

## *For the Good of the World*

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Tonight I'd like us to dedicate our meditation for the people who've died in the events of the past week. This is a traditional practice in Thailand and in all Buddhist countries. It's based on the realization that when people have passed over, the only way you can get in touch with them is through the power of the mind, what Ajaan Lee calls the current of the mind. And the best thing you can do for them is to send them a current of peace, a current of goodwill, hoping that they find a good rebirth.

A lot of people have been asking recently about how karma has played out in recent events. The Buddha generally discourages trying to trace back exactly what people did that caused them to die in this or that way. He said that if you tried to trace that back you'd go crazy, for the issues of karma are so complex. The basic principle is simple: Whatever was done with a skillful intention gets a pleasant result, whatever was done with an unskillful intention gives an unpleasant result. And there's a correspondence between a particular type of unskillful action and a particular type of unskillful result. But the precise details – "What exactly did these people do? Did they do it all together? Did they do it separately?" – no one can trace those back.

What the Buddha did teach, though, is to focus on what's the most skillful thing we can do now, given the situation. That's where the emphasis should lie. And one thing we can do is to help the world through our meditation. Many people think that to sit with your eyes closed like this is irresponsible, that we're running away from the world. But when you think about the unhealthy energies people are putting out in the world all day, everyday, through their thoughts, words, and deeds, the world really needs people who are putting out peaceful energy. That's where meditation has a lot to offer.

The mind is like a broadcast station. It sends out currents. If we create a peaceful, steady, calming current, that has an effect on the world in ways that are hard to trace, but they're there.

So reflect on the fact that all who are born into the human race have unskillful karma. There's no need to wish ill on anyone, no matter what. The best you can do in difficult circumstances is to figure out the most skillful thing to do right now. You try not to give in to your emotions, not to give in to your fears, but to create within your mind as skillful a state as possible, as calm and steady and mindful a state as you can, and then offer that to other people. That's one way of helping. And when the people are far away, it's probably the best thing to do right now.

So as you're meditating, realize that you're not doing this just for yourself. You're doing it for the good of the world. And you want to do it well, do it truly, so that it can truly be helpful to others as well. Sometimes that thought can give you an extra incentive to be more careful with your meditation, to put in more effort than you might feel inclined to. We can all get sloppy, thinking, "Well, it's just me and I'm perfectly content with a sloppy meditation tonight so I can get over with it and get on to something else." But what does that kind of meditation do for those who are what the Thais call our companions in aging, illness, and death? Nothing much at all.

The general current of energy in the world requires as much calm, steady input as possible. So, if this is what you're broadcasting right now, make sure you're broadcasting it well. Ajaan Mun once said that the only true goodness in the world is goodness without any drawbacks, without any harm. There are so many things that are good in one way but harmful in another. Yet the practice of meditation, the practice of training the mind, is good all around, good for ourselves and for the people around us.

I was talking on the phone this evening to a woman in lower Manhattan who was saying it's been very heartwarming to see how New Yorkers – and we know the reputation of New Yorkers – have come out of their usual shells, showing kindness in all sorts of ways she would never have imagined. That's the proper response to a disaster: to realize, one, that disasters keep happening all over the world; and, two, when a disaster strikes near home, it gives you an opportunity to do your best. The shame is that when opportunities like this pass, we usually get back to our normal ways and tend not to think about doing our best, doing the most skillful things. But actually that's what's really demanded of us all the time.

This is one of the reasons we develop mindfulness: not to be non-reactive, but to be mindful of what we're doing, of what situation we're in, and of the most skillful thing to be doing right now. Keep that in mind, because the principles of karma, the laws of karma, are not traffic laws that apply only in certain places, only at certain times, on the south side of the street from 4:30 to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, that kind of thing. Karma is a law that applies to all of our actions, 24/7.

So be skillful at all times. No matter what the situation, no matter how minor or major it may seem, we've got the opportunity to do good, to act on skillful intentions – not just good intentions, but intentions that are skillful as well. That requires work. It requires training. This is what we're doing right here. It's important always to keep that in mind, no matter how ordinary or extraordinary the situation. It's a teaching that applies everywhere: What you're doing right now is important, so be careful to do your best.