which make them afraid when they see each other, and do not accomplish each other, but obstruct each other), and all dharma obstacles (obstacles formed in the recognition of all things).

The detailed analysis is as follows:

Obstacles caused by killing: all bad karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, life expectancy obstacles (many diseases, short life, such as early death).¹¹

¹⁰ Translated by FaZhi: *Sutra of the Buddha's Explanation for the Layman Śuka of Distinctions in Karmic Retribution*, Dazheng Store, vol.01, p.893.

¹¹ Translated by Xuanzang: *Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels*, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.763.

Obstacles caused by not taking (stealing): all bad karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, treasure obstacles (money and property are difficult to obtain, kings, thieves, water, fire, unfilial children, five families share, scattering assets).¹²

The obstacles caused by the desire for evil conduct (evil deeds): the obstacles of all evil karma, the obstacles of vexation, the obstacles of sentient beings, the obstacles of all dharma, and the obstacles of the family (family members committing wrongdoing among themselves).¹³

Obstacles caused by false speech (delusional speech): all bad karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, and faithful speech obstacles (obstacles to faithfulness, language, and writing ability).¹⁴

Obstacles arising from slandering: the obstacles of evil karma, the obstacles of vexation, the obstacles of sentient beings, the obstacles of all dharma, and the obstacles of harmony and respect (it is difficult for people to have good relationships with each other and to respect each other).¹⁵

Obstacles caused by harsh language (evil mouth): all evil karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, and goodness adjustment obstacles (inability to adjust one's state of body, speech, and mind, often losing one's state, running out of tune).¹⁶

Obstacles caused by frivolous speech: all evil karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentience obstacles, all dharma obstacles, and righteousness obstacles (it is difficult to accept the benefits of new things and to speak in a way that expresses righteousness and benefits).¹⁷

¹² Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.763.

¹³ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.764.

¹⁴ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.764.

¹⁵ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.765.

¹⁶ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.765.

¹⁷ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.765.

Obstacles caused by greed: all evil karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, no greed obstacles (not getting all the benefits of no greed, truly achieving no greed, all money and property will revolve around you).¹⁸

Obstacles caused by hatred: all evil karma obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, ignorance obstacles (due to hatred wisdom is blocked, and even very simple things are not understood).¹⁹

Obstacles caused by evil views: Obstacles to all evil karma, obstacles to vexation, obstacles to sentient beings, obstacles to all dharma, and obstacles to right view (obstacles that arise when learning, practicing, and applying right view).²⁰

From the preceding scriptures, we can see that the Ten Evil Deeds bring about extremely painful physical and mental rewards, endless obstacles, which make people fearful.

According to the *Upasaka Precepts Sutra*, Volume 6, The Ten Evil Deeds increase because of the cause of vexation; the Ten Wholesome Deeds increase because of the absence of vexation. ²¹Combined with the analysis of the Ten Habitual Causes and Six Crossing Retributions in the *Shurangama Sutra*, it can be deduced that delusion and vexation are the root causes of the Ten Evil Deeds. Therefore, as long as one remembers that these bad karmas will bring about many obstacles and make one suffer physically and mentally, one will not dare to follow and continue with delusions and vexations, and naturally, one will not dare to create the Ten Evil Deeds.

¹⁸ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.766.

¹⁹ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p.766-767.

²⁰ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p. 767.

²¹ Translated by Tan Wuchan: Upasaka Precepts Sutra, Dazheng Store, vol.24, p.1067.

(II) Analysis of the fear of the Ten Evil Deeds and the natural upholding of the Ten Wholesome Deeds

Following on from the previous section, let's take "killing" as an example to analyze why fear of the Ten Evil Deeds rewards can naturally lead to the practice of the Ten Wholesome Deeds and be free from suffering and gain happiness.

In the *Upasaka Precepts Sutra*, it is said that the mind is the root of all good and bad dharma, and the key to keeping the precepts is the heart as the root. ²²This sutra also mentions that the formation of fixed karma requires three conditions: "fundamental, expedient, and accomplished." The formation of fixed karma for killing must also meet these three conditions.²³Therefore, after understanding the terrible consequences of "killing" (as mentioned in the previous article, killing will lead to the next three evil paths, as well as all kinds of evil karmic obstacles, vexation obstacles, sentient obstacles, all dharma obstacles, and life obstacles) and the great benefits of "not killing" (see my seventh essay "The Relationship between Precepts and Cause and Effect" on the great consequences of not killing), one will definitely have a fear of "killing" and will not dare to create the evil karma of "killing", then the evil karma of "killing" will not cause fixed karma, and at the same time, because of the joyful desire for the merits of "not killing", one will naturally be willing to take the good karma of "not killing", so that one can be free from suffering and achieve happiness.

Of course, all sentient beings are born in this world with bad karma, and they often create bad karma unintentionally with their bad habits. However, as long as they know the horrible consequences of bad karma, they will naturally be afraid in their hearts. Even if they do evil deeds, it is uncertain karma and easy to repent. This principle can be extended to

²² Same as note 2.

²³ Translated by Tan Wuchan: *Upasaka Precepts Sutra*, Dazheng Store, vol.24, p.1067.

the other Ten Evil Deeds. On the basis of the fear of the ten evil karmas, one can naturally practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds.

Let's analyze the "evil karma of speaking" again. For example, if you tell a lie, you may cut off all good roots (for example, if you tell a big lie in the four pure and clear teachings of the Shurangama Sutra of the Great Buddha, if you don't prove it, you will cut off all good roots.) If one speaks a single word of wrongdoing of the Buddha's four sages, one can easily break the harmony of the Sangha; if one speaks a single evil word, one may create a great evil deed on the head of the Three Jewels (e.g., one who slanders those at home and those out of home who recite the Lotus Sutra with one evil word).²⁴ Saying a word that slanders the Three Jewels may create the Ten Evil Wheels, and all good roots will be cut off, and all the Buddhas will not be able to save you. (As the Buddha has taught the three teachings of the Buddha, or the Sound Dharma, or the Vajrayana Dharma, or the Mahayana Dharma, and has destroyed, slandered, obstructed, covered up, concealed, and prevented others from learning or reciting any of them, or even a single verse.)²⁵ If one knows precisely the terrible consequences of "evil karma of the speech", one will naturally protect the karma of the speech and dare not create "evil karma of the speech". The reason why many Buddhists still dare to create "bad karma" is that they mistakenly believe that speaking unlike the body is actually creating evil karma, which is not very important and will not be subject to evil retribution. Another reason is that they do not pay enough attention to the terrible consequences of "evil karma of the speech", and very often they only know it in a general way, not precisely.

By analogy, after clearly understanding the Ten Evil Karmas, one will naturally be afraid of the Ten Evil Karmas and will naturally be able to practice the Ten Wholesome Karmas, so that one can leave suffering and attain happiness. Therefore, recognizing the Ten Evil Karmas, fearing the Ten Evil Karmas and aspiring to the Ten Wholesome Karmas is the key to achieving the natural practice of the Ten Wholesome Karmas .

²⁴ Translated by Kumarajiva: the Shurangama Sutra, Dazheng Store, vol.09, p.30-31.

²⁵ Translated by Xuanzang: Sutra of the Great Assembly of Ti-tsang's Ten Wheels, Dazheng Store, vol.13, p. 740-741.

V. Conclusion

This paper first explains the definition and superiority of the Ten Wholesome Deeds and the definition of the Ten Evil Deeds. It proposes that by understanding the Ten Evil Deeds, we can fear the Ten Evil Deeds and aspire to the merits and virtues of the Ten Wholesome Deeds, so that we can naturally practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds and get rid of suffering to achieve bliss. The focus of the study is on the Ten Evil Deeds, which are very painful and bring about many obstacles that make us fear the Ten Evil Deeds, and we use "killing" and "bad karma of the speech" as examples for specific analysis.

Although this paper mainly focuses on the fear of the consequences of Ten Evil Deeds, it is natural to uphold the Ten Wholesome Deeds to discuss the Ten Wholesome Deeds. But there is no comprehensive discussion, the facts and arguments are not full enough, it seems not convincing, and there are still many gaps in other aspects of the paper, I hope you can give me more advice.

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